

Feature Article 【專題論文】

Point and Line: Uniqueness and Relationality  
Applied in "Self" and "Others" in the  
Cross-cultural Dialogue

點與線：  
獨特性與關係性應用於跨文化對話裡的  
「自我」與「他者」概念

Hong-Hsin LIN  
林鴻信\*

**Keywords:** person, relationality, uniqueness, self, others, cross-cultural dialogue

**關鍵詞：**位格、關係性、獨特性、自我、他者、跨文化對話

---

\* Professor of Systematic Theology, Taiwan Theological Seminary & College.

## Abstract

In the history of Christian thought, the concept of "person" has been adopted to denote the origin of subjectivity. For most discussions, the concept of person refers to God (e.g., the three persons of the Trinity), which could be dealt with as an ideal type of human being as the image of God. According to the Western theological tradition, when discussing the "Trinity," the focus is on oneness. Then the three persons are differentiated from oneness, so that the uniqueness of each person is emphasized. But according to the Eastern theological tradition, while discussing "Trinity," the focus is on threeness. Then, after the relationship between the three persons has been the focus, the relationality of each person is underlined.

There are two ways of thinking about both the uniqueness and the relationality of a person. First, the relationality of a person should be defined on the basis of its uniqueness. For example, it is possible to draw a line only if there have been two distinct points already. Second, the uniqueness of a person should be defined only on the basis of its relations. That is to say, the uniqueness of a point solely depends upon what kinds of lines can be derived from it. The image of point and line displays the interdependence of individual and community. That the uniqueness of a person has been overemphasized at the expense of relationality can be observed in modern Western society. And that the relationality of a person is overstressed at the expense of uniqueness can be seen in the traditional Eastern society. In the continuing dialogue between East and West, how to prevent from radical individualism but not to swing to collectivism, and how to be against the marginalization of personal uniqueness without losing a sense of community are important issues.

While being applied to "Self" and "Others" in the Cross-cultural dialogue, one the one hand, the first way of thinking is to deal with the uniqueness of the "Self" first, and then derive relations with others from which according to its uniqueness. Those who have regarded themselves as the center of the world tend to think in the first way, no matter they are rigid Chinese traditionalists or aggressive Western imperialists. On the other hand, the second way of thinking is inclined to focus upon the relations brought in by "Others," and then endeavor to find out the uniqueness of the self. Those who care about such as "China in the eyes of the West" or "the West in the eyes of China" tend to think in the second way. The dialogue itself must be a learning process of finding the best balance of both ways of thinking. The question for the time being is what will be the best composition of the first and the second way of thinking in a world of cross-culture as a global village.

## 摘要

在基督宗教思想史上位格概念被採用來指稱主體性的源頭，主要用來討論上帝，而上帝可以做為人的理想典型，因為基督宗教相信人有上帝形象，因此討論位格就相當於討論人。

在西方神學傳統裡，當論及三一上帝時，主張「三位格」從一個源頭分化出來，結果突顯出各位格的獨特性。在東方神學傳統裡，當論及三一上帝時，焦點在於「三位格」之間的關係，以致強調位格之間的關係性。

大體而言，關於獨特性與關係性有兩種思考模式。其一，在位格的獨特性基礎上界定其關係性，就好比唯有兩個明確的點之間才能拉出一條線來。其二，在位格的關係性基礎上界定其獨特性，就好比一個點的位置是建立在那些從此點引伸出來的線上。

點與線的比喻呈現出個體與群體的相互依存性。當人的獨特性被高舉而犧牲關係性時，結果就是現代西方社會所常見的現象；而當人的關係性被過於強調以致犧牲獨特性時，這在傳統東方社會裡則相當常見。在東方與西方的繼續對話當中，如何不讓極端個體主義摧毀關係性但亦非擺向集體主義與如何抗拒個體的獨特性被邊緣化而不至於失去團體意識，實在是重要議題。

