

**PERSONS AS GIFTS:  
UNDERSTANDING INTERDEPENDENCE THROUGH POPE  
JOHN PAUL II'S ANTHROPOLOGY**

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*Interdependence is a phenomenon prevalent in collectivist societies. Despite being a well-known concept, it is only recently that the interaction between interdependence and independence was studied as orthogonally varying constructs (Liu & Goto, 2007). A primary finding is that individuals high on both interdependence and independence have better mental health and higher family cohesion. This article attempts to understand these findings in light of Pope John Paul II's understanding of persons as gifts. From Trinitarian theology to its philosophical underpinnings, it will be shown that it is precisely in this gift character that interdependence finds its roots and fundamental meaning. Furthermore, this gift structure also accounts more fully and coherently for the independence-interdependence interaction.*

The past three decades of social psychology has solidified the terms “individualist” and “collectivist” as constructs in describing different societies and populations across the world (e.g., Triandis, 1989; 1996). As the name suggests, an individualist society will tend to emphasise the distinctiveness of an individual above his or her peers, namely, to *stand out* from the rest is the end goal of one's pursuits. A collectivist society, on the other hand, tends to emphasize harmony between its members such that one attempts to “*blend in*” with his or her peers in order that there be minimal disruption to the social fabric. The dominant cultures in Western Europe, the United States, Canada, and Australia are more individualistic; while most Asian, African, Southern European, and Latin American cultures lean toward a more collectivist state of affairs (Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). From the distinct, though not unrelated, philosophy underlying the two types of societies, it is not difficult to see that family life on certain levels would also be fundamentally different. In collectivist societies, the concept of *interdependence* is highly valued. The family (i.e., the entire extended family), being the basic unit of society, is thus also structured such that each member is dependent on all the rest to a larger or lesser extent for their entire lives. Conformity to family values and wishes are also emphasized. On the other hand, in individualistic societies, the concept of *independence* is more esteemed;

as a consequence, the family structure (i.e., the nuclear family) stresses the eventual leaving of the child from the family home as a sign of healthy maturation and growth. Conformity to family wishes is less of an issue as opposed to being “true to oneself.”

On a more fundamental level, *independence* and *interdependence* are not merely descriptive terms for societies and/or families; they also have been studied as basic construals of the self. The first part of this paper will outline these two basic conceptions of the self and their fundamental differences. Attention will be paid primarily to interdependence as it is found in Asian populations. The analysis will then move on to describe a recent empirical work which revealed the interaction between independence and interdependence in an orthogonally varying bi-dimensional model.

Leaving empirical research aside for a section, this paper will foray into the theology and philosophy of the human person. This will be done by way of introducing Trinitarian theology and proceeding to examine how the understanding of the nature of the Godhead leads to the insight of the *gift character* inherent in the metaphysical structure of the human person. In brief, the very basis of creation out of the sheer act of love forms the very foundation of the gift nature of all of creation. Furthermore, it is precisely due to this gift nature that the human person, *qua person*, is called to respond by entering into relation with other persons.

Finally, having established the metaphysical nature of the human person, this article will endeavour to reconcile and integrate the empirical findings on interdependence, independence, and their interaction through the understanding of gift nature of persons. In short, the overarching thesis of this paper is this: The gift nature of the human person which obliges a relational response not only undergirds the need and advantages of interdependence, but it is also due to this need for relations that independence finds its most compelling roots.

## **Empirical Findings on Independence and Interdependence**

### ***Overview***

As would be expected, individualist societies tend to subscribe to *independence* as a normative imperative. Children are encouraged to be self-sufficient and to more explicitly express their unique attributes (Johnson, 1985; Miller, 1988; Shweder & Bourne, 1984). Hence, mature, independent behaviours are organised primarily around and made meaningful in reference to the thoughts, feelings and desires of the *self* rather than the thoughts, feelings, and desires of others. In other

words, the individual is “a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against a social and natural background” (Geertz, 1975, p.48). The topic of independence, as such, will not be discussed any further except in relation to interdependence.

Collectivist societies, conversely, lean heavily toward the self as *interdependent*. There is an insistence on the fundamental “connectedness” of persons, especially within the family. The normative view of the self as interdependent entails understanding oneself as not merely being encompassed within a social network, but precisely by recognizing that one’s behaviour is, to a certain extent, determined by and contingent upon those relationships (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Within such a framework, *the self becomes most meaningful in relation to another person*.

