ABSTRACT

This research is about a theological ontology which is based on Zizioulas’ ontology of personhood. His ontological thought is manifested by a renewed view of God and the human person. Therefore, this thesis includes three parts. The first part examines the being of God as personhood. The second part examines the being of the human person as personhood. The third part analyzes and criticizes Zizioulas’ ontology of personhood.

In Part I, I explore the background and source of Zizioulas’ ontology of personhood in the Cappadocian Trinitarian theology. Zizioulas claims that there has been an ontological revolution against Greek substantialism: based on the identification of hypostasis with personhood rather than ousia; the ontological principle of God is traced back to the person (hypostasis). It means that God first is God the Father rather than his substance or nature. This is a reversal of a view which has prevailed in Western theology. The Father is the personal cause of the generation of the Son and of the procession of the Spirit. One of the significances of the Father as personal cause is that the personal Father generates personal otherness in the divine being. Zizioulas’ ontology of personhood is based on the concepts of communion and otherness. He excludes essence or ousia from his ontological categories.

In Part II, I will explore the being of man as personhood. The Father as personal cause bequeaths us an ontology of personhood which also provides the metaphysical ground for the being of human persons. Personhood rather than human nature is the centre of anthropology. The mode of existence of the Trinity is the foundation for the transformation of human existence from a biological hypostasis to an ecclesial hypostasis. Personal otherness is constitutive of human person. Otherness as an ontological existence transforms the relationship between human beings in communion. The coexistence of otherness and communion in a Trinitarian model provides a foundation for the criticisms of Levinas’ concept of otherness without communion.

In Part III, I will criticize the Western views of God and person, but also analyze and criticize Zizioulas’ ontology of personhood. The significance of the ontology of personhood is shown by its providing an insightful and radical critique of the substantialist Trinitarian theology which understands One God as substance foremost. At the same time, it provides strong criticisms of individualist understanding of the concept of personhood.

I conclude that Zizioulas has reconstructed a new theological ontology and a new systematic theology which are significantly different from our customary thinking of theology. But because of his overlooking of the views of sin and justice in the ontological sense, I also criticize Zizioulas’ ontology of personhood for its lack of a critical reflection on the society.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Above all, I would like to thank my family, the pastor, sisters and brothers from church for their encouragement and support which are the sources of my strength and confidence to sustain my study and research in the past few years especially when my health was not in good condition. Without their prayers and care I would not have survived those tough days.

My special appreciation and thanks go to my principal supervisor, Prof. Kwan Kai Man, who has guided me along the way with his tremendous patience and outstanding academic vision. I would like to thank him for correcting my bias and stubbornness and spending lots of time mentoring me in writing the dissertation. I would like to thank Dr. Richard Lee, my co-supervisor, for his academic guidance and patient instruction. I would also like to thank Dr. Chan Sze Chi, for his spending a lot of time to help me improve my dissertation including correcting the grammar mistakes. My thanks also go to other teachers from the Department of Religion and Philosophy for their encouragement and support.

Last, but by no means least, I specially thank my friends in mainland China—Wang Chengjun, Li Meilin, Baihong etc. They are all university teachers from Department of Philosophy, and their particular research on religious philosophy has inspired me a lot.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration i  
Abstract ii  
Acknowledgments iii  
Table of Contents iv  

Introduction 1  

Part I The Being of God as Personhood, or Persons-in-Communion 21  
Chapter One The background and source of the ontology of personhood 22  
1.1 The influence of Greek substantialism on the idea of One God 23  
1.2 Problem of the ‘Person’ in the Trinitarian formula 25  
1.2.1 Western Sabellianism in Trinitarian theology 27  
1.2.2 Eastern Tritheism 27  
1.2.3 Arianism and Eunomianism 28  
1.3 Reasons underlying the problem of the Trinitarian formulation 31  
1.3.1 The Logos approach to the idea of truth 32  
1.3.2 ‘Persona’, ‘Prosopon’ and ‘hypostasis’ in Grace-Roman thought 36  
1.4 A new idea of truth and an ontological revolution 38  
1.4.1 A new idea of truth: the identification of truth with life 38  
1.4.2 The Ontological revolution initiated by Athanasius 41  
1.4.3 The Cappadocian Fathers continuing the ontological revolution 44  
1.5 The influence of the ontological revolution on the Second Ecumenical Council and later Christological debate 47  
1.5.1 Its influence on the Creed of Constantinople 47  
1.5.2 Its influence on Chalcedonian Christology 49
Chapter Two Analysis of Zizioulas’ ontology of personhood

2.1 The meaning of the being of God as person
2.1.1 The being of God as person answering the question of ‘how God is’
2.1.2 The being of God as person giving rise to otherness and communion

2.2 Further analysis of Zizioulas’ ontological concept of personhood
2.2.1 Has Zizioulas misunderstood the Cappadocian concept of divine person?
2.2.2 Zizioulas’ understanding of the concept of person vis-à-vis the Cappadocian Fathers
2.2.3 A different Trinitarian formula from the Cappadocian Fathers