當應用於跨文化對話的「自我」與「他者」時，第一種思考方式優先處理自我的獨特性，而根據其獨特性導引出與他者的關係。那些把自己視為世界中心的人們傾向採用這種思考方式，不論是頑固的中國傳統主義者或者帶有侵略性的西方帝國主義者皆然。另一方面，第二種思考方式把焦點集中在他者與自我的關係，而從中尋找自我的獨特性，諸如那些關切「西方眼中的中國」或「中國眼中的西方」者傾向採用這種思考方式。當今的問題是，在面對全球化的跨文化趨勢時，如何找出第一種思考方式與第二種思考配合運用的最佳組合。

## 1. Introduction

What is human being? The question has to be answered from two perspectives. On the one hand, every human being is an individual. On the other hand, every human being belongs to certain communities in terms such that it is impossible to imagine a totally isolated person in the world. From the perspective of the individual, human being refers to each unique individual by itself regardless of whether it belongs to a community or not. But from the perspective of the community, human being refers to those communities composed of individuals, or those individuals in relationship with others.

There is a tension between the individual and the community in terms that any overemphasis of the individual will threaten the solidarity of a community and any prioritization of the community will dissolve the identity of individuals in the community. Every culture has its own way of dealing with the tension between individual and community. Some favor the individual over the community, and others favor the community over the individual. The former tends to emphasize the uniqueness of each person, but the latter would rather stress the relationality of every one. The difference between the two reflects itself in the way of thinking. It depends on whether uniqueness is prior to relationality, or *vice versa*.

During 1986-1990 I wrote a dissertation on the person of the Holy Spirit at Tübingen University. This led me to think over about the concept of person, which was originally applied into the Divine Being and could be applied into the human being as well. As a matter of fact, the concept of the person could be regarded as an ideal picture of what and who a human being is in terms that the Divine Being is the original version of the human being as the image of God according to the Judeo-Christian tradition.

---

While writing my dissertation, I came to realize that there were two ways of interpreting the concept of personhood in the context of the doctrine of Trinity. On the one hand, the Catholic-Protestant tradition, which will be abbreviated as "the Western tradition," is mainly interested in the oneness of the Trinity and starts its argument from oneness to threeness with a focus upon oneness. On the other hand, the Orthodox tradition, which can also be called "the Eastern tradition," is mainly interested in the threeness of the Trinity and begins its argument from threeness to oneness with a focus upon threeness. Moreover, the Western understanding of the Trinity tends to highlight the idea of uniqueness by way of thinking from oneness to threeness, but the Eastern argument of Trinity is inclined to emphasize the idea of relationality by way of thinking from threeness to oneness.

Metaphorically, the uniqueness and relationality of a person are like point and line. In a similar way, a line must start from a point and end at another point. If there are no two distinct points, there will be no line between them. And if there is no definite piece of line, it will be difficult to define a point. For instance, the most usual way for us to show a point is to point it out, namely to make a line between it and us. It is therefore impossible to talk about a piece of a line without mentioning points, nor possible to talk about points without mentioning a line between them. When applied to the concept of personhood, there is uniqueness of a person in its relationality and there is relationality of a person in its uniqueness. Nevertheless there is a difference between those who favor uniqueness and think from uniqueness to relationality and others who favor relationality instead and think from relationality to uniqueness. We may trace this difference in the history of Christian thought. But the aim of this essay is not to explore the history of the concept of the person in detail; rather, it focuses on the uniqueness and relationality of a person which could be applied to the understanding of human beings with regard to the "self" and "others" in cross-cultural contexts.

## 2. The Concept of Person

In the early history of Christianity, there was a need for a non-anthropological concept to discuss God with subjectivity but not at the expense of projecting the understanding of the human being with subjectivity onto God. The concept of person was adopted, to make it brief, in order to define each unit which expresses subjectivity. As a matter of fact, the concept of person could be applied not only to God the creator but also to the human creature. The Christian faith believes that God has created humanity in God's image (*imago Dei*), so the person of God can be regarded as the original and ideal image of the person of human being.

