

Embodying *New* the Worship Relationship  
Whole Theology and Practice Required

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## Chapter 1      *The Relationship of Worship*

**These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.  
They worship me in vain.**

Mark 7:6, NIV<sup>1</sup>

Christians worship God in many and diverse ways, depending on our understanding of worship, our traditions, our sociocultural context and how we perceive God. Also, our celebrations and confessions of faith in worship may be long established or recently developed. However, not everything we do in corporate worship has significance to God, nor can worship include everything expressed as worship in churches today.

In its primacy, making secondary all else, worship is our relational response back to the transcendent creator God, who initiated relationship with us. And because worship is this reciprocal relational response to God, worship can't be just anything we want it to be, even if well established; nor can we make assumptions about whether our worship has significance to God based on good intentions. God is the one who establishes the terms for relationship with God. This has always been the nature of covenant relationship with our holy God, which historically has been reshaped by human terms—including in worship today. Any assumptions on our part about worship are what Jesus challenged (and still challenges) in his words opening this study. Not all our expressions—verbal and otherwise—serve God's relational desires and purpose for our worship gatherings. What then in worship integrates with God's relational desires and purpose and has the relational outcome both pleasing to God and satisfying to us in our innermost?

For our relational response of worship to have significance to God, it must by its relational nature involve the following: (1) It must be compatible with the righteousness of God—that is, the *who*, *what*, and *how* God is and thereby is present with us; and (2) it must conjointly be congruent with how God is involved with us, which is distinguished by the whole of God's (the Trinity's) intimate relational involvement.

The whole of God's presence and involvement were vulnerably embodied by Jesus in the incarnation, and are now extended to, with and in us by the Spirit. Therefore, based on God's relational nature and intimate involvement, worship is relationally significant only in the wholeness of our reciprocal relational response to the whole of God as Subject—not a fragmented response that reduces God to merely an object of our worship. For God's worshipers to whole-ly respond in worship is to 'embody *new*' the worship relationship—that is, in compatible and congruent response to the whole of God that Jesus embodied. And the terms for our response in worship are composed only by God's relational terms, which are distinguished from *our* terms that are unavoidably shaped by tradition (including Christian traditions), culture (including Christian subcultures), or any other influence (notably modern technology) from our human context.

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<sup>1</sup> Scripture references throughout this study are taken from the NRSV unless otherwise noted. Wording in italics indicate my renderings.

Jesus succinctly summarized God's terms as "in spirit and truth" (with the vulnerable honesty of our heart, Jn 4:23-24), terms which we easily revise with substitutes for direct relational involvement. Our terms for the worship relationship will always lead us to 'embody *old*' our response with simulations, resulting in invalid, idle, vain (*matēn*) worship according to Jesus; and it may surprise many to see just how contrary our terms are to God's. Vain worship on our terms has no relational significance, the point of Jesus' critique of certain Pharisees in Mark's Gospel (Mk 7:6-9,13; par. Mt 15:6-9).

Jesus contrasted those Pharisees' worship (embodied *old*) with certain persons who embodied *new* (i.e. "in spirit and truth," cf. Jn 4:23-24), for us to learn from. Rather unexpectedly, the disciple who demonstrated compatible and reciprocal relationship in both her discipleship and worship was Mary, Martha's sister, whose response to Jesus was both a challenge and in contrast to the other disciples. And Jesus further illuminated what composes worship that pleases God when he affirmed some children who were shouting praises in the temple soon after Jesus restored it to its primary function (Mt 21:12-17). These persons—Mary and the children—are examples for us to help us see the extent to which we need to undergo redemptive change (dying to old, rising in new) in our person and function in relationships that is necessary to transform from embodying *old* to *new* the worship relationship. They are discussed in the next two chapters to demonstrate for us what it means to be worshipers unfettered by secondary matters that constrain even most dedicated followers of Jesus.

Mary and the unrestrained children are our unlikely teachers who show us wholeness in their 'person' who respond to God with relational significance. And we should be both challenged and encouraged by them, to help us grow in our relationship with God integrally with our relationship of worship, in conjoint function individually and corporately.

This study is an extension of my two previous worship studies.<sup>2</sup> Along with the others, the current study is written with the prayers that through it the Spirit will encourage and help all God's worshipers go further and deeper in our worship practice—that is, in whole practice to reflect the whole theology distinguishing God's presence and involvement with us. I urge you to engage this study in ongoing interaction with the Spirit.

## **Who and What God Gets: Three Major Issues for Worship Practice**

In proceeding to talk about the worship relationship, crucial relational matters need to be established from the outset that will be built upon throughout the study. Integral to our growing in the worship relationship are *three major issues* for our relational involvement (i.e. our practice) as Jesus followers to be whole in worship; without focusing on parts of us, this involves inseparably our discipleship and spirituality (growing deeper in relationship with God). The worship relationship must never be separated from discipleship in relational terms, which is first and foremost the

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<sup>2</sup> The two previous studies are: *A Theology of Worship: 'Singing' a New Song to the Lord* (Theology of Worship, 2011) and *Hermeneutic of Worship Language: Understanding Communion with the Whole of God* (Worship Language Study, 2013). Both are available online at <http://4X12.org>.

relationship of following Jesus in the relational progression from disciple to family of God, and not primarily about serving and ministry (though these are important), as is commonly promoted in worship services (cf. Jn 12:26). While the worship relationship beyond the corporate gathering ongoingly involves serving, service is not the primary focus for discipleship or worship.

The three major issues for all practice were vulnerably embodied in Jesus' earthly life, and provide a necessary framework by which to ongoingly examine our notions about and our practice of (1) who and what we are as worshipers/disciples (our ontology) and (2) how we are involved in relationship (our function). Our ontology and function compose our theological anthropology, which underlies all that we discuss in this study. These three major issues for practice get us to be very specific as we examine our actions and their significance in worship. If we are willing and committed to the LORD for redemptive change, the three issues for worship practice are invaluable for clarifying the ways we need to change in order for our worship response to be compatible to God for congruent relational connection. The **three major issues for all practice** are as follows:

1. The significance of the person presented, demonstrating the integrity of the person we present to others (especially to God) particularly in worship.
2. The quality and integrity of our communication to God, which also reflects how well we hear and receive God's communication to us.
3. The depth level of involvement in the worship relationship, reflecting qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness.

## **1. The Person Presented**

How would you feel if you met someone for the first time who was wearing a face mask or a bag on their head and wouldn't take it off? Or perhaps you had a meeting or date with someone, who sent another person in their place? It's impossible to make any kind of relational connection with such persons. These extreme examples illustrate who and what God gets in worship—something less than whole persons, or some substitute.

God came into our human context embodied whole-ly for all to see and experience in the person of the Son—that is, a person embodying a subject for relationship, not an object to be observed. During his earthly ministry Jesus presented nothing less than and no substitutes for his whole person, inseparable from the Father and Spirit. Persons witnessed and experienced in Jesus' person the whole of God (the Trinity), who is vulnerably available to anyone for relationship together. And even though the whole of God embodied in the Son is not the entirety of transcendent God, who and what persons experienced was nothing less than and no substitute for God's being, nature, and presence. Beyond the significance of the manger, cross and resurrection, the person Jesus ongoingly presented was who, what and how God is—signifying the incarnation principle of *nothing less and no substitutes*. This is how the person Jesus presented is the ontological, functional and relational keys for our own person that we present in relationships, as noted above for worship.

Could the Father have sent someone other than the Son? Instead of the Son, the Father might have continued sending his angels or some other intermediary to be a guide for us in this life, or hand someone a book of ready-made New Testament Scriptures—

which is often how we treat God's vulnerable communicative acts—but he didn't. The OT records that at one point while Moses was leading the Israelites, God was ready to send an angel in place of his own presence had Moses not argued for God's own presence (see Ex 33:1-3,12-17). For Moses, a substitute was not good enough, was not acceptable to Moses, and God received Moses' plea and responded with nothing less than God's own presence. As the arc of God's thematic relational action to restore humanity and the rest of creation to wholeness unfolded in history, God made improbable strategic and tactical shifts by sending the Son himself into the human context to meet us Face to face (e.g. Jn 1:14; 2 Cor 4:6)—nothing less than the whole of God embodied in Christ, and no substitutes for his vulnerable presence and intimate involvement. When persons vulnerably received in their hearts Jesus' person extended to them on God's relational terms of his grace, those persons were made whole from inner out—the enactment of reconciled relationship only to be whole (the biblical meaning of 'peace').

God chose the most improbable and vulnerable way to enact his relational response to the human condition and need, presenting his very own whole self as Subject for relationship and not merely parts to observe and be the object of our worship.

Our perception and reception of Jesus (God vulnerably with us) must therefore include his life between the manger and the cross. After you die and go to heaven, do you want your loved ones to remember you only for the day you were born and the last week of your life? This is essentially how even the most ardent of believers (both in church and the academy) fragment 'the whole of God embodied' and ironically miss Jesus' profound relational significance for us. Furthermore, when we do actually pay attention to his earthly ministry between the manger and the cross, we tend to use a quantitative outer-in perceptual interpretive lens; we thereby pay more attention to what Jesus did (e.g. miracles, ate with sinners, even died for our sin) and had (power, wisdom for teaching, attributes of God in a comparative process), consequently giving primacy to secondary aspects of Jesus' person. That is, we fragment and reduce his person by defining him primarily by what he did and had. But these aspects of Jesus do not give us whole understanding of his whole person who has made the Father known (Jn 1:18). This narrowed-down view of Jesus essentially ignores the whole of Jesus' revelation, with the relational consequence of ignoring the integrity and significance of the persons presented.

Rather, during his time on earth, Jesus ongoingly made known his intimate relationship with his Father, and made intimate relational connection with his disciples in order to bring them to the Father for their own relationship together in likeness of Jesus' relationship with the Father. John's Gospel highlights Jesus' words revealing that the relationship between Jesus and the Father is so intimate that they are "one" (Jn 10:30,38; 17:20-26), such that to know him is to know the Father and to see him is to see the Father (Jn 8:19; 12:45; 14:7,9). As Jesus' disciples would grow in deep relational connection with Jesus, this would bring his followers into whole relationship with the Father in the relational progression of discipleship. Jesus further revealed that the Spirit would be his relational replacement in whom the whole of God (the Trinity) would come to dwell in the hearts of his followers (Jn 14:15-21, 23).

In all these disclosures, Jesus is the key for us to understand how the Trinity relationally responded to the human relational condition "to be apart" from relationships necessary to be whole. The full significance of Jesus' incarnation isn't understood until we experience the relational outcome of being made whole in relationship together with



the whole of God. Therefore the common view of Jesus (from manger directly to the cross) fragments and reduces the whole of God's self-disclosures, thereby functionally reshaping the God we worship in a process of "idolization of God" (to be discussed later).

Worship services through the church calendar year regularly reinforce this fragmentation and reduction of Jesus' whole person. What now dominates much of worship is the narrowed-down version of Christ in an incomplete Christology. This reduction of Jesus' whole person has had extensive and complex consequences—epistemological, theological and relational consequences which render us to a relational gap without the relational connection necessary for our worship to have significance. Moreover, we cannot know who Christ fully is, and thus cannot become who we, as his followers and worshipers, have been saved to become. In your worship experiences, what is the predominant focus about Jesus, notably in avowed christocentric worship? Does this focus help us relationally know Jesus so that we are made whole and redefined in our person from inner out?

The dominant factor creating and maintaining this gap is the perception of God that has been shaped by reductionism. Reductionism—the prevailing influence of human contextualization—fragments a whole into parts, then redefines that whole by one or some of the parts. Reductionism forms our "lens" of what we pay attention to about persons (human and God), namely what persons do (e.g. job, reputation, role in worship) or have (e.g. resources, attributes, even spiritual gifts); with the reductionist lens we increasingly ignore whatever is qualitative and relational. Reductionism turns even the most significant beliefs and practices—originally defined by only God's relational terms for the primacy of relationship together—into mere human tradition, or as Jesus put it to the Pharisees, "your tradition" (Mk 7:10,13). How Christians historically have shaped the practice of Communion and baptism are prominent examples of this. These become our terms for relationship with God, including how we celebrate and confess our faith in worship. Human contextualization and its dynamic of reductionism is a force to recognize and examine for all worship (including discipleship) practice, the necessity of which is indispensable for distinguishing 'embodying new the worship relationship' from embodying old.

The relational process to depth of understanding and knowing Jesus—and thus the Father, as Jesus says (e.g. Jn 10:30; 12:44; 14:9) can take place only in *God's relational context* and by *the trinitarian relational process of family love*. This relational context and process determine the primary purpose and significance of discipleship (inseparably with spirituality): to follow Jesus in his relational context, in the relational progression from disciples to friends (Jn 15:13-14) all the way to the Father, with the relational outcome to come face to face before God as adopted daughters and sons in his new creation family. The relational process by which we follow him in this life together is the dynamic of intimate relationship in likeness of the trinitarian persons' interrelationships—which Jesus vulnerably makes known to us. God's relational context is distinguished from the common human context (confused by our usual notions of heaven and earth, respectively, as physical locations), which is illuminated as follows:

If our theology is the outcome of relational connection and involvement with God's communicative action in self-disclosure—not merely from an authoritative Word or an inerrant Bible—then we are contextualized beyond human

contextualization to the further and deeper contextualization in the now-accessible relational context and process of the whole of God. That is to say, this distinguished contextualization is the trinitarian relational context and process into which the whole of Jesus—the embodied communicative Word who vulnerably came to us to “take us” experientially to the whole of God—not only intimately contextualizes us but whole-ly constitutes us in relationship together. This gospel cannot emerge whole in referential terms, but only in the relational terms initiated by God’s improbable theological trajectory and determined by the embodied Word’s intrusive relational path. Anything less and any substitute of the whole gospel neither distinguishes God’s improbable theological trajectory and intrusive relational path, nor has significance for the human condition in our need to be made whole.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, the corporate worship context, in order for all that takes place in it to have significance to God, can only be God’s relational context and must function by the trinitarian relational process (intimate relationships together of family love). In all of God’s relational work to reconcile us together, Jesus’ person presented vulnerably in wholeness—nothing less and no substitutes—is the indispensable key who embodies for us all that we need to flourish as beloved members of the new creation family. The person Jesus presented is this key as follows:

- (1) Jesus provides the epistemological key to open the relational epistemic process with the Spirit for whole knowledge and understanding of God.
- (2) Jesus provides the hermeneutical key that opens the ontological door through which the Spirit further discloses to us the whole of God, the triune God, the Trinity.
- (3) Jesus also provides the functional key that opens the relational door to the whole of God’s ontology and function, the necessary way through which the Spirit transforms us to intimate relationship with the Father, belonging together as the whole of God’s family (new creation and church) constituted in the Trinity.<sup>4</sup>

The integrity of the person presented by Jesus is defined by nothing less and can be determined by no substitutes.

Given the above understanding about what is primary to God, can the persons we present to God in worship be just anything less and any substitute for our whole persons, from inner out?

What would your experience be if your primary relationships functioned only on the basis of obedience? Parents, what if your children were simply only obedient, where obedience is all they expressed; what would your experience with them be? Or as children, what if your parents only expected you to obediently do what they told you to do? In these scenarios, parents only gave the rules, children only obeyed. These relationships in the extreme illustrate the focus that we get from reductionism on ‘what to

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<sup>3</sup> T. Dave Matsuo, “*Did God Really Say That?*” *Theology in the Age of Reductionism* (Theology Study, 2013). Online at <http://4X12.org>, 5.

<sup>4</sup> T. Dave Matsuo, *The Gospel of Transformation: Distinguishing the Discipleship and Ecclesiology Integral to Salvation* (Transformation Study, 2015). Online at <http://4X12.org>, 80.

do'. Both are views that wrongly depict God as only expecting us to obey (read 'do'), and accordingly we think that to obey ('do') is how we are supposed to function. This bleak scenario can describe what God gets in worship: being treated as a duty-minded or even demanding parent, and worshipers as mere obedient and relationally passive children (even while engaged in much ministry and service). Would this response be significant to God?

Where does this perspective come from? From common misreading and mis-hearing of God's Word with an interpretive lens focused on 'what to do'. My husband and I heard a sermon in essence about how we as Jesus' followers are sheep who simply need to obey. There was no focus on relationship together with God, just doing what we're told and follow the lead of the Good Shepherd. If we define our person primarily by what we 'do' for God, then the person we present in worship will be reduced accordingly. That is, we function more as objects rather than the subjects necessary for involvement in relationship together. For what has shaped our worship perspective, we also need to take a deep look at what have evolved as Christian traditions (e.g. ancient and denominational) and how we appropriate them for worship. If for example we rely primarily on tradition to drive corporate worship, resulting in "honor me with lips but without significant relational connection," then Jesus' words to some Pharisees and their worship (Mk 7:6-8) are meant for us *now*.

Here we need to honestly critique ourselves, compelled by Jesus' words to "pay attention to what you hear *from me*" (Mk 4:24). Tradition based or not, he wants all of each of us as subject-person, and all of us together, to make intimate relational connection in worship. Worship leaders, preachers, singers, and musicians can no longer hide behind performance of their roles or their credentials (e.g. education and training), and the congregation can no longer hide behind the former, can no longer depend on others to mediate their worship, and cannot take comfort in passivity or anonymity. All those persons presented do not have the integrity of being whole, but rather only present parts of their person, if not some substitute. While such presentations may be sufficient for those participating in these gatherings, who and what God gets have neither inner-out integrity nor relational significance. Accordingly, if God vulnerably embodies his heart to be relationally involved with us, anything less from our persons would not be compatible reciprocal response for congruent relationship together.

So, who among us are willing to drop the masks and let it all hang out for God? Mary and the shouting children show us what that looks like. Of course there were negative consequences for them, an expected outcome that highlights the incompatibility between embodying old and embodying new in the person we present to God.

## **2. The Quality and Integrity of Our Communication**

Imagine how you would feel if you were at a meeting or on a date, and the other person kept referring to you in the third person. Or that person spoke to you through a third party even though you are sitting together? How do you feel when another person talks to you only indirectly through telling stories (either about themselves, or about others), or talks only in reference to some topic? Likewise, how significant a connection can you make with a person by only texting? The substitutes for face-to-face, person-to-person interaction extend from the first issue of our practice to the second issue

addressing what's taking place in any interaction. These examples can translate to what God receives from us in worship. Who and what can God receive in such worship? Only fragmented persons in shallow relationships, from indirect communication, and in referential language that constrains communication in relationships.

Worship is reciprocal communication—God to us, we back to God. Whether or not this communication has the blessed outcome of intimate relational connection depends on the quality and integrity of our communication. We learn something important from Moses. In his first encounter at the flaming bush, Moses heard his name being called, and Moses answered (Ex 3). Moses knew the ontological difference between this God and himself, yet “the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend” (Ex 33:11; cf. Num 12:6-8). He complained to God about God, about the Israelites, and talked back too. Moses was just Moses, responding with his person—nothing less and no substitutes—no embellishment, no recitation of ancient creeds, nothing indirect. If only we were so free with God! Yet, this is the relational dynamic necessary to compose the worship relationship that God seeks from us (as Jesus summarized, Jn 4:23-24).

Can God count on us to be whole-ly who we say we are? On God's part, all the words Jesus uttered were congruent with the person he vulnerably presented, for the integrity and quality of all his communication. Although we often find that much of what he said is downright baffling, our failure to understand him reveals more about us and the inadequacy of our interpretive framework to interpret Jesus' language. What is more, for communication to make relational connection, how the listener/receiver hears is inseparable from what the speaker utters. God doesn't speak in a secret language that only “elite” Christians (e.g. mystics, scholars) can understand, nor does he speak only in theophanies (see Num 12:6-8); and for persons (and traditions) to claim so are wrong, perhaps elitist, certainly self-serving or exclusivist—the position assumed by temple leaders objecting to the children worshiping whole-ly (Mt 21:15-16).

Whether in worship or in discipleship, the problem for us is that we can never adequately understand and receive Jesus' relational language by using a referential language lens; and this was the disciples' ongoing problem in understanding Jesus. “Do you still not perceive or understand?” (Mk 8:17), and “Have I been with you [pl.] all this time, and you still do not know me?” (Jn 14:9) Ears that fail to hear, eyes that fail to see, hearts that fail to understand (Mk 8:17-18) keep us at a relational distance, because his language is only for relational purposes and not primarily to dispense information, as referential language is designed. Modern church leaders and scholars continue to depend on referential language and thus make assumptions similar to the above temple leaders. We need to be reeducated in Jesus' relational language and thereby have the integrity and quality of our communication transformed to his relational terms.

Communication theory describes basic features about personal communication: (1) one cannot not communicate; (2) “Any communication implies a commitment and thereby defines the relationship;”<sup>5</sup> and (3) “Every communication has a content aspect

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Watzlawick, Janet Helmick Beavin, and Don D. Jackson, *Pragmatics of Human Communication: A Study of Interactional Patterns, Pathologies, and Paradoxes* (NY: W.W.Norton & Company, Inc, 1967), 51.

and a relationship aspect such that the latter classifies the former.”<sup>6</sup> The third feature, the relational content of any communication, is conveyed as *relational messages* as follows:

- (1) What one is saying about him- or herself in relationship with another person.
- (2) How the speaker feels about the other person.
- (3) How the speaker feels about their shared relationship.<sup>7</sup>

How have you felt when family or friends tell you they’re going to do something—such as come by at a certain time, do a favor for you, repay you—and then then don’t come through (consider message 3). Or, how do you feel when you get to worship service early, and as people arrive, they avoid sitting next to you (consider message 2)? These are examples of negative relational messages that aren’t spoken yet communicate clear messages to us. We are more likely to understand relational messages that are conveyed to us (both positive and negative), but not so clear about the messages we give or perhaps just don’t pay attention to them. Yet, in terms of relational awareness, we’re not very good at receiving God’s relational messages.

God has made it clear in his covenant (old and new) promises that he can be counted on in the covenant relationship with his people to be who he claims to be and to do what he promises—how God composes relational message (1) with the quality and integrity of his communication. Additionally, this is the significance of the person presented in God’s righteousness, more accurately rendered ‘relational righteousness’ to distinguish it from the common use of ‘righteousness’ as an abstract static attribute of God. As this study progresses, ‘relational righteousness’ will become increasingly clear as essential to ‘embodying *new* the worship relationship’. Relational message (2) is the one we Christians think we understand best: God loves us. Yet even this message has gotten reduced in our understanding, as we will see. And relational message (3) is one that we as the new creation family must grow further in hearing from God, and will be increasingly blessed in as we do.

For our worship response to be compatible, we can no longer maintain our preference or predisposition for referential language; rather we need to undergo the inner-out change necessary to hear Jesus’ relational language, to deeply receive him. Then we will be able to both hear from God and ‘speak’ (with words and otherwise) congruently to God for the relational connection we all seek and desire. For despite our need and desire to be loved by God, we have yet to deeply hear the abundance of God’s relational messages to us, to receive his heart, and respond for the depth of relationship together that God desires with us, and the purpose for which he created us and for which he has acted throughout human history. The critical issue revolves around whose language we use.

What can God count on from his worshipers based on our relational messages? In spite of our own declarations through sermons, songs, prayers that say positive things, we also give many negative relational messages to God in worship, thereby exposing our

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<sup>6</sup> Watzlawick et al, 54.

<sup>7</sup> This rendering of principles from communication theory of Watzlawick et al (“This is how I see myself...this is how I see you...this is how I see you seeing me”; p. 52) is developed by T. Dave Matsuo in *The Relational Progression: A Relational Theology of Discipleship* (Discipleship Study, 2004). Online: <http://4X12.org>. Chap 1, section: “Understanding the Word.”

insensitivity to the relational nature of corporate worship. This also exposes the existing hermeneutical impasse preventing our knowing and understanding God. Negative relational messages can be communicated to God even when we praise and thank God—pointing us to the three major issues. For example, an obvious negative relational message we give to God is habitually arriving late to worship; the implied relational message is, “God, you’re not that important so I don’t need to be there when worship begins.” Related to this is when worship service regularly starts late (the responsibility of persons leading worship); the relational message is, “God, worshiping you is secondary to other more important things demanding our attention.” Yet starting late and coming late are so normative in God’s church that we are numb to what we’re really communicating to God; our practices have become normative by default, further reflecting our endemic unawareness of such relational messages to God. Additionally, the stated start times become meaningless, thereby exposing lack of integrity of communication (cf. Mt 5:37). Worshipers cannot count on the worship leaders to start when they say they will; worship leaders cannot count on worshipers to come on time—both exhibiting a lack of relational righteousness. What can *God* count on from either? If God can’t count on us for as a minor thing as starting worship on time, how can he count on us for more significant matters?

The point here isn’t to become obsessive about punctuality—God doesn’t function by the clock (*chronos*)—but to be guided by the primacy of relationship together with God, who is relationally righteous and seeks compatible response from his worshipers. Cultures that do not revolve around clock-time also need to examine the primacy given to relationship together defined by God’s terms and not by cultural terms.

In the same vein, consider the messages we give God when we are distracted in worship. Certainly accidents happen, such as errors in the power points, wrong musical notes, things falling, and other such distractions taking our focus off God. But being distracted by the ‘outer’ aspects of worship (e.g. style, order, vocabulary) doesn’t mean we have to let them be distractions. They are only secondary issues; we need to take more responsibility as gathered worshipers not to let secondary things distract us from the primary, and not stress about a lack of so-called perfection in secondary matters.

I think we make too many excuses to try to cover up our own lack of quality and integrity in our communication to God by pointing out others’ “faults” in secondary matters. We need to grow in relational awareness, and to hold each other accountable for the primary, the relational messages we give God, and each other as well. This all requires both communicating in relational language and engaging a deeper level of relational involvement.

For example, to grow whole in our practice, worship needs to be designed to set the relational tone for all who gather. Be resolved to clearly communicate relational messages to God of his importance to you, and your feeling giving primacy to the worship relationship: first, by starting worship on the agreed time (what is communicated otherwise?); and then come at that time prepared to worship our Lord! And persons leading worship need to lead even before worship begins by helping to cultivate this relational focus on God in their own actions, not on preparing music, instruments, or related matters and details. Then, leaders need to help establish and/or deepen connection directly with God, not assuming that a song accomplishes this. Reading words from God and expressing prayers to God help us directly focus on God.

### 3. The Depth of our Relational Involvement

How would you feel if you had a significant other whose primary way of relating was through giving you something, performing a role or function, always doing things for you, ostensibly for your benefit? And what would it imply that they never asked you what you want, and if they got upset when you were not excited about all their efforts? In these cases, your significant other neither treats you as a whole person, nor engages relationship together as a whole person. What they present and communicate to you are only secondary parts or substitutes of their person, and they are involved with you just on this reduced basis.

Or how would you feel if you were the honoree at a special event for which the planners and guests spent a lot of time, effort, money (even to the point of sacrifice), yet, hardly anyone talked directly to you? At best, they would limit their focus to talking about you in referential language to highlight information *about* you without any further involvement *with* you.

These fictitious scenarios illustrate the third major issue for all practice in a lack of depth of relational involvement. Such involvement is shallow and results in only shallow relationship engaged on their terms that keeps them relationally distant from you, that is, at their comfort-level. In much of our worship, this shallowness is what God gets from us, embodying *old* the worship relationship.

In contrast to the above, Jesus' presence and involvement with persons was always available for deeper relational connection—open and vulnerable for heart-to-heart relational connection. Whenever his deep involvement with persons was reciprocated, connection was made and persons were changed—made whole by God's relational grace Face-to-face in relationship together. Mary (Martha's sister) is one such disciple, whereas other disciples (notably Peter) had difficulty reciprocating. Jesus' vulnerableness in his deep relational involvement with persons was evident throughout his earthly life as he experienced the range of responses from humans, from open reception (e.g. Jn 1:12-13), to relational distance (e.g. the disciples, Jn 14:9a), to rejection (Jn 1:11, 6:66). Moreover, he was exposed to human sin (notably as reductionism), and deeply affected by it (e.g. Lk 19:41-47). Yet, without being influenced and shaped by these human contexts, Jesus vulnerably embodied God's relational grace and family love (*agapē*) to human persons with nothing less and no substitutes. Persons such as Levi (Matthew) and Zacchaeus experienced Jesus in this way (face to face, heart to heart) especially at Jesus' table fellowship—a relational context whose process becomes for us the definitive expression of the depth of Jesus' involvement with persons, and will be discussed more fully in chapter four.

Even before we can talk about depth of relationship, we need clarity about reciprocal relationship with God. God does not do relationship unilaterally, yet this is what many worshipers expect. Unilateral relationship is not the relationship God composed at creation or with the covenant, but we Christians practice this oxymoron as worship. *Reciprocal* relationship is incongruent with any notion of unilateral relationship, and precludes our worship posture as passive objects, for example, who expect God (or worship leaders) to do all the relational work. A passive posture is dissonant with covenant relationship with God because God cannot be other than what God is by nature: unequivocally relational. On the other hand, worship leaders need to examine ongoingly

that they are not engaging in unilateral relationship by performing before God or trying to make things happen during worship gatherings.

Furthermore, for deeper involvement in the worship relationship we need to pay attention to and take responsibility for the relational messages we communicate to God in worship: what we're saying about ourselves, about how we see God, and feel about our relationship. That is, everything that takes place individually and corporately in worship says something relationally from us directly to God (intentionally or unknowingly). To make the shift from practice unaware of relational function to practice having awareness of our relational function requires the deliberate action of redemptive change involving dying to the former practice so that the latter practice can emerge and grow. The three issues for practice then help form the qualitative relational lens necessary for us to grow in our awareness of what is taking place relationally, and thereby make any needed correction to (1) the person(s) we're presenting, (2) what and how we're communicating, and (3) the level of reciprocal relationship we're involved in.

Only with this qualitative lens can we transpose all the dynamics in corporate worship into a compatible key for our ecclesiology of worship, such that the relational outcome of our 'singing' has relational significance to God. In other words:

'Singing' is the integral relational dynamic of life that clearly distinguishes God's family in the tune of the new song composed in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God, the song of which worship is the chorus. And, worship is the integrating focus and the integral relational convergence of our (both individual and corporate) reciprocal relational response and vulnerable involvement in relationship together with God—the ongoing primacy of which is the sound of consonance significant to God's ear.