At this point in the discussion, an anecdotal example will perhaps suffice to show the telling difference between the interdependent and independent construal of the self and society (Markus & Kitayama, 1991):

A small Texas corporation seeking to elevate productivity told its employees to look in the mirror and say “I am beautiful” 100 times before coming to work each day. Employees of a Japanese supermarket that was recently opened in New Jersey were instructed to begin the day by holding hands and telling each other that “he” or “she is beautiful.” (“A Japanese Supermarket,” 1989, p.1)

The newspaper article from the *New York Times* gives a simple yet concrete situation in which the difference between the two self-construals is compelling. The independent self tends to focus on one’s own self as the motivational core—“I am beautiful”, whereas the interdependent self tends to draw motivation from one’s relationships—“You are beautiful.”

### ***The Association of Interdependence and Independence***

How, then, does independence and interdependence relate to independence: Do they lie on a continuum—i.e., high interdependence necessarily indicates low independence; or are they co-extensive but separate constructs? To put it in experimental terms, are independence and interdependence two uni-dimensional constructs (continuum

model), or can they vary orthogonally in a bi-dimensional model (co-extensive model)? Past studies have tended toward testing them as uni-dimensional constructs (e.g., Okazaki, 2002; Okazaki & Kurasaki, 2002). To that end, there is converging evidence suggesting that interdependent self-construal is negatively related, while independent self-construal is positively related to mental well-being (see Okazaki, 2002 for an extensive review). The measures used in these studies focus on four main areas: depression, social anxiety, self-esteem, and life satisfaction. If interdependence and independence were indeed uni-dimensional constructs, and based on the discussion above concerning these two views of the self, it seems reasonable to conclude that it would be clinically beneficial to encourage highly interdependent individuals to shift to a predominantly independent view of the self. The concurrently low need for interdependence would presumably lessen mental distress in this interdependent individual.

Yet, is this truly the case? Historically, it seems that Asian populations (particularly the Chinese population—one of the oldest surviving civilizations in history) would have “figured it out,” so to speak, through the millennia of trial and error, to reduce the need to be interdependent in order to lessen mental distress. Theoretically, that is, cultural evolution would have wiped out this ineffectual trait, *if* indeed mental distress were high in this population to begin with. In fact, however, not only is mental distress *not higher* in these populations compared to individualist cultures, depression rates are actually *lower* than the averages in individualist cultures. Two extensive cross-cultural studies have shown that the life-time prevalence rates of depression in Asian populations are *lower* than in industrialised Western nations, with estimates of these Western countries ranging from 3%-17%, while rates were as low as 0.19%-1.14% in China and Taiwan (Weissman et al., 1996; Hwu, Chang, Yeh, Chang, & Yeh, 1996). Is this simply a diagnostic incompatibility, for example, the Chinese using the diagnosis of “neurasthenia” more frequently than the Western category of depression? Or are there real benefits of an interdependent self-construal which have heretofore not been discovered due to the use of the uni-dimensional framework which have been used for these constructs?

In addition to the issues raised above, which seem to contradict findings that high interdependence is positively associated with depression, the issue of bi-culturalism should also be taken into consideration. Asian-American individuals constantly have to navigate between collectivist and individualist cultures. In terms of this navigation, it has been found that orientations toward both their host as

well as their native cultures interact to influence psychological health (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993), with a bi-culturally competent individual showing more resilience to mental distress than his or her uni-culturally competent peer. This is true regardless of whether the preference is toward the host culture or their native culture (Birman, 1998; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, as cited in Liu & Goto, 2007). If the collectivist culture leans toward an interdependent view of the self, and an individualist culture toward an independent view, *and* bi-culturalism is not only possible in one and the same individual but is also beneficial, would it therefore be more appropriate to understand interdependence and independence as co-extensive constructs instead of constructs that lie on a continuum?