The concept of person comes from Greek *prosopon* and Latin *persona*, the original meaning is "mask" or "role," which has referred to as "character" as well. Tertullian (ca.160-ca.225) is the first theologian to bring up the trinitarian formula, which has been widely accepted by the Western tradition: "Three persons in one substance." He adopted the concept of person to denote those who have characters of subjectivity in order to interpret the threeness of God in contrast with the concept of substance to interpret the oneness of God. That is to say, the concept of person is to refer to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Each of the three persons originates divine subjectivity and shares the one divine substance. Thus the early Christian church came to a common confession of trinitarianism. But the problem for trinitarianism is how to keep a balance between the three persons and one substance. As a matter of fact, it is hardly possible to maintain an absolute balance between both. That is to say, among those who hold to trinitarianism, some put oneness prior to threeness but others put threeness prior to oneness.

### 2.1 Western Tradition

The trinitarian doctrines of the Western church, which were influenced by Latin culture, were mainly developed by the theology of Augustine (354-430).

---

While discussing the Trinity, he has started from one divine essence and then dealt with the three persons. The whole picture depicts the one essence as prior to the three persons. The focus is upon the one essence, which has not much to do with relationship. The three persons and the relationship between them are subordinate to such an essence. Moreover, since the three persons are derived from one substance, there is a tendency to emphasize the uniqueness of each person as if differentiated from one source. Speaking broadly, the thinking pattern of the Western tradition starts from oneness and proceeds to threeness. The result is that the uniqueness of each of the three persons has been emphasized, because every person is derived from the same essence in its own way, so the relationship between the three persons is not as dominant as the uniqueness of each person.

For instance, Augustine prefers to adopt psychological analogies in his doctrine of the Trinity. The Trinity has been compared to three psychological functions under a psychological subject.<sup>1</sup> Such kinds of analogies have shown his favor of oneness over threeness, for the reason that though the three psychological functions have been mentioned, the three are none the less under one psychological subject. The threeness is based upon the ground of the oneness. The result is that the relationship between the three persons tends to become secondary, but the uniqueness of each person is given much weight. In other words, relationality is not so important as the uniqueness of a person.

The emphasis on the uniqueness of a person has led the Augustinian tradition to a spirituality of the inner world in its application. Contemplation as the most important way to approach God has strengthened the individualistic tendency. As the contemporary Catholic theologian C. M. LaCugna (1952-1997) comments, "Personhood in the Augustinian tradition has mainly to do with individual consciousness and its internal differentiations. The journey of the soul

---

1 Augustine, *The Trinity* (Brooklyn: New City Press, 1991), Book 9-11.

toward God is a journey inward."<sup>2</sup> Such a solitary inner travel of the soul has promoted individualism which stresses the unique character of each person.

## 2.2 Eastern Tradition

The doctrine of the Trinity in the Eastern tradition, which was influenced by Greek culture, was mainly formulated by the Cappadocian Fathers. The formula "three *hypostasis* in one *ousia*" was adopted as a Greek version of "three persons in one substance." While discussing the Trinity, the starting point is the three persons and then the derived divine oneness of God from the three. The whole picture suggests that three persons go prior to one substance, and the focus is on the relationship between the three persons. That is to say, the one substance has been identified through the personal relations between the three as if it exists only in the personal relations. The argumentation of the Eastern tradition has therefore heavily attached importance to personal relationship.

In virtue of the starting point of three persons, Gregory of Nyssa (ca.330-ca.395) boldly adopts social analogies to illustrate the Trinity, disregarding the possible critique of tritheism. He compares the Trinity to "Peter, James and John, being in one human nature, are called three men."<sup>3</sup> Among the relations between the three, there is one human nature. His way of thinking starts from threeness and results in oneness. The result is that the relationality of three persons is more dominant than the uniqueness of each person.

Following the Eastern tradition, the contemporary orthodox theologian J. D. Zizioulas emphasizes being as relationship, for instance: "The being of God is a relational being: without the concept of communion it would not be possible to

---

2 C. M. LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (S. F.: Harper Collins, 1991), p. 247.

3 Gregory of Nyssa, "On 'Not Three Gods'," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), p. 331. Cf. The Great Basil, "Letter 38," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), p. 137.