Nothing less and no substitutes for this composition can embody new the worship relationship. All else is fragmentary, unable to compose wholeness for persons and relationships.

Portraying as 'singing' this qualitative-relational focus and function in wholeness distinguishes the qualitative depth level of relationship from discursive referential language and function taking place from a relational distance. The level of worship that we embody new can take place only 'behind the curtain' in God's holy and intimate presence (discussed further in the next chapter). God's language is only this 'singing'!

These three major issues for worship/discipleship practice help us ongoingly examine whether or not our response to God in worship is compatible with the righteous God (as defined earlier) and congruent for relational connection with the whole of God as Subject. Who and what we bring before God as his worshipers, whose language we use in worship, and the presence or absence of relational clarity and relational significance in worship either converge in our embodying the worship relationship *new*—that is, in wholeness of persons and relationships—or diverge into fragmented worship that maintains and reinforces embodying the worship relationship *old* as a fragmented church reduced to parts of persons without depth of relational connection. Lack of relational awareness underlies much of what seems to be missing, even wrong, in so much of our worship; conjointly the three major issues also help us move forward with specific ways to change from inner out for a blessed relational outcome of wholeness in worship that



has deep relational significance to God as well as to us.

There is much written these days about worship/liturgy and spiritual transformation. Many worship thinkers believe that by virtue of attending worship on a regular basis that persons will be transformed. That is wishful thinking based on the view that change can take place from outer in (*metaschēmatizō*, to change the outward form or appearance, cf. 2 Cor 11:13-15)—wishful because the redemptive change of transformation simply doesn't work that way. Scripture tells us that to change from inner out involves *metamorphoō* (cf. Rom 12:2; 2 Cor 3:18). This is the redemptive change composing transformation, which requires both dying to the old (outer in reductionist ontology and function) so that the new can emerge—made possible by Jesus' relational work on the cross and the experiential reality of ongoing intimate connection with the whole of God (Rom 6:4-11; 2 Cor 3:17-18). Recognizing the need for deep change in us is an essential first step.

Redemptive change (*metamorphoō*) takes a lot of relational work on our part and isn't for the faint of heart. Yet, we are immeasurably blessed and loved by the whole of God's provisions for us for this redemptive change: the Father has adopted us into his very own family; Jesus provides us with the necessary keys we need for this change, including his work on the cross that opened up the curtain for us to enter into the Father's intimate presence, to establish us as his very own daughters and sons for Face to face connection (2 Cor 3:18; 4:6; Heb 10:19-22; Rom 8:29); and the Spirit now dwells in us for reciprocal relationship together (Rom 8:14-17; Gal 4:6). 'Transformed persons in transformed relationships embodying the new that Jesus saved us *to*' is what we are focused on in this study as pertains specifically to corporate worship. Who and what God gets back in worship are significant only when composed by this relational outcome distinguished by who and what we get from God. Accordingly, redemptive change is never about 'what to do' nor about unilateral relational work (even by God), but it is the reciprocal relational work involving our willful choices to let go and die to the old so that the new composed by God can emerge in us as whole persons in whole relationships together as the new creation family of God. Only this distinguished relational outcome composes the basis of the ecclesiology of worship.

And Christians throughout the global church need to claim the experiential truth of the whole gospel (not selective parts of it) that Jesus embodied. Then we, individually and collectively, are responsible to address the experiential reality that the whole of God expects, even demands, nothing less and no substitutes in reciprocal relationship together that he embodied in relational response to us.

## **The Key of Jesus' Relational Language**

How would you feel if someone kept speaking to you in a language that was unintelligible to you—even though that person knew your language but didn't like to speak your language (too difficult, didn't like the sound of it)? This is what God has to experience from us in worship. A lot of Christians "don't like" to be immersed in God's relational language, even though they might give lip service to it. In so many words, "we don't like what we feel threatened by." But many of us aren't even aware that God's relational language is any different from our referential language, and that the latter is

dissonant to God.

Scripture differentiates between two languages that are used in worship: relational language and referential language, both of which are present in any human tongue; all humans have the ability to speak referentially and relationally. Relational language is what Jesus distinguished as “my language” (*lalian tēn emēn*, Jn 8:43). “My language” openly disclosed the intimate family relationships within the Godhead in deep relational tones from the Father (e.g. Mk 1:11; Mt 3:17; 17:5; Jn 12:28b) and the Son (e.g. Mt 6:9-13; Jn 11:41; 12:28; 17:1-26). Relational language (including family language) discloses the whole of God’s intimate relational being and vulnerable involvement together for our benefit (e.g. Jn 12:30) because “my language” also defines the primacy of Jesus’ relational work to make us whole together in relationship to compose his new creation family.

Because language (in various forms including song, prayer, non-verbal) is the primary means of communication in worship, we need to take God’s many words about language far more seriously than we have up to now. We learn how critical language is when we listen carefully to God in Scripture, who critiques referential language in worship (i.e. honor with lips but distant hearts), challenging us to examine the assumptions we implicitly make, week after week, even in our confessions of faith. In order for us to embody *new* the worship relationship that has significance to God, we need to ‘listen’ to key words from both Jesus and the Father. “This is my Son...Listen to him!” is the Father’s command to Peter, James and John at Jesus’ transfiguration, in key relational language (Mt 17:5; par. Mk 9:7). The Father’s command extends to all of us in relational terms, not as a ‘law’ to obey but as the relational imperative needed to pay attention to him who has the keys to relationship together with God.

By necessity, Jesus qualifies this imperative, telling his disciples to “pay attention to how you listen” (Lk 8:18). The most common way we listen to God’s Word focuses on the words that Jesus speaks as referential words—a focus that disembodies his words from his person and thus that de-relationalizes his purpose in communicating those words. Most of the time we “listen” to Jesus’ words in Scripture to find out what we need to do. Such listening is from outer in, which narrows down our focus to the transmission of information by shifting God’s *relational language* to *referential language*. This has deep relational consequences: fragmenting Jesus’ whole person, reducing the integrity of the person he presents to us down to parts, notably his teachings and examples, and thereby ignoring the significance of the person and the quality of his communication with us for the primary purpose of reciprocal relationship together. Such listening in function is unilateral in that we only receive Jesus’ words in referential terms as a deposit of knowledge for us to accumulate (the bank deposit notion), to better ‘do’ what’s asked of us, not in relational terms for relational connection.

The only language sufficient to make relational connection is *relational language*, which, again, is what Jesus referred to as “my language” (cf. Jn 8:43), and which composes God’s vulnerable communication that makes relational connection only when received and reciprocated compatibly by us. The listening “to my Son” that the Father makes the relational imperative for us is only a function of relationship (namely the depth level of relational involvement, the third issue for practice), requiring our vulnerability to Jesus’ relational language, and our compatible response. Both discipleship and worship must, by their relational nature, be embodied by relational terms over referential terms.

Otherwise listening becomes another method (albeit a spiritual methodology) of what to do, keeping relational distance and focusing instead on what we have (knowledge). So listening isn't merely the physical function of the ears, but the involvement of our whole person in compatible reciprocal response to God.

When Jesus rejected the practice of honoring God with lips but with distant hearts, he was exposing and rejecting the referential language that typifies worship on our terms. All traditions, creeds and confessions of faith fall into this category when composed by referential language and/or practiced in referential terms—no matter how correct the theology or good the intentions of the practice. Referential language is any use of language for purposes other than making relational connection with God on his relational terms. Lectures and reporting—the imparting of information—are clear examples of language for information as an end in itself. Referential language in worship speaks *about* God and focuses on what God has done, does, and will do (e.g. delivers, does miracles) or has (attributes); but referential language lacks the qualitative relational involvement for compatible reciprocal response of worship because it doesn't involve the whole person (signified by the relational function of the heart from inner out).

The narrowed-down terms of referential language by design keep persons and relationships from being vulnerable. With uninvolved, distant hearts, our congruent connection with God is impossible. This is the critique Jesus makes about 'lips without heart'. Much of Christian tradition has been reduced to this, and needs to be redeemed and made whole, that is *renewed* by the transformation unfolding only from redemptive change.

Sadly, many prayers and songs presented in worship, whose primary purpose is ostensibly relational, are in practice focused more on secondary aspects (e.g. embellishment, lengthy, high volume), thus reducing the relational communication that prayer and song should compose to referential language. It should become axiomatic in our understanding that in the absence of the primacy of relationship together, our worship involvement will give primacy to outer in, increasingly focused on secondary outer aspects of our worship language, such as how skillful singers are, how eloquent, even moving, a preacher is, how embellished prayers are. Sermons can be merely referential language, though not always; it depends on the person giving the sermon and his/her involvement with God and the gathered worshippers—reflecting the three major issues for our worship/discipleship practice. If, for example, a sermon becomes focused on secondary aspects of Scripture, it becomes referential language in the process of 'referentialization of the Word'.

Because referential language doesn't involve our whole person from inner out, this so-called communication in worship actually creates or maintains relational distance—perhaps even while giving the illusion of relational involvement. The consequence is to fail to fulfill the primary purpose of communication in worship, which is to make relational connection with God. Again, the three major issues for all worship practice are essential to giving us needed feedback about whose language we are using in worship—God's relational language for embodying *new* the worship relationship, or referential language of worship on our terms, thus embodying *old* the worship relationship.

Referential language in worship is most recognizable when we speak or sing about God (e.g. in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person), indirectly referencing God—recall personal examples

raised earlier. In such worship, it is also often the case that instead of focusing our attention on God, we are really paying attention to the speaker, the singers and instrumentalists, or other activity going on during worship, creating ambiguity about who is the central focus. Performance by singers, musicians and dancers create such ambiguity. Ambiguous worship lacks the *relational clarity* that is basic to worship having relational significance to God. Ambiguous worship *de-personizes* God and *de-relationalizes* God from the Subject in relationship to an object observing, which are the consequences of trying to ‘do’ relationship on our terms. And yet, ambiguous worship is so normative in worship that we don’t notice it. Is it any wonder that we don’t “encounter” God in worship, as much as we long to? And from God’s point of view, where can he find those worshipers who are available for intimate relational connection, that is, worshipers who worship in spirit and truth, vulnerably in the honesty of their heart?

All this illuminates why any and all worship of lips without our hearts is vain (Mk 7:7), why we cannot include just anything in worship, and why everything expressed isn’t worship that has significance to God.

Worship planners and leaders bear much responsibility to ensure relational clarity defines each worship gathering, and this requires relational awareness and qualitative sensitivity on their part. There are specific ways to work and grow in leading worship directly to God, which we address later in this study. Relational clarity is but one dimension, though it is the necessary first dimension to move us from ‘lips without heart’ toward growing corporately as God’s compatible worshipers.

For examples of relational clarity needing to emerge in worship practice, eliminate relational ambiguity to help ensure that the focus of everyone’s attention is directly on God—not, as is common, on the worship team, choir or other leader. Diverting the relational focus from God challenges us to make every effort to reposition those leading worship to the back or sides of the worship space, away from front and center stage; at the very least, they should turn around to face God and not those gathered. All worshipers need to function as subjects to clarify their relational focus on God, and thus eliminate performances in the service that render worshipers as observers. Also, facilitate singing the words of songs directly to God by communicating in the second person, not indirectly in third person (including in PowerPoint displays).

At the very least, worship needs relational clarity; without this dimension there is nothing of relational substance to connect our worship. However, relational clarity alone is never sufficient for our relational response of worship to be compatible with God and congruent for relational connection with him. This is because even speaking or singing directly *to* God (e.g. in the 2<sup>nd</sup> person) does not ensure the involvement of our hearts (signifying our whole person from inner out) with God. As mentioned previously, our response to God must be compatible with God’s whole person presented to us, and congruent with God’s relational involvement. Who and what we bring in our worship cannot be some generic, general offering of ourselves, but must be specific to God’s person and God’s terms for relationship together, which then requires our direct involvement in God’s relational context and process. Once relational clarity is established, our involvement needs to go deeper for any relational connection with God to have significance.

Our worship therefore needs to have *relational significance* to God, which is determined when our response has the following function: our whole person vulnerably involved for intimate relational connection is compatible to who and what God is, and congruent with how God does relationship. Relational significance is specific to God—whose ‘being’ is heart, whose nature is relational, whose involvement is intimate—and always giving primacy to relationship together, thereby ongoingly making secondary all other expression and activity in worship.

The old axiom ‘You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink’ accurately implies that it is up to each individual to make the relational choices to have relational significance to God. Ongoing relational choices involve both living as a subject rather than an object, and engaging in reciprocal relationship over unilateral relationship. Worship planners can do all that’s possible to have relational clarity in a worship time, but the experience of relational significance depends on “the measure of *relational involvement* you give” (Mk 4:24) for each worshiper. Yet, on another level this relational responsibility isn’t merely an individual issue but needs to become the collective concern of the church family together.

We are individually and corporately accountable for who and what we bring before God, and for how we are involved in relationship together. This is our relational responsibility for our relational significance to God in our worship gatherings. Worship teams alone do not bear this responsibility for everyone, though they have the relational responsibility to ensure relational clarity and lead the church family in worship with their own reciprocal relational response to God. Likewise, the whole church family needs to be intimately involved with each other in order to build each other up by encouraging, admonishing, and sharing deeply in life together. This is the relational work of family love that Paul rigorously engaged in, for example, as he challenged and corrected the Corinthian church members about their divisive Communion practice (1 Cor 11:17-34), and their self-serving use of spiritual gifts (12:12-13 and 14:4-5).

Jesus’ rebuke of referential worshipers (Mk 7:6-7) gets to the heart of the matter (as he always does), in which he also challenges our own assumptions we make about who and what we give to God and thus intrudes on the status quo of our worship. And the heart of the matter is *the heart*, the qualitative function of which integrates the whole person inner and outer. God, whose very being is heart (“God is spirit,” Jn 4:24), wholly embodied his heart in relational response to us, giving us nothing less than and no substitutes for his whole person in vulnerable presence and intimate involvement in the primacy of relationship together. God doesn’t play games, is not capricious—not like us. *Nothing less and no substitutes* is how God is always present and involved; this is the significance of God’s relational righteousness, mentioned earlier. God’s relational righteousness is only a function of covenant relationship (whose terms are determined by God, not us)—that is, contrary to the common concept of a righteousness as an abstract static attribute—so that we can always count on him to be whole-ly who and what God *is* and how God engages in relationship. This understanding of God is critical for the truth of what we can expect from God and for the reality of what we experience with God in relationship together.

Based on who, what and how God is, God desires and expects nothing less than and no substitutes for *our* whole person in compatible reciprocal relationship together. This relational basis is why the worship relationship must go beyond honoring with lips

only—no matter how innovative, eloquent, or theologically correct—in order to be the reciprocal response of our whole person signified by the heart’s qualitative function. That is to say (in relational terms), only our righteousness in worship as ‘nothing less and no substitutes’ composes the response of worship that is compatible in response to and congruent in connection with the whole and holy God—the worship that has relational significance to God. Distinguished only by God’s whole relational terms, this composes the worship relationship embodied *new*, which is not a template demanding our conformity.

God’s deep and affirming relational message here is that God wants *us*, our whole person—he loves *us* whole-ly for intimate relationship together, not what we do for him or give to him. We have to distinguish these vital relational messages from God; and we also have to account for the relational messages we give God by our worship.

Finally, ‘embodying *new* the worship relationship’ as our compatible response to God and congruent connection with God cannot remain at the individual level. The latter alone is limited and, like referential language, is rendered to embodying *old*. But embodying *new* must be composed in whole relationships together as God’s new creation family. In Jesus’ prayer to the Father at his last table fellowship, Jesus deeply prayed for his followers to be “one as we are one” (Jn 17:11). For us to become “one as we are one” has to be understood as those who have been freed from our sin (especially the sin of reductionism, addressed throughout this study), transformed and made whole in intimate and reconciled relationship with the Father, who has adopted us into his *very own family* as daughters and sons together (cf. Eph 1:3-14; Rom 8:29). Our corporate worship does not yet reflect this in practice, even if it is in our theology. It doesn’t help that some in the theological academy see adoption as only a reality for the end times. Jesus and Paul both attest otherwise (cf. Mk 3:35; Eph 1:5). But, again, carefully listening to Jesus’ relational language makes it imperative to give primacy to his indisputable family language.

By holding us accountable, God affirms us as persons equalized in his family and helps us to grow further and deeper in transformed relationships together in likeness of the Trinity (as Jesus prayed). This is who and what God desires and pursues us for in his ongoing relational action in the gospel of wholeness—the complete gospel of what God has saved us *from* and *to*. And because wholeness (*šālôm*) cannot be realized in disparate individuals—even a group of individuals—particular focus needs to be given to our worship language and its integral importance to relationships *together* as God’s family, God’s relational whole. Relational language is only for the building up of God’s whole, thus worship language has an integrating function for the maturing into wholeness of the church in all our relational bonds together—in the relational outcome of the ecclesiology of worship. This uncommon relational context with its whole relational process is integral for the significance of worship of the whole and holy God.

Transposing from embodying *old* to embodying *new* the worship relationship therefore needs a transformed ecclesiology that has expression in whole worship theology and practice. Most worship experiences in Western contexts today remain highly individualistic, either by design or by default—despite references in church to “family.” Worship in collective contexts may not highlight the individual but tend not to illuminate the church as family in relational terms. Much of what takes place in any given worship really gives only an outer appearance as family, inadvertently or perhaps intentionally. As such, our worship reflects a truncated soteriology that doesn’t take us fully into God’s

family, that is, the new creation family we are saved *to*. Truncated soteriology yields a limited ecclesiology that has been renegotiated to our terms, and both of these reflect an incomplete Christology that remains narrowly focused on only Christ of the cross and thus limited to what we are only saved *from*. Embodying *new* the worship relationship is all-embracing—that is, embodies the whole of persons and relationships, not parts or limited aspects—and requires major transformation (*metamorphoō*) from inner out that will surely turn a lot of church-goers away. God is waiting for all his daughters and sons. How well are we listening to “my language”?

## “The Measure You Give is the Measure You Get”

The heart of the matter (the heart) that Jesus ongoingly addresses also involves the deep issue of how we define who and what we are (our ontology), and what determines how we engage in relationships (our function), notably in the worship relationship with God. This is about our theological anthropology and specifically where our heart is. Knowing where our heart is is essential to understand in order to grow in wholeness as the persons transformed in righteousness, worshipers God can count on for intimate relational connection.

Jesus said to his disciples about relationship with him: “Pay attention to *what* you hear *from me*; the measure you give will be the measure you get, and still more will be given you” (Mk 4:24). Jesus knows we often don’t pay attention to all his words or ignore certain words because of our biases, our selective listening. Listening is critical to any and all relationships. Accordingly, not only do we need to pay attention to what we hear from Jesus, we also need to pay attention to *how* we listen (Lk 8:18). How we listen—that is “the measure you give”—critically determines the quality and depth of our involvement in relationship together (the third major issue for all practice).

What Jesus points to in these key relational words is applicable to God’s worshipers (and inseparable from our discipleship): when our response of worship is with nothing less and no substitutes, then intimate relational connection is always made. This is beautifully illuminated for us by Mary (Martha’s sister), whose response of worship shows us compatible response and congruent connection with God. As we will see further about Mary, she responded to Jesus’ person with her own vulnerableness necessary for intimate relational connection together. The relational outcome was that Mary deeply knew and understood Jesus. Mary didn’t focus on Jesus for what he did or had (in contrast to how Peter often related to Jesus), but was qualitatively focused on his whole person extended to her, and relationally responded to his person. Her interpretive lens was qualitative and relational, not quantitative and at a relational distance (characteristic of the other disciples). She shows us by her own worship that the interpretive framework and lens we use (either outer in, or inner out) is the determining factor for the depth of our involvement in relationship with Jesus (“the measure you give”), and the depth of relational connection made and outcome of relationally knowing each other (“the measure you get”).

This unavoidable relational process composes **the relational paradigm** critical for our ongoing practice of discipleship and worship: “Who and what we give is who and what we get in relationship with God.” Stated in nonnegotiable relational terms, the

relational paradigm we need to embrace ongoingly reads: “The vulnerableness of our person we extend in worship will be the connection we get with the Father in Face-to-face relationship together.”

‘Lips without heart’ is God’s relational critique that is relevant today, exposing what takes place in too much corporate worship. Even though we sing God’s praises, deliver dynamic hymns and praises to honor him, and work hard each week to ensure excellence in all that we bring to God, without the qualitative involvement of our hearts from our innermost, vulnerably involved with God, then our worship isn’t compatible with God’s whole person vulnerably embodied in relational response to us, nor is it congruent to make relational connection with him. And in spite of any talk about the primacy of relationship as Jesus’ followers and intimacy in worship, by our not coming before God in the vulnerableness of our whole person(s) presented to God as our compatible response of worship communicated in relational terms, we show that we don’t understand what it means to be the worshipers the Father seeks. Those are the worshipers, as Jesus revealed to the Samaritan woman at the well, who are compatible with God (“God is spirit...must worship in spirit,” Jn 4:23-24). The worshipers whom Jesus distinguished and the Father seeks are distinguished only from inner out. In relational terms the worship relationship cannot be embodied new by embodying distinctions from outer in—even if these distinctions have been long revered or are widely esteemed today.

Therefore, whenever our involvement in worship doesn’t make the relational connection with God (as Mary did) that is congruent with how God engages in relationship (notably within the Trinity as Jesus vulnerably revealed in the incarnation), then who and what we bring to worship aren’t those who worship in spirit and truth (vulnerable honesty of heart). And it is critical indeed for our practice to embrace the full reality that ‘who and what we give is who and what we get in relationship with God’. More than likely we aren’t even aware of all these relational implications, even those of us who see ourselves as ‘relational’. Yet we have a lot to look forward to with anticipation, but only if we’re willing to be vulnerable with our ‘vulnerably present and intimately involved’ God. Are we ready to learn Jesus’ relational language? Who and what God gets depend on it!

As we continue, keep in focus that whole theology and practice will always be required.

## **For Your Theology and Relational Response**

Carefully consider the following song composed in the key of Jesus’ theological trajectory that he vulnerably embodied on his intrusive relational path in order to relationally respond to our human condition—and for only one relational outcome. May the whole of God’s vulnerable presence and intimate involvement embody us new in the worship relationship.



## The Whole of God Embodied<sup>8</sup>

*(words in parentheses optional)*

Transcendent God, holy God  
vulnerably present  
is who you are (who you are)

O, Righteous God, faithful God  
Intimately involved (with us)  
is what you are (O, what you are)

Revealed by grace, with your love  
here for relationship (with us)  
is how you are (yes, how you are)

O-- Praise be to God, embodied God  
only for relationship (with us)  
the whole of God (whole of God)

Thanks be to God, embodied God  
relationship together  
with the whole of God (embodied God)

*Reflectively*

Hmm-- who you are, yes--  
relationship together  
with the whole of God  
Hmm-- what you are, yes--  
relationship together  
with the whole of God  
Hmm-- how you are, yes--  
relationship together  
with the whole of God

O-- Praise be to God, embodied God  
vulnerably present  
the whole of God, whole of God

Thanks be to God, embodied God  
intimately involved  
the whole of God

*(Repeat song)*

*(Descending slowly)*

The whole of God  
the whole— of— God

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<sup>8</sup> T. Dave Matsuo and Kary A. Kambara, ©2008. Music available: Online at <http://4X12.org>, Worship Songs.



## Chapter 2 Unveiling the Worship Relationship

**Praise the LORD, O my soul;  
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.**

Psalm 103:1, NIV

**My heart is *resolved*, O God;  
I will sing and make music with my *whole person from inner out*.**

Psalm 108:1, NIV

How would you feel if your family or friends threw you a birthday party year in and year out in the same way: people doing the same things, same food, same presents, same decorations, and same words to you? It wasn't that you cared for any of it, but according to them, "It's how we've always done it." Or, to give it more meaning and try to dress it up as special, they might claim, "It's our tradition!" Perhaps the first time, even the second time, all this effort touched you (was significant at the time), but by the tenth time it was common for your friends to just plan and execute this tradition without further (notably deeper) thought.

Whether we're aware of it or not, we easily let ourselves become limited to set actions for celebrations. One likely reason is that it requires much more of us to go beyond the tried and true (what's common), to go deeper than the expected (what's the norm), that is, into uncommon action expressed, particularly to be vulnerable in person-specific involvement. The *uncommon* is action designed not to be innovative or different from common practice, but rather is designed to be compatible in relational response to the holy (uncommon) God. This uncommon worship response is what the above psalmists compose, which is clearly distinguished from our common practice expected in worship (even in contemporary worship).

Going deeper than expected gets into unfamiliar territory—holy ground, as will be discussed below—that will set us apart from the common, the norm, the majority. Therein raises the undesirable matter of risk, of being open to possible disapproval and even rejection. How much safer it is to essentially let our involvement be determined by how we've always done it, by traditions, all of which serve as templates to guide, shape and construct our actions into conforming limits. Perhaps the lure of conforming to templates is why social media such as Facebook are so popular—it's easier to fill in blanks and share only fragments of who we really are. Any connections made through such templates—be they through social media or through many worship practices—can only be simulations of a deeper connection (ontological simulation), because the person we present is delimited by the templates, and our communication is a substitute for quality and integrity (and content) needed for deeper relational connection. Yet, such simulation doesn't prevent us from having illusions about the significance of this level of involvement.

It is critical for us to understand that such templates in both social media and worship focus us on quantitative outer-in aspects of persons, human and divine, along with our relationships. The level of relational involvement that we engage is

automatically restricted because the focus on secondary aspects of persons relegates heart-level function to secondary importance, or is left out altogether—even when the heart is mentioned in our worship vocabulary. This dynamic is contrary to what the above psalmists compose; they are challenging not only our worship practice but the basic function of our person in relationship. Thus, we are brought back to the three major issues for practice and the relational paradigm introduced in the previous chapter: The person we present, the integrity and quality of our communication, and the depth level of our relational involvement will be the worshipers God gets and the relational connection we get.

## Vulnerable Heart or Default Worship

Translating these dynamics into the worship relationship, the issue is that we bring this same level of involvement into worship. Reflect on your overall experiences in corporate worship, especially the primacy given—by design of the worship planning, as well as your own involvement—to our compatible response to God beyond the mere words from our mouths (cf. Mt 15:8). How much are you actually involved with God and others? How much of the dynamics in any given worship service follow set patterns or templates (cf. Mt 15:9)? When it comes to the worship relationship, does God get outer-*in template involvement* or whole persons from inner out? Another way to describe template involvement is *default worship*. Such involvement in worship did not emerge with technology's templates<sup>1</sup>; technology only further exacerbates the counter-relational work of reduced persons in reduced relationships in default mode. “Default” means the condition that exists in the absence of willful intervention. In other words, default worship is what we do as passive objects, actively giving primacy to ‘what to do’ as an end in itself—even with good intentions to worship God, yet with only simulation of the worship response and illusion of its outcome.

Herein we further define the two ways of embodying the worship relationship old and new. To embody old is to worship by default, as a relationally passive *object* (even while very active) whose involvement in relationship is reduced to template involvement, functioning from outer in by what to do (e.g. your friends’ way of throwing a party, following templates for worship), giving substitutes from secondary involvement in place of our whole person in the primacy of relationship. To embody new is to worship wholly as a *subject* in the primacy of relationship, vulnerably engaged from inner out with one’s whole person. The former can remain at a comfortable relational distance with little vulnerability before God, who gets treated as Object to be observed, and merely talked and sung about. The latter is worshiping vulnerably involved for deeper relational connection in compatible response to God who as Subject is vulnerably present to us. Does it really make any difference to God or does this distinction not matter as long as God is worshiped? If the God we worship is the God whom Jesus embodied whole-ly, then yes indeed, God is affected by how we embody the worship relationship. Otherwise, what Jesus vulnerably shared of God’s strategic shift with the Samaritan woman has no meaning or significance for us today (Jn 4:23-24).

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<sup>1</sup> A quick online search of “worship templates” yields an enormous number of results, most of which have to do with technology: videos, PowerPoint visuals, flyers, worship bulletins, etc.

For praise that has relational significance to God, pay close attention to Psalms 103:1 and 108:1 (the two Scriptures opening this chapter). The poet in Psalm 103 praises God with “all my inmost being” (NIV), or, less helpful, “all that is within me” (NRSV). The Hebrew word here is *qereḇ*, which denotes the interior or center of a person. This poet has experienced God’s deep and ongoing relational involvement, and reciprocally responds with praise and blessing from inner out, in contrast to the outer-in worship act of ‘lips without heart’ (Mk 7:6). How do we in our *qereḇ* praise the holy God? To understand this, it is helpful to consider the verse in Psalm 108:1.

To open Psalm 108, the poet declares “My heart is steadfast [*kûn*], O God.... I will sing and make music with my *kāḇôḏ*” (see also Ps 57:7-8), teaching us in relational words about being vulnerable before God, about who and what God gets in worship. *Kûn* denotes to stand firm, to be established, prepared, or determined (resolved), and is usually rendered “steadfast” or “fixed.” Yet the psalmist takes us beyond a merely static condition or attribute (as “steadfast” is commonly interpreted) to the relational reality of being secure in relationship with God, based on the depth of God’s relational involvement of love and faithfulness, that is, based on *how* God is with us (108:4). *Kûn* also significantly denotes that the psalmist directs his attention to God and is ready to act on what he has been considering,<sup>2</sup> which is: “I will sing and make music with all my *kāḇôḏ*” (NIV). English translations use “soul” for the Hebrew *kāḇôḏ* when referring to human beings (see also Ps 16:9<sup>3</sup>; 57:8), but “soul” (the usual translation for another Hebrew term, *nepeš*) is not adequate to represent *kāḇôḏ*. Why not?