The answer seems to be in the affirmative. In a recent study, Liu and Goto (2007) set out both to disaggregate and to combine the interactive effects of interdependence and independence in bi-culturally situated individuals. They framed interdependence and independence as orthogonally varying bi-dimensional constructs; that is, these constructs were measured separately, allowing for the possibility of both to be high (or low) in the same individual. In addition, independence and interdependence were then combined in an interactive term to give an overall measure of “self-construal.” The major predictor variable in the study was family cohesion as the researchers reasoned that the influence on mental distress in an interdependent individual would likely be due to the mechanisms within the family structure. Mental distress served as the outcome variable in the study. In brief, the study found that family cohesion was indeed a running theme throughout, being a function of both independence and interdependence: The “self-construal” term as well as independence on its own was predictive of cohesion. Surprisingly, however, by itself interdependence was not a significant predictor. It was also found that both interdependence and independence can exist in equally high levels in the same individual, a finding which strongly supports the bi-dimensional model. Moreover, family cohesion is more likely to remain intact in high interdependence and independence individuals; otherwise, low independence and high interdependence actually correlates negatively with family cohesion. When the effects of family cohesion were controlled for, mental distress was found to be positively correlated to interdependence in general. However, the significant correlation between interdependence and mental distress only held in individuals high on interdependence (one *SD* above the mean) but low on independence. This significant relationship disappeared in individuals high in both independence and interdependence. The researchers speculated that family cohesion was a

protective factor against mental distress. This is the only research to date to study the interactive effects of interdependence and independence as they relate to family cohesion and mental distress.

Based on the discussion so far, a few conclusions can be drawn. First, an interdependent view of self is not gained at the expense of an independent self-perception. In fact, individuals high on both these factors are more resilient to mental distress. Secondly, it is likely that the protective factors of bi-cultural competence are found in a cohesive family environment; and that family cohesion itself is a function of these two traits. In other words, the effects are bi-directional. Thirdly, despite the positive interactive effects of high independence with high interdependence, it remains a fact that an individual who is high only on interdependence but not independence, is *more likely* to be mentally distressed. Two questions, then, remain to be answered from these findings:

Why does high interdependence with little independence lead to a breakdown in family cohesion *and* increase the individual's susceptibility to mental distress?

Conversely, why is an individual high in both independence and interdependence able to sustain and thrive in a cohesive family structure *and* concurrently experience better mental health?

These two questions can be rephrased into a more precise philosophical question: What is the metaphysical structure of the person which underlies both interdependence and independence such that the person and the very structure of the family flourish?

### **Theological and Philosophical Foundations of Interdependence**

This article will now shift its focus to philosophical and theological anthropology first by introducing Trinitarian theology and then proceeding to show its philosophical coherence.

#### ***Personhood: An Overview***

*Personhood of the Trinity.* In the teaching of the Catholic Church, the Trinitarian God is a trinity of Persons precisely because of the Godhead's intrinsic relationality. The term "substance" (or "essence", "nature") is used to designate God in His one-ness, that is, His unity; the term "Person" (or *hypostasis*) is used to designate the real distinction between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; while the term

“relation” designates that this distinction lies explicitly in the *relationship* between them (CCC no. 252). In other words, the Being (*ens*) of the Godhead is one (*unum*) in essence (*res*); but simultaneously, God is also a trinity of *Persons* in virtue of the *substantial relations*. As Lateran Council IV pronounced, “It is the Father who generates, the Son who is begotten and the Holy Spirit who proceeds” (Lateran Council IV, 1215, DS804; c.f., CCC no. 246). Or, to put it another way, the coming into being of the Son is not something superadded to the Father, “the person *is* the deed of generating... [and] is identical with this act of *self-donation*” (Cardinal Ratzinger, 1990, p.444, emphases added).

*Personhood of the human being.* How, then, does Trinitarian theology inform the philosophy of the *human person*? It will be argued here that since man and only man is made in the image and likeness of God (c.f. Genesis 1:27), therefore, from the philosophical principle of cause-and-effect, the nature of the specifically *human* personhood is also one of relationality. “To be the image of God implies relationality... Hence it means the capacity of relationship; it is [also] the human capacity for God” (Cardinal Ratzinger, 1995, p.47).<sup>1</sup> Understood as such, the human person “is the event or being of relativity. The more the person’s relativity aims totally and directly toward its final goal, at transcendence, the more the person is itself” (Cardinal Ratzinger, 1990, p.452). This is not to imply that human personhood is a substantial relation akin to the Persons in the Godhead. Rather, the relationality of the human person lies in the *gift character* founded in the very act of creation (of which the philosophical and theological underpinnings will be discussed shortly).