---

speak of the being of God."<sup>4</sup> Since relationship is the key to understand being, the focus has been put on relationality. Personal relationship goes first, and then uniqueness of a person appears in its relationship. The outcome of its argumentation tends to be communitarian rather than individualistic. While being is applied into spirituality, the focus is upon the relationship between human being and God, and the relationship between human beings, rather than the inner world of an individual.

### 2.3 Discussion

Broadly speaking, the Western tradition has focused upon the uniqueness of a person, but the Eastern tradition has paid more attention to the relationality of a person. The key question is whether the emphasis on the uniqueness of a person will necessarily exclude its relationality, and *vice versa*. Are they both really so exclusive to each other? As the origin of subjectivity, a person is both unique, for it is distinctive, and in relationship, for it is located in an interpersonal context. The concept of a person has to present not only the uniqueness of a person and but also its relationality as well. This is owing to the fact that the concept of the person presents both the uniqueness of a person through its relationality and the relationality of such a person based upon its uniqueness. There is no way to exclude each other in terms that, while emphasizing the one, the other will also inevitably be mentioned. But during the history of the concept of the person, some give priority to uniqueness and others to relationality. The uniqueness and relationality of a person have been paid attention to in turns.

---

4 Jean. D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), p. 17.

### 3. Two Ways of Defining a Person

In the history of Christian thought, any attempt to give a definition to the concept of person has to consider both uniqueness and relationality. There are two main ways of defining a person given by two thinkers.

#### 3.1 Two Definitions

The first is the classical definition of a person by Boethius (A. M. T. Boethius, ca.480-ca.524) that "a person is an individual substance of a rational nature."<sup>5</sup> Such a definition emphasizes the uniqueness of a person as "an individual substance."<sup>6</sup> The main concern is to present "what is a person," because every person has its own irreplaceable uniqueness.

The second is issued by Richard of St. Victor (d.1173) that "person in God is the incommunicable existence of the divine nature."<sup>7</sup> This definition emphasizes the relationality of a person, because as "the incommunicable existence" a person exists as a basic unit of communication.<sup>8</sup> An incommunicable person is the prerequisite of entering into a communicative relationship. The main concern lies in identifying the cause or source of personhood. Accordingly, the basic understanding of a person consists in its relationship. To make it brief, the Orthodox theologian V. Lossky (1903-1958) regards the definition of Boethius as an answer to "what is a person" and the definition of Richard as an answer to

---

5 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (= *ST*) (Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, 1981), I, 29, 1.

6 H. Mühlen, *Der Heilige Geist als Person* (Münster: Aschendorfer Verlag, 1966), pp. 33, 42. Cf. E. J. Fortman, *The Triune God. A Historical Study of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972, 1982), pp. 161-164 and T. F. Torrance, *Reality and Scientific Theology* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1985), pp. 174-175.

7 Thomas Aquinas, *ST*, I, 29, 3.

8 H. Mühlen, *Der Heilige Geist als Person*, pp. 33, 43. Cf. E. J. Fortman, *The Triune God. A Historical Study of the Doctrine of the Trinity*, pp. 191-194 and T. F. Torrance, *Reality and Scientific Theology*, pp. 176-179.

"who is a person."<sup>9</sup> When answering "what," the uniqueness of a person is the focus; while answering "whom," the relationality of a person is the main focus.

Boethius's definition, which emphasizes uniqueness, is flourishing in the Western tradition. Basically, the Western tradition favors uniqueness in terms where its trinitarian thinking takes the one essence as the starting point and then derives three persons from such an essence. This has caused a total effect where uniqueness is prior to relationality. When applied to the understanding of the human being, there is a tendency that the uniqueness of a person is more dominant than its relationality.