Before we can grapple with why “soul” misrepresents *kāḇôḏ*, we need to see why “soul” (*nepeš*) is not adequate to represent the whole person either, as explained in this excerpt from a study on the gospel of transformation:

The qualitative inner of *nephesh* is problematic for the person in either of two ways. Either *nephesh* is reduced when primacy is given to the quantitative and thus the outer in; this appears to be the *nephesh* signified by supervenience in nonreductive physicality that is linked to large brain development and function. All animals have *nephesh* (Gen 1:30) but without the qualitative inner that distinguishes only the person. Or, *nephesh* is problematic when it is fragmented from the body, for example, as the soul, the substance of which does not distinguish the whole person even though at times in Scripture it identifies the qualitative uniqueness of humans. The referential language composing the soul does not get to the depth of the qualitative inner of the person in God’s context (cf. Job in Job 10:1; 27:2), because the inner was constituted by God in relational terms for whole ontology and function. The ancient poet even refers to *nephesh* as soul but further illuminates *qereḇ* as “all that is within me” (Ps 103:1), as “all my innermost being” (NIV) to signify the center, interior, the heart of a person’s whole being (cf. human *ruah* and *qereḇ* in Zec 12:1). This distinction gets us to the depth of the qualitative inner that rendering *nephesh* as soul does not. The reduction or fragmentation of *nephesh* is critical to whether the person in God’s context is whole-ly distinguished (beyond a comparative process) or merely referenced in some uniqueness (within a

<sup>2</sup> *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 604; also “inner impulse” *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Co., 1982), 651.

<sup>3</sup> The NIV curiously translates *kāḇôḏ* here as “tongue.”

comparative process).<sup>4</sup>

In Hebrew thought, the person isn't separable into two parts, but is considered as a whole that has inner and outer aspects. 'Soul' may point to the inner of a person, but *qereb* directs us to the deeper sense of *kābôd*. This next excerpt deepens our understanding of *kābôd*, which is usually translated as "glory" when referring to God:

*Glory* is one of those words in our Christian vocabulary...whose significance gets lost in familiarity. The word for glory in Hebrew (*kābôd*) comes from the word "to be heavy," for example, with wealth or worthiness. A person's glory...is shaped and seen on the basis of the perceptual-interpretive framework used for how a person is defined and what defines that person. The glory Jesus distinguished brings us further than an abstract attribute of the transcendent God and takes us deeper than a person defined by what he does and has. In the OT, *kābôd* is used poetically to refer to the whole person (Ps 16:9; 57:8; 108:1).

The main idea of 'the glory of God' [*kābôd yhw*] denotes the revelation of God's being, nature and presence to us, that is, the whole of who, what and how God is. Our initial introduction to God's glory is revealed in creation (natural or general revelation, Ps 19:1-4), which does not distinguish the whole of God but has heuristic purpose (Rom 1:20) that is complete upon encountering the deep profile of Jesus' face from inner out. Paul made conclusive that this disclosure of God's glory was not in referential terms but relational terms from inner out ("who has shone in our hearts") distinguished "in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6). In the incarnation the vulnerable disclosures of Jesus' whole person and presence engaged us with God's glory—that is, God's being, nature, and presence with us: the who (being), the what (nature) and the how (presence) of God. Who, what and how Jesus *is* vulnerably disclose who, what and how God *is*—that is to say, *phaneroō* [reveals in relational terms] God's glory only for relationship, not for systematic theology or doctrinal certainty. Therefore, the who, what and how in the distinguished face of Jesus is the hermeneutical key to the ontology of the glory of God, through whom we can know and understand who, what and how God is. And when the glory seen is the distinguished face of God, the person Jesus presents in whole ontology and function discloses the functional involvement of God's being, nature and presence with us as Subject in face-to-face relationship, not merely an Object to be observed.<sup>5</sup>

On the basis of this understanding of *kābôd* for God, I then conclude that *kābôd* for human beings signifies the whole of our being, nature and presence (who, what and how we are), created in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the triune God. God in his *kābôd* seeks nothing less than our *kābôd*, the full weightiness of our whole person from inner out. As with relational righteousness (the whole of who, what and how we are), only with our whole person vulnerably present and involved with God on his relational terms can we worship the Lord in compatible response and congruent connection—as the psalmist did. This is the uncommon action that can never be

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<sup>4</sup> T. Dave Matsuo, *The Gospel of Transformation: Distinguishing the Discipleship and Ecclesiology Integral to Salvation* (Transformation Study, 2015), 229.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

composed by the common—the embodying new that will never emerge in the worship relationship from the embodied old.

Getting back to the soul, *nepeš* is used to mean the inner of a person as opposed to the outer, not in dualism, but to highlight in a general way the qualitative depth of persons. The human person's *kābôd* encompasses *nepeš*, yet that which is most important for us to understand for our practice in worship is their function of the heart (*leb*), illuminated as follows:

The qualitative significance of the heart is not composed in referential language and terms but only distinguishes the person in relational terms that God “breathed” into human persons. *Nephesh* may be rendered “soul” but its functional significance is the heart (Dt 30:6; Rom 2:28-29). From the beginning, the heart defined and determined the qualitative innermost of the person in God's context and not the soul; the soul's prominence unfolded much later from the influence of philosophical thought, shaped by referential terms. The heart's significance only begins to define the image of God, yet the heart's function identifies why the heart is so vital to the person integrally in the image and likeness of God....Since the function of the heart integrally constitutes the whole person, God does not have the whole person for relationship until it involves the heart (Dt 10:14-16; Ps 95:7-11).<sup>6</sup>

The psalmist has his heart set on celebrating God by singing and making music vulnerably with his whole person from inner out (*kābôd*); he (his heart) is determined for God to receive his due, that is, in reciprocal relational response with nothing less and no substitutes of his whole person. As worshiper, the psalmist's primary focus is relational, in compatible response to the whole of God and in congruent connection with how God is with the psalmist. Do we similarly have our hearts—not just the intention of our heart but the uncommon action of our whole person—set on worshiping God when we go to church? How much do we ask “who and what does God receive directly from me personally and from us as his family?” Or do we repeat the patterns illustrated at the beginning of this chapter? Accordingly, when relational clarity and relational significance are lacking in any given worship service, do we even notice? Do we pay attention to what God receives in the primacy of relationship together, or are we more preoccupied with secondary aspects of worship?

If we don't make the conscious choices of a subject-person, as composed by the psalmists, then we should expect and not be surprised by our participation in default worship.

### **The Integration of Mary's Discipleship and Worship Relationship**

Another person in the Bible whose heart was set on responding to Jesus was Mary (Martha's sister). As mentioned in the previous chapter, Mary is an unlikely teacher for us as to embodying new the discipleship/worship relationship. How was Mary distinguished from the other disciples, including many if not most of us today? Three interactions featured in the Gospels that take place between Mary and Jesus show her vulnerable honest heart in response to Jesus' whole person vulnerably extended to her.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 230.

After discussing Mary, we'll examine how Peter's involvement differed from Mary's, which will help us examine our own responses to the Lord.

When Jesus visited Martha and Mary in the well-known narrative from Luke's Gospel (Lk 10:38-42), Mary chose to engage with Jesus by making quite a counter-cultural move. Yet, what she did was not simply to defy a cultural norm by leaving a woman's place in the kitchen with Martha in order to sit at the teacher's feet to study. Rather, her bold move determinedly (cf. *kûn*) rejected the constraints of being defined from outer in by her socio-religious context that would keep her at a relational distance from Jesus, and stepped into Jesus' relational context to be directly relationally involved with Jesus with her whole person. She refused to allow herself to be limited by default to her socio-religious context, or by Martha's protestations. Whereas Martha's response to Jesus was indirect and her involvement more generalized in the performance of her prescribed role (as object), Mary's choice (as subject) was relationship-specific to Jesus' person. Mary compatibly responded to the primacy that Jesus gave to relationship with his disciples (cf. Jn 12:26); and though none of the Gospels mention Jesus having called to Mary to "follow me," she did indeed follow Jesus in her congruent connection for relationship together on Jesus' relational terms—the relational connection that would distinguish her discipleship from the other disciples.

Although in this scene we don't know what Mary said, by her determined actions (cf. psalmist above) Mary expressed her whole person by embodying relational messages to Jesus in her communication, the content and quality of which spoke loud and clear to Jesus. Jesus was obviously pleased by Mary's involvement, and affirmed Mary for having chosen the "better part" (v.42), which is in her place with Jesus in God's family where she now belonged permanently (cf. Jn 8:35-36). Her action reciprocally responded to Jesus' initiative of coming into their house for such relational connection.

Mary's heart was further distinguished in a second interaction with Jesus when Lazarus died (Jn 11:28-33). After Jesus talked with Martha, Mary was told that Jesus was calling for her, and she quickly went to Jesus, knelt at his feet and poured her heart out to him, weeping, whereby Jesus' heart was "deeply moved" (Jn 11:28-35). In the four Gospels, Mary rarely speaks. In the one instance when she does say something, her words are the same as Martha's (Jn 11:21,32), yet words more deeply expressed with a very different relational outcome. Mary didn't stay at a comfortable distance relationally from Jesus, in contrast with Martha's more restrained interaction with Jesus at a noticeably different level of affect for both Martha and Jesus (vv.20-27). We see here Mary's freedom to be vulnerable and direct with Jesus (cf. Jn 8:31-32) that none of the other disciples demonstrated (cf. Mk 6:52; 8:14-17; Jn 4:27,31-33). She could be free and confident with Jesus because she experienced his acceptance of and his involvement with her whole person—as in the whole theology and practice that Paul made definitive for the church's wholeness (Eph 2:18; 3:12).

In the third climactic scene, Mary extended her person to Jesus in an uncommon response of worship (Jn 12:1-8). Not long before his crucifixion, Jesus and the disciples were having dinner with Martha, Mary and Lazarus (a family whom Jesus loved, Jn 11:5), when Mary came and poured very expensive perfume on Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair (Matthew and Mark's Gospels say "a woman came...and poured the ointment on his head," Mt 26:6-13; Mk 14:3-9; cf. a similar action from an ex-prostitute, Lk 7:37-38). Other disciples who were present chastised Mary, calling her action



wasteful because the perfume should have been sold and the money used to help poor people. In this crucial moment leading to the cross, their primary focus was on serving and ministry, not on the person of Jesus. Nevertheless, Mary demonstrates both senses of *kûn*: she was established in the primacy of her relationship with Jesus and not merely in the role of servant; on this primary basis, she directed her attention to act on what she had been considering. Mary's heart, even at what could be considered an elementary stage, was both defined by whole theology (namely Christology) and determined by whole practice—neither reduced nor fragmented by the secondary. Therefore, Mary deeply involved her whole person with her Lord in this act of worship—openly and vulnerably involved with Jesus.

It is important to note that Mary's confidence was based on, as was the psalmist's, her relational experience of the love and faithfulness of her Lord. Mary's openness wasn't akin, for example, to Peter's relative openness (from outer in) because Mary's response emerged as *relational trust* in Jesus' whole person. Relational trust is the significance of faith, the relational response beyond the common sense that faith is a quantity to possess. In functional terms, faith is only our relational response to God that is contingent on who, what and how God is. Relational trust in the whole of God embodied by Jesus must by its relational nature embrace Jesus' person jointly in his theological trajectory (whole theology) and on his relational path (whole practice). Beyond the other disciples, Mary teaches us the depth of this relational response and the relational outcome unfolding from such involvement in relationship together.

Mary illuminates the kind of disciple and thus worshiper that the Father seeks. She was a "true worshiper" whose person functioned whole from inner out with honesty and vulnerability of heart (i.e. "in spirit and truth," Jn 4:23)." Hers was the compatible and reciprocal response to Jesus and how Jesus is relationally involved with persons: "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you" (Jn 15:9). Jesus' relational involvement with persons embodies love (*agapē*), God's family love. God's family love is never primarily about what to do—not even with sacrifice, though it can include sacrifice—but about being deeply involved relationally with the other person for whole relationship together (cf. Jesus' involvement with others while on the cross). Since God is always vulnerably present and intimately involved with persons, those who receive God with their own vulnerable hearts for relational connection (only on his relational terms of relational grace) are those persons who will experience the depth of his love, and who will be made whole in intimate connection. This was Jesus' relational work that composed the integral basis for Mary's reciprocal relational response. Mary's relational connection with Jesus—like no other disciple's—is the outcome of God's relational involvement of family love to reconcile persons with him in the new creation family. This relational outcome is the good news that composes the 'whole' gospel of Christ (i.e. the gospel of peace, wholeness in relationship together, Eph 6:15). Her relational language epitomized 'sounds of consonance' in reciprocal response to Jesus' whole person. Therefore, Jesus highlights the significance *to him* of Mary's act of worship by making the most remarkable statement about Mary, a statement that rightfully should be proclaimed by the global church:

I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her (Mk 14:8-9, NIV).

The uncommon response of Mary's worship needs to become paradigmatic for all worshipers, because she was a rare one who received Jesus' relational language and 'sang' back in his relational language in worship to make intimate relational connection with him (again, intimacy defined as open and vulnerable hearts making the deepest connection together). Mary's compatible, reciprocal response and vulnerable involvement with Jesus make her a definitive teacher for us to learn from for our own growth to embody new the worship relationship. Likely, it will require humility on our part to be taught by a woman occupying a minor place in the Gospels' narratives. Undoubtedly, we will need to be vulnerable in order to learn from her.

Mary's experience with Jesus illuminates *agapē*, the depth of intimate relationship together. *Agapē* is not about 'what to do' (even serving the poor) but only about how one is involved with others in relationship. "Love" is one of those words and concepts that we need to clarify, because its most common use for Christians is reduced to what to do. Due to our default lens of reductionism that defines persons by what we do and have, our interpretation of God's love is nearly always about what God does for us and what we do for God and others. In view of that, ministry and service become our primary preoccupation, and relational involvement gets relegated to secondary importance. This is one of the problems arising from so-called incarnational churches. Love also gets reduced to emotions, which are important, to be sure, but do not compose the whole person in determined vulnerable relational response. Nor are spontaneous actions from a person to another necessarily expressions love, which might be construed as from the heart. Peter's spontaneous bold declarations to Jesus in the face of Jesus' impending suffering (Mt 26:33,35; Mk 14:29,31; Lk 22:33) may have issued from Peter's good intentions, but his words belied his greater propensity to being controlled by fear.

In contrast, persons functioning in vulnerableness as subject toward another for relationship together are persons who love with *agapē* involvement, which is what Jesus embodied from the Father that determined how he is ongoingly involved with us. It is imperative for Jesus' disciples and the worshipers the Father seeks to understand love (*agapē*) in the following terms:

Jesus said the most distinguishing characteristic of his disciples—which those in the surrounding context will recognize as relationally belonging to him—is their *agape* for one another (Jn 13:35). That is, this engagement of love will be recognizable as his if it is congruent (*kathos*) with how he loved them (v.34). Yet, contrary to a prevailing perception, love is not merely about the quantity of something we do (or even feel), nor merely about the quality. *Agape* is what we experience in relationship first from Jesus (the relational work of God's grace), and thus what we ongoingly share together in the intimate involvement of relationship, not in activities or occupying space together. In other words, *agape* is how we are to be involved with God, each other and with others.<sup>7</sup>

Even though Mary's circumstances may not compare to Peter's in terms of potential physical harm, the issue important for Peter, Mary, and all of us to face is what God can count on from us relationally. Ever since Jesus said, "Wherever the gospel is

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<sup>7</sup> T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology: A Theological and Functional Study of the Whole of Jesus* (Christology Study, 2008). Online at <http://4X12.org>, 141.

preached,” the gospel proclamation has spanned thousands of years and entered billions of ears, yet Mary’s name is rarely, if ever, attached to Jesus’ gospel. If not what Jesus embodied and affirmed in Mary, what in fact is the gospel that gets preached? If the gospel we claim and proclaim doesn’t tell of Mary’s response—as compared to, say, Peter, James and John’s missional activities (even as important as these activities were), we have ignored Jesus’ own words. To have ignored these particular words (in relational language) from Jesus’ mouth can only be the result of selective listening with our biased perceptual-interpretive framework and lens. The omission of Mary’s relational significance to Jesus is less about androcentrism as some biblical feminists would claim (though gender is undoubtedly involved) than it is about the threat that Mary’s person presents to those (both male and female) who are defined and determined by reductionism (namely a theological anthropology of reduced ontology and function) instead of by God’s relational grace and *agapē* involvement, because the latter requires vulnerability of our person before God.

At the risk of making generalizations, it seems also that due to socialization in both Western and Eastern cultures (encompassing the global South), females are more open to being vulnerable before God than are males, and that males will be more resistant to the whole practice of Jesus’ vulnerable face embodying his intrusive relational path. Accordingly, and based on a fragmentary Christology, males are more likely to present substitutes to God in place of their whole person, nothing less and no substitutes—though females certainly fall into substitutes by default as well (cf. Martha’s focus on fulfilling her role to serve). But since the difference in function between females and males is because of socialization (the influence of our human contexts), this human condition is not irreversible and redemptive change is available. Thus, males and females are equally able to be vulnerably involved for intimate relational connection because this is how we are all created in the qualitative image and relational likeness of God. We all need to die to the old of reductionism so that the new of wholeness can emerge and flow. If we cannot, perhaps will not, embody new in our person and relationship, then by default we are rendered to embodying the old.

To have ignored Jesus’ words about Mary exposes the bias of the church’s interpretive lens in the shift from God’s relational language to referential language, resulting in a relational gap that underlies fragmentary theology and practice. The consequence of this relational gap is reduced persons in reduced relationships lacking significant connection. To ignore Mary’s relational significance for the gospel is to continue in a reshaped gospel in referential language, which then extends to reshaping our worship. Thus, we can no longer presume that the gospel we preach in our worship services is not “a different gospel” that Paul fought against in the churches for ecclesiology to be whole (cf. Gal 1:6).

It is time to “listen to my son,” as the Father makes the relational imperative for all Jesus’ disciples, to take Jesus’ affirmations of Mary to heart, and to see Mary’s whole person embodying the much-needed leadership for us to embody new our discipleship and worship. Her lead is unmistakable and challenges all of us to follow to be distinguished new also. And be careful how you listen to Jesus’ relational words and not to fall into reductionism: this is not a gender-related issue but an issue about worshipers the Father seeks, about subjects, not objects, about love not sacrifice.

## Peter's Good Intentions and Default Worship

How would you feel in the following scenario: You invite some persons to your home for a meal, persons with whom you want to become friends, and when they arrive, you warmly welcome them in, but they won't come inside. They may be feeling unworthy to enter your home. While you vulnerably extend yourself to them and make it clear that you want to enjoy time with them, they stubbornly don't budge in apparent deference to you as their superior patron. What they *are* willing and eager to do, however, is some work for you such as clean your yard instead. Their mindset and posture prevent relational connection of any significant depth from developing, creating a relational impasse no matter how much you extend yourself to them. What is the root cause of this relational gap? Culture and family upbringing? Personal preference and comfort zones? Are these simply differences that you have to accept or be resigned to?

Aside from the particulars, let's look at the relational dynamics going on in this interaction. Among possible reasons or excuses they may give, it is most likely that those persons feel threatened by your openness, your vulnerableness, which they aren't willing to reciprocate. Instead, a key dynamic in this scenario is that those persons give an alternative to what you wanted. That alternative is indirect involvement with you—a *substitute* for their 'person' sitting with you at your table in face-to-face relational interaction—in the form of serving you, an expression of reductionism defining the person by the outer-in criterion of what to do. In human relations, accepting their alternative and reduced terms of involvement might be a first step toward making connection, a compromise reshaping the relationship between you and them. In covenant relationship with God, however, compromise is not an option since reduced terms fragment the relationship from wholeness, thereby making it incompatible and incongruent for the whole and holy God. As much as God makes himself vulnerable to us, God cannot be reduced to our terms and still *be* God—leaving no choice between reduced compromised relationship and whole reciprocal relationship (cf. Lk 13:34).

Shifting now to our disciple/worship relationship with God to see some parallel, those persons represent Christians (us!) who try to renegotiate God's relational terms for the covenant relationship together in order to avoid having to be vulnerable before God and each other. As we mentioned in the previous chapter, our relationship with God requires the vulnerableness of our heart, signifying our whole person from inner out—nothing less and no substitutes—as subject. But worship on our terms will always translate into our offerings to God of something less and some substitutes, by which our vulnerable involvement gives way to functioning as an object in primacy of the secondary, determined by influences other than responding to God, even inadvertently. Notable examples in worship are the prevalence of performances (even with apparent good intentions) by worship leaders, singers, instrumentalists; we must include here our outer-in adherence to time-honored traditions practiced with distant hearts (Mk 7:7; Isa 29:13). Such substitutes of the secondary dominate corporate worship today, which render us to diminished or minimalized involvement as conforming objects and a comfortable audience.

Peter's involvement with Jesus is illuminating for us today to learn from. In a way, he also is a teacher for us, but unlike Mary and the unrestrained children (whom we will focus on in the next chapter), Peter's practice shows us the issues from which we

need to be redeemed: reductionism and consequent relational distance with Jesus, substitutes for our whole person in worship, and functioning as an object.

Peter's relationship with Jesus had ups and downs because Peter defined his person from outer in by the quantitative criterion of what he did and had, which involved how he saw himself in a comparative process with Jesus. Peter's interpretive framework constrained himself and Jesus to outer-in roles and functions as student and teacher—Jesus the rabbi in a higher status, and Peter the student in a lesser status. This reflected his reduced theological anthropology—defining persons and relationships in reduced ontology and function—that needed further redemptive change from inner out (*metamorphoō*).<sup>8</sup> Consequently, Peter would maintain relational distance from Jesus' person, which was evident in Peter's default worship at Jesus' transfiguration and his refusal to let Jesus wash his feet at their pivotal table fellowship.

At the transfiguration, Peter, James and John were confronted by the whole of Jesus (with Elijah and Moses), and fell down frightened (Mt 17:1-8). Controlled by his fear, Peter's first impulse, his default mode, was outer-in focus on doing something rather than to be involved with Jesus relationally in this defining moment. While the content of Peter's communication was about his offering, what was really going on inside Peter was that he was frightened (par. Mk 9:6). Instead of admitting his fear to Jesus, Peter presented something less than his whole person from inner out, a substitute in the form of offering to make three shelters (cf. those in the above example wanting to do something for you). This limited the depth of Peter's relational involvement with Jesus to shallowness during this exclusive moment of Jesus' full self-disclosure as the whole of God. It is critical for us today to recognize the substitutes we offer in worship and to learn from Peter's reductionist practice, because so much of our practice engages in default worship.

Peter's heart was unfree to be directly involved in worship with Jesus' person, and therefore his worship at best could only be something offered indirectly (apart from face to Face)—performing a service, not unlike Martha in the kitchen. We might want to credit Peter with having good intentions, but there is a crucial matter for us to understand here: Peter's worship act had no relational significance because he remained relationally distant from Jesus. Peter's focus lacked relational clarity, and his indirect response and measured words emerged more from his fear than relational involvement with Jesus. In terms of the relational dynamic, Peter worshiped with a relational barrier (the significance of the veil over his heart, discussed below), not with openness and vulnerability with Jesus face to face, heart to heart, and thereby with an incompatible response that was dissonant to Jesus' presence and involvement with Peter and the others.

Notice here what God ignores and what God pays attention to. When Peter offered to build three shelters, the narrative of this scene makes no mention of Jesus or the Father responding to Peter's offer. In fact the Father interrupted Peter's words ("while he was still speaking") with his relational imperative to "Listen to *my son!*" (Mt 17:5). Then Jesus responded to the disciples who had fallen down in their fear when he "came and touched them" (Mt 17:7). In clear contrast to Jesus' affirmation of Mary's act of worship, we can only conclude that Peter's worship had no relational significance to God

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<sup>8</sup> Theologically, how Peter attempted to have relationship with Jesus was problematic and reflected his "hybrid theology," which is discussed in full in T. Dave Matsuo, *Did God Really Say That? Theology in the Age of Reductionism*.

and was unworthy of a response.

In family love, Peter's heart is what Jesus pursued at the last table fellowship before going to the cross. Table fellowship with Jesus signified the primacy of relationship together with Jesus during his time on earth, which he made definitive for embodying the new (Lk 5:33-39). (We discuss Jesus' table fellowship in greater depth in chapter four and how it must transpose our Communion practice today.) Jesus continued his relational work of family love, extending to his deepest relational involvement with the disciples—even before he reaches the cross—at his last meal with them (read Jn 13:1-18). At the evening meal before Passover, Jesus began to wash the disciples' feet. Peter refused Jesus, and was sternly corrected by Jesus. What's happening in relational terms? Even after having been with Jesus for three intense years, Jesus' vulnerability still made Peter uncomfortable (i.e. threatened). This involves both the relational significance of Jesus' act and Peter's own theological anthropology—which are vital for us to understand for depth of relationship with Jesus and for depth of involvement together in Communion table fellowship.

In relational terms, Peter's message to Jesus was a refusal to engage with Jesus on Jesus' terms for intimate relationship together, but rather to stay within his old constraints (in a reduced theological anthropology) and continue to engage with Jesus on his own terms. Peter was resisting letting Jesus redefine him from inner out, the irreplaceable relational response of grace which would free Peter from the constraints of his old outer-in interpretive framework. Yet Jesus continued to pursue Peter for communion together: "Unless I wash you, you have no share with [*meros meta*] me" (v.8). In other words, Jesus told Peter that he must let Jesus redefine his person from inner out by his relational grace (the sole significance of Jesus washing the disciples' feet) in order for the only relational outcome of the primacy of intimate communion together. "Share with me" only involves the relational experience of communion together with Jesus. Various other words signify this relational 'sharing with' together—*koinōnia* refers to the fellowship and participation together that Jesus' table fellowship embodies and calls persons to (cf. Acts 2:42); *koinoneō*, to be a partaker in, share together in (1 Pet 4:13); *koinos* refers to what is shared in common by several persons (Acts 2:44). To "share with me" and not just "share in something" necessitates whole persons for compatible connection in congruent relationship together. Thus, Jesus kept pursuing Peter in the relational work necessary for Peter to become whole from inner out; this moving interaction makes unmistakably clear the relational function of grace and family love enacted by the whole of God.

Peter's refusal to let Jesus wash his feet was with the same resistance when he rebuked Jesus about going to the cross because Peter's "teacher" would not do such a despicable thing (cf. Mt 16:22-23). With his outer-in interpretive lens, even by the time Jesus was preparing to leave the disciples, Peter still related to Jesus on the basis of their socially-defined roles: Jesus was Peter's master teacher, and thus 'better' than Peter in Peter's comparative process. In Peter's interpretive framework, it simply was not permissible for Jesus, the Rabbi, to lower himself to the position of a servant and wash his feet. Peter hereby continued to function as an object that was defined and determined by his sociocultural context.

Given Peter's final reply to Jesus ("not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" 13:9), his relational posture still reflected his outer-in interpretive lens. His focus

was on the act of washing as an end in itself, not on Jesus' vulnerable involvement face to face without the relational distance created by titles and roles. Peter balked at the response Jesus sought: vulnerably receiving and responding in relational trust of Jesus' whole person who was presented for the most intimate connection to redefine him by grace from inner out to make him whole in the primacy of whole relationship together. This is the function of relational grace and the relational significance of Jesus' footwashing and Jesus' table fellowship, the relational outcome of which still eludes many in churches today along with Peter.

As an aside, it is critical for us not to perceive Jesus' actions with a limited interpretive lens that only sees Jesus modeling 'servant leadership', because what he engaged in goes far deeper than 'what to do'. 'What to do', though with good intentions, is that which the servant model gets us to focus on in a primary way, to the diminishment of the primacy of relationship that God always seeks. What Jesus is vulnerably and intimately embodying is God's relational grace to remove all relational barriers—represented here by the teacher-student roles—for the purpose of communion together in transformed relationships of God's new creation family. Embodying new the worship relationship can only be composed by the whole relational terms Jesus embodied for us to be *new*.

We also see Peter's constrained relational response after Jesus' resurrection, when Jesus continued to pursue Peter's whole person for relationship (Jn 21:15-22). Even in that last exchange, Peter's focus turns elsewhere in the comparative process, asking "what about him?" to which Jesus continued (albeit with growing impatience) to call Peter back to their relationship: "What is that to you? [You must] follow me!" even after the resurrection, Peter still required redemptive change from the 'old' to be transformed to 'the new', the new wine, the new creation.

We are no different relationally from Peter when the person we present to God in worship is defined by roles we or others have in leading worship, teaching, or serving in other capacities; we too engage with God (and others) on the basis of these roles. This is the influence from our own sociocultural contexts—both Western and Eastern contexts, throughout the global North and South. Inseparable from this person we present to God is the referential content and reduced quality of our communication, and indirect depth level at which we engage relationally with God. This exposes the experiential reality that embodying new the worship relationship requires to be integrally defined by whole theology and determined by whole practice. Composed by a different theological trajectory than what Jesus embodied, we maintain relational distance by remaining 'in front of the curtain' (Lev 16:2; Heb 10:19-22) and with the 'veil' over our hearts (2 Cor 3:14-16, discussed below) apart from God's intimate relational context and its process of intimate relationship, heart to heart, face to Face. Unfortunately, the traditions in many of our worship practices, whatever their theological origin, cultivate relational distance "in front of the curtain" or maintain relational barriers with a veil over our hearts—just as Jesus critiqued earlier of prevailing worship practice (Mk 7:6-8).

God does not do relationship on our terms, which by default give primacy to the secondary and thereby focus on what we do *for* God over being directly involved *with* God. Worship on our terms, whatever we think we are experiencing, is always an ontological simulation that is based on epistemological illusion. Ontological simulation is shorthand for the illusions we create to substitute for direct and whole relational

experience with God and others. Our involvement in such relationships is limited to the fragmentary parts of what we do or have, resulting in fragmentary involvement in fragmentary relationships—that is, shallow involvement in ambiguous relationships. Epistemological illusion is shorthand denoting the biases, assumptions and the terms from human construction by which we think we know God (however sincerely we feel) and thus assume to know what God desires—a boast that cannot be made on secondary terms (cf. Jer 9:23-24).<sup>9</sup> Given Jesus’ surprising feedback, even the early disciples could not assume knowing the person Jesus (Jn 14:9). The relational consequence unavoidably constrains us to the relational impasse of default worship embodying the old ‘in front of the curtain’. We need to address this prevalent relational consequence because it emerges unmistakably from practicing relationship with God on our terms (as emerged from Peter).