2.3 Further Ontological Implications of Zizioulas’ unique understanding of person as the ultimate ontological category - Taking seriously ‘the Father as cause’
2.3.1 Monas refer to the Father ontologically
2.3.2 Stressing person to the extent of excluding ousia
2.3.3 Causality in Trinity transcending Greek cosmology
2.3.4 Person, relationality or communion as central ontological categories of the Trinity
2.3.5 Rendering communion primordial not in conflict with the ontological ultimacy of the Father
2.3.6 Personal ordering in the immanent Trinity not a substantial Subordinationism
2.3.7 Zizioulas’ ontology of personhood transcending necessity to bring about freedom

2.4 Preliminary evaluation of Zizioulas’ ontological proposal
2.4.1 Criticisms of the monarchia of the Father as cause
2.4.2 Criticism of Zizioulas’ ontology – Alexandrian ontology of relationality versus Cappadocian ontology of relationality
2.4.3 Evaluation of a part of discussion: further analysis of the true Cappadocian intention
2.4.4 Defense of the Father as cause- Calvin and others
Part II  From God’s Person to Human Person  89

Chapter Three  The person of the Father as the ontological ground for the personhood of human beings  90

3.1 The ontological meaning of personhood  90
   3.1.1 Ekstasis and hypostasis as two basic aspects of personhood  91
   3.1.2 Three characteristics of the concept of personhood  93

3.2 The being of God as the ontological ground for the being of man  95
   3.2.1 The Father as personal cause for personal existence  95
   3.2.2 Christ is the way to personal existence  96

3.3 From biological to ecclesial hypostasis  98
   3.3.1 The ontology of communion as a standard to distinguish two modes of existence  99
   3.3.2 Biological hypostasis  101
      3.3.2.1 The emergence of biological hypostasis  101
      3.3.2.2 Death as an ontological problem for biological hypostasis  102
   3.3.3 The ecclesial hypostasis  104
      3.3.3.1 The emergence of a new particular hypostasis through Baptism  104
      3.3.3.2 Eucharistic hypostasis as a relational expression between biological and ecclesial hypostasis  107

Chapter Four  Personal communion and otherness  110

4.1 Personal otherness for the being of human person  110
   4.1.1 The basic meaning of otherness: uniqueness and relationship  110
   4.1.2 Otherness as constitutive of human person  112
   4.1.3 Otherness beyond the conflict between the particular/person and the general/ nature  113
   4.1.4 Otherness decides the end of ecclesial existence  115
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Personal communion in otherness</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 Transformation of the relationship with the Other</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.1 Negligence of the Other</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.2 The self prior to the Other</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.3 An impersonal relationship</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.4 The necessity of renewing the understanding of personhood in</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>theology</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.5 A personal relationship</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 Critique of Levinas’ concept of otherness without communion</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.1 The ‘otherness’ as metaphysical desire in the thought of Levinas</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.2 An ethical relationship among humans without communion</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.3 A kind of communion not threatening otherness</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.4 A personal Christology breaking down totality</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.5 A Trinitarian model for the coexistence of otherness and communion</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part III Critical Assessment of Zizioulas’ Ontology of Personhood</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Five Critique of Substantialist view of God from the</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perspective of Zizioulas’ ontology of personhood</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Western substantialist view of God</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1.1 Augustine: God as absolute being</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1.2 Boethius: one <em>ousia</em> and three substances</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1.3 Thomas Aquinas: God as the subsistent being</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Critique from the perspective of the ontology of personhood</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.1 Separation of <em>oikonomia</em> and <em>theologia</em> in Western substantialist approach to Trinity</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.2 Divergence between East and West in dealing with <em>oikonomia</em> and</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>theologia</em></td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.3 Substantialist approach causing the problem of <em>Filioque</em></td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2.4 Zizioulas’ reiteration of the Cappadocian notion of the Son’s mediation in the procession of the Spirit

5.2.5 Substantialism dictates that unity precedes diversity logically or ontologically in God

5.3 Theological and philosophical significance of the ontology of personhood

Chapter six Critique of Western concept of personhood from the perspective of Zizioulas’ ontology of personhood

6.1 The concept of person in Western anthropology

6.1.1 Augustine: person as consciousness

6.1.2 Boethius: person as individual and rational substance

6.1.3 Thomas Aquinas: person as a subsistent individual

6.2 Criticism from the angle of the ontology of personhood

6.2.1 Individualism in the concept of personhood: there is no otherness and communion

6.2.2 Relationship between God and human as an impersonal union

6.2.3 The problem of man as a moral issue rather than ontological one

6.3 Analysis of Zizioulas’ criticisms

Chapter Seven Contributions and criticisms of Zizioulas’ ontology of personhood

7.1 Contributions of Zizioulas’ ontology of personhood

7.1.1 Reconstructing a theological ontology as a new approach to theological study

7.1.2 A personal knowledge or epistemology for Christianity

7.1.3 Salvation concerning foremost hypostasis rather than human nature
7.2 Criticisms and defenses of Zizioulas’ ontology of personhood 207

7.2.1 Is Zizioulas’ ontology of personhood philosophical rather than theological? 207
7.2.2 Defenses of Zizioulas’ personal ontology 210

7.3 My criticism: lack of proper doctrines of justice and sin in Zizioulas’ ontology of personhood 212

7.3.1 Sin only as an ethical concept for Zizioulas 213
7.3.2 Sin as an ontological problem and a relational concept 214
7.3.3 Divine-human communion lacking the idea of justice 217
7.3.4 Detachment from the injustice of reality 221

Conclusion 225

Bibliography 229

Curriculum Vitae 241