On the other hand, Richard's definition, which highlights relationality, is in accordance with the Eastern tradition, which pays much attention to interpersonal relationship. By taking the three persons as the starting point and then pursuing uniqueness among the relations of three persons, the Eastern tradition favors relationality. This has caused a total effect that relationality goes prior to uniqueness. While applying into the understanding of human being, there is a tendency that relationality of a person goes prior to its uniqueness.

### 3.2 Interplay

According to Richard's definition, while focusing upon relationship by emphasizing communication, we have to consider the uniqueness of the basic unit of communication as "the incommunicable existence." Whenever we think about communication, it is necessary to tell who is communicating with whom. That is to say, whenever we think about relationship, it is necessary to tell about between who and whom after all as well.

---

9 V. Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), pp. 118-119.

According to the definition of Boethius, which emphasizes uniqueness, we have to present "an individual substance" inevitably from the perspective of its relationship in order to show how distinctive it is through its relationality. The conception of Thomas Aquinas (ca.1225-1274) has proved that Boethius' definition is not sufficient without Richard's. The Western tradition has been carried forward by Thomas Aquinas in the middle ages. Thomas Aquinas follows Boethius' definition and holds that a person is "an individual substance of a rational nature," and he therefore emphasizes the uniqueness of a person. But when he defends applying the concept of the individual to God, he argues that God's being as individual is based upon his "incommunicability." In this way, he introduces Richard's definition to claim that a person in God is the incommunicable existence of the divine nature as a complement to Boethius's definition.<sup>10</sup>

In short, Thomas Aquinas takes Richard's definition to show that the incommunicability of a person is the main reason of its being an individual substance. The outcome is that the incommunicability of a person presents its uniqueness, because an incommunicable person as a unique subject is the prerequisite of entering into a communicative relationship. But this is contrary to the general view that the incommunicability of a person is to present its relationality. This is a good example to show that the emphasis of the relationality of a person cannot be separated from its uniqueness, just as a line cannot be separated from two distinct points. The case of John Calvin (1509-1564) will prove this further.

Reformation is an extension of the Western tradition. The Reformer John Calvin has defined the concept of person as: "a subsistence in God's essence, which, while related to the others, is distinguished by an incommunicable quality."<sup>11</sup> Such a definition has integrated Aquinas' definition with Richard's

---

10 Thomas Aquinas, *ST*, I, 29, 3.

11 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1. 13. 6.

definition. Though Calvin follows the Western tradition of emphasizing one essence and uniqueness of a person, he discusses incommunicability in order to show the relationality of a person. Even though related to the others, a person is distinguished by its incommunicable quality. Furthermore, Calvin regards such a person in relationship as a unique subsistence in God's essence. We may see that he has integrated uniqueness with relationality by emphasizing that the relationality of a person lies in its uniqueness as a subject to enter into communicative relationship.

### 3.3 Point and Line

The image of the points and line will make this relationship clearer. A line must start from a definite point and end up with another point. If there are not two definite points, then there can be no line. A line must pass through two definite points— since a line without a start or an end cannot be a line at all. In other words, at least two unique individuals are required in order to construct a definite relationship. Therefore, it is impossible to consider the relationality of a person without taking into account the person's uniqueness.

Furthermore, while two definite points are needed for a clear line, the line displays the uniqueness of these two points in return. If there is no such line, then it is impossible to indicate the uniqueness of these two points. For instance, when two points overlap each other no line exists and there is uniqueness for the points. That is to say, there should be a relationship between two individuals in order to present the uniqueness of each individual. Therefore, it is impossible to consider the uniqueness of a person without taking into account its relationality.

Broadly speaking, there is the uniqueness of a person in its relationality, and there is the relationality of a person in its uniqueness. The Western tradition, which emphasizes the uniqueness of a person, should consider its relationality, which is necessary to present its uniqueness soundly. The Eastern tradition,

which emphasizes the relationality of a person, should not neglect its uniqueness, which is the basis of its relationality.