### ***Love, Relationality, and Gift***

Having established the intrinsic nature of human persons as relational, and associating interdependence with love, relationality, and the gift character of the human person, the following points can be developed:

1. Love is the order of creation;
2. Relation is the order of love;
3. Gift is the order of relation.

It will then be shown that as human persons have a gift character “moulded,” as it were, into their very nature, they can only flourish fully in relation—they are intrinsically interdependent.

1. *Love is the order of creation.* Creation, as understood by the Church Fathers and definitively taught in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994), arises from a sheer overflow of love (refer to CCC nos. 293, 1604). Only love can explain creation because only love can create gratuitously: for the nature of love is an “overflow”, it is not self-contained; indeed, it *cannot* be self-contained.<sup>2</sup> A lover can only say he loves his beloved if the lover wants the good of the beloved *for the beloved’s sake*. Granted, to see one’s beloved happy inevitably brings joy to the lover as well, but lover’s joy is, nevertheless, *motivated by the beloved’s happiness*. At the risk of oversimplifying, love in its barest form is a *response* to the beloved—an overflow of a selfless desire for the good of the beloved (e.g., see Wojtyla, 1993a). In this sense, creation can only have its basis in the Love of the Creator. Creation is not necessary, it is not a need on the part of the Creator, but is a sheer gratuitous act stemming from an overflow in the essence of Love Himself. *Love, therefore, is the order of creation.*

2. *Relation is the order of love.* Since love is at the very least a response to another, it follows that love is also *intrinsically relational*. This is a first principle, as it were, of the nature of love. Given that first principles, by definition, cannot be proven positively, per se, this section will attempt to bring to evidence this truth from experiential support. On the negative side, take, for instance, what is known as “disordered” or “selfish” love of self in a person with narcissistic personality disorder. From one point of view, this person may very well view himself as the subject (the “I”) who loves that which he perceives (even if only non-consciously) as object, namely the grandiose and special “me” whom he expects to be recognised for (see DSM-IV-TR, 2000 for details of this disorder): “I love *me* (and you ought to love me, too).”<sup>3</sup> Even in this disordered state of “love,” there is still an intrinsic relational content. Evidently, then, the love which is correctly ordered from *one person to another* is also that which is most properly relational at its very core. This is present most clearly in the Persons of the Trinity: the Father’s love begets the Son, of which the love between Father and Son brings about the procession of the Holy Spirit (CCC no. 246). *Relation, therefore, is the order of love.*

3. *Gift is the order of relation.* As was intimated earlier, relationality in the human person stems from the gift character of the creation itself. How is this so? According to the analysis of Pope John Paul II (1997), creation is not only a calling of creatures from nothingness into existence, it is also “a fundamental and “radical” giving, that is, a giving in which the gift comes into being precisely from nothingness” (p.59). To elaborate, there are two related but distinct

dimensions in the account of this first creation narrative (i.e., Genesis 1) of which the Pope speaks. First, in its most basic dimension, creation was brought forth out of *nothing*—*creatio ex nihilo*. Secondly, the overflow of love as the basis of this act is exactly that dimension which confers upon creation its *gift character*. As previously discussed, only love can give gratuitously; but even more than simply the basis for gratuitous giving is the fact that *the very essence of Love Himself does not but give gratuitously!* For this reason, “every creature bears within it the sign of the original and fundamental gift” (Pope John Paul II, 1997, p.59). Since persons are gifts in the very metaphysical structure of his creatureliness, *and* since he is created out of love to love, it follows that relationality is part of the *metaphysical makeup* of the human person.

What does this gift character entails? What is the meaning of gift? What does one do with a gift in order that its *nature* may be fulfilled and actualized? Experience seems to give a suitable answer. Under typical circumstances, when one is *given* a gift, one first has to *freely accept* the gift. One then proceeds to *open* and *discover* the gift, *affirm* that the gift is good, and *enjoy* it as appropriate to the item’s function. Analogously, the gift character of the human person calls for the *giving* of oneself away and the *receiving* of affirmation in return. As *Gaudium et Spes* (1965) puts it, “...man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself” (art. 24), a gift-act which cannot but entail that one enters into genuine self-giving relationships with other persons. *Gift, therefore, is the order of relation.*