Peter eventually experienced the inner-out change of transformation that Jesus pursued Peter for, apparently having deeply experienced God’s relational grace to be made whole in relationship together (1 Pet 1:3-4). In his two letters, Peter expresses his understanding of the vital difference between functioning as an object and subject, so vital for the basis of who/what defined him and determined how he functioned. As he writes to encourage Christians who are being persecuted, he tells them “prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled [*nēphō*]; set your hope fully on...” (1 Pet 1:13; cf. 2 Pet 1:6, *enkrateia*, self-control; cf. Gal 5:22). “Self-controlled” is commonly misunderstood to mean “self-constrained,” an interpretation that focuses narrowly on an ethic of what not to do. While we might think Peter is talking about not being impulsive, as he had been at times, this doesn’t fit the purpose of Peter’s letter, nor would it have helped the Christians he wrote to. Peter’s meaning to “be self-controlled” is to function as subjects, as those who are resolved and determined (*kūn*, in both senses) to function whole, whatever the circumstances—not, for example, in fear as objects reacting to circumstances, or acting merely on impulse, both of which are reactionary functions apart from being subjects relationally secure with the Lord. Self-control doesn’t constrain the person to an object but rather counters fragmentation by integrating the person to be whole as subject.

In his second letter, Peter continues to illuminate that we are slaves to whatever controls us (2 Pet 2:19b; cf. Paul’s words in Rom 6:16-19). To function as a slave is, again, to live as an object who is acted upon, controlled by anything from the outer in. As objects, we merely react to outer influences that we allow to determine how we live. To be self-controlled counters functioning as a slave in order to be a subject who is, in God’s words, “holy [i.e. uncommon, distinguished from common] as I am holy” (1:15-16). In contrast to objects, subjects function as whole persons giving primacy to relationship together (1 Pet 1:22) regardless of constraining surrounding influences (as we saw in Mary’s actions). With these words, Peter apparently experienced what Jesus differentiated as the outcome of either slaves or children of God who permanently belong in the family (cf. Jn 8:34-35).

I wonder if Jesus’ words to Peter that “on this rock I will built my church” (Mt 16:8) foretold that his church is to be built of persons in whom the ‘old’ is exposed,

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<sup>9</sup> These are vital issues needing further study; they are fully discussed in T. Dave Matsuo’s two studies, *Sanctified Christology* and *The Whole of Paul and the Whole in his Theology* (Paul Study, 2012). Online: <http://www.4X12.org>.



chastened, redeemed and made whole in a truly new life—to illuminate the inner-out change necessary for each one of us. Moreover, Peter’s discipleship demonstrates more the depth of Jesus’ love for Peter and less Peter’s love for Jesus. Jesus was vulnerably and intimately involved with Peter’s person, being affected by Peter’s reductionism, and with patience and unswervingly pursuing Peter’s person to be whole. In other words, “do you love me” could only have been embodied new by Peter as the reciprocal relational response of intimately experiencing the relational love embodied by Jesus—which requires the removal of relational barriers signified by the veil.

Until I started writing this study on the worship relationship, I had never before thought about “default worship” and its relation to functioning as an object. While I understood for myself the difference between living as a subject or as an object, the Spirit has been taking me deeper in understanding the dynamic of how much our person gets diminished by default to an object—an object that often fails to pay attention to how it is acted upon by outer-in influences from our human contexts. Those contexts include situations and circumstances, our families, societies and subcultures. All these human contexts are embedded in reductionism (unless they are redeemed). As such, human contexts promote relationships from outer in by presenting substitutes that occupy us in secondary matter, by engaging in the comparative process that fragments and stratifies relationships, thereby resulting in relational distance at every level of life. These are pervasive and normative ways we do relationships, which we inevitably bring into our relationships in church and, to be sure, into worship. The result composes the worship relationship in default mode as objects who, in turn, “shape” (i.e. redefine) God accordingly, whether inadvertently or intentionally.

The dictionary definition for “default” is “a situation or condition that obtains in the absence of active intervention,”<sup>10</sup> hereby unmistakably connecting living as passive objects with the default mode. But to be active subjects, we need to learn from Peter and Mary that acting on impulse or, more euphemistically, acting spontaneously doesn’t compose a subject; rather a subject is the person whose heart is set on (*kûn*, like the psalmist) functioning vulnerably in love. It has been edifying to hear God’s relational words to me and all of us who have good intentions to worship the LORD: good intentions are not sufficient to compose the worshipers the Father seeks because we are always faced with the lure of reductionism to default function; default worship is unavoidable without the heart resolve of our whole person.

We really can’t take comfort in mere good intentions any longer. Will we function as subjects or objects in the person we present, the integrity and quality of our communication, and the depth of relational involvement that we engage in the worship relationship? God, in loving pursuit of us, holds us accountable for such choices that we make ongoingly, just as he did with Peter and affirmed in Mary. Therefore, it is inexcusable for us to use tradition, culture or prevailing norms as the primary basis for both how we function as persons and how we engage in relationship with God.

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<sup>10</sup> *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2006).

## The Way Opened: God’s Relational Response of Grace

For much of my Christian experience, many things in Scripture seemed to have no functional significance to me/us beyond historical information or abstract theological explanation. One such example was the temple in OT times, much less the Holy of Holies (also known as the Most Holy Place) and its curtain (also referred to by some as the “veil”). Another matter was the “veil” that Moses put on his face and that Paul wrote about. But now that I have deeper understanding, it is clear that the curtain, the Most Holy Place, and the veil are of critical importance in order to have relational significance in our shift from embodying old to embodying new our worship relationship with God. The relational dynamic inherent in these matters—commonly perceived in narrowed-down referential terms—is integral for the whole theology and practice required for embodying new the worship relationship. This irreplaceable dynamic engages us in ‘holy ground’: the relational context and process necessary to be intimately involved in reciprocal relationship together with the holy and whole God.

From the Gospel narratives, we know—at least in our theology, if not in our disciple/worship relationship practice—that the curtain (*katapetasma*) in the temple was torn from top to bottom at the moment of Jesus’ death on the cross, signifying the work of atonement that Jesus finished (Mt 27:51; Mk 15:38; Lk 23:45; Rom 3:25; Heb 2:17). According to the OT, in temple practice, only the high priest was allowed to enter behind the curtain into the Most Holy Place. Here the high priest came into the holy (uncommon) presence of Yahweh (i.e. into God’s relational context), serving as mediator between God and the Israelites by making the needed animal (blood) sacrifice as atonement for the people of Israel (*kāpār*, to cover, make atonement, make reconciliation, forgiving; this is the Jewish holiday Yom Kippur). The atonement sacrifice made it possible for the people of Israel to be restored to and continue in covenant relationship with Yahweh, yet the people could only stand outside, or ‘in front of the curtain’ as the sacrificial animal served as a substitute for them. Perhaps it could be said that the people became observers conforming to a substitute offered to God.

To the Jewish people in Jesus’ day, the tearing open of this curtain from top to bottom must have seemed scandalous, terrifying, or tremendously life-changing to persons—certainly astonishing—depending on one’s interpretive framework. How vulnerable they may have felt without the curtain was correlated directly to their level of involvement. For us Christians today, when it comes to embodying the worship relationship, the curtain’s rending has but static doctrinal significance; and we need to shift to its relational-functional significance that opened the relational dynamic to newly compose the vulnerable nature of the worship relationship. With the curtain torn open, persons no longer had a valid basis to just observe.

Of the four Gospel accounts of Jesus’ crucifixion, only John’s Gospel does not mention the tearing of the curtain. Instead, John records that just before Jesus died, he pronounced, “It is finished” (*teleō*, to accomplish, fulfill, Jn 19:28,30); he had now fulfilled the relational requirement of sacrifice (from the old covenant) by his own person to open up direct access to the Father (into God’s uncommon relational context) for the

new covenant.<sup>11</sup> This is not merely a static doctrinal truth about atonement in only referential terms, which Paul made definitive in relational terms for the church's relationships together to be whole (Eph 2:14-18; 3:10-12). In theological-relational terms of the new covenant, atonement means that on the basis of God's *relational response of grace*, and on that basis only, we are now freed from the constraints of our sin to enter 'behind the curtain' into the most intimate presence of the Father (Heb 6:19; 10:19-22), Face to face, heart to heart. That is, 'behind the curtain' enters the holy ground of God's relational context and engages the relational process constituted by Jesus that opened access to direct intimate relational connection with God. The curtain has been torn away for this intimate access to God, who is not accessible 'in front of the curtain' as if Jesus' relational work of atonement never happened or, at least, has any relational-functional significance.

In this intimate relational connection together, we are transformed (*metamorphoō*) and made whole conjointly in our person from inner out and in our relationships. That is, we now participate in God's uncommon (holy) context and relational process of family love—now qualitatively distinguished from the human context characterized by reductionism and distant relationship. Therefore, we cannot claim to be transformed 'in front of the curtain', nor can we claim to be followers of Jesus yet follow him only up to the curtain without being "where I am" behind it. "Do you love me... 'follow me'!"

The new covenant isn't just any context but the distinguished relational context 'behind the curtain' in which we (only as subject-persons, not as observing objects) can come face to face with the transcendent and holy (uncommon) God. As the holy (uncommon) relational context, this requires that we let go of our own terms and submit to God's terms defined by his relational response of grace (beyond a gift to possess). God's relational grace is the only basis (nonnegotiable and irreducible) by which we truly 'sing' in God's relational language to make relational connection with the whole and holy God. Only 'behind the curtain'—that is, without the relational barriers composed by the veil—is where we can fully participate in God's life, to be, as Jesus sought for his followers, "where I am."

Mary's move away from the constraints of human contextualization on her person (for which the kitchen is an apt metaphor for women) to Jesus' relational context clearly composes the requisite vulnerable response to God's relational terms for the new covenant relationship together. If we instead function apart from this nonnegotiable relational basis of grace—notably by defining ourselves by what we do/have—then grace remains a mere generalized word referentialized in our Christian vocabulary without its full relational significance. With such a nonrelational basis, we will only remain defined and determined by our human context and its limits notably constrained by referential language, and thus limit our experience in worship to whatever takes place 'in front of the curtain'—at a relational distance from God.

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<sup>11</sup> I recommend the discussion of all seven of Jesus' statements while he hung on the cross taken together as a whole in T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology: A Theological & Functional Study of the Whole of Jesus*, chap. 6, section "The Ultimate Salvific Discourse."

## Receiving God's Response of Relational Grace

In worship, we often sing about and refer to grace. But it is vital to understand that we sing incompletely, even wrongly, when we speak of grace in reduced quantitative terms (e.g. of what God does and what we have), just as we think incorrectly of love and faith in these reduced terms. We can never possess grace, love or faith; they are only dynamic functions of relationship together with God that God vulnerably initiated and embodied in relational response to our human condition. Additionally, we cannot adequately understand the necessity of grace until we adequately understand the sin of reductionism, which is the antithesis of God's relational grace, the adversary of God's relational desires (cf. Col 1:21). Even though commonly assumed, we don't possess what God does in grace and love unless we separate God's grace and love from the whole of who, what and how God is, thereby reducing God down to fragments of grace and love that we think we possess. In contrast and conflict, we can only *receive* God in his relational response of grace and his relational involvement of love. Likewise, faith is not what we possess, for example, in our confessions of faith. As Peter made evident in his limited confessions of faith that were insufficient to receive Jesus' whole person, faith is our relational trust in vulnerable reciprocal response to receiving Jesus' whole person in his relational grace and love—which Peter had difficulty receiving vulnerably in relational terms in spite of those confessions from his mouth.

God's relational response of grace goes far deeper than the commonly reduced understanding of 'grace' as a quantifiable gift (e.g. we thank God for the grace to accomplish or endure hardship), or an irresistible influence (as in Calvinism). God's response to us in relational grace is God's relational message of love communicated specifically to us, for only on the basis of his relational involvement of love, his favor, did he make the relational provisions to redeem us from our human condition "to be apart" (the condition of relational orphan) to adopt us into his very own family. Whole theology is required here to understand as well as to experience the relational significance needed for our practice to be whole. The condition of relational orphans *is* the human condition and need, and the whole of God has responded to us by the trinitarian relational process of family love. Yet, because God does not engage in unilateral relationship (prevenient grace aside), we are accountable for God's terms for relationship together. In specific terms, the critical relational work we are accountable for involves the 'demands' of God's relational grace: we can come into God's whole and holy presence only with vulnerable honesty of our hearts (relational significance of worshiping "in spirit and truth") as subjects involved on holy ground 'behind the curtain'. To be vulnerable means there is no hiding from God of all that one truly is—including our inadequacies, weakness, and sin of reductionism made vulnerable without the veil. As long as our hearts remain hidden or distant from God (our default mode), we neither experience relational grace nor make relational connection with God at any depth.

To further emphasize, working against honesty and vulnerableness of hearts is our sin of reductionism, which always has us defining our person (and others) by quantitative outer-in criteria of what we do (e.g. church leader, biblical scholar) or anything we have (education and training in worship, talents, even spiritual gifts). Such preoccupation becomes all too convenient in our practice, if not our theology. With this outer-in focus, we avoid being vulnerable by ignoring or hiding the qualitative function of the heart (the

necessary function that integrates our person to be whole from inner out). We urgently need to understand how reductionism affects our heart, because, as stated earlier, the heart is the qualitative and relational key to our worship relationship—God simply doesn't have our whole person until he has our vulnerably honest heart, which is the relational purpose that the curtain was torn open and the veil is removed.

We saw with Peter that reductionism always engages us in a comparative process, comparing ourselves to others in order to measure and establish our self-worth and our identity; this inevitably leads to stratified relations built on the perceptions of “better” or “less.” As long as we define ourselves from outer in, the consequence on relationships with others is distance or barriers, whether intentional or unintentional. We don't want to be vulnerable with others, especially with those who become the competition. Worship and church leaders measure how they are doing in comparison with other churches and worship services, using as a measuring stick the numbers in attendance, the loudness of responses (prompted or not), perhaps the complexity or newness of their technology—primarily focused on and likely preoccupied with the secondary at the expense of the primacy of relationship. Consider how prevalent this comparative process is.

When we hear Jesus try to focus us on relationship together, how quickly we deflect the focus away from ourselves by saying “what about him/her?” just as Peter functioned in a key interaction with Jesus (Jn 21:20-21). Here we are stuck in front of the curtain, avoiding being vulnerable both with God and others in face-to-face, person-to-person, heart-to-heart involvement. Even with good intentions, we are unwilling to make the choices necessary for our practice to go deeper into our person and relationships together. Our prevailing terms for relationships make it too convenient for us to remain within these constraining norms of practice, whereby we get embedded in the comparative process of “what about others, indeed?”—either ignoring or not paying attention to Jesus' incisive feedback “What is *the secondary* to you? Follow me *behind the curtain in the primacy of intimate relationship together*” (Jn 21:22).

To receive God's relational grace makes imperative that we reject (die to) the sin of reductionism—reject defining our person from outer in and die to the comparative process that keeps us relationally distant from God and each other. Conjointly with dying to the old in and around us, our whole person as subject needs integrally to emerge from inner out with our hearts available now to God for intimate relational connection. Integral to redemptive change is dying to the old in order for the rising of the new—the embodying of whole theology and practice. We have our relational work to engage in reciprocally with the Spirit, as subjects giving primacy to relationships together over the secondary of what to do and have. In reciprocal relationship with the Spirit, our subject-person emerges in wholeness, in affirmation and celebration as God's daughters and sons who are transformed and made whole to compose relationship together in wholeness. In this vulnerable relational process without the veil God's relational grace negates the sin of reductionism and its counter-relational work, and from that death of the old we emerge new: transformed, ‘equalized’ before God, with each other, and intimately connected together in transformed relationships. Transformed persons in transformed relationships together as God's new creation family are the relational outcome of what we are saved to, having been saved from sin of reductionism. Without this whole theology there is no whole practice, that is, practice distinguished by embodying this new creation.

How does this relational process connect with the relational dynamic of with the

temple curtain and worship? To say we are ‘equalized’ before God does not at all mean we are made equal with God, because God will always be ontologically distinct from us both quantitatively and qualitatively. Rather, it means that we can stand before him without feeling bad about ourselves (less as a person) from a comparative process—which by necessity includes without feeling “better” than others. To be equalized is to be freed from the reductionist outer-in criteria that engages us in the comparative process, that focuses us on what we do and have, and thereby frees us from the need to hide our hearts (for fear of rejection). We are freed then to let our hearts come forth for Face-to-face connection in his relational context and intimate relational process—only behind the curtain with the veil removed—and to be involved with others for intimate and equalized relationships as God’s new creation family. This is the significance of following the person of Jesus (not his sacrifice) behind the curtain into the Father’s intimate presence (Heb 10:19-22); whole theology requires Jesus’ whole person, while reduced or fragmentary theology only includes his sacrifice—the practice of either having crucial relational implications for which we are accountable. Here behind the curtain, the person we present, the quality of our communication, and the depth of our relational involvement compatibly compose who and what God gets in worship—nothing less and no substitutes.

In our worship relationship, are we still in front of the curtain (embodying old), or have we received God’s relational provisions to free us to enter behind the curtain (embodying new) to be with God Face to face? Have we each let Jesus wash our feet, that is, to receive the relational grace embodied by Jesus, vulnerably involved with us face to face, eye to eye, in order to redefine our person from inner out?

### **The Veil is Gone!**

We need also to understand more deeply the significance in our practice about the “veil” (first mentioned in connection with Moses), and whether the veil is in place (representing a relational barrier) or removed. This has further bearing on how we embody the worship relationship, old or new. The veil also reflects whether or not our relationship together with God results in the outcome of knowing and understanding God (cf. Jer 9:23-24).

Moses experienced most notably a face-to-face relationship with God (Ex 33:11; Num 12:6-8), which caused Moses’ face to radiate (cf. Ex 34:33-35). Whenever Moses came back to the people after meeting with God, Moses would tell them what God commanded with uncovered face, after which Moses would then put a veil on his face because apparently the people couldn’t bear to see Moses’ radiant face. Whenever he went back into God’s presence he removed the veil. Who and what God got with Moses led to God’s definitive affirmation of Moses: “With him I speak face to face—clearly, not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the LORD” (Num 12:8).

Paul wrote from his own relationship with the Lord (his experiential truth) that the Face-to-face relational connection now possible for everyone is even better than what Moses had, because we have the direct ongoing relational involvement of the Spirit (2 Cor 3:7-8,17; cf. Eph 2:18), without the veil. To be face to Face with God behind the curtain also means that the veil, signifying relational barriers, has been removed (2 Cor

3:14-18; 4:6; cf. Eph 2:14). Moreover, Paul continues, God “has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6; cf. Jer 9:23-24). And “the Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children” (Rom 8:16; cf. Jn 8:35). With the veil removed, God finally gets *us*! Theologically and in function-relational terms the veil no longer exists, and we are freed from relational barriers as we come before God. Yet, by not being vulnerable with God we still function as if the veil has not been removed.

As previously discussed about Mary, her vulnerable involvement with Jesus—that is, with her whole person from inner out—distinguishes the compatible reciprocal relational response to him behind the curtain and without the veil. The relational outcome was to deeply know Jesus the person. The other disciples’ complaint that Mary was wasting expensive perfume by using it on him instead of selling it for the poor exposed their primary focus on the secondary matter of ministry, which came at the expense of Jesus losing out. In the primacy of relationship, Jesus affirmed Mary with relational words that we need to carefully pay attention to: “Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, *what she has done* will be told in remembrance of her” (Mt 26:13; Mk 14:9). “What she has done” was relationally significant to Jesus, but not because she worshiped Jesus extravagantly; Mary worshiped him with her whole person from inner out (i.e. whole-ly) in the primacy of relationship together.

Of further significance for us to pay attention to, Jesus was fully aware that Mary had anticipated “the day of my burial” (Mk 14:8; Jn 12:7). Mary’s vulnerable involvement in this way reflected the depth of Mary’s *qualitative sensitivity* and *relational awareness* of Jesus; she had deeply listened to Jesus’ disclosures about his impending death (e.g. Mk 9:31), and also did not stay relationally distant and unaffected. The depth of Mary’s involvement with Jesus demonstrated knowing and understanding Jesus beyond what any of the other disciples demonstrated (cf. Jn 14:9). Beyond a pending event, by anointing Jesus’ body beforehand for burial (Mk 14:8b), she was connected with Jesus together in his deepest moments, and freely responded to him as she was able to (“she has done what she could,” Mk 14:8a). In other words, Mary was vulnerably participating in the whole of Jesus’ life, her whole person from inner out deeply involved with Jesus’ whole person even in anticipation of his death, which was in stark contrast to the relational distance that the other disciples kept (e.g. Mk 9:31-32; cf. Mt 26:40,43). I imagine many of us in that situation would have been focused on ‘the right thing to do’, such as some act of “real” ministry, just as the other disciples were (Mk 14:4-5).

In her clearly distinguished (i.e. whole-ly involved from her innermost) response to Jesus, we see how Mary deeply knew and loved Jesus; and surely at this depth level, her heart was breaking as she poured the perfume on Jesus. And yet, since she took Jesus’ words to heart, she could anticipate the future with hope.

Mary embodies for us the words that Paul wrote to the Galatians: “For freedom Christ has set us free....the only thing that counts is faith working through love” (Gal 5:1,6b). It is this expression in freedom in reciprocal relationship with the Spirit that Paul also wrote about in relational terms for whole relationship together without the veil (2 Cor 3:16-17). Communion with the whole of God means to participate in his vulnerable life and thereby know him deeply, yet our participation in the whole and holy God’s life can only be engaged with him, as he says, “where I am,” (Jn 12:26, 14:3, 17:24). At this

vital juncture of God's presence and involvement, 'where I am' is only 'behind the curtain' and 'without the veil' in the whole of God's uncommon (holy) relational context, to be completely engaged in the trinitarian relational process of family love. Therefore, if we are 'where I am', our worship will engage this distinguished communion together, in a sense worshipping *with* our sister Mary, thus 'in memory of her' because this integral relational outcome is the gospel (Mk 14:9). If we are not 'where I am', our worship will remain focused in a primary way on substitutes composed by secondary matter of what we do or have—reflecting liturgy in front of the curtain that essentially constrains us in a 'secondary sanctuary'. If we don't relationally know Jesus in the communion of integral relationship together, we have yet to join *with* his person ("where I am") in his sacrifice behind the curtain (Heb 9:12, 10:19-22) that reconstitutes the sanctuary (no more secondary sanctuary<sup>12</sup>) in order for the whole of God's presence and involvement to be with us directly in Face-to-face relationship together (Eph 2:18-22)—"where I am."

Worship that has relational significance to God takes place only behind the curtain conjointly in the relational context of God's vulnerable presence and by the relational process of Face-to-face involvement without the veil. This is the experience of reconciled relationship with the whole of God that is experienced together as family in the intimate and equalized relationships necessary for our wholeness. I hope that by now readers understand that always working against wholeness of our person and relationships is the counter-relational work of reductionism. When not accounted for, reductionism in the worship relationship will by default influence us to mirror the human shaping from human contextualization that fragments whole persons and minimalizes whole relationships that are rightfully God's. That's why embodying the worship relationship only emerges new from whole theology and practice. Otherwise our worship is subject to reductionism's counter-relational work.

There is no question that the common experience in churches is that persons are defined by quantitative criteria of what they do (e.g. roles in leadership, ministry, worship, service) and have (e.g. attributes, talents, resources, even spiritual gifts) in a comparative process—with the rest of the gathering rendered to conforming to such templates. There results a "hierarchy" of better-less distinctions that create relational distance and even relational barriers, both vertically and horizontally. As you either lead worship or sit in the pews as worshiper, consider the roles that you assume for yourself and for others and the relational barriers these distinctions create (although they may be quite subtle). These include but aren't limited to the following: the clergy-laity distinction created by the value placed on education and training; worship team and the rest of the congregation; guest speakers and you; adults and youth/children; male and female roles. Persons defined and determined by these distinctions do not function in intimate and equalized relationships made whole on the basis of God's relational grace; even though the theology may affirm the latter, the practice promotes, reinforces or sustains the former.

In the distinctions we ascribe to God, we also need to understand our own simulation of humbleness in the worship relationship, believe it or not. For example, a prominent expression in much of Western church worship today is the exaltation of God

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<sup>12</sup> For a fuller discussion of secondary sanctuary, see my earlier study, *A Theology of Worship: 'Singing' a New Song to the LORD* (Theology of Worship, 2011). Online at <http://4X12.org>, 1-8.



in comparative terms, the extreme of which are superlative terms such as highest-, greatest-, most-, best-.... This gives the appearance of our humility, but our offerings and confessions are structured only in comparative terms that limit or constrain our involvement from a fragmentary position as “less” (incorrectly assumed as humbleness). Or if we are functioning from outer in—even with the desire and intention to be humble—we may even take on the physical posture of getting on our knees or of lying prostrate before God. Yet without making our hearts vulnerable from inner out we are still trying to have relationship with God on our own terms, and thus maintaining relational distance even on our knees or lying prostrate. God is not impressed by what we say or do but is responsive to how we’re relationally involved. Accordingly, for genuine humbleness as Jesus’ followers, we necessarily must grow in knowing where our heart is and submitting whole-ly to the discipleship relationship on God’s relational terms.<sup>13</sup> This reciprocal relational involvement is what Mary embodied new and how Peter struggled with embodying old.

All these issues we must consciously talk about together and address, not only as individuals but corporately together if we are to embody new the worship relationship that is indeed worthy to be called good news distinguishing the whole gospel, that is, nothing less and no substitutes but the gospel of wholeness. This is the most serious critique I can think of for all of us together, my sisters and brothers in Christ. When it comes to our worship relationship, not to mention our discipleship (since they are inseparable), this relational impasse is a critical point where our theology and practice of our worship relationship must converge in wholeness. The key issue unavoidably is again the heart, the honesty and vulnerableness of our heart (“spirit and truth,” Jn 4:23-24) that the Father makes the relational imperative for intimate connection in the worship relationship. The question of where our heart is involves much more than just emotions, though emotions are an important qualitative function of our heart. Where our heart is determines the person we present before God, which then determines the integrity and quality of our communication to God and the depth level our relational involvement with God in worship. The psalmist’s heart was determined, resolved to respond with nothing less and no substitutes.

‘Who, what and how will you be?’ the Lord asks us. In front of the curtain (on our terms of something less or some substitute, as objects) or behind the curtain (on God’s relational terms with vulnerability of honest hearts, as subjects)? With the veil over our hearts (maintaining relational barriers) or with the veil removed (our innermost freed to be loved by God and participate in his life Face to face, heart to heart)?

Wholeness in our theology and in our practice is neither reducible to human contextualization nor negotiable to our terms. As the psalmist’s heart functioned with *kûn*, may our hearts have the resolve and be determined to make the ongoing choices necessary for our persons to be whole in the worship relationship and to live whole together with the Trinity.

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<sup>13</sup> The limits of this study don’t allow us to elaborate here on the Sermon on the Mount. Please read T. Dave Matsuo’s *The Gospel of Transformation: Distinguishing the Discipleship and Ecclesiology Integral to Salvation*, 177-257.

## For Your Theology and Relational Response

Consider deeply the song on the following page, which is composed in the key of Jesus with the Spirit and sung with Mary and Paul (2 Cor 3:16-18). By God's relational work of grace, the way is opened and the veil has been removed to intimate relationship with the holy and whole God.

### 'Singing' the New Song<sup>14</sup>

Sing the new song to the Lord  
Sing the new song to *our* Lord  
(*Joyfully*) —the veil is gone  
the veil is gone  
[embrace the whole of God]

Note: [ ]s hummed (or the like); no words aloud, no instruments played

Sing the new song to the Lord  
Sing the new song to *our* Lord  
—you are holy  
you are whole  
—we're uncommon  
we are whole  
[embrace the whole of God]

Sing the new song to the Lord  
Sing the new song to *our* Lord  
(*Passionately*) —you compose life  
in your key  
—life together  
intimately  
—no veil present  
distance gone  
[embrace the whole of God]

Sing the new life with the Lord  
Sing the new life with *our* Lord  
—you are present  
and involved  
—we *be* present  
now involved  
[embrace the whole of God]

Sing this new song to *you* Lord  
Sing this new life with *you* Lord  
(*Joyfully*) —the veil is gone  
the veil is gone  
[embrace the whole of God]  
[embrace the whole of God]  
[embrace the whole of God]

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<sup>14</sup> Kary A. Kambara and T. Dave Matsuo, ©2011. Printable sheet music available: Online at <http://4X12.org>, Worship Songs.

## Chapter 3

## Shout-*in* to the Lord

**Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD;  
let us *shout aloud* to the Rock of our salvation.**

Psalm 95:1, NIV

**Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.**

Psalm 98:4, NIV

**I run in the way of your *terms for relationships* for you have set my heart free.**

Psalm 119:32, NIV

Had it not been for the relational work whole-ly embodied by the Son, we would have no idea as to what a worshiper that the Father seeks looks like. Certainly, we would have the OT Psalms and some information about ancient temple worship. However, Jesus directly initiated, vulnerably embodied and relationally established us in a new covenant to come into the very presence of God, Face to face without the veil. Jesus also visibly demonstrated for us whole-ly embodied praise (Lk 10:21, discussed below). For our part as his followers, what reciprocity is needed is our compatible response and congruent connection in order to experience the relational connection the Father so desires. We continue to unfold what is necessary on our part for this blessed, yet unnecessarily elusive outcome—elusive because it’s a relational outcome not determined by secondary aspects of worship. What hope we have in this relational process because the Spirit is now here within us!