#### 4. A Modern Case

In order to clarify the interplay between the uniqueness and relationality of a person, a modern Catholic theologian, LaCugna, will be discussed below. She has creatively developed her doctrine of the Trinity. On the one hand, she interprets the concept of person mainly from the perspective of relationality: "Persons are essentially interpersonally, intersubjective."<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, it is impossible to imagine any isolated person. On the other hand, she emphasizes the uniqueness of a person by saying: "A person is an ineffable, concrete, unique, and unrepeatable ecstasis of nature."<sup>13</sup> A unique and unrepeatable person: "ineffable" signifies the indescribable core of a person which one is unable to convey to others, and "concrete" refers to that person's groundedness in its concrete living contexts. In short, a unique person is neither replaceable nor interchangeable with any other persons.

As Thomas Aquinas shows, in Richard's definition, "incommunicability" is adopted as the basic description of the uniqueness of a person in order to display its relationality, because its relationality is based upon its uniqueness. In a similar way, LaCugna uses "ineffable" in order to describe the relationality of a person which is derived from its uniqueness. Generally speaking, LaCugna starts her definition from the perspective of relationality, but it results in uniqueness. The person in its relationship must have its unique identity in order to construct its relationship. Otherwise, a non-unique person will be replaced by others, and there will be no stability and distinguishing features in its relationship.

---

12 C. M. LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, p. 288.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 289.

Yet by defining that a "person is the *ecstasis* of a nature," LaCugna emphasizes the way of thinking from the perspective of relationality.<sup>14</sup> To go out of oneself is concurrent with relating to others. "To exist as a person is to be referred to others; the negation and dissolution of personhood is total self-reference."<sup>15</sup> Following this line, she would like to regard "hell" as a form of self-reference, which is "the antithesis of what persons were created for."<sup>16</sup>

In opposition to the modern trend of individualism, LaCugna appeals to the importance of the relationality of a person. She criticizes not only Barth's tendency of strong monotheism, which implies a certain kind of individualism, but also Rahner's tendency toward individualism, because both great theologians lack this way of thinking about personalism. She refers to the German theologian W. Kasper who argued that "what Rahner describes is in fact not at all the full modern understanding of person but rather an extreme individualism in which each person is a center of action who possesses himself, disposes of himself and is set off over against others."<sup>17</sup> Rahner's limitation lies in the fact that he lived in a time before the rise of modern personalism which makes it clear "that person exists only in relation; that in the concrete, personality exists only as interpersonality, subjectivity only as intersubjectivity."<sup>18</sup> LaCugna contends that we should understand the concept of person from the perspective of relationality.

It is notable for a theologian emphasizing the relationality of a person, as does LaCugna. She calls into question whether the emphasis on the relationality of a person will sacrifice its uniqueness while discussing the issue of abortion. She questions whether an unborn fetus is a person. In the view of philosophers

---

14 Ibid., p. 289.

15 Ibid., p. 289.

16 Ibid., p. 316.

17 W. Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ* (N. Y.: Crossroad, 1984), p. 289. Cf. C. M. LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, p. 255. W. Kasper has the names of M. Buber, F. Ebner, and F. Rosenzweig in mind.

18 Ibid., p. 289.

like John Macmurray, who emphasizes personal relationality, a fetus is not a person because it has not yet entered into a relationship. For similar reasons, the Orthodox theologian Zizioulas would deny the personhood of a fetus because it has no connection with the church through the sacraments.<sup>19</sup> As a Catholic, she cannot accept such a personalistic position which will justify abortion. As a feminist theologian, she would stand with the position of the weak by refuting any opposition against the right to life of fetuses.

LaCugna is worried about that the emphasis on relationality will lead to submission to the existing relations by taking them for granted. The overemphasis on the relationality of a person might result in the justification of the male dominant social system. The existing inequality of sexual relationships would be justified in the name of the emphasis of relationality, just as fetuses are treated as nothing valuable for they have not yet entered into a relationship. Although she gives weight to relationality, she realizes that the one-sided emphasis on the relationality of a person will sacrifice its uniqueness, because uniqueness of the weak side will be ignored in the relations dominated by the strong side.