### **Persons as Gifts: Finding Expression in Interdependence and Independence**

#### ***Interdependence and the Gift Character of Personhood***

The question this section poses is simple: How does the metaphysical foundation of the gift character of personhood help in understanding interdependence in collectivist cultures? It seems almost too obvious that it is precisely through the gift nature of personhood that living in relation and in communion finds its most essential meaning: A gift can only be fulfilled in its nature if it is given away and received fully by the other, and interdependence in its most ideal form is exactly this giving and receiving of one another in community. What, if anything at all, does this mean for any and all persons in general, regardless of the cultures that they are born and/or raised in? Is interdependence constructive in a so-called “trans-cultural” way? Can its benefits be generalized? If it is indeed the case that all persons are intrinsically

relational in their very *metaphysical structure*—a state of affairs which is patently trans-cultural—then it follows that interdependence is fitting in all contexts.<sup>4</sup>

Further, recall that Liu and Goto (2007) found striking results using their bi-dimensional model of independence-interdependence. They found that: (a) family cohesion was more likely to remain intact in high interdependent *and* independent individuals, (b) high interdependence with low independence led to a significant relationship between interdependence and mental distress, and (c) high interdependence with high independence led to a non-significant relationship between interdependence and mental distress. It would be reasonable at this juncture to attempt to understand how the gift character of the human person is not only related to interdependence, but also how it affects *independence*.

### ***Independence and Interdependence: The Gift of Selfhood in Community***

In *The Theology of the Body*, Pope John Paul II (1997) speaks of the reciprocity of the gift nature between man and woman. The nature of exchange in the act of giving is such that in giving oneself in service to the other, the woman—who is first and foremost both “given” (p.71) to herself and to man by God—“rediscovers” (p.71) herself through the man’s affirmation of her humanity and femininity. It is through the very fact of her selfhood being accepted and affirmed *by another* “for her own sake” (p.71) that the man *mirrors back*, as it were, the woman’s goodness and beauty to her; and in that mirroring, she comes to possess her selfhood ever more fully. Even though Wojtyla speaks in the context of man and woman, the same principles apply to all human persons. Just as one must first have a gift before one may present the gift to another; analogously, each person must possess himself before he can even hope to give the gift of himself to another.

To elaborate, at least two significant points should be considered here. First, since the nature of the human person is one of *gift*, it is therefore necessary that one should enter into *self-giving* relationships with other persons for the full actualization of the human person to take place. Furthermore, for the giving to be truly completed, there has to be the *receiving* of the gift—the affirmation of the very personhood of the giver by the one receiving. Secondly, the entire dynamic of mutuality ultimately rests in self-possession which, as a wholly *human* act, is not a static, non-changing reality, but one that can be either continually renewed and strengthened or eroded and destroyed.<sup>5</sup>

Herein lies the pivotal role of independence: A child must be “given to himself,” as it were, by his parents, an affirmation of the goodness of his existence, his very *self* which he then understands and feels as “good to be.” The child should be nurtured with a healthy sense of self which allows him both to be *a part of* his family and *apart from* it. As the philosopher Martin Buber (1965), so aptly puts it:

Sent forth from the natural domain of species into the hazard of the solitary category, surrounded by the air of chaos which came into being with him, secretly and bashfully he watches for a Yes which allows him to be and which can come to him only from one human person to another. (p.71)

This is not merely a romantic notion, as it were, of parental affirmation; it is not simply a play on the affect, though affect plays a major role. At the heart of this “Yes” lies the truth of the human person: “Only if one *possesses* oneself can one give oneself... and only if one *governs* oneself can one make a gift of oneself” (Wojtyla, 1993b, p.194, *emphasis* added). It is precisely from this “Yes” as a gift from the parents’ own self-giving love that the child learns that it is good to be oneself and hence to possess oneself; but self-possession alone is not enough, for it forms but the basis of giving oneself. Through this affirmation, the child must also learn that it is good and necessary to govern oneself—to be properly independent—in order that one might then be able to make a gift of oneself.

In light of this examination of the gift nature of the human person, it is not surprising that Liu and Goto’s study (2007) found family cohesion to be more likely in highly interdependent *and* independent adolescents. Harmony in the family can only be truly maintained and flourish when its members can govern themselves and hence also give themselves more perfectly to one another. In addition, mental distress was not significantly predicted in this group of adolescents. Moreover, in terms of the negative aspect of this same dimension, it is not surprising that parental psychological control of children which actively discourages individuation and encourages family enmeshment is significantly correlated with emotional distress (see Barber, 2002 for an extensive collection of studies of this empirically measurable construct).