In Jesus’ interactions with Mary and Peter in particular (discussed in the previous chapter), Jesus makes it unmistakable that if our worship relationship is to have relational significance to God, it has to be on God’s relational terms (i.e. to receive and reciprocally respond to God’s relational response of grace to us): whole terms giving primacy to relationship together over reduced terms composed merely by anything we do or have (the focus of the secondary). To embody the worship relationship *new* can only be with our whole person from inner out, signified by vulnerable and honest hearts in compatible response to who and what God is and how God is involved with us. This reciprocal response can only be as subjects (not objects, as Peter demonstrated), coming before God with resolve and determination as Mary shows us. As we participate in these relational terms, our worship response to God will be distinguished as uncommon (holy), compatible with the righteousness of God (who, what, and how God is and thereby present with us), and congruent with the whole of God’s relational involvement with us.

## Shout-*in*, not Shouting

In recent decades we have seen worship renewal movements in Protestant evangelical churches and academic contexts emphasizing the need for “wholistic (or holistic) worship.”<sup>1</sup> Wholistic worship has various meanings: worship as a lifestyle by which believers worship God throughout the week by how they live, not just at a once-a-week event; or wholistic worship might involve shifting from a constrained cerebral worship service (with emphasis on the sermon) to involve all the senses, and also include more emotive (qualitative) aspects in worship, such as dance, visual arts, and generally more physically active participation by all the worshipers. While these aspects may be relatively new for Western churches, they are commonly witnessed in global South churches.

These are all pointing in the right direction. Yet getting all our parts engaged in wholistic worship doesn’t automatically engage our whole person from inner out in compatible response to God, and in congruent connection—the elusive relational outcome. Much of what is described as wholistic worship is still outer-in practice giving primary focus on what to do, just that now more of our parts are engaged; the process is still fragmentary, and merely adding to the sum of the parts does not equal the whole sought for—notably wholeness in relationship together. What is still lacking is to give primacy to relational involvement from inner out, making all other aspects of what to do secondary. In other words, it’s the vulnerably honest and freed heart that integrates the whole person from inner out that composes the whole worship relationship *new*, which the Father seeks in intimate relationship together.

It is necessary, then, that we go even further and deeper than just actively engaging all our parts limited to only outer-in expressions—which Jesus rebuked some Pharisees for (Mt 15:8-9)—in order to go beyond in our response to God with our whole person from inner out. The Psalms quoted above deepen our understanding and thus our practice to be whole. “Shout” (*rûa* ‘) in Psalms 95 and 98 is a fitting place to start this chapter’s focus.

Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD;  
let us **shout aloud** (*rûa* ‘) to the Rock of our salvation!  
Let us come before him with thanksgiving  
and **extol** (*rûa* ‘) him with music and song.                      Ps 95:1-2, NIV

**Shout for joy** (*rûa* ‘) to the LORD, all the earth,  
Burst into jubilant song with music...  
**Shout for joy** (*rûa* ‘) before the LORD, the King.                      Ps 98:4,6, NIV)

These psalms call worshipers to demonstrative worship expressions to sing for joy, shout aloud, shout for joy, burst into jubilant song, and make music. The recurring

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<sup>1</sup> The church has engaged in worship renewal movements since at least the 19<sup>th</sup> C. These comprehensive liturgical movements began with the Roman Catholic Church’s Liturgical Movement and Vatican II, from which emerged Protestantism’s liturgical renewal. The interest in (w)holistic worship is rooted in these efforts. For further study on liturgical movements, see Geoffrey Wainwright and Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, *The Oxford History of Christian Worship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

word *rûa* ‘ means to shout aloud for joy, to make a joyful noise by shouting or playing a musical instrument. In the Psalms, *rûa* ‘ is nearly always used in this sense linked to joy, music, and singing to the Lord. To emphasize the connection, the poet twice calls worshipers to shout for joy, both to the Lord and before the Lord in Psalm 98:4,6 (NIV).

The emphasis, however, is not about being demonstrative as ‘shouting’ indicates; rather it involves the exclamation of the whole person in response to God. Joy is the inner-out response from our heart to the heart of God, Face to face—now composed behind the curtain and with the veil removed (as discussed in the previous chap.). This relational experience beyond mere emotion cannot be produced from outer in (though we can try hard to feel joy, as I used to, to no avail). It is this inner-out exclamation of the vulnerable heart that is signified by ‘shout-*in*’ that appears in the title of the chapter. Shout-*in* distinguishes for us from *inner* out—unmistakably distinguished for the psalmists—the vulnerable involvement of our whole person signified by our heart (nothing less and no substitutes) responding compatibly to our nothing-less-no-substitutes God. Shout-*in*, therefore, chastens any outer-in “shouting” that is something less than our heart’s expression from inner out. Shout-*in* worshipers are those whom the Father seeks who will worship with honest and vulnerable hearts! How demonstrative this *rûa* ‘ may be can certainly vary, yet the exclamation of shout-*in* must by its nature have intensity, the intensity of joyful hearts relationally connected to the heart of God. This intensity is why the psalmist *runs* in God’s relational way—not just casually walks—“ for you have set my heart free” (Ps 119:32).

Another Hebrew term expresses the inner-out response of joy to the Lord, for example when the poet says, “*Rejoice* in the Lord...” (Ps 32:11). The word *gîyl* is rendered in modern English as joy, to rejoice, and the majority of its occurrences in the OT refer to praising God. Yet, the Hebrew sense is deeper and more whole than in modern English because *gîyl* is visibly expressed as a congregational expression. *Rûa* ‘, *gîyl*, and similar other words refer to spontaneous vocal expressions, as opposed to narrative praise of *yādāh* (confess, praise, give thanks) and *hālāl* (as in the imperative hallelujah, “praise Yahweh”). The Septuagint renders *gîyl* into Greek *agalliaomai*, which means to jump and leap for joy with one’s whole person from inner out (cf. Lk 10:21, when Jesus jumped for joy as he praised the Father, discussed below).<sup>2</sup>

We worshipers in the global North are familiar with demonstrative expressions in worship that are construed as inherent in a particular concept of wholistic worship, such as lifting up hands, clapping, and dancing. While most Christian worship contexts have music and singing, spontaneous shouting out loud is rarer in much if not most worship today, except when prompted by the worship leader. We could easily add shouting to the Lord to the expressions of wholistic worship.

Historically, Pentecostal and African American worship have been verbally and physically demonstrative to varying degrees.<sup>3</sup> While I certainly cannot know the hearts of

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<sup>2</sup> For an illuminating discussion of these and other words of joyful expression, see *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 3, 1273-76.

<sup>3</sup> For an African American viewpoint on wholistic worship, see Pedrito Maynard-Reid, “Worship: an African-Rooted Paradigm.” *Spectrum Magazine*, 18 August 2010. Online at <http://spectrummagazine.org/article/spirituality/2010/08/18/wholistic-worship-african-rooted-paradigm>. For a Pentecostal viewpoint, see Travis W. Cooper, *Ecstasy and the Kinesthetic Body: An Ethnographic Study of Contemporary Pentecostal Worship*. Online at [http://www.academia.edu/1475874/Ecstasy\\_and\\_the\\_Kinesthetic\\_Body\\_An\\_Ethnographic\\_Study\\_of\\_Contemporary\\_Pentecostal\\_Worship](http://www.academia.edu/1475874/Ecstasy_and_the_Kinesthetic_Body_An_Ethnographic_Study_of_Contemporary_Pentecostal_Worship).

these sisters and brothers, it isn't always apparent if those outward expressions are inner out, or the outer-in expressions in adherence to their particular traditions and cultures or subcultures. Among all God's churches worldwide (global North and South), however, we should all be concerned on two fronts: (1) Does our lack of demonstrative expressions in worship reflect our self-constraints from outer-in influences from the surrounding context? and (2) Are our demonstrative worship expressions indeed shout-*in* with joy to God with relational significance to him *from inner out*, or really merely outer-in behaviors shaped by sociocultural factors?

Before continuing, we need to clarify the difference between shouting for God just as we shout for our team at a baseball game, and "shout-*in* for joy to the Lord" as expressed in the Psalms. For a sports team, shouting is about cheering for what the team does—for example, when they score runs, make good plays, and win. We shout to urge them on to succeed. When they play poorly, we don't cheer because we feel let down, disappointed or frustrated. As fans, we ascribe to our team some source of our own self-worth and identity, though usually only in 'fair weather'. That is, our involvement is based on what they do; it is situational, meaning that there's no direct personal relationship between the team and the average fan, even though we take the results personally. As the team goes up and down, so go our responses.

In this latter sense, our shouting to the Lord may likewise be only situational, whereby our shouting is contingent on how well God meets our expectations in our situations and circumstances. In other words, those results determine our level of joy. Our shouts to the Lord in this sense go up and down. By contrast, shout-*in* does not rise and fall with situations and circumstances because shout-*in* is only about the primacy of relationship, and God is the One we can always count on in relationship together. Shout-*in* is possible on the basis of God's righteousness, that is, the whole of who, what and how God is in our ongoing relationship, with nothing less and no substitutes.

As we further distinguish shout-*in* from shouting, we must inevitably address the problem of prompting by worship leaders, an increasingly popular mode in contemporary worship. Prompted shouting (e.g. "amen") is problematic in that worshipers usually react only to cues from the outer situation (as objects), not as their own response of the heart to the Lord (as subjects). This is similar, if not identical, to dynamics in sports events (and worship concerts, which are discussed shortly), where cheering is prompted by cheerleaders, other fans, or JumboTrons. The common response to such prompting is just that—a response to prompting, and thus is ambiguous at best as to its relational significance. Prompting may indeed produce results encouraging to leaders, but this process needs to be challenged for what it is.

Prompted responses ("amen," clapping during a song, applause, etc.) are all about quantitative parts of what to do, even when the prompt to "give it up for God" is ostensibly for God's praise. Yet, who and what does God get from shouts that had to be prompted out of worshipers—who likely offer only fragmented parts of their person? For example, simulations of joy may create a positive mood for those gathered but they do not make connection to that elusive relational outcome with God. I strongly suspect that many who prompt a response from worshipers are really wanting some affirmation for themselves in the form of noise—the louder and longer the better—or any other reaction from worshipers. This includes asking people to repeat their response of "good morning" back to the speaker because the original greeting was lifeless. Such responses become

merely ends in themselves. Of course, even with good intentions prompts may be seen as needed stimuli to evoke response from otherwise observers in the audience. Yet, the implications of being merely objects and/or treated as objects gets to the heart of the worship relationship and embodying what shout-*in* involves.

Prompting needs to be addressed in each church because there are other serious issues involved. On the one hand, some worshipers feel they are being manipulated to behave a certain way by prompting, and rightly so. On the other hand, however, worshipers frequently are relationally distant or detached and not ready to worship, and undoubtedly worship leaders try to get them involved. Yet, prompting as a solution is not edifying, and only feeds into outer-in involvement or passivity of some worshipers. Those who feel manipulated do need to examine themselves, before pointing the finger at others; and by honest examination relationally respond to God as subjects regardless of how others function, and thereby hopefully embody an example for others to be edified (as Mary demonstrated). Uninvolved worshipers need more than prompting, because their function exposes deeper issues in their discipleship relationship. These matters must be addressed by church leadership if a church is to grow as God's new creation family and embody new the worship relationship.

For example, those who teach in various church and academic contexts need to integrate discipleship with worship. The worship relationship and the discipleship relationship are inseparable in both individual functions (i.e. individuals' relationships with God), as well as in corporate functions such as in corporate worship. These two dimensions—individual and corporate—are necessary both for all persons and relationship together to grow in being whole. For teaching/nurturing that involves individual attention to church members, small growth groups of four to five persons serve better than the gathered worship service, with a lecture format replaced by interactive dialogues.

Another serious concern for worship leaders as well as active participants is that whenever we express praise to the Lord from outer in, we are involved in an illusion of inner-out worship whereby we outwardly give the appearance of relational connection with God. This illusion leads to further simulation of worship based on quantitative criteria of what one does (e.g. perform) and has (e.g. extensive musical training). The process is summarized as follows: outer-in expression→ illusion of relationally-significant worship→simulation of relational connection in worship→further embedded in outer-in expression (the quantitative “more” the better). I suggest that this process is the impetus behind contemporary worship's rock concert spectacle, just as it is for the common performance mentality of many worship planners and worship leaders in more traditional churches. In this respect, we also need to stop making the assumption that God is the “audience” for our worship, which renders God to an Object without the relational interaction as Subject Face to face.

Some worshipers truly want to respond by shout-*in* with joy to the Lord, but the dynamics of the worship service discourage and constrain them. The alternative should not be to resort to prompting, rendering them to function as object, as mentioned earlier. Rather, all worshipers need to be encouraged and nurtured in their shout-*in* to the Lord—to embody new the worship relationship with their *whole* person from inner out, vulnerably involved with God without relational barriers. The exclamation of the heart cannot be programmed but certain structures can provide opportunities to grow deeper in

the relational quality of our responses, not to increase further in quantity.

For example, for each local church as a church family, work together (e.g. initially in small groups) on ways to move beyond comfort zones in responses to the Lord. Understand that each person is at a different place in how free they are to express their hearts to the Father, therefore as sisters and brothers think of ways that allow everyone to vulnerably take steps together. This is only about taking steps in relational trust to let go to the Lord, just as Mary stepped out. This should never devolve into a focus on ‘what to do’ but how to be involved with the Lord to grow as the worshipers he seeks, about who and what God gets. Accordingly, persons should not lapse into becoming observers of what others are doing. Worship planners and leaders need to take the lead by their own vulnerable responses to the Father; they also have the important responsibility to ensure that inner-out expressions of worshipers have abundant opportunity to emerge. Certainly, this will not only involve exclamations of joy but also other feelings such as sadness, fear, frustration, even anger (cf. Mt 26:38-39; 27:46), all of which God wants to receive and respond to (cf. Mary after Lazarus died, Jn 11:32-33).

Many years ago I was involved in worship times in which everyone was strongly encouraged to sing to God freely, holding nothing back. At that time, for me it meant to sing loudly and without any concern for staying on tune or how I sounded. Over many of these worship times, the Spirit brought out of me floods of feelings, most of which I couldn’t explain in words. I shed lots of tears. Some of these feelings were the deep longing I had for relational connection with God, some of them were pain and anger from my past; and those were important times for my heart to re-emerge after having been buried for many years. Subsequently my Father responded to my heart’s deep needs. Having experienced those times in the context of worship was important for my journey to wholeness in Christ, specifically as my Father’s beloved daughter.<sup>4</sup> What are ways churches can work on shout-*in*—which inevitably will require going beyond our sociocultural influences?

For example: Worship planners and leaders can easily design the singing portion of the service with heartfelt songs that directly address the Lord, have no instruments but only worship leaders leading with their whole person from inner out—and include the ‘out’ (physical expressions also<sup>5</sup>), and encourage, even challenge everyone to lift up their hearts to the Lord beyond their comfort zones. Perhaps remind them who and what God gets depends on what we give him—and he wants *all* of our person. It helps us to specifically address ourselves to the three major issue for all practice:

- (1) the person we present (our whole person from inner out, or something less?)
- (2) the qualitative-relational integrity of our communication in song (regardless of how we sound or putting constraints on it?)
- (3) the depth of relationship that we engage with God as we sing to him. Start with simpler songs (simple lyrics and melody) so that persons can focus on the Lord without distraction. For example: “How Great Thou Art,” “Thou Art Worthy,”

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<sup>4</sup> I’ve shared much of my personal journey with the Lord of working through areas of my life needing to change in an essay, “My Ongoing Journey to Wholeness in Christ” (Spirituality Essay, 2010). Online at <http://4X12.org>.

<sup>5</sup> The term usually used by worship thinkers for physical movement is “kinesthetic.” Kinesthetic movements include dancing, swaying, jumping, clapping, lifting hands, kneeling, prostrating, waving.



“10,000 Reasons,” “Agnus Dei.”

To reiterate, there is a critical difference between what is meant by wholistic (all the parts of a person involved) and what is functioning whole-ly from inner out, which we always need to be aware of and address in ourselves.

This concern about outer-in expressions extends to “worship concerts.” Persons regularly shout and are demonstrative “before” the Lord at a worship concert, but relational clarity is ambiguous (who receives the focus of attention?), and involvement with God is determined more by the setting (i.e. performance), so that relational significance is questionable at best. And if the performers are selling their music CDs at those events, then relational clarity is muddled even more. There certainly can be some teaching value to worship concerts. Those performing at such concerts have an opportunity to teach, even reach out to younger generations. I suggest that it would be better to call these gatherings simply Christian music concerts, and not give the illusion of worshiping God. Moreover, such settings are difficult to replicate in regular worship gatherings, and any attempts to do so fall further into simulations.

Shout-*in* for joy to the Lord is relationship specific; when we shout for joy to the Lord, we cannot be ‘doing’ something as an end in itself. There’s no shout-*in* for joy without having received and experienced God’s love and grace that frees our hearts and makes us whole. Accordingly, shout-*in* only has relational significance to God in God’s relational context and process—that is, only behind the curtain with the veil removed by the relational work of grace of him who embodies us new in the worship relationship.

Yet another concern is raised by “shout with joy to the Lord.” There are worshipers who don’t feel comfortable shouting or lifting hands or engaging in any kind of demonstrative expression; they conclude “that’s who I am.” In fact, these are probably the majority of God’s worshipers, in both the West and East. By contrast, many African worshipers simply must dance their worship—“that’s just who I am.” They have perhaps long concluded “that’s just who we are,” and may feel that they aren’t able to worship without dancing.

To my sisters and brothers who consider themselves to be introverts by nature, that self-perception is understandable. I have long felt and believed that I was born shy. I also felt that I couldn’t change, and, to be honest, I didn’t want to change, reasoning that if I did, then whatever would come out of me wouldn’t be ‘the real me’. Looking back now, I also knew there was a lot going on inside, turbulence, a person needing to be freed, to be healed and made whole. I intimately know many reasons (and, yes, excuses) to remain constrained in worship (and also in life in general).

We shy persons do need to ask ourselves in all honesty (i.e. be vulnerable) if we are living as a whole person, regardless of our composure or limited affect. For example, ask yourselves if you are also introverted, for example, at sports events, or while on a roller coaster. As I’ve examined my shyness, I’ve seen that it comes from self-consciousness, insecurity about myself, an insecurity (needing to be redeemed and made whole) in my relationship with God that would keep me overly concerned about how others would perceive me. And this insecurity stemmed from my defining myself by what I did and had, determining how I functioned in a distinct (though often implicit) comparative process with everyone around me. Ultimately, this posture is self-focused, gives primacy to oneself—whether intentional or not, perhaps inadvertent—and thereby

remains less concerned about who and what God gets from ‘me’ in worship.

This is, again, about reductionism of our person into fragmentary parts, the sum of which never adds up to be whole. And the most obvious consequence of reductionism is in our relationships, composing shallowness of or total lack of relational connection; simulations make us unaware, or at least help us ignore, such relational consequences. This isn’t, however, just an individual matter that Western churches can assign to the individual’s Christian freedom, nor that global South churches can ignore as a part of cultural practice. The issue of reductionism and its counter-relational work needs to be the concern of the church as the new creation family, as we discuss later in this chapter. Thus, it needs to concern churches in the global North and South without exception, because shout-*in* gets to the heart of the person created in the qualitative image and relational likeness of God—the very heart of persons, regardless of human distinctions, whom God seeks in the worship relationship.

### **“A New Creation is Everything”**

To shout or not to shout in worship is not the question, nor is the question whether or not to lift hands, to dance or to clap. The meanings of physical gestures are culturally conditioned, and so we shouldn’t merely prescribe them for worship thinking that they have inherent meanings and thus inherent value to God. Here in the West, the gestures we are familiar with in worship—mainly clapping or lifting hands—have meanings other than praise in Scripture. Certainly, this doesn’t eliminate such expressions in worship but we should not automatically assume their meaning and value to God.

For example, the OT rarely mentions persons clapping in praise (Ps 47:1), and nature (seas, rivers/floods, trees) only a couple of times (Ps 98:8, NIV; Isa 55:12). In the OT, lifting up ones hands is a gesture with many meanings: of praise (Ps 134:2), prayer and petition, expressing faith (Ps 28:2; Ps 63:4), of oaths (Ex 6:8; Num 14:30), and animosity (2 Sam 20:21). In the NT, clapping and shouting in praise are never mentioned, which doesn’t exclude them but they aren’t prescribed either. In the NT, lifting holy hands accompanies prayer, mentioned only once (1 Tim 2:8). Thus, any discussions about wholistic worship have to go beyond and deeper than particular expressions, or such prescriptions can become mere templates for our conformity (as objects, not as subjects).

The issue for each of us and for us together corporately is whether our worship relationship is compatible with the whole of who and what God is and how God is involved with us, and congruent with how God makes connection with us. Recall from the first chapter of this study that God is involved with us with nothing less than and no substitutes for the whole of God, just as Jesus vulnerably embodied for all to experience, and for which the Spirit is now present and involved. ‘Nothing less and no substitutes’ is the relational righteousness determining how God is with us; therefore nothing less than and no substitutes for our whole person in our discipleship and worship relationship is the issue that determines our reciprocal response.

For our reciprocal response to be compatible and congruent with God, it must emerge from an irreplaceable process that the psalmist highlights: “you have set my heart free” (Ps 119:32, NIV). In very specific terms—God’s terms for relationship—we have to

die to the old self-constraints (or constraints imposed from our surrounding contexts) that keep us relationally distant from God, and which exist even while we long to experience God deeply. Underlying the human condition of all persons is the counter-relational work of reductionism, which is evident in the human shaping of relationships, including our shaping of relationships even in the church and with God. Therefore, we have to keep in mind that God never engages relationship on our reduced terms, because our terms by default render us to function as less than whole—our person and relationships fragmented, as objects, with relational distance in spite of our good intentions and having doctrinal purity (cf. the church in Ephesus, Rev 2:2-4). The struggle between God’s relational terms and our terms continues, thus requiring of us to vulnerably engage the redemptive change (old dying, new rising) of this relational work as subject-person who is resolved to respond to the Lord just as Mary resolved to embody new her response to Jesus.

The current emphasis in worship studies on wholistic worship is well-intentioned, with the aim of building up the church as worshipers who experience God’s presence, and to grow more fully as God’s people. Yet, it cannot be emphasized too much: it’s not what we do or don’t do (both from outer in) that has relational significance to God, but only our vulnerable response of worship, with relational trust (faith), and the depth of involvement with our whole person in relationship together (*agapē*)—without the veil, behind the curtain Face to face. The primacy of relationship together in wholeness is what the Father seeks from us in ‘the honesty of our heart’ vulnerably involved in the worship relationship (Jn 4:23-24). This wholeness unfolds only as the relational outcome of redemptive changes in our person and relationships.

Shout-*in*, not shouting, echoes Paul’s words to the church at Galatia regarding the practice of circumcision. Going back to OT times, God had instituted circumcision with Abraham (Gen 17:10) as a “sign of the covenant” between them; this sign continued throughout Israel’s history into NT Judaism (Second Temple) as well. Genital circumcision was only a secondary sign of the primacy of persons’ heart-level relational involvement of trust and obedience to God in the “covenant of love” (Dt 7:12-13, NIV). “Circumcise...your heart...do not be stubborn [stiff-necked, inflexible, hardened] any longer” (Dt 10:16) specifies the compatible reciprocal response of persons’ vulnerable and honest hearts.

Yet, because of the outer-in function of the people influenced by reductionism, circumcision became fragmented from the whole inner-out function of persons, and by NT times, it had come to serve as a national identity marker (along with the Sabbath and dietary laws) with no relational significance to God. Given reductionism’s counter-relational work, the primacy of relationship was lost to preoccupation with secondary matters—sound familiar? Paul understood this reductionist practice from his own experience. Therefore Paul made definitive the distinction between outer-in and inner-out circumcision (Rom 2:28-29), and relativized the issue of circumcision and uncircumcision to what is primary to God: “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love” (Gal 5:6). To make this emphatic, he restates what is primary to God—“neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything”—in whom he boasts as one transformed, a “new creation,” and made whole (Gal 6:15-16).

Therefore, just as genital circumcision or uncircumcision do not determine a

person's heart and relational involvement with God, neither do engaging in specific actions or not in worship. The only thing that counts to God is that we are functioning whole-ly from inner out as the new creation. As we so function, we will likely express our joy to the Lord through demonstrative gestures that may appear identical to the ones we've just said don't matter. God will know if our worship relationship is new from inner out (e.g. shoutin), or old from outer in (merely shouting). He wants us to love him in freedom with our whole integrated person—with the intensity of “I run in the way of your *relational terms for our relationship*, for you have set my heart free.”

## Maturity of the ‘Child-person’

How would you feel if Jesus came and stood face to face to you and your Christian sisters and brothers, and told you “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will *not be able to participate in the life of God as my disciples and worshipers* [behind the curtain and without the veil]” (Mt 18:3). This is what Jesus told his followers in Matthew's time. How would you respond?

I don't know about in your church, but in the Christian academy there's a lot of talk about *transformation* that we as God's church need and that can take place in worship. Worship thinkers raise legitimate concerns about the lack of depth in worship and worshipers, and lack of fire, all pointing to a condition of status quo, and the acknowledgement that something important is missing. Not surprisingly, most of the suggestions for how to remedy this sad state of God's church lean toward what to do from outer in (outer-in change is the meaning of *metaschematizō*, cf. 2 Cor 11:14), yet with the express expectations for the Spirit to make change happen. God, however, doesn't engage in relationship with us unilaterally, nor at the level of any reduced terms. In the context of these concerns, we need to heed the Father's words to “listen to my Son” (Mk 9:7) and Jesus' words to “consider carefully what you hear *from me*” (Mk 4:24) about our need to change; yet there is a blind spot in our perception, the elephant in the room that escapes our notice. Much of this fog is the result of influence from our surrounding contexts that have shaped our theology and practice (notably our theological anthropology); Paul confronted this outer-in focus in the worship relationship with the need for inner-out redemptive change that transforms to wholeness (*metamorphoō*, not *metaschematizō* and related *syschematizo*, Rom 12:1-2).

As we having been facing issues needing to die to so that our worship relationship can truly emerge new, it's necessary for us to examine even further and deeper the issues of self-constraint (as passive objects) and self-control (as determined subjects) for ourselves as disciples and worshipers (raised in our discussion about Peter, chap.2). Whether or not we're aware of it, God's worshipers (and I include myself) function normatively with self-constraints (from *self-consciousness*, the antithesis of *person-consciousness*, both discussed below). Even when not intentional, self-constraints emerge by default from prevailing self-consciousness. Our critical part in this process is first to be vulnerable with God, which may cause tension but is unavoidable if we indeed want to embody new the worship relationship.

First noted in chapter one, children (along with Mary) are our unlikely teachers, who show us the vulnerableness as whole persons from inner out who can reciprocally

respond to God's relational response of grace. In key interactions, Jesus invokes the vulnerable involvement of a 'child' to illuminate how we need to be transformed from inner out. Three interactions are crucial for us to carefully consider. In these touching, illuminating and encouraging scenes, Jesus focused his disciples on little children as both a metaphor for and the experiential reality of persons who function with the hermeneutic and epistemic process needed to make relational connection with Jesus on his relational terms and thereby know and understand the whole of God ("enter the kingdom of God," Mt 18:3). The unpretentious vulnerable and often delightful function of little children represents the compatible relational response and depth of involvement distinguishing the true worshipers the Father seeks (e.g. Mary). Jesus makes it imperative for his followers to engage in relationship together with the vulnerable involvement of the 'child-person'.

This qualitative involvement is nonnegotiable for all who follow Jesus so that we can be with him 'where I am' (Jn 12:26). Again, 'where I am' is behind the curtain in the intimate presence of the Father, in the Face-to-face relational connection necessary to become daughters and sons who know and understand God, and accordingly worship in spirit and truth without the veil. As you read through these three interactions, consider carefully how you function in the Father's presence.

### **First Key Interaction**

The first key interaction is recorded in Luke (Lk 10:17-23). After having completed their mission, Jesus' seventy-two disciples "returned with joy" (*chara*, related to *charis*, grace). Excitedly, in this relational outcome of grace, they reported to Jesus what had taken place in his name. With joy they expressed themselves vulnerably—unconstrained by self-consciousness—to Jesus, quite in contrast to other times when they (i.e. namely Jesus' closest disciples) were very constrained with him (e.g. Mk 8:16, 9:32; Lk 9:45; Jn 4:27). In response, Jesus expressed his own joy by skipping and leaping ebulliently (*agalliaō*) in the Spirit, praising the Father with his whole person from inner out, both verbally and physically, freely and vulnerably as a child would (cf. Isa 11:6). He praised the Father because "you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants [or little children]." In this passage, which is a critical key for our own practice to be whole (inseparably for our discipleship and worship relationship), Jesus unexpectedly puts into juxtaposition the 'wise and learned or intelligent' (*sophos* and *synetos*) with unlikely 'little children' (or infants, *nēpioi*).

The 'wise and learned' are characterized by giving primacy to outer aspects of Jesus, such as his teaching and actions in quantitative referential terms. On that basis, they consequently acquire only referential knowledge about him, and engage in only measured relational involvement at a relational distance—their shaping of relationships from the influence of reductionism. Persons who define themselves and others on the basis of what one does or has (referential information about Jesus), render their hearts unavailable for any heart-level involvement, though simulations may give the appearance of going deeper. Without vulnerable involvement of their own person to engage Jesus as Subject in relationship together, their limited perceptual lens in a narrow-down epistemic process focuses only on Jesus as object merely to learn about in fragmentary or disembodied knowledge (e.g. propositional truth). Any deeper knowledge and understanding of Jesus the person are either not paid attention to or ignored, usually due

to assumptions and biases—yes, notably of the ‘wise and learned’. These persons cannot therefore complete the relational connection with God’s vulnerable self-disclosures whole-ly embodied by Jesus.