Although the emphasis on relationality might diminish the uniqueness of a person as LaCugna has seen, the emphasis on the relationality of a person need not sacrifice that person's uniqueness since its relationality is based upon uniqueness. In an ideal environment, relationality would allow for the complete growth of uniqueness, and uniqueness would support the full development of relationality.

---

19 C. M. LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, p. 310. Cf. John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation* (Amherst, N. Y.: Humanity Books, 1999).

---

## 5. Individual and Community

Augustine is well known for his mysticism and emphasis on the inner world, but he is not an individualist at all. He is always a member of groups and communities. There are friends accompanying with him through most of the stages of his life. He believes that it is only possible to live one's own way through his interactions with others. When he comments on the phrase "live together in unity" in Psalms 133.1, he says:

Since the Psalm says, "Behold, how good and how pleasant is it, that brethren should dwell together in one," why then should we not call Monks so? For *Monos* is one. Not one in any manner, for a man in a crowd is one, but though he can be called one along with others, he cannot be *Monos*, that is, alone, for *Monos* means "one alone." They then who thus live together as to make one man, so that they really possess what is written, "one mind and one heart," many bodies, but not many minds; many bodies, but not many hearts; can rightly be called *Monos*, that is, one alone.<sup>20</sup>

This is the picture of Augustine's ideal of living together as an ascetical body. It is a life of community, and the "one" is composed of many "ones." He takes *Monos* to interpret the common oneness and regard which is the only real one. This is the basis for his expectation of the Christian faith community: "Surely they are become a temple of God; not only each respectively a temple of God, but also all a temple of God together. They have therefore become a place for the Lord."<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, there should be individuals in a community, and there should be communities among individuals. That is to say, there should be

---

20 St. Augustine, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms*, 133.5, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, vol. 8.

21 *Ibid.*, 132.3.

points in a line, and there should be also lines among points. The case of British writer C. S. Lewis (1898-1963) may clarify this further.

When Lewis was faced with the death of his wife, he might have thought about the possibility of them both dying together so that they would not be separated. But in her last days, his wife said: "Even if we both died at exactly the same moment, as we lie here side by side, it would be just as much a separation as the one you're so afraid of."<sup>22</sup> The key here is separation rather than who will pass away. This thought struck him forcefully: "Cut one off, or cut both off simultaneously. Either way, mustn't the conversation stop?"<sup>23</sup> Whether one passes away first or both die together, the end result is the same: namely the loss of connection.

A thorough separation makes it impossible for the two points to remain in contact any longer. Connecting two points makes a line; but regardless of whether one point or both are cut away, there will no longer be a line. From the perspective of a relation between two individuals, to lose one or to lose two makes no difference; either way, there will no longer be any relationship. Furthermore, whenever there is no relationship in the case of Lewis, will he be a whole person as before?

## 6. Conclusion

In a traditional Chinese society, community tended to be highly emphasized at the expense of individuals. For instance, in the Chinese language it is difficult to find a term for "responsibility," which refers to a spontaneous response from one's own will, but it is not difficult to find terms for "duty," which refers to an obligation required by others, such as 責任 or 義務. Whenever we talk about

---

22 C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (N. Y.: The Seabury Press, 1980), p. 15.

23 Ibid.

duty, we mean something we must do in an obligatory sense. But whenever we talk about responsibility, we mean something that we are willing to do whether or not it is required. "Must" is regarded as a synonym of "duty," and "will" as a synonym of "responsibility." The traditional Chinese way of thinking tends to deal with duty as an obligatory thing, which is a must no matter whether one likes it or not, such as the five ties. A person is identified first according to its relationship, rather than its uniqueness. Such an identity requires that one should perform his roles and follow the rules according to his relationship.