### **Conclusion: An Integrative Framework**

This article has examined the case for interdependence in light of the philosophical foundation of the human person understood in his gift character. Although there is still a relative dearth of empirical evidence—and hence generalizations should be drawn cautiously, Liu and Goto (2007) have found that independence and interdependence do not lie on a continuum; instead, these two constructs can and do fit into a bi-dimensional model. In practical terms, this means that a person can rate high in both independence and interdependence. As such, the separation of these two constructs allow for a better qualitative explanation of the benefits of biculturalism, as well as the widespread prevalence of interdependent cultures and collectivist societies.

When viewed in terms of the gift structure of personhood, both the benefits of interdependence as well as its interaction with independence can be coherently accounted for. *Love is the order of Creation; relation is the order of Love; gift is the order of Relation.*

Independence, expressed as self-possession and self-governance, is intimately bound up with interdependence which finds its underpinnings in the human person's gift character. Ideally, if these two aspects of the selfhood are present simultaneously in a healthy balance, the person will be better able to flourish both as an individual, as well as part of his family, community, and the larger society. As Cardinal Ratzinger (1990) aptly puts it, "If the human person is all the more with itself, and is itself, the more it is able to reach beyond itself, [then] the more it is with the other" (p.451-452).

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## Notes

1. The capacity for God, or in other words, the *return* to his Creator is grounded in the *exitus et reditus* principle in metaphysics. Simply put, this principle maintains that every being coming forth (*exitus*) from the Creator has a natural “inclination” to return (*reditus*) to its Source. The term “inclination” is used here in the ancient and medieval sense of “tendency” (*tendere*), and is applicable to both conscious and subconscious acts. For a more comprehensive understanding of this *exitus et reditus* principle, see, for example, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine* (St Augustine of Hippo, 1991).

2. To elaborate, God, with such attributes as wisdom, knowledge, mercy, etc.—indeed, God *as* Wisdom, Knowledge, Mercy, etc. does not create because He is wise, or omniscient, or merciful; for to impute the act of creation on those attributes would be to imply a necessity on God’s part, namely, that He *needs* to create. If it were indeed the case that it was necessary that God *had* to create, it would also mean that God has an intrinsic *need*. This divine neediness, so to speak, is inherently self-contradictory: For God to be *God*, He must be entirely self-sufficient and need-less; therefore, those attributes cannot be that which “caused” the act of creation. Hence, the only attribute which can properly be the cause of creation is *love*, or rather, Love Himself.

In addition, although the present paper is not the place to discuss this, but for a more comprehensive account of the nature of love through the centuries, see, for example, the works of the 12th-century theologian Richard of St. Victor, 14th-century Seraphic Doctor of the Church St. Bonaventure, 19th-century Dutch philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, and 20th-century philosophers and/or theologians such as St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein), Dietrich von Hildebrand, and Karol Wojtyła (Pope John Paul II), among others.

3. To put it another way, every human experience—including cognitions, emotions, and behaviours—is reflexive insofar as a person under normal circumstances can, at will, reflect on his own experiencing by “distancing” himself—his “I”—from the “me” who is experiencing: *I can think about my thinking/feeling/acting*. For a better account of the relation between *subject* and *object* in the human person, see John F. Crosby’s (1996) *The Selfhood of the Human Person*.

4. In this regard, the Church stands by the position that “God wills the *interdependence of creatures*. The sun and the moon, the cedar and the

little flower, the eagle and the sparrow: the spectacle of their countless diversities and inequalities tells us that no creature is self-sufficient. Creatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in the service of each other” (*CCC* no. 340, *emphasis* in the original).

5. This nurturing and/or erosion of self-possession can be seen very clearly in psychological conditions such as addictions where the addict becomes “subsumed,” as it were, into the object or activity of the addiction. Self-possession is gravely eroded in the acts concerning the addiction itself, e.g., theft to obtain money for drugs is “driven” by the craving, it is immanent within the person, and remains an immanent act in its metaphysical structure, never able to surpass the self-centredness to transcendence. As Wojtyła puts it (1979), “In true willing: the subject is never passively directed to an object. The object—which may be a good or a value, . . . never leads the subject back on itself; it never forces the subject into its own reality thereby determining it from without; that kind of subject-object relation would in fact amount to determinism; it would mean that the subject was in a way absorbed by the object and also that innerness was absorbed by outerness” (p.127).