Most of us have functioned similarly to the ‘wise and learned’ (knowingly or unknowingly), treating God’s self-disclosures with the limited and constrained involvement that gives primacy to the outer-in function of reasoning (the intellect) at the expense of the heart’s qualitative function. We would expect this rationalizing approach to God’s self-disclosures to prevail in biblical studies and theology in the academy. In worship gatherings this approach also prevails, especially when church leaders give primacy to what they and others do (e.g. teach in higher education institutions) or have (the education, training, reputation as scholars). This critique is not in any way suggesting fideism (faith without reason). Rather, we must understand that the relational consequence for the ‘wise and learned’ is that God’s vulnerable self-disclosures remain “hidden” from us and relational connection cannot be experienced to truly know and understand God in wholeness (cf. Jer 9:23-24). That leaves us stuck functioning with the veil, in front of the curtain without whole knowledge and understanding of God, just as the early disciples (Mk 8:17-21). This relational gap is insurmountable by the working of the human mind, though whose hermeneutic (interpretive framework and lens) is capable of shaping and constructing mere ontological simulation of relational connection with God and thus epistemic illusion of knowing and understanding God. At best, that’s the most the ‘wise and learned’ can come up with, leaving God’s presence uncertain and God’s involvement speculative.

In contrast to the ‘wise and learned’ are persons who function with the interpretive lens and epistemic process of ‘little children’. The Greek word *nēpios* (Lk 10:21) is formed from *nē* (not) and *epōs* (word), and literally means “wordless,” referring to a child too young to talk, or more precisely, an infant. Babies this young do not yet talk in developed language; yet, they communicate and make relational connection with their whole person. This relational reality should not elude us for defining the significance of our person. Babies vulnerably receive communication from others and communicate to others, albeit nonverbally; and they don’t make assumptions limiting their perceptual lens, nor do they impose biases to narrow down the epistemic process. Unlike the wise and learned, they are vulnerably open to receive, learn and grow in new ways—specifically, in this context, the relational ways of God.

In Jesus’ joyful praise to the Father, Jesus refers to his disciples as infants, not infantile but as child-persons, for their ontology and function. To at least some extent here (though not consistent in other situations), they functioned with a qualitative-relational interpretive framework and compatible epistemic process. Imagine the disciples returning in vulnerable exuberance prompting Jesus to literally jump for joy as well. Because of their open response (not measured and constrained) to Jesus’ person, God’s self-disclosures—having been received and responded to—are thus able to be “revealed” and relational connection made. This is the dynamic taking place in God’s relational context ‘behind the curtain’ in the process of intimate relationship with the veil removed (cf. Heb 9:8; 10:19-22). To experience these disciples in this way was joy to Jesus’ heart. It was this uncommon relational connection that was “well-pleasing” in the Father’s presence (*emprosthen*, before, in the presence of), which Jesus deeply knew because it was so delightful to him as well.

To more deeply understand the distinction Jesus is making between the ontology and function of a wise-learned person and the child-person, the following excerpt is helpful:

The “young children” (*nepios*), about whom Jesus was so excited, is a metaphor for a person from inner out, not from outer in: an unassuming person just being whom God created—with a heart open and involved, a mind free and adaptable to the improbable (i.e. able to go outside of the box as characteristic of most children). More specifically, this “child-person” functions by using the mind ingenuously in likeness of the whole of God, without unnecessarily complicating matters or overanalyzing things, yet not over-simplistic or foolish, thus compatible with the qualitative presence of God—a mind distinct from what prevails in the human context. Most important, therefore, this child-person’s mind does not function apart from the heart in order to entrust one’s whole person—nothing less and no substitutes—to be vulnerably present and intimately involved in God’s relational context and process for the relational epistemic process necessary to know the whole of God. Moreover, while the mind of a child is considered immature and undeveloped according to prevailing terms, this metaphor includes the function of a perceptual-interpretive framework that is unrestricted by predispositions and biases. As our mind grows in development, we also put on different lenses that tend to become more and more restricting and essentially reductionist (e.g. imagination, creativity, spontaneity decrease)—as in the trained incapacities often from higher learning. This ironic development describes “the wise and intelligent or learned,” who, as Jesus directly implied, depend on their rationality (*sophos* and *synetos*) without epistemic humility. Consequently, they fail to function as the whole person from inner out necessary by nature to engage the relational epistemic process to receive God’s self-disclosures and know the whole of God in relationship together—resulting in the relational consequence to labor in fragmentation and not truly be whole.<sup>6</sup>

The child-person characterizes the ‘soft’, vulnerable heart that is open to others (in Scripture referred to as “circumcised hearts,” e.g. Dt 10:16, 30:6; Rom 2:29) in contrast to “hardened hearts” (e.g. Ps 95:8; Zec 7:12; Mk 10:5; Heb 3:15; cf. Eze 36:26). This openness to others signifies being both *sensitive to the qualitative* and *relationally aware*, thereby composing the hearts sought by God that are available for relational connection together. Recent studies on babies highlight how deeply babies are relationally aware and sensitive to the qualitative in interactions, and help us understand more deeply why Jesus uses babies as the metaphor for our necessary involvement with him.<sup>7</sup>

It is delightful, not to mention edifying, to watch babies who lack the self-consciousness that children only slightly older have acquired, which unfortunately

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<sup>6</sup> T. Dave Matsuo, *Jesus into Paul: Embodying the Theology & Hermeneutic of the Whole Gospel* (Integration Study, 2012). Online at <http://4X12.org>, 8-9.

<sup>7</sup> I have cited in my study on worship language recent baby studies that demonstrate babies’ innate relational awareness; please refer to *Hermeneutic of Worship Language: Understanding Communion with the Whole of God* (Worship Language Study, 2013). Online at <http://4X12.org>, 70.

develops into self-constraints on the whole person. Babies communicate through their unspoken relational language of facial expressions, physical gestures, and sounds, with their relational lens in active mode. We can readily learn from babies why becoming like the child-person is a relational imperative for Jesus' followers to worship inner out in spirit and truth on his vulnerable relational terms. Little wonder that some Christians had relationally connected with Jesus in early childhood, only to lose that qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness in adulthood. Likewise, when adults become Christians (perhaps more in the global South), they often initially experience a more vibrant relationship with God than later when they learn "how" to be a Christian (particularly from Western thinking).

None of these relational dynamics are completely new to us, because all of us were at one time babies born with the qualitative-relational interpretive framework and relational epistemic process. Yet, not surprisingly, most if not all of us change from that kind of vulnerability in relationships; we have 'lost' these relational functions through 'trained incapacities' from reductionism, as noted in the quote above. To my knowledge, adulthood in every culture has this consequence. The lack of vulnerability and self-consciousness characterize even our most significant relationships—with God and other loved ones—and prevails in most of our worship gatherings. The relational implication in worship is that without the vulnerableness that composes the hermeneutic of the child-person, we remain worshipping in front of the curtain with the veil of relational barriers constraining our hearts. Redemption does not take place in front of the curtain to "set my heart free" in order to exclaim the joyful intensity that "I run in the way of your terms for relationship." Consequently, our worship customarily consists of substitutes from the secondary of what we do and have, the significance of which is shaped only by human contextualization, including our surrounding contexts of culture and family.

The hermeneutic and epistemic process we use in our relationship with God—either that of 'wise and learned' or of the 'child-person'—composes either referential language and fragmentary knowledge about God, or relational language and whole knowledge of God. This difference distinguishing the two conflicting ways we function is the difference between immature and the mature followers of Jesus, a paradoxical difference that challenges our sociocultural notions of maturity (Heb 5:11-14).

The writer of Hebrews admonishes persons for being "dull in understanding" (i.e. lazy or sluggish in understanding v.11), just as Jesus critiqued his disciples for failing to know and understand his self-closures (Mk 8:17-21; cf. Lk 9:45). These persons are immature ("infants" in the negative sense of being undeveloped, i.e. "you need milk," Heb 5:12), who are stuck on the fundamentals of God's disclosures ("elementary truths of God's word," NIV; cf. the common overly christocentric focus of much of our worship services, Heb 6:1), and not growing in understanding the necessity of righteousness (the whole of who, what, and how one is) as the essential relational function for covenant relationship with God (v.13). Does this describe the status quo existing in churches today? Whether we function as 'wise and learned' or 'dull in understanding', both reflect the lack of 'soft hearts' of vulnerableness necessary to receive and relationally respond to God's vulnerable self-closures embodied by Jesus' whole person, and thus are not able to follow him behind the curtain to be with the whole of God Face to face without the veil. Only this distinguished connection in this irreplaceable relational context has relational significance to God, because any other context is unable to compose intimate connection



with the whole and holy God.

The Hebrews writer contrasts these immature ones still feeding on milk with the mature who go on to solid food. That which distinguishes the mature is that they use their “faculties [that] have been trained by practice,” that is, their hermeneutical means (*aisthētērion*, organ of sense and perception, v.14), to perceive, receive, and respond to God’s self-disclosures (“distinguish good from evil”). Accordingly, they are able to know and understand God because they have responded compatibly to the whole of God as “those who are being made holy [uncommon]” (Heb 10:14), joining Jesus behind the curtain (Heb 6:19, 10:19-22). The writer of Hebrews included this key discussion about *aisthētērion* (perceptual-interpretive framework and lens) to address persons’ apparent lack of relational trust necessary to experience communion together with the whole and holy God without the use of a veil (i.e. any form of relational distance).

The writer reinforces Jesus’ words about the hermeneutic of the child-person: that the mature are, ironically, those who become the child-person, while the immature are like the ‘wise and learned’—quite in contrast to and in conflict with how we Christians today measure so-called maturity, whether in the global North or South. Very clearly the global church’s measuring stick is from human contextualization, notably the gold standard of Western higher education. With this irony we should be encouraged, because the blessed outcome of any epistemic and relational humility exercised to become the child-person is to experience nothing less and no substitutes of the whole of God, thereby to know and understand God, whereby to be worshipers congruent with the Father’s desires—to his delight and to our joy.

Therefore, we should question, for example, the primacy that churches and the academy place on their worship leaders having academic degrees in worship. Is academically-informed worship helping persons to relationally connect with God on his relational terms? How do master’s or doctoral degrees in worship studies help a worship leader build up a congregation’s worship that delights God’s heart in the way that Mary or an unrestrained child-person can? We are challenged, if not confronted, by Jesus’ very words to question the assumptions we make and the measuring sticks that we use about who and what God gets in worship, and who can lead worship. “The measuring stick we use will be the relational significance we get” (Mk 4:24).

For worshipers who embrace and follow Jesus’ lead, including in the worship relationship, his clearest and, for us today, most challenging example is his unrestrained leaping with joy (*agalliaō*, usually translated as “exult,” Lk 10:21). I love this image of Jesus in unconstrained exuberance. Yet because of the constraints in our worship subcultures, I cannot imagine the average congregation today jumping about (shout-*in*, i.e. with our whole persons from inner out) as Jesus did, not even for God—unless we change to the child-person.

## **Second Key Interaction**

The second key interaction took place between Jesus and the disciples, and began with the disciples entangled in the comparative process of ‘better-less’ indicated by social ranking (“Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” Mt 18:1-4; cf. Mk 9:33-34; Lk 9:46). Their reductionism (reduced in their ontology and function) was on full display. To chasten them, Jesus brought a little child into their midst and said, “Truly I tell you,

unless you change and become like little children, you will never *participate in the kingdom of heaven*” (v.3). Jesus defined being ‘where I am’ (signified by “the kingdom of heaven”<sup>8</sup>) as contingent on “change and become like little children.” Jesus obviously was not telling his disciples to behave like infantile children; such a view would be to interpret Jesus’ language referentially from outer in and fail to understand Jesus (which was Nicodemus’ problem, Jn 3:4,9). Nor was Jesus idealizing children. In direct response to their reductionism, which constrained them from making relational connection with him and created competition with each other, Jesus focused them on how they needed to change in order to participate in his life behind the curtain for communion together without the veil.

To “humble *oneself*” (*tapeinoō heauton*, reflexive voice, Mt 18:4) is Jesus’ relational imperative for his followers to be involved with him openly with their whole person from inner out. Humbling oneself requires the vulnerableness of the child-person without pretense, without “masks” to hide behind, without presenting anything less or any substitute for one’s whole person. Although Jesus did not specifically address the issue of masks in this interaction, it is important to understand how the use of “masks” counters vulnerableness of the child-person. The use of masks is to present an identity to God (and others) in relationship that is different from our whole person from inner out. Masks in Greek theater were used by actors to play a role, a character or identity other than their own; this is the significance of the masquerade of *hypokrisis* that both Jesus and Paul rebuked (Lk 12:1-3; 2 Cor 11:13-15). Peter was later confronted by Paul for just such hypocrisy (Gal 2:11-14), which reflected the need for Peter’s further transformation from inner out. The relational consequence of such a presentation is always experienced by distance in relationships, without necessarily the deception commonly associated with hypocrisy.

For Jesus’ disciples today, this common dynamic of *hypokrisis* continues to have direct consequences for the person we present to others in our relationships—notably with God and in the church family but also in the world. The primacy of relationship that God created us for will always be reduced to secondary importance when persons function with masks, even unknowingly and unintentionally. This reduced priority sets in motion a reshaping of relationships together whose appearance has no real significance (cf. Heb 9:9-10). In other words, masks function in ontological simulation in church practice by only simulating the new creation family.

To use a mask is to perform in a role from outer in, for example, be it as worship leader, musician, singer, preacher, and all gathered worshipers, all enacted to construct a drama of worship. Masks in worship give the appearance of worshiping God, of being relationally involved, of being devout, even spiritually mature; but the appearance does not mean being vulnerably involved with God or each other with the vulnerableness of the child-person that Jesus clearly makes imperative. The outer-in performance of these roles draws attention and gives primacy to the outer presentation of what one does and has, for example, musical talent, eloquence, style in preaching, even demonstrative singing—performed even with the intention of worshiping God. Yet, the true or full

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<sup>8</sup> See a fuller discussion of the kingdom of heaven in T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology: A Theological & Functional Study of the Whole of Jesus* (Christology Study, 2008). Online at <http://www.4X12.org>, 175-79.

identity of those engaged does not emerge as long as a mask is in place. Moreover, inseparable from performing roles is that the significance of one's performance is always measured in a comparative process, whether in comparison to what others do and have, or by the comparative feedback we get from others who also focus on the performance (or that mask).

Such feedback is given in our churches increasingly as praise and applause directly following a performance, and this is extremely problematic in worship and feeds the underlying concern expressed by the disciples "Who is the greatest?" The praise and applause after any performance in worship creates relational ambiguity such that it is no longer clear who is being worshiped. Some sensitive worship leaders figure out ways to deflect applause in God's direction, but rare are those who intentionally teach congregations to praise only God.

This relational ambiguity exists in all Christian contexts wherever Jesus' disciples define themselves from outer in (signified by "who is greatest?"), but is particularly grievous in worship. Our worship language becomes unintelligible as communication that distinguishes reciprocal relational response to the Face of God. Thus, prevalence of relationally ambiguous worship reflects the reductionism in worship and church leadership, and reinforces reductionism's counter-relational work; and this can all be taking place with the intention of promoting wholistic worship. Jesus holds with special accountability those who are leaders and teachers in worship, church and the academy (Mt 18:5-6, cf. Jas 3:1) because all such persons have the relational responsibility to help others grow in relationship on God's relational terms only—for the primacy God gives to relationally knowing and understanding *him*.

To function with masks, or with the veil, is the antithesis of righteousness, because God cannot relationally count on mask-veil users in worship to be whole-ly who, what, and how they truly are from inner out. The identity of the person they present to God in worship functions less than whole, at a relational distance, as one yet to be mature (Heb 5:13). These are not worshipers who worship in spirit and truth without the veil, but persons with the veil (often presenting extremely attractive and convincing selves) still in place. To humble oneself to become the child-person ("become humble like this child," Mt 18:4) is to come with honesty of our heart to God about our sin (which must include the sin of reductionism), fully accepting we are utterly incapable to make relational connection with God on our own terms from self-determination. This vulnerable relational posture before the whole and holy God is what Jesus makes clear in the first Beatitude (cf. 'poor in spirit', Mt 5:3). 'Poor in spirit' is an integral step for our person to emerge from inner out to worship God 'in spirit and truth'. To thus humble ourselves is an inescapable step in the redemptive process of dying to the 'old' way of defining our self, which includes our masquerade, and to be redefined 'new' from inner out by only God's relational grace to remove our veil, thereby to be made whole in face to Face relational connection (cf. Eph 4:24).<sup>9</sup>

Continuing with the interaction between Jesus and his disciples, when Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me" (Mt 18:5), he directed the disciples' involvement in God's relational context and process to include their

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<sup>9</sup> For a helpful discussion on the Beatitudes for identity formation of Jesus' followers, I recommend T. Dave Matsuo, *Jesus into Paul: Embodying the Theology and Hermeneutic of the Whole Gospel* (Integration Study, 2012). Online at <http://www.4X12.org>, 221-240.

involvement with each other. He did this to counter their comparative-competitive process that always creates relational barriers. In this he clarified that just as they must function in vulnerability for communion together with him in order to participate in the kingdom of heaven (signified by “in my name”), they must also function with this same depth of relational involvement with each other—that is, to “welcome” each other in their true or whole identity in congruent function as his followers (those who “welcome me”).

“Welcome” (*dechomai*) denotes to deliberately (as subjects) “take to oneself what is presented or brought by another, to receive kindly”<sup>10</sup>—that is, without the false distinctions from human contextualization that those disciples used to determine their identity, for which Jesus corrected the disciples in this interaction. This is how they needed to further change to function in relational likeness with how the whole of God engages in relationships. We need to apply Jesus’ words to how we function in our worship gatherings so that our relationships are reordered (transformed) also—in this relational primacy of *the new relational order* instituted by Jesus.<sup>11</sup> Our vulnerable involvement with God is inseparable from our involvement with each other if we are indeed functioning new as God’s family (cf. Jn 13:34; 15:12; 1 Jn 4:7-12). We are not a gathering of individuals (the prevailing sociocultural process in the West). Yet even in the East, though ostensibly more collective oriented, still how persons function within their expected roles is self-determined and defined from outer in. When we come together to worship our Lord, our gathering needs to compose ‘family time’ in interdependent relationships, in which God’s whole family is greater than the sum of its individual parts. In other words, worship is not primarily an individual experience but the church functioning in whole relationships together as the new creation in likeness of the Trinity (cf. Col 3:9-17). In this distinguished relational context and process, the church in the West sorely needs correction from Jesus. (The new relational order is further discussed in chaps 4 and 5).

Jesus’ words “unless you change...you will never” emphatically mean that our reduced theological anthropology—with its reduced ontology and function of persons and relationship—in no way can make relational connection with the whole and holy God to truly know and understand God. The disciples’ reductionism and comparative process could never enable them to fully engage in his life ‘where I am’ participating in the kingdom of heaven (Mt 18:4; cf. Mt 5:3). The disciples needed to change by becoming vulnerable like the child-person with Jesus in the relational context and process of the whole of God, and thereby engage the relational epistemic process to know and understand his relational language to receive whole-ly the vulnerable presence and intimate involvement of the Trinity.

The relational consequence for the disciples was evident in Jesus’ pained exposure of these disciples at his last supper with them (“Don’t you know me yet?” Jn 14:9). Moreover, for Jesus’ disciples to continue in reductionism had the unavoidable effect of influencing others to also engage in reductionism (cf. Peter’s outer-in function influenced “even Barnabas” at the Antioch church, for which Paul had to rebuke Peter,

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<sup>10</sup> From the lexical aids, Warren Baker, ed., *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible: Key Insights into God’s Word*, ESV (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> For an in-depth discussion of the new relational order, see T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology: A Theological & Functional Study of the Whole of Jesus* (Christology Study, 2008). Online at <http://www.4X12.org>, 237-54.

Gal 2:11-14).<sup>12</sup> Jesus' words may sometimes sound harsh (Mt 18:6-10), but such intense language is necessary to communicate emphatically—not necessarily in literal terms such as self-mutilation—his unambiguous message that to continue in reductionism and reinforce reductionism in others is unacceptable and, essentially, condemned. There is no room for negotiation with reductionism or our wholeness is fragmented. Therefore, it is hermeneutically inexcusable to claim that Jesus' relational language is not clear to us and to assume a position of non-understanding, and remain less than vulnerable. Let us not be mistaken: this is true for us today.

Even though we may continue to remain in front of the curtain during our worship, the experiential truth of the whole gospel is that Jesus embodied new the sacrifice to reconstitute God's dwelling for the experiential reality of intimate relational connection without the veil of relational barriers with the whole (not parts of) and holy (not common images of) God. Our theology and practice must be composed by nothing less and no substitutes in order to be whole to embody new both the discipleship and worship relationships. Therefore, may Jesus continue to hold us all accountable in the same way revealed in biblical times—so that we don't keep trying to shape relationship together on our terms, so that God will finally receive all who are rightfully his in the worship relationship, those persons embodied new as the child-person.

### **Third Key Interaction**

The third key interaction involving the child-person and the 'wise and learned' builds in progression from the first two interactions. Just after Jesus' celebratory entry into Jerusalem, this pivotal interaction took place between Jesus and temple leaders (chief priests and scribes) and brings out the contrast, indeed the conflict between the child-person and the 'wise and learned' (Mt 21:12-16; cf. Mk 11:15-18; Lk 19:45-47).

Temple practice had, by Jesus' time, become so distorted and narrowed down that women, Gentiles and disabled persons were denied access, thus marginalizing them.<sup>13</sup> Jesus entered the temple and cleansed it of the practices and activities that had reduced the temple to "a den of robbers" (v.13; cf. Jer 7:11). Jesus thus restored the temple to its primary function in wholeness as God's relational context for relational involvement together as "a house of prayer" open to all persons (Mk 11:17; Isa 56:7), namely, those who functioned inner out with righteousness ("who choose what pleases me...who bind themselves to the LORD...to love the name of the LORD, and to be worship him...who hold fast to my covenant *relationship*," Isa 56:1-7, NIV). The primacy that God gives to relationship above all else is unmistakable. Thus, no more illusions and simulations of

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<sup>12</sup> For an important discussion about Paul's involvement with Peter in this passage, see T. Dave Matsuo, *The Whole of Paul and the Whole in His Theology: Theological Interpretation in Relational Epistemic Process* (Paul Study, 2010). Online at <http://4X12.org>, 16-17.

<sup>13</sup> The outer temple courts were supposed to be for Gentiles but were jammed with vendors for persons to change currency and buy animals to sacrifice. Craig Keener comments that Jesus' action probably wasn't so much about commerce per se taking place but all this activity took up the space that was supposed to be for Gentiles. Jesus' reference to "a house of prayer for *all peoples*" (Isa 56:7) is significant for the issue of who can rightly worship God in his temple. Keener also notes that the OT temple didn't exclude women or foreigners from the temple, but the architects of Herod's temple extended Jewish purity laws to exclude those persons from access. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary, New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 101.

God's dwelling.

This restored temple function for relationship with God became immediately evident as blind and lame persons came to Jesus there and were healed and made whole from inner out. Then in uncommon function the children (*paidas*) responded by shouting in the temple "Hosanna to the son of David!" (Mt 21:14-15). The chief priests and teachers of the law became indignant when they "saw the children shouting in the temple area, 'Hosanna to the Son of David'" (Mt 21:15, NIV). These temple leaders confronted Jesus about the children proclaiming such worship in the temple; their indignation exposed their own fragmentary condition from a reduced theological anthropology (ontology and function), illuminated as follows:

Part of the relational outcome for the temple [being restored] involved children crying out "Hosanna to the Son of David." Certainly in our tradition we have no problem with this but within the limits of those leaders' epistemic field they strongly objected to the improbable [which] was twofold for them: (1) the whole of God's theological trajectory as Subject embodied by the vulnerable presence and relational involvement of Jesus, who to them—within the limits of their tradition—was a mere object transmitting information about God that they disputed; (2) and by implication equally improbable to them—yet based more on their ontology and function rather than their tradition—was essentially that these children knew better than the leaders what they were saying—improbable because the leaders had the key knowledge about God in general and about the messiah in particular from their rabbinic education. Based on an ontology and function defined by what they did and had, there was no way children could make definitive statements about the probable with certainty and without error, much less about the improbable; and they needed to be kept in their place in the socio-religious order based on reduced ontology and function.

Jesus' response to them redefined the person and transformed the existing relational order. He pointed them to God's relational action having "prepared praise" from children (*katartizo*, 21:16). *Katartizo* connotes either to complete or to repair and restore back to completion (cf. Eph 4:12), which in this context points to God's relational action to make whole the person reduced to outer-in distinctions and the relationships necessary to be intimately involved together in God's whole family. This wholeness is signified in the vulnerable openness of these children involved with Jesus in their relational response of trust. This more deeply connects back to when Jesus leaped for joy over his Father's "good pleasure" (*eudokia*, righteous purpose) to disclose himself to the intimate relational involvement of "little children" and not to the "the wise and learned" in what integrally constitutes the whole ontology and function of the new relational order (Lk 10:21, NIV).<sup>14</sup>

In this interaction, Jesus emphasizes the contrast between how the child-person functions, and how the 'wise and learned' function in relation to him. The child-person's hermeneutical means (*aisthētērion*) paid attention to Jesus' whole person as he restored the temple to its qualitative-relational whole function, signified in part by his healing the blind and lame. The children thereby recognized who Jesus was and celebrated his

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<sup>14</sup> T. Dave Matsuo, *Jesus into Paul*, 207.

wonderful (i.e. distinguished beyond what commonly existed) work to restore God’s relational context in which persons are made whole. Having this relational knowledge and understanding—the outcome Jesus made conclusive is “revealed to little children” (Lk 10:21)—these child-persons compatibly worshiped Jesus for all to hear; and by their intensity (shout-*in*) they functioned uncommonly as worship leaders with the veil removed. The psalmist anticipated what would unfold in this key interaction: “The unfolding of your *embodied Word* gives light; it imparts understanding to the *child-person*” (Ps 119:130). Does their shout-*in* speak to worship and church leaders today?

The limited framework and lens of the chief priests and scribes focused entirely differently: they did not recognize the person Jesus was disclosing as he restored the temple, not hearing the significance of “my house” (Mt 21:13; Isa 56:7); nor did they rejoice in what Jesus now embodied new in his whole person, that is, replacing the physical temple with the relational context and process of the whole of God for “all peoples” (*am*, denoting all tribes, all humanity, Isa 56:7). The temple leaders could not perceive the qualitative new temple reconstituted behind the curtain to remove the relational barriers of the veil (Eph 2:14-22). They obviously did not know and understand who and what the children clearly knew, because their ‘wise and learned’ lens biased, distorted, fogged their perceptions such that “these things [were] hidden *from their hermeneutic*” (Lk 10:21). And not surprisingly, the temple leaders wanted these children suppressed, to be silenced—the common negative, often hostile, reaction from reductionism in the presence of wholeness and righteousness (cf. the disciples scolding and causing trouble to Mary). The negative reaction is to be expected because those who function without the veil always pose a threat to those with the veil.

Jesus responded to the chief priests and scribes by pointing them to their own Scriptures: “Yes; have you never read, ‘Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself?’” (Mt 21:16; cf. Ps 8:1-2). Here again is the irony that child-persons, signified by “infants” (*nepiōn*) and “nursing babies” (*thelazontōn*) who do not yet talk, are the ones whose vulnerable involvement makes their hearts available for relational connection with the whole and holy God whereby praise comes forth. Without the presence of a veil, they are the ones who listen to and speak in God’s relational language. Jesus’ words taken from Psalm 8 are about the nature and function of God’s relational language, not referential language. He directs the temple leaders to this major Psalm (8:1-2) which opens with praise for who, what and how God’s presence (signified in the OT by ‘his name’) is. To simply state Jesus’ point:

Only God is “distinguished” (*’addiyr*, insufficiently rendered “majestic” to set God apart) and only God can speak for himself. Relational language is the only language God speaks, the only language that can speak to God and for God; therefore, praise significant to God can only be composed by relational language from the lips of those who speak God’s relational language. Referential language is unable to speak to or for God.

The Hebrew for “prepared” or “ordained” (*yāsad*, Ps 8:2) means to establish firmly, appoint, lay a foundation (cf. Ps 78:69, 102:25). God definitively established that the only praise sufficient to distinguish him is the qualitative relational response of child-persons who do not rely on referential words, but rather are relationally involved with their whole

person from inner out. Those who know only referential language cannot distinguish God—though they might speak elegantly and with extensive information about God; they are therefore rendered silent (v.2), unable to speak to or for the distinguished God. In Jesus’ response (noted in the block quote earlier), the Greek *katartizō* (translated as “prepared” or “ordained”) connotes “either to complete or to repair and restore back to completion.” The praise in relational language ordained since creation needed to be restored back to completeness, that is, to wholeness because such praise had become de-relationalized and fragmented from the whole person by the reduced involvement of referential language uttered by the ‘wise and learned’ who “honor me with lips but their hearts are far from me” (Mt 15:8-9).

We need to hear again Jesus’ unmistakable claim as to who can adequately speak to and for God in his relational language in worship. In the inner-out change we need, we need hermeneutical correction of our interpretive framework and lens. This is not optional but is his relational imperative for our worship to have significance both to God and to us as his worshipers. Once again emphatically, only “the unfolding of your relational Word gives us light, and imparts understanding only to the child-person.”

Worship in the referential language of the wise and learned can certainly speak about God, but this God can only be a fragmentary God, a God we have reshaped in a process of ‘idolization of God’ noted in this study’s first chapter. Due to the idolization of God, God no longer speaks for himself, and in functional-relational terms is rendered as an un-known God. In other words, referential language cannot distinguish God’s vulnerable self-disclosures, so that God cannot be distinguished in our midst as gathered worshipers. Reduced to our shaping of God, God is rendered silent (cf. Ps 115:4-7).