For the modern age, in a world of cross-cultural exchange, "a global village," the "individual" tends to be highly rated at the expense of community not only for Western society but also for every Eastern society in the process of modernization. One of the important origins of the modern concept of self is the Cartesian self which tends to be individualistic. A contemporary philosopher Charles Taylor (1931-) thinks that the modern concept of self has a strong inwards character, so he endeavors to respond to such a trend with communitarianism and an emphasis on tradition.<sup>24</sup>

It is understandable that certain modern Western intellectuals would appeal to communitarianism given the context of the extreme development of individualism. However, in the East, communitarianism has not always been positive, yet its influence is still very high. But modernization is bringing about a big impetus toward individualism. There has been apparently a tension. On the one hand, in a strongly communitarian society individuals will be dissolved into the community. On the other hand, a sense of community will disappear in a highly individualistic society. The problem is to determine how communitarian and how individualistic we need to be, in other words, how relational and how unique a person should be. In the continuing dialogue between East and West, we are concerned to discover ways to be opposed to the destruction of relationship through radical individualism, but not to swing to another extreme of

---

24 C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

collectivism; and how to be opposed to the marginalization of personal uniqueness, but without losing a sense of community.

The uniqueness of a person is like a point, and the relationality of a person is like a line. The metaphor of point and line has displayed the interdependence of individual and community. Uniqueness without relationality is like paper covered with loose sand— a collection of messy points only. Relationality without uniqueness is like an intertwined wool ball— only entangled lines. Whenever the uniqueness of a person has been overemphasized at the expense of relationality, there will be ego-centered "me" generations everywhere which are publicized by consumerism as we may see in modern Western society. But whenever the relationality of a person is overstressed at the expense of uniqueness, we are left with unified and indistinguishable clayed figures in a complicated interwoven network of relationships. This can be seen in the traditional Eastern society. This even happens again in the modern Eastern society which blindly runs toward modernization and therefore transforms everyone into either sellers or buyers without any "face."

While applied to the "self" and "others" in cross-cultural contexts, the emphasis on uniqueness would focus upon "self" first, and then derive relations with others from it. Those who have regarded themselves as the center of the world tend to think in this way, regardless of whether they are rigid Chinese traditionalists who place China as the center of the world, or aggressive Western imperialists who regard the West as the conquer of the world. On the other hand, an emphasis on relationality would focus upon "others" and would define the self according to those relations with others. Those who care a great deal about "China in the eyes of West" or "the West in the eyes of China" tend to think in this way. What is clear is that any one-sided thinking is inappropriate for a

fruitful dialogue between East and the West. The dialogue itself must be a learning process of finding out the best balance of both ways of thinking.♦

---

♦ Responsible editor: Hsiu-wen Huang (黃秀文).

## Bibliography

- Augustine, Bishop of Hippo  
 1983 *Expositions on the Book of Psalms*, 133.5, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983)  
 1991 *The Trinity* (Brooklyn: New City Press, 1991)
- Basil, the Great  
 1983 "Letter 38," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983)
- Calvin, John  
 1960 *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960)
- Fortman, Edmund. J.  
 1982 *The Triune God. A Historical Study of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972, 1982)
- Gregory of Nyssa  
 1983 "On 'Not Three Gods'," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983)
- Kasper, Walter  
 1984 *The God of Jesus Christ* (N. Y.: Crossroad, 1984)
- LaCugna, Catherine Mowry  
 1991 *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (S. F.: Harper Collins, 1991)
- Lewis, Clive Staples  
 1980 *A Grief Observed* (N. Y.: The Seabury Press, 1980)
- Lossky, Vladimir  
 1985 *In the Image and Likeness of God* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985)
- Macmurray, John  
 1999 *Persons in Relation* (Amherst, N. Y.: Humanity Books, 1999)
- Mühlen, Heribert  
 1966 *Der Heilige Geist als Person* (Münster: Aschendorfer Verlag, 1966)
- Taylor, Charles  
 1989 *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989)
- Thomas, Aquinas  
 1981 *Summa Theologica* (Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, 1981)
- Torrance, Thomas F.  
 1985 *Reality and Scientific Theology* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1985)

Zizioulas, Jean. D.

1985 *Being as Communion* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press,  
1985)