The vulnerableness of the child-person is essential to our integral maturity as Jesus’ disciples and as the worshipers the Father seeks, which Jesus exuberantly embodied for us to “jump with Jesus” ‘where I am’. This vulnerableness is freed from self-consciousness for relational connection with the whole of God, and is irreplaceable to compose our involvement in worship that is delightful to God. These relational dynamics are vital for us to understand if our worship is to be relationally specific to the whole and holy God, and not an un-known God we have shaped by idolization. Therefore, this is the only hermeneutic and relational epistemic process available to us to sufficiently know the God whom Jesus whole-ly embodied to disclose for nothing less than and no substitutes for relationship together. Indeed, jump with Jesus all child-persons!

## **Freed from Self-consciousness to Person-consciousness**

How would you feel if everyone around you were either trying to impress you by what they could do or have, or were always shying away from you? These common practices are two sides of the same coin, and depict how we function *old* in the worship relationship by oversensitivity or over-concern about how one’s self measures up. Keeping in mind the question of who and what God gets in worship, we need to be freed from both of these expressions from self-consciousness because such sensitivity and concern constrain our persons from opening up from inner out. Whether on one side or



other of this unsettled condition, we humans grow up functioning with self-consciousness—overly concerned about how we appear to others and overly sensitive to their evaluation. Self-consciousness, then, narrows our sensitivity and limits our concern to these self-defining and self-determining matters—defining and determining even for those in a collective-oriented context where ‘self’ is less explicit yet nevertheless always implied. The consequence for God in worship is that our focus remains on ourselves worshipping at a relational distance in front of the curtain with the veil over our hearts, all while trying to build an identity favorable in a comparative process (“Who is the greatest?”).

Thus far in this study we’ve only touched on self-consciousness and person-consciousness. How are these consciousnesses different and what is the significance of their difference for our daily function? Self-consciousness is consciousness of our *self*, whereas person-consciousness is consciousness of our *person*. Self-consciousness is rooted in defining our person from outer in based on criteria measuring the parts of what we do or have in a comparative process. In self-consciousness we function as objects who merely react to our situations and circumstances because this has become our default mode from reductionism, which narrows our function down to the limits and constraints from our surrounding context (e.g. culture, tradition, even family and friends). Therefore, in the redemptive change to the child-person, dying to self-consciousness is dying to the influence of reductionism (i.e. being defined and determined by human contextualization) that has narrowed down or fragmented our person to the limiting and constraining ontology and function of merely an outer-in self.

Self-consciousness means being controlled specifically by the self-concern in the comparative process of what others will think of us if we do or have something deemed unacceptable. We are very sensitive and even afraid of what others will think about us, afraid of disapproval and rejection; whether apparent to us or not, these feelings exist in our innermost as long as we engage this comparative process to establish our value, self-worth and identity. Just as the disciples demonstrated in pursuit of the label as “greatest,” this is counter-relational for our discipleship and worship relationship. Such practice exposes our ontology and function based on the measured parts of what we do or have, and according to this fragmenting process we engage others in relationships on those reduced terms—all of which negates God’s relational grace, as discussed in the previous chapter. Essentially, the person is elusive to the consciousness of self until we are freed from inner out (heart set free) from these fragmentary limits and constraints composing who and what we are and how we live.

We noted that Peter’s worship at Jesus’ transfiguration exposed his self-consciousness, and, accordingly, his lack of freedom. His self-concern about what to do or say yielded a substitute for his vulnerable honest heart (which was afraid); functioning in this way should be familiar to all of us whose hearts are unfree, that is, stuck in the limits or constraints of our self-consciousness, “enslaved” functionally by reductionism and its counter-relational work in the comparative process.

As we die to our self-consciousness for redemptive change, that which can now freely emerge is person-consciousness. Person-consciousness focuses on the whole person from inner out and functions as subject-person who exercises willful response over reacting as an object, and who is sensitive to the qualitative (beyond the quantitative

of self) and relationally aware (beyond the comparative process of self), just as we saw in Mary.<sup>15</sup> The process embodying person-consciousness is not complicated for child-persons, who respond (however difficult) foremost from their unencumbered hearts in relational trust; whereas the process is problematic for those (like the ‘wise and learned’) who make things more complicated than they need to be, because they are not confident or free to simply respond from their heart (a vulnerable response of relational trust).

Clearly then, to function in person-consciousness requires our intentional and ongoing heart-level choices that we make (*kûn*, to be resolved and determined, as in Ps 108:1) for the person we present as subject before the Lord. Such choices involve the freedom to be ourselves with God, without hiding, without masks, free from the comparative process, freed from the pressure of trying to measure up to someone’s expectations of what we ought to be doing or not doing. We are free to let our hearts open (with the positive and the negative) to God, to give ourselves freely to God (in our imperfection and weakness, as Paul learned, 2 Cor 12:9)—the honesty of our hearts, ‘in spirit and truth’, to God’s delight. Recall that *agapē* love is not about what to do, but about the depth of relational involvement. “She did what she could” were Jesus’ words to affirm Mary’s involvement, not focusing on what she did, but highlighted on the person she presented to him to embody new the worship relationship in person-consciousness while not being limited and constrained by any self-consciousness imposed by the other disciples. Does this difference in consciousness have significance for how we function?

Two other disciples in the Gospels show us the shift from self-consciousness to person-consciousness to respond back to Jesus’ relational response to them. They are Levi (Matthew, Mt 9:9-13, Mk 2:13-17, Lk 5:27-32) and Zacchaeus (Lk 19:1-10). They both illuminate inner-out change (*metamorphoō*) to person-consciousness, the outcome of intimate relational connection with Jesus that is inadequately explained as merely conversion.

Though Jews, Levi, though a Jew, and fellow tax collectors were ostracized by the Jewish religio-cultural community because of their occupation—an ostracism based on outer-in criterion of what they did (e.g. often using their employment with the Roman government for dishonest gain). Levi, whether or not he himself was dishonest, experienced the relational condition of being “apart,” that is, the condition of relational orphan. What Levi experienced when Jesus called him is summarized here:

For Jesus’ person to be vulnerable to [Levi] and openly be exposed to social sanction and ridicule certainly must have spoken volumes to Levi. And to hear this person say (with both content and relational aspects of his communication) that he wants *me*, my whole person, for relationship together undoubtedly disarmed Levi and touched him at his core—the significance of his heart, most likely guarded from others in the surrounding context. This person Jesus presented was too significant, qualitatively different and relationally intimate for Levi to dismiss or resist.

Yet, for him to cross those social, cultural and religious barriers, Levi would openly have to let go of his old life and reject reductionism—its perceptual-interpretive framework and its substitutes for the whole of persons and relationships,

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<sup>15</sup> Human consciousness is expressed in person-consciousness and self-consciousness; these are fully discussed in T. Dave Matsuo, *The Person in Complete Context: The Whole of Theological Anthropology Distinguished* (Theological Anthropology Study, 2014). Online at <http://4X12.org>.

both prevailing in the surrounding context. This is a risk Levi is able to take because he is entrusting his person to relationship with the vulnerable person he can count on to be truly who and what he is, nothing less and no substitutes. He can count on this person Jesus in this relationship because he personally sees how Jesus is in practice—the significance of his person presented, the qualitative difference of his communication, the intimate depth of relationship he engages—is congruent with who and what he is, thus confirming for Levi that Jesus’ whole person is for relationship. This is what Levi must have seen (not merely *blepō*, to see, but more like *horaō*, to recognize the significance of, encounter the true nature of, to experience) in Jesus to support making such a drastic change.

Levi’s story is about the gospel.<sup>16</sup>

Levi experienced God’s relational response of grace in Face-to-face involvement from Jesus, thereby was relationally loved and redefined in his innermost. By this relational involvement, Jesus established Levi into the relational context and process of the whole of God by family love, which is the significance of Jesus’ table fellowship. In table fellowship together, Jesus embodied the functional and relational keys of the gospel, along with the keys to whole worship. Based on his experience with Jesus, Levi made the choices necessary to vulnerably respond with his whole person. Like Mary, Levi was resolved and determined to follow Jesus’ person regardless of any consequences from others. Any self-consciousness Levi may have lived with up until Jesus called him into relationship together, then “died” as Levi emerged as subject in person-consciousness with Jesus.

Levi’s experience of the gospel embodied by Jesus was extended to Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector (Lk 19:1-10). Like Levi’s story, Zacchaeus’ story of the gospel deepens our understanding of the relational significance of table fellowship and its relational outcome that is the necessary basis for our vulnerable response of discipleship and worship. Very briefly, Zacchaeus pursued Jesus (climbing up a tree to see him) and Jesus responded to him with table fellowship in Zacchaeus’ home. The significance of the table fellowships that Jesus had with both Levi and Zacchaeus are further discussed in the next chapter. For our discussion here, what is notable is how Zacchaeus, like Levi, refused to let any self-consciousness from outer-in criteria from their religio-cultural contexts constrain them. In face-to-face relationship with Jesus by relational grace, their persons emerged to respond compatibly with Jesus’ vulnerable presence and involvement with them. The relational outcome for Zacchaeus’ person was to embody the new identity as an intimate member of God’s family—an experiential relational reality that eludes the consciousness of self even though doctrinal illusions may exist.

Not surprisingly, Levi and Zacchaeus had their detractors (Mt 9:11; Lk 19:7), similar though less direct and less hurtful than what Mary experienced. These three show us that even if others reject our vulnerable person, we as subjects embodying new the discipleship and worship relationship with God are assured of God’s approval, thereby negating anyone else’s disapproval. How others react is *their* problem, not ours; and we must neither assume that it’s ours nor be subject to their problem of reductionism. And if those who reject us are our own brothers and sisters in the new creation family—as the temple leaders rejected the shout-*in* child-persons—then the church family embodied new

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<sup>16</sup> T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology*, ch.1, section “His Person Presented to New Disciples.”

needs to take up the issue to correct them in order for persons and relationships to be whole and not reduced to the limits and constraints of self-consciousness in the counter-relational work of a comparative process.

This issue of disapproval is specifically addressed by Jesus, going back to the third key interaction regarding the child-person (Mt 18:1ff). Again, the harsh language of Jesus (vv.6-10)—not literal but emphatic—communicates that we are accountable for both continuing in self-consciousness in the comparative process (“who is the greatest”) as well as trying to suppress person-consciousness of the child-person. I recall a time when one self-constrained brother was derisive to another brother who was simply expressing the exuberance of his heart in a small gathering. In the condescending brother’s eyes, the other was “goofy” (i.e. “uncool”). Any such condescension has no place in God’s family, which, by its nature, must be embodied new by child-persons whose shout-*in* always prevails by person-consciousness over self-consciousness.

Recall also that Jesus challenged the disciples who were angry with Mary and scolded her harshly (*embrimaomai*, Mk 14:6). Mary’s offense was her vulnerable response in the depth of relational involvement with Jesus in person-consciousness as subject. Integrating Jesus’ two corrective interactions with his disciples, child-personness was offensive to their self-consciousness, which in function could not perceive the qualitative and relational significance in Mary’s person and function. Instead they latched onto a secondary issue (money for ministry to the poor) and tried to make that primary—over the primacy of the discipleship and worship relationship of being involved together ‘where I am’—which Jesus rejected. Are we listening? “The unfolding of your Word gives us light and imparts understanding to the child-person” (Ps 119:130).

For example, when we are at a worship service, consider the secondary matters that we focus on instead of being involved with God freely and vulnerably. To encourage us to focus on the latter, it’s helpful to review the three major issues for all practice, summarized in brief here: (1) the person we present to God in worship, (2) the quality and integrity of our communication in worship, and (3) the depth level of relational involvement we engage with God. When we determine these three issues in a comparative process with the practice of others, our own practice goes in a direction contrary to ‘freely and vulnerably’ and becomes ‘limited and constrained’. Then we place that expectation on others, even imposing it for their conformity. It’s quite confronting to realize, that based on what we consider to be the norm we often critique persons who are freer than we are—the comparative process at work. Our self-consciousness gets us to point the finger at others, if only indirectly.

This is the target of Jesus’ words about judging others (Mt 7:1-5). In this critical relational message on discipleship, Matthew includes Jesus’ words “the measure you give will be the measure you get” (cf. Mk 4:23-24). Moreover, if we judge a child-person, one such as Mary whom Jesus affirms, then our righteousness (who, what and how we are) does not go beyond the reductionist practices of some Pharisees, and, as Jesus makes clear, we do not participate in God’s life ‘where I am’ (the significance of “you will never enter the kingdom of heaven,” Mt 5:20; 18:3). The reality in this process of comparing is that self-consciousness competes with person-consciousness for functional prominence—just as the temple leaders imposed on the shout-*in* child-persons. Self-consciousness neither affirms person-consciousness nor is compatible with it. Therefore, we need to die to our self-consciousness—as individuals and corporately together—and

*affirm* and *encourage* each other in the primacy of person-consciousness over anything less and any substitutes. Directly related, one question we can ongoingly be asking ourselves is where our own heart is. Remember, self-consciousness is our default mode, which will pervade and even prevail in the discipleship and worship relationship unless our person is freed from inner out.

## **Embodying “You have set my heart free”**

How free is your heart in worship? How would you be different in worship if your heart were freer? How is it that God sets our hearts free? We often think inadequately or understand incorrectly about Christian freedom (cf. Paul’s critique in 1 Cor) that it is the result of God having removed our propensity to moral failure—like lying, cheating, stealing, addictions, and inappropriate sexual thoughts or actions—and our guilt about them (whether just guilty feelings or our “legal” guilt before God as judge), whereby we are now free to do essentially what we want. With this lens, freeing our hearts from those matters results in our focusing on just not doing those things anymore. This lens obviously limits our focus on only the negative part of the picture and avoiding doing the wrong thing, after which we are free to do what we want. Freeing our hearts goes much deeper than those things, deeper to our very ontology and function: The outcome of our hearts being set free is to “run in the way of your *terms for relationship*” (Ps 119:32)—in uncommon (holy and whole) relationship with God and others, just as the whole and holy God is involved in relationship—in the relational reality as God’s beloved children (i.e. those distinguished as child-persons, as in Jn 8:31-36, discussed shortly).

Psalms 119 as a whole has this summary focus and function: ongoing reciprocal relationship with God only on God’s relational terms, and our reciprocal response composed only by those terms. The ancient poet knew and embraced God’s relational language and relational terms signified by God’s laws, statutes, decrees, precepts and commandments. These terms, however, are commonly reduced to referential language in de-relationalized terms to compose templates for conformity in what we do—that is, focused primarily on what not to do. This psalmist understood that only “unfolding of your *relational language and terms* gives light and imparts understanding to the *child-person*” (v.130). He also knew that by responding to God’s terms, then his heart was freed (v.32, NIV, ESV) from the reductionism of any and all constraints. The reverse is also true: when his heart is free, he runs in the way of God’s relational context and process together by God’s terms of wholeness. The alternative readings for “you have set my heart free” are “when you enlarge [*râchab*, to broaden, open wide] my heart [understanding],” which also express the heart (signifying the whole person integrated from inner out) freed from constraints and thus able to live whole-ly in relationship. This latter point is important for us to embrace, and is discussed further in chapter five.

Scripture in whole, and the Psalms in particular, uses many words to refer to God’s relational terms; along with the above signifiers, we can add principles, ways, word and teachings, which are more prevalent in the contemporary church yet still lacking in relational understanding. Sadly for God as well as for the church, because teaching of Scripture is most often in referential language (not relational language), these words are reduced to what to do from outer in. This reduction is clearly highlighted when

some persons queried Jesus saying, “What must we do to perform the works of God?” (Jn 6:28)—to which Jesus answered in only relational terms, that the work of God is “*relationally trust* in him whom he has sent” (6:29). We often search Scripture to try to find out what we must do to perform the works of God in worship. Yet, Jesus clarified how the hearts of child-persons are freed from that outer-in focus and function.

Speaking pointedly to would-be disciples (then and now), Jesus reinforces the freedom for our whole person as we follow him in his relational terms in his relational path. “If you *remain* [*menō*, dwell, abide] in my *relational terms*... you are really my disciples...the truth will set you free...So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” These words from Jesus to so-called believers simply echo Psalm 119:32 (and all of Ps 119).

When Jesus said “you will know the truth and the truth will set you free” (Jn 8:32), it is important to understand that these words have both a structural contingency and a contextual contingency. Both contingencies are interconnected by relationship, the outcome of which by necessity involves the relational process of the relational progression.

This well-known saying of Jesus is structurally contingent on the previous verse, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples” (v.31). The term for “teaching” (*logos*) involves the essence of Jesus’ whole person, not merely his principles, directives and propositions; “my teaching” cannot be disembodied. The term for “hold” (*meno*) is the same word Jesus told Zacchaeus (“must stay,” Lk 19:5) and the rest of his disciples (“remain,” Jn 15:4-11), which involves the relational act of abiding, dwelling. Jesus was making evident the dynamic reciprocal relational process of intimate involvement together. Each time he identified their part in the relationship with the word “remain” (in Jn 15:4-11) a relational outcome was also identified. This relational outcome reflected the authenticity of being his disciples (15:8), which is the structural contingency of Jesus’ well-known saying. Yet, disciples are authentic (*alethes*, Jn 8:31) not by having a title or status, nor by occupying an identity or fulfilling a role, but only by deep involvement in the reciprocal relational process with Jesus’ whole person in relational progression—the relational significance of “Follow me” (cf. Jn 12:26).

The relational process of the structural contingency connects it to the contextual contingency. Deep involvement with Jesus’ whole person engages the embodied Truth, which results in the intimate experience of knowing him. Truth is only for this relationship, the outcome of which makes evident the contextual contingency. When the embodied Truth is known by the reciprocal relational process of intimate involvement together, the embodied Truth functions in the relational involvement of family love to “set you free” (*eleutheroo*, liberate, Jn 8:32). The redemption Jesus pointed to, however, has a contextual contingency.

The embodied Truth is the relational means necessary by which his followers are liberated from their enslavements (or released from an undesirable relational condition) for the specific relational purpose and outcome, so that they can be adopted as the Father’s very own daughters and sons, thus intimately belonging to his family permanently (*meno*, Jn 8:34-36)....

As the immediate context further defines in contrast, an indentured servant (*doulos*) is not free to experience God as Father and participate (*meno*, abide) in his family as his own child; such a servant must be redeemed first, then must be adopted to belong. This combined context makes evident the contingency of adoption. Redemption is never an end in itself but a relational process always connected to the vital relational outcome of adoption. And this contextual contingency is not fulfilled without the structural contingency of deep relational involvement with Jesus' whole person in the relational progression. These contingencies interact in this relational process of the relational progression to effect this relational outcome.<sup>17</sup>

In the previous chapter we saw how Mary's person responded to Jesus from her innermost, freely without constraints from self-concern about what others would think about her—the significance of being freed from self-consciousness. As subject-person she was resolved to be vulnerably involved with Jesus, no matter what, and experienced intimate relational connection with him. We also saw how Peter's person and function were often constrained, reactionary, and self-conscious, in spite of his good intentions—the significance of not functioning in person-consciousness. Peter was eventually transformed (the veil functionally removed for Peter) and made whole.

For Peter, this involved his person being freed from self-constraints as an object (for example, reacting out of fear) and focused on 'what to do' as substitutes for vulnerable involvement with Jesus (cf. 1 Pet 1:3-7). He could eventually live as a subject who was self-controlled (not self-constrained) in the primacy of compatible reciprocal relationship with the Lord (cf. 1 Pet 1:13-16; 2:16), making choices as this subject to love and encourage other sisters and brothers (e.g. 2:16-17; 3:8-17). Though we don't know from Scripture, we can assume that Peter's worship relationship, jointly with his discipleship, went further and deeper with the whole of God. I wish we had more narrative about Peter's life in his later years.

As we grow in our whole person vulnerably responding to the whole of God with our whole person from inner out, the issue of Christian freedom arises and needs understanding. While Christ has freed our person from its constraints, for example, of self-consciousness, this freedom has to always be conjoined with wholeness in relationships together. Otherwise Christian freedom loses its relational purpose, which then functions with a narrowed lens in more self-contained or self-revolved practice. Paul deeply experienced this freedom and thereby also clarified the mature exercise of freedom we have in Christ. Paul says it is for freedom that we have been set free, along with “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us with unveiled faces...are being transformed *from inner out* into *the image of God*” (2 Cor 3:17-18). Yet Paul qualified this freedom by putting it into the context of the whole, that is, the relational whole of the new creation family. The issue that we must understand for our own freedom in worship is that not everything we want to do in worship to exercise our self-expression—even in the name of freedom—is necessarily edifying for the whole. Self-expression is important and necessary. However, it is also important to understand that self-expression can too easily shift to self-determination and self-interest, even by default—practices that highlight self over whole relationship together. Any self-interested use of our freedom needs to be chastened by what is best for building each other up in

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<sup>17</sup> T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology*, 95-96.

love for the growth of the new creation family (Gal 5:1,6; 6:15; 1 Cor 6:12; Eph 4:15-16).<sup>18</sup>

Specifically, our freedom doesn't give us license to draw attention to ourselves at the expense of others and to promote the primacy of self-interests. For example, the current movement in evangelical worship renewal incorporates visual arts, dance, and other self-expressions. The key word here is "self." There are times when these are more about "self" than about edifying the gathered worshipers; this results when the expressions are merely performances—which in God's relational terms is more about self-consciousness than person-consciousness. Rather, primary consideration for any artistic expressions must be given to loving the family to build it up in wholeness; and perhaps also to edify others to step out in their worship, but not as a demonstration before and audience. This comment is not intended to reject artistic expressions in worship, but I have experienced such acts mainly as self-referencing. I suspect that the underlying default mode of reductionism for all of us has yet to be identified and adequately addressed in worship renewal efforts. When that happens, it will be apparent to the hearts of child-person worshipers—including to God but not to the 'wise and learned'.

The primacy of building up the body of Christ was Paul's relational purpose in his instructions to the Corinthian church regarding their behaviors when they came together to worship. Family love chastens our misuse of Christian freedom. So too our shout-*in* for joy to the Lord is always focused on the primacy of who and what God gets, and for building up the new creation family in the relational involvement of love that composes our relationships together in wholeness (as Paul further clarified, Rom 14:17-18)—which is distinguished from idealized practices composing merely illusions and simulations.

Undergoing redemptive change to the child-person—thus freed from reductionism (i.e. defined and determined by human contextualization)—involves perceiving and engaging each other from inner out in new relationships together. This transformation means no longer functioning from outer in, in the comparative-competitive process, but with the same vulnerableness needed to receive Jesus' whole person, thus also to receive the Father (Mt 18:5). Vulnerableness is the major test for 'hearts set free' in persons and relationships that challenges all of us in two integral ways:

1. The presence of being vulnerable by persons is a clear indicator of the reality of their hearts set free, the lack or absence of which also indicates this transformation has yet to become an experiential reality.
2. The function of persons being vulnerable in relationships (foremost with God) is a necessary indicator of the reality that "you have set my heart free" in and for the primacy of relationships together in wholeness, the lack or absence of which also indicating this transformation not being a functional reality.

These clear and necessary indicators are the tests for the condition of our hearts that challenge all of us in the global church, regardless of family background, culture, tradition, race-ethnicity, socioeconomic category, gender or age.

In these integral ways, Jesus' followers participate in the kingdom of heaven—as

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<sup>18</sup> For an important and fuller discussion about Paul's teachings about Christian freedom, please see T. Dave Matsuo, *The Whole of Paul and the Whole in His Theology*, especially pp. 194, 254-55, 285.



the new creation family in communion together, sharing fully in new wine table fellowship, and worshiping the triune God in his relational language, speaking to and for God such that God is distinguished and thus made known to the world (as Jesus prayed, Jn 17:16-23). Chapters four and five expand on the need to understand the new wine table fellowship (relational communion) and the new creation family emerging from it.

The process of transformation takes intentional relational work on our part. We need to take this bull by the horns, and start with dying to self-consciousness (i.e. reductionism) that embodies *old* the worship relationship. This is an ongoing relational process, rigorous at times, in which the Spirit has even transformed my own person more deeply as I've been writing this chapter. "Thank you for pursuing my heart and wanting my whole person in relationship together." Inseparably, we need to be resolved (*kûn*) to make choices in person-consciousness (i.e. wholeness from inner out) in relational trust, so that our relational response to God is compatible with how God is involved with us. It's difficult enough to step out 'new' as subjects to respond to Jesus (notably dealing with self-constraints) without the added opposition coming from our sisters and brothers (as Mary experienced). The latter—opposition in the form of disapproval and insult—easily render us to function as objects, who merely react to situations and circumstances, and thus who passively comply with the common and the status quo because nobody wants to be criticized or rejected.

Therefore, the twofold matter to address together as church family is summarized in these relational terms, necessarily participating in God's relational process of family love:

1. We each need to be resolved about our own responsibility for the reciprocal relational work necessary in the process of transformation. To be freed from concern about what others will think when we function in the uncommon, we need to die to outer-in criteria of what we do and have, along with turning away from our participation in the comparative process by which to measure our value or worth. Jointly, we need to take specific steps in person-consciousness in our worship, so that God may receive each of us whole-ly.
2. We as God's church need to function vulnerably together so as to build each other up in the relational involvement of family love, and not tear each other down by any form of condescension based on distinctions in a comparative process (e.g. better or less). Collectively we have to address ourselves to the necessary redemptive change from inner out (i.e. *metamorphoō*)—"become *the child-person*" (Mt 18:3)—that will transform both our persons and relationships for the relational outcome to embody new both our discipleship and worship relationships. Anything less maintains the status quo and renders these inseparable relationship to embodying old.

For example, I'm sure all of us have witnessed persons in worship who are much more demonstrative than we are (whether they are from inner out or outer in may not be discernible to us—but God knows). Think about your feelings toward them. Do they make you feel uncomfortable? Do you tend to think they're goofy, weird, or uncool? If so, carefully consider why, and talk with the Lord and others about it honestly. If,

however, you wish you were as free from self-consciousness as they seem to be, then certainly pursue this with the Lord for your own inner out change. Don't assume you can't change, or worse, that you don't have to change. He wants to set our hearts free and make us whole, but he won't unilaterally impose that on us. Think reciprocal relationship together! Then embrace the reality that we are all in this relational process together. Accordingly, to corporately grow in maturity as child-persons, church and worship leadership must embrace Jesus' relational words, take to heart these matters for themselves, and take the lead along with Jesus and Mary—not in the titles and roles of self-consciousness—as the mature child-person we are created whole and redeemed to be.

We, as persons and persons together as church, also need to embrace the experiential truth that nothing less and no substitutes have significance to God and can make whole our persons and relationships.

## **Christian Tradition and Sub-Culture**

Whole theology and practice is required to embody new the worship relationship. How compatible is church tradition with this theology and practice, and how congruent is it with whole theology and practice? Christian tradition is like a framework or template for the church's life and practice, and is expressed in our worship practices. I imagine that most of us take Christian tradition(s) for granted, and make assumptions about our traditions, namely that they are nonnegotiable—at least that seems to be the attitude in the global North.

Here's some food for thought about Christian traditions aligned with the Christian calendar year. The Christian calendar is a tradition in itself, and Protestant Christians plan worship according to its special days (e.g. Christmas Day and Easter/Resurrection Sunday), months and seasons (e.g. Advent and Lent). There are others, of course, but these are the primary ones to which churches devote most of their time, energy and resources. Are these special times nonnegotiable to God?

With these questions in mind, consider Paul's words of admonishment to the church at Galatia: "How can you want to be enslaved to *the outer-in* practices again? You are observing [*paratēreō*] special days, and month, and seasons, and years" (Gal 4:9-10). Both Judaism and pagan religions were strictly calendrical,<sup>19</sup> so whether Paul is addressing Jewish or pagan influence, he is strongly scolding the Galatians for going back to practices that focused on secondary matters. *Paratēreō* denotes to observe meticulously or superstitiously. Paul's rhetoric is firmly established in the context of his entire Galatians letter, in which Paul is actively fighting against reductionism in the church, here pointing out its divisive relational consequences (2:11-14), as well as the relational outcome that they had already experienced (4:6-7). In his Romans letter, Paul also made definitive the whole theology necessary for our whole practice (composed in "righteousness") in the relational outcome (composed by "wholeness") of reciprocal relationship together with "joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom 14:17-18).

So, is Paul eliminating traditions that follow the calendar, such as the Christian

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<sup>19</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary of the New Testament* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993), 529-30.

liturgical year, or at least making traditions secondary to what is primary? Or may we continue to assume our traditional Christian observances are nonnegotiable?

Consider now Jesus' words about how holding to human traditions can oppose God's terms for relationship (commands), which return us to the scene of Jesus' confrontation with some Pharisees (Mt 15:1-9; Mk 7:1-13). The interaction began when some reductionist Pharisees challenged Jesus and his disciples for not following "the tradition of the elders" by washing their hands before eating. Let's pay close attention to Jesus' words about "your tradition" (*paradosis*, Mt 15:3,6; Mk 7:9,13) and "human tradition" (Mk 7:8; cf. Paul's comment on human tradition, Col 2:8).

The critical issue for Jesus was the irreconcilable gap between the outer-in nature of the Pharisees' religious practices ("your tradition" and "human tradition") and "the commandment of God" (i.e. God's terms for relationship, including for worship; cf. "in vain do they worship me"). These Pharisees had both abandoned (*aphiemi*, to let go from oneself) and nullified (*akuroō*) God's relational terms by elevating their outer-in observances and relegating relationship (both worship and following God) to secondary importance (Mk 7:8,13). *Akuroō* means to void, the opposite of ratify, a covenant. Their practice was accordingly engaged in a comparative process, whose counter-relational effect was apparent by their condescension and animosity toward Jesus and his disciples. Jesus indicated that God rejected their practices, particularly their worship, because they conflicted with God's relational terms ("commands"). The Pharisees' tradition, because it gave primacy to outer-in criteria of what to do, stood in direct conflict with the primacy of God's relational terms. As rigorous as Pharisees were in their theology and practice, their interpretive lens limited their theological understanding and narrowed down their practice, consequently reducing both from the wholeness originally composing the covenant relationship (*tāmiym*, Gen 17:1).

Don't we function similarly with our Christian traditions? While we don't intentionally abandon or nullify God's terms for relationship together, our practices have become extremely focused on outer-in criteria of what to do. Moreover, much of our theology today is based on the referential information composed by referential theology from church tradition, not the relational terms "unfolding of your words gives light and understanding" (Ps 119:130). That's why the embodied Word confronted the human shaping of their theological traditions and its reductionist fragmenting of their practice, notably in worship.

So, why do we carry on with our traditions, assuming without further examination that they don't reduce our theology and practice—the prevailing assumption from Genesis 3:4? Why do we make such spectacles, for example, of Christmas and Easter? Why do we give equal, or even more, importance to gift-giving, decorating, preparing traditional food, and other aspects from our sociocultural contexts? In the presence of this primary attention to secondary matters of our traditions, relational consequences are unavoidable. Who and what does God get in our special worship services? And what do we get? "The depth of involvement we give [cf. "honor me with their lips"] will be the depth of involvement we get."

Having grown up in a Baptist church, by the time I was in college I was a questioning agnostic. During my college years of searching for meaning in life, I recall feeling envious of Christians for whom Christmas meant something deep, or so I assumed. Yet, after becoming a Christian, the first Christmas for me as a Christian didn't

have any more significance deep within than as an agnostic. I think it was due to the outer-in Christmas traditions shaped by our Western sociocultural context that have reshaped and reduced the incarnation to templates of tradition. Since then, nothing much has changed in Western churches, and I assume in those churches in the global South influenced by Western theology and practice. We have created an illusion of awe and wonder about Jesus' coming by swaddling his birth with nostalgia and sensory stimulation. It is my view that this illusion has led us to settle for less by making a big deal out of only one small part of the incarnation. The relational consequence is that we are missing out on the whole of God's vulnerable presence here and now for relationship together in wholeness—the whole and wholeness church traditions usually fragment and de-relationalize.

As noted in the earlier discussion about the children shouting praises to Jesus in the temple (Mt 21:12-17), the religious tradition of the temple leaders was challenged by Jesus. The temple was central to Judaic religious tradition, of which the chief priests and scribes were guardians. To these learned experts, it was unthinkable that little children could know better than they, and thus these men became angry at being shown up. For Jesus, the primacy of shout-*in* child-persons trumped the well-educated and scrupulously observant traditionalists. This interaction sharpens our lens to examine Christian tradition(s) today and their compatibility and congruence for whole theology and practice. We need to make the connection between their practice and our practice today.

On the one hand, historically independent churches had eschewed worship traditions prevalent in liturgical churches. On the other hand, much study and work has been done in evangelical churches and the Christian academy in the past few decades to integrate ancient Christian tradition into our worship services. Ancient-future worship thinkers and practitioners deserve credit for seeking more meaningful worship and deeper connection with Christ's historical church.<sup>20</sup> Yet, there is an urgent critical tool that we need to use that has yet to be recognized and addressed in all these efforts: the qualitative-relational lens (of which Jesus is the hermeneutical key) to expose the presence and influence of reductionism and its counter-relational work in any worship tradition—past and present. Reductionism and its counter-relational work were precisely what Jesus raised to the temple leaders and the Pharisees—both keepers of traditions shaped by humans that limited their theological understanding and narrowed down their practice contrary to the whole theology and practice “unfolding from your embodied Word.”

In his fight against reductionism, Paul made definitive for us the relational process necessary for the church's transformation to embody new this whole theology and practice (Col 3:9-17). Two integral relational imperatives for composing whole theology and practice are defined clearly for us to embody today:

1. “Let the *wholeness* of Christ *prevail in determining* your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to *wholeness*, and be thankful *for hearts embodying new our relationship together*” (v.15, NIV).

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<sup>20</sup> The discussion of ancient-future worship renewal is developed in the work of Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern Word* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999).

2. “Let the *relational* word of Christ dwell in you *whole-ly from inner out* as you teach and admonish one another in *his relational terms*, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with *the intensity* in your hearts *set free for shout-in to God*” (v.16).

Paul’s basis for these inseparable imperatives is twofold: First, embracing Jesus’ whole person (not just his teachings and examples) that composes the *complete Christology* necessary to illuminate the wholeness of Christ (“unfolding of your Word gives light”) and to whole-ly understand the qualitative and relational terms of God for relationship together (“...gives understanding to child-persons”); and this complete Christology then provides the lens—Jesus as the hermeneutic, epistemological, ontological and relational keys—needed to have the ‘strong view of sin’ to understand sin as reductionism and to perceive reductionism’s influence fragmenting whole theology and practice.

Therefore, given the defining challenge of Paul’s integral relational imperatives, it is time to re-examine all our Christian worship traditions with the qualitative-relational lens and focus of complete Christology in order to penetrate to the hearts needing to be set free for embodying new the worship relationship only with child-persons—shout-*in* child-persons who are not limited or constrained by human-shaped traditions. In particular are two types of traditions we need to examine:

1. Identify those that need to be restored to whole theology and practice. That is, some traditions are compatible with the primacy God gives to relationship together, but have become practiced as ends in themselves, about what to do. They may need to be restored to wholeness in primacy of relationship together on God’s relational terms, having been reduced by outer-in involvement and relational distance (e.g. how we practice Communion, which is discussed in greater depth in the next chapter). Some traditions, such as those celebrating aspects of the incarnation (e.g., Advent, Christmas, Holy Week, Resurrection Sunday), urgently need to be redeemed from secondary matter, and made whole within the whole of God’s relational response of grace to us. Consider, for example, how to observe and celebrate Christmas in a whole-ly new way that gives primacy to everyone’s direct relational involvement with Jesus—not indirectly by association or participation in so-called sacred activities—for *Jesus* to receive from *us* in reciprocal relationship.
2. Identify any traditions that are incompatible with wholeness in primacy of relationship together on God’s relational terms, which includes the church being the new creation family; for example, incompatible by promoting a comparative process of persons, and traditions reinforcing or sustaining relational distance by preoccupation with secondary matters such as forms, procedures, wordings, all of which limit or constrain direct relational connection in the worship relationship. The practice of these traditions must be chastened and/or turned from, if we are to be compatible with God’s wholeness and congruent with the primacy of his relational terms.

To redeem compatible traditions certainly will evoke negative reactions, from

both within a local church and from others beyond it. It is challenging enough to be uncommon (holy)—that is, to be different in our ontology and function—from our prevailing sociocultural context. But it is also difficult to be uncommon in our prevailing Christian subcultures, in both the global North and South. Yet, reciprocal relationship with the whole and holy God by its nature is irreducible and nonnegotiable. Peter learned this the hard way when he tried to impose his traditions onto Jesus and the early church (e.g. Gal 2:11-14).

Like Peter, there are constraints on our person from Christian subcultures, the constraints that we adhere to based on long-standing assumptions about the place of Christian tradition(s). The sources of Christian subcultures are Christian traditions old and new. We have thus far in this study implicitly and explicitly challenged assumptions from these traditions that much of Christian worship is based on. Yet, this study is not an anti-Christian-tradition statement; there are essential traditions in Christian church life and practice. What this statement does, however, is critically challenge any fragmentary theological aspects of traditions and the normative ways we practice traditions that have de-relationalized their significance. Jesus' critique to some Pharisees (as discussed previously) was about upholding "their traditions" while ignoring God's commands (i.e. God's relational terms), thereby replacing the primary with the secondary and transposing persons and relationships from inner out to outer in.

I have no doubt that the Father has been waiting on us for a long, long time, seeking worshipers who make relationship together primary just as he does. God deserves and desires our shout-*in* with the intensity of nothing less than our whole person from inner out (the child-person like Mary), and with the exclamations of no substitutes from outer in (the 'self' of the other disciples). Shout-*in* requires our ongoing resolve (*kûn*) to make the choices necessary as subject-person in order to vulnerably respond in reciprocal relationship by running (not limping or slumbering) only in God's whole relational terms. However, we have to pay attention and listen to our heart, because this child-person does not emerge with anything less and any substitutes and, by default, is ongoingly subject to the limits and constraints of self-consciousness.

Therefore, let's take into our hearts the *wholeness* and *words* of Christ that Paul makes relational imperatives for the church, and let us respond vulnerably to Jesus' whole person extended to us in his call and challenge to "follow me"—he who is our worship leader along with Mary and all other shout-*in* child-persons. Let's whole-ly embody "you have set our hearts free to run in your terms for relationship together," and transform his worshipping new creation family.

Yes, indeed, my sisters and brothers, whole theology and practice is required of us because nothing less and no substitutes can embody new our discipleship and worship relationship.

## For Your Theology and Relational Response

Consider vulnerably the following song, which celebrates the whole of who, what and how God is in his relational righteousness with us—nothing less and no substitutes. The whole of God calls for our (individual and corporate) shout-*in* in the vulnerability and person-consciousness of child-persons, calling only those who embody new this worship relationship in wholeness.

### Hallelujah Whole<sup>21</sup>

(Mt 15:8-9, Jn 4:23-24, Col 1:19-20)

1 Hallelujah! nothing less  
Hallelujah! no substitutes  
The whole of God be present  
The whole of God **be praised!**  
Nothing less no substitutes

**Chorus:** Hallelujah, hallelu, hallelu  
Hallelujah, hallelu, hallelu  
Praise to You, to You, to You  
Praise You holy! Praise You whole!  
All of You—all of You!

2 Hallelujah! nothing less  
Hallelujah! no substitutes  
The whole of God be involved  
The whole of God **responds!**  
Nothing less no substitutes  
(chorus)

3 Hallelujah! nothing less  
Hallelujah! no substitutes  
The whole of God be embraced  
The whole of God **exalted!**  
Nothing less no substitutes  
(chorus)

4 Hallelujah! nothing less  
Hallelujah! no substitutes  
The whole of God highlighted  
The whole of God **give thanks!**  
Nothing less no substitutes  
(chorus)

**Ending:** *slowing* All— of— You!—

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<sup>21</sup> By T. Dave Matsuo and Kary A. Kambara, ©2013. Printable sheet music is available online at <http://4X12.org>.





## Chapter 4      “Remember Me Whole-ly” Embodied by    “Follow Me Whole-ly”

***“Participate in communion in remembrance of my whole person...  
relationally involved together in the new covenant.”***

1 Corinthians 11:24-25

***“Whoever serves [and worships] me must follow my whole person; and where my  
person is, my child-persons also will be whole-ly.”***

John 12:26

The unfolding of God’s relational word, whole-ly embodied in Christ, continues in this chapter to give us further understanding for our compatible relational response in worship and discipleship. In particular, we consider carefully the deep relational significance of Jesus’ table fellowships for his earliest followers, a significance that was not always understood by his disciples, and that is missing in most practice by us today (even if present in our theology). These table fellowships provided persons with the experiential reality of *communion* (sharing in intimate relationship together) with Jesus in God’s relational context and process, for example, when Jesus came to Martha and Mary’s home. It is through God’s relational context and process where persons relationally come directly before God on God’s terms for relationship—behind the curtain and with the veil removed—for the primary relational purpose to compose the *new covenant*. The relational outcome of the new covenant is what Jesus embodied, formally instituted at his final and pivotal table fellowship, and sealed with the sacrifice of his whole person on the cross.

Compared with the first covenant in the OT, in which face-to-face connection with God was limited to Moses (Num 12:8; Dt 34:10), the new covenant opened up access to God to anyone. As part of God’s unfolding of the new covenant, these gatherings around the table served as settings in which the new covenant terms of relational grace were whole-ly embodied in a new way. That is, this was something truly new (beyond innovation), the unfolding in improbable strategic and tactical shifts made by God in his increasingly vulnerable relational response of grace to the inherent human need and human condition (‘to be apart’ from God’s relational whole).<sup>1</sup> The relational outcome was that the new covenant is experienced in intimate communion, of which Jesus’ table fellowship is our hermeneutical key. It is essential for our practices of Holy Communion to deeply understand and experience the face-to-face relationship of Jesus’ table fellowship. And since his table fellowships often made persons uncomfortable and created conflict, I would not be surprised by resistance to engage this discussion.

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<sup>1</sup> For further discussion of this shift, along with God’s strategic and functional shifts, see T. Dave Matsuo’s *The Gospel of Transformation: Distinguishing the Discipleship and Ecclesiology Integral to Salvation* (Transformation Study, 2015). Online at <http://4X12.org>.

In the Mediterranean region during biblical times, table fellowship signified close friendship and belonging. Yet Jesus' table fellowships were distinguished far beyond those human contexts by Jesus embodying the vulnerable presence and intimated involvement of God with persons in an uncommon way. At these table fellowships, Jesus now embodied the new covenant relationship, in which Jesus' vulnerable presence and intimate involvement with persons was most openly available for persons to come Face to face and heart to heart with the whole of God. Recall Jesus' disclosure that "whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9). What was unheard of before, now even persons who were unlikely table companions—such as Levi, Zacchaeus, and other marginalized persons in that sociocultural milieu—were provided direct access to the whole and holy (uncommon) God.

In this unlikely and simple way, table fellowship with Jesus whole-ly (not parts of him, e.g. teachings, his sacrifice, ethical model) composed communion (intimate relationship together) taking place 'behind the curtain' with the veil removed. This is *whole-ly communion* composed by whole persons (divine and human) in wholeness (not fragmented and reduced to parts, but integrated whole from inner out), in reciprocal relationship together on God's terms of relational grace, with nothing less and no substitutes in both theology and practice. *Whole-ly communion* integrates *holy* (uncommon)—that is, being compatible with who and what God is and thus in God's qualitative image—and *whole* (being congruent with how God functions in relationships, and thus in relational likeness of the Trinity). Communion that is not whole and holy, whole-ly, is fragmented and common, which describes much of communion practice today.

Whole-ly communion that persons enjoyed at table fellowship with Jesus was the distinguished and paradigmatic embodying of the new covenant relationship together. This uncommon communion is the relational experience of whole persons in whole relationships of the new covenant, inaugurated by Christ when he entered behind the curtain to make the blood sacrifice necessary to enact it (Heb 9:11-14). Yet, in relational terms some persons experienced whole-ly communion with Christ even before he went to the cross. Even while on the cross, Jesus continued his relational work to establish his Father's family, for example, which included bringing his mother Mary and disciple John together in family love (Jn 19:26-27).<sup>2</sup> Before and while on the cross, Jesus was always engaged in the relational work of family love, the primacy of which should expand the common narrow focus on the cross as just the symbol of Jesus' sacrifice for us. To remain overly focused on Jesus' sacrifice fragments Jesus' whole person to only that part, and de-personizes and de-relationalizes the whole of who and what Jesus whole-ly disclosed. That is to say, communion that is overly christocentric has relational consequences, which render such communion practice without relational significance. Whole-ly communion with the whole and holy God in the new covenant is also to be *our* experiential reality today as the new creation family into which we have been adopted as full members 'already'.

The new covenant and its primacy for relationship together won't be realized among us as long as we continue in the old of making the secondary primary, the old

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<sup>2</sup> For an urgent discussion that will transform our incomplete Christology, please see sections "New View of the Cross" and "The View *from* the Cross," in T. Dave Matsuo, "Did God Really Say That?" *Theology in the Age of Reductionism* (Theology Study, 2013). Online at <http://4X12.org>.

symbolized as the tent of the first covenant (Heb 9:8-10). If the old tent still stands, the new cannot emerge. The question that must be asked ongoingly—not taking for granted where we are, in front of the curtain or behind it—is whether we really are functioning in relationship with God according to God’s relational terms of the new covenant. As we continue, we need to examine some ways that the secondary have eclipsed the primary, ironically in many of our celebrations of Holy (yet common) Communion—including our theology, certainly in our practice.

## **Whole-ly Communion Embodies the New Covenant**

The discussion in this section may appear to reduce the significance of Communion. Nothing could be further from the truth, for the practice of Communion is an irreplaceable integral aspect of every worshipping body of Christians; and the relational function (not in referential terms) of this practice joins us together as ‘one’ in Christ, not only in theology but relationally in the church’s function worldwide. What we need to understand is the historical and current reduction of the Communion’s theology and practice, namely the predominant practice (and traditions) of making secondary matter primary, which creates or reinforces relational distance in our discipleship relationship, our worship relationship, and thus in our corporate relationships (our ecclesiology). Relational distance in our corporate family life reflects a renegotiated ecclesiology that runs counter to God’s distinguished relational design and purpose for the new covenant. Such assumptions underlying so much of church life and practice need to be clarified and corrected, perhaps even chastened, before the new wine communion of Jesus’ table fellowship can restore Communion to its intended wholeness in theology and practice.

For Jesus’ closest disciples, these table fellowships were distinguished experiences as they experienced Jesus face to face in intimate relationship together. And while these intimate times held relational significance for individuals, the corporate experience of relationship together was equally important. This relationship with Jesus composed the relational progression that deepens from being disciples to friends, and into the relational belonging in the Father’s very own family (Jn 15:14-15; Mt 12:48-50)—the relational progression necessary for reconciled relationship with the whole and holy God as the new creation family together (as Paul clarified for ecclesiology in wholeness, Eph 2:14-22; 2 Cor 5:17-19).

To continue discussion noted earlier about the biblical Mediterranean sociocultural and religious context, table fellowship was an important context of acceptance, close friendship, and belonging.<sup>3</sup> Given that the region was home to numerous deities, shared meals were part of sacred rituals signifying the relationship between humans and their deities—which influenced a fragmenting hybrid practice in churches (cf. Rev 2:19-20). In OT times, the Israelites observed a temple/ tabernacle cultic practice of sharing a meal with God—the practice of peace offerings (*šelem*, also

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<sup>3</sup> See full discussion of table fellowship in the Mediterranean world in S. Scott Bartchy, “The Historical Jesus and Honor Reversal at the Table” in Wolfgang Stegemann, Bruce J. Malina, Gerd Theissen, eds., *The Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 175-183.

called the “fellowship offering,” Lev 7:11-15, 32-33). For this occasional shared offering, the worshiper brought an animal to be sacrificed, a portion of which was given to God, and the rest to be eaten by the priests and worshiper(s). Very detailed regulations were followed pertaining to ceremonial purity of the sacrifices, the priests and worshipers for this shared meal (indeed for all the various sacrifices and offerings), which apparently were enjoyable celebrations expressing thankfulness to God. In effect, with these offerings the Israelites “shared a sacred meal with God as a sign of their acceptance by him through the sacrificial act.”<sup>4</sup>

Yet, by Jesus’ time, the Pharisees had reshaped Judaism’s cultic practice by turning every meal into a sacred one, and their strict outer-in emphasis on ritual purity had relational consequences, as noted by Christian liturgy historian Paul Bradshaw:

They were very careful about not only *what* they ate (so as to observe the dietary laws prescribed in the Old Testament) but also *with whom* they shared a meal, since table-fellowship with those regarded as impure would compromise their own ritual purity.<sup>5</sup>

The Pharisees’ meal practice along with their other religious practices created relational barriers for those who didn’t measure up to their strict traditions—part of why Jesus cleaned out the temple to restore God’s house for all persons without distinctions (Mk 11:15-17).

It was for this reason that Jesus’ behaviour scandalized many of his contemporaries, since, although apparently claiming to be a pious Jew, he ate with the outcasts of society—tax collectors and sinners.<sup>6</sup>

Beyond merely observing Jesus in referential terms, we need to pay attention to the relational significance unfolding to whole-ly embody the church. Table fellowship with Jesus was the incomparable experience of God’s relational grace for relationship together in wholeness for these disciples. This relational outcome has been ambiguous, elusive or simply absent in Communion practice in church history to the present.

After Jesus ascended, the Lord’s Supper (the Eucharist) was a meal shared by the earliest Christians in the form of Jesus’ table fellowship (1 Cor 11:17-34). The earliest worship settings were private homes and the number of persons attending depended on the size of the house that could be opened up for such gatherings.<sup>7</sup> What soon transpired in some places was not the disappearance of the Eucharist, but rather the substitution of it with something else. Notably, the primacy of its relational significance very soon was diminished. In the Corinthian church, for example, the meal became an end in itself, as when some of the Corinthian Christians indulged themselves (eating and getting drunk)

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Bradshaw, *Early Christian Worship: A basic introduction to ideas and practice* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 38.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>7</sup> E.g. Roman villas “could have accommodated a group no larger than forty to fifty,” according to Larry W. Hurtado, *At the Origins of Christian Worship: The Context and Character of Earliest Christian Devotion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 41-42.

while the poor members were left out. Paul was infuriated by this fragmenting of the church family (1 Cor 11:17-34). Thus Bradshaw writes, “What was happening was the exact opposite of the unity that the meal was supposed to express, so that Paul concludes, ‘it is not the Lord’s Supper that you eat (v.20).’”<sup>8</sup>

From the fourth to the twenty-first century, controversies and debates have divided God’s church over interpreting Jesus’ words focused in referential terms. For example, how do we explain Jesus’ presence or absence in the bread and wine?<sup>9</sup> About these and related issues, we can make the generalization that the disagreements arose from interpreting Jesus’ words and actions in referential language (not relational). Referential language interprets Jesus’ words as information from an object to study and explain, rather than as relational disclosures by God as Subject. Consequently, Jesus’ words “Take, eat; this is my body.... this is my blood” (Mt 26:26-28) have been reduced by referential language in two major ways: (1) By linking the bread and wine to Jesus’ death on the cross, we end up thinking that “do this in remembrance of me” is solely (or primarily) about Jesus’ sacrifice; (2) this perception then reduces Jesus’ whole person to one part (his sacrifice), with fragmenting theological ramifications, discussed shortly.

Although most modern theologians, church and worship leaders wouldn’t interpret Jesus’ words literally (cf. Jn 6:52), their referential interpretive lens has only a limited narrowed-down field of perception; they can only continue in the mode of the wise and learned (discussed previously in Lk 10:21). Throughout the church’s fragmenting history, theologians have done interpretive gymnastics, creating theological fog out of words from Jesus that in whole context make sense only in relational language. And, again, Jesus’ relational language is clear to child-persons who can hear and speak “my language” (Jn 8:43).

Bradshaw points in the direction of how our referential language lens pays attention to only one part of Jesus (his sacrifice), thereby reducing the broader relational significance of Jesus’ relational involvement with persons:

While I believe it was, and is, perfectly legitimate for Christians to interpret Jesus’ sayings [at the Last Supper] in relation to his death...I believe a valuable balanced insight was lost by an excessive focus on the power of his sacrificed body and blood and a consequent diminishing of the value of his living and nourishing flesh and blood. In particular, it led in the course of time to a decline in the reception of communion, as that came to be seen as less important for believers than the offering

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<sup>8</sup> Paul Bradshaw, *Early Christian Worship*, 40-41.

<sup>9</sup> The **sacramentalist** views: (1) *transubstantiation* in Roman Catholic Church belief that upon consecration of the elements, the substance of the bread and wine convert into the body and blood of Christ, though retaining the appearance of bread and wine; and (2) *consubstantiation* (especially for Lutherans) which holds that Christ’s body and blood coexist with the bread and wine. **Non-sacramentalist** views include (1) the *memorialist* view (Zwingli, Anabaptists) that the elements are only symbolic of the risen Christ (theology of absence), but the Spirit joins worshipers with Christ who is in heaven; this view downplays the importance of the Eucharist; and (2) *transsignification*, in which communication through signs, words, and gestures, can contain presence, so that there is a changed significance; that is, bread and wine mean one thing, and when words are said, it changes the meaning. This was rejected by Vatican II because it was temporary, and sounded too Protestant. Calvin tried to negotiate between Luther and Zwingli by affirming that Christ is at God’s right hand in heaven and cannot be limited in the elements at so many churches; the Holy Spirit mediates Christ’s presence in the elements.

of the Eucharistic sacrifice—to a disproportionate emphasis, if you like, on altar rather than on table.<sup>10</sup>

Bradshaw speaks also to the need for our lenses to broaden and deepen, in order to take in the whole, rather than focus on parts of Jesus. Let us reflect on our Communion experiences, and the gap between the theology and words that we hear, and what we actually experience. I dare to offer that the lack of experiential relational significance in Communion has been disheartening to many, stirring up deeper desires and longing, perhaps even prompting persons to stop going to church. That is to say, communion practice is only a symptom of what churches don't feed, nurture and mature in their members.

Communion (capital “C”) today is not distinguished in practice as whole-ly communion, the sharing together in intimate relationship composing the new covenant, which Jesus' table fellowships embodied. We have an accounting to make that cannot be fixed by any relationally-less-significant approaches, or be replaced by any relationally-less-significant substitutes, no matter how sincerely we try. This brings us to an assumption we make about participating in worship, and especially Communion, that it forms worshipers into Christlikeness (and what that means depends on the Christ we follow) and also the people of God (e.g. a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people).

The reality or fact that merely being present in worship, and especially at Communion, has been ineffective in bringing about inner-out change of persons is the unmistakable presence (i.e. if not ignored) of relational distance among us. Even among long-time Christians, from the personal level, within a single local church, churches in a region, within a country, all the way to the macro level of the global church, relational distance is the key indicator of embodying old the worship relationship (as well as discipleship). The inner-out change of *metamorphoō* is eclipsed in our theology and practice by giving attention and primacy to secondary matters—secondary matters, for example, in the various traditions of Communion—and merely making outward changes (*metaschematizo*).

In spite of the Communion's deeply hope-filled theology and its Great Prayer of Thanksgiving,<sup>11</sup> participation in Communion on a regular basis has not broken down the relational barriers of traditions, denominations, race, gender, class, and any other human distinctions—in churches both in the global North and South. The relational barriers exist also between clergy and laity—role functions in the church not interconnected by the primacy of relationship as Paul defined for the church body (1 Cor 12:12-26)—which point to relational barriers between the highly educated and those less educated. The underlying comparative process of human distinctions unavoidably stratifies relations vertically and not just horizontally at the communion table. By relational distance, whole-

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<sup>10</sup> Paul F. Bradshaw, “Did Jesus Institute the Eucharist at the Last Supper?” in Maxwell E. Johnson, ed., *Issues in Eucharistic Praying in East and West: Essays in Liturgical and Theological Analysis* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010; www.litpress.org), 19.

<sup>11</sup> In the West, this prayer is also referred to as the Great Prayer, Eucharistic Prayer, and the Canon of the Mass; in Eastern Orthodox churches, the prayer is referred to as the anaphora. A recommended guide for the Great Prayer was developed as an ecumenical tool to promote Christian unity in the Eucharist by the World Council of Churches: *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Faith and Order Paper 111. [Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982]; para.27 of the Eucharist).

ly communion becomes fragmented and stratified communion, intentionally or unintentionally. We must not assume that God is pleased with the status quo of Communion practiced today. Would Jesus overturn this table and clean his house today in order to restore the primacy of relationship together for all persons without distinctions?

Currently there is growing interest in “spiritual transformation” of persons said to take place by attending worship on a regular basis.<sup>12</sup> Certainly persons’ behavioral changes indicate that *something* is changing. And certainly it is only God (and maybe the person) who knows whether inner-out heart-level changes of the whole person (*metamorphoō*, to change from inner out, heart, mind, physically and relationally, cf. Rom 12:2; 2 Cor 3:18) are taking place, not merely outer-in behavioral change of only parts of the person (*metaschematizō*, to change only one’s outward form, cf. 2 Cor 11:13-14). Yet, to repeat Jesus’ words as to the indicator that we are being transformed not only to be like Christ, but, more importantly, by experiencing the relational outcome of reciprocal relationship with him, “Just as I have loved you *in the depth of relational involvement*, you must also love one another” (Jn 13:34). This is a matter addressed in the new relational order of intimate and equalized relationships composing the new creation family (Heb 9:10), to be discussed later in the chapter.

On the basis of the primacy God gives to relationship together on only God’s terms for relationship—namely, God’s relational acts of grace and grace’s relational demands and outcome in intimate and equalized relationships—it is urgent for us to press ahead with vulnerable listening to the Spirit as never before.

Even before Jesus’ last and pivotal table fellowship, some of his would-be disciples came to their own conclusions about what Jesus meant when he linked his flesh with bread to eat, and his blood with drink (Jn 6: 26-68). These disciples stopped following Jesus (v.66) based on having interpreted Jesus’ words through their narrowed-down lens of referential language. Their lens focused on only a few of Jesus’ words fragmented and disembodied from the integrity of his whole person presented to them, the quality and relational content of his communication for them, and the depth level of his relational involvement with them.

By referentializing his words (i.e. the referentialization of the Word), these persons detached Jesus’ words from his whole person, thereby fragmenting and reducing him to parts (“his flesh”). Thus, while Jesus was initially openly disclosing his intimate relationship with his Father, they paid attention to only a few words (a selective bias), and they ended up with no more than the absurd conclusion that Jesus was discussing cannibalism (6:52). This is how they disembodied and de-relationalized Jesus’ discourse on eating his body and drinking his blood, which in relational terms was only about engaging in intimate relationship together of the new covenant (cf. vv.29,40,54-57). This same process of referentializing Jesus’ relational disclosures has led to the divisive theories in subsequent years up to the present day, forming traditions churches live by regardless of the relational consequences. Such doctrinal priority and commitment was clarified and corrected by Jesus of a church that, despite their impeccable church practice had “abandoned your primary love” (Rev 2:2-4).

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Alexis D. Abernathy, ed., *Worship That Changes Lives: Multidisciplinary and Congregational Perspectives on Spiritual Transformation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

At his last supper with the disciples, when Jesus picked up the bread and cup and pronounced “this is my body...this is my blood” (Mk 14:22-24), he never intended his words to be taken literally in referential terms, nor was he uttering a mystical esoteric truth that only a few can understand. He was communicating in relational language (that child-persons understand), about persons vulnerably and deeply receiving him for the most intimate relational connection possible, constituted behind the curtain by his wholly embodied sacrifice that removed the veil of relational distance permanently. This is why John’s Gospel emphasized “receiving” (*lambanō*, to take, receive, partake) Jesus. When John illuminated this relational involvement of those “who received him, those who believed *and responded relationally to his whole person*,” he anticipated the relational outcome that these persons were given the right of adoption to relationally belong as God’s children permanently in God’s family in the primacy of relationship together, without the relational distance of human distinctions (Jn 1:12). Are any wise and learned persons, church and worship leaders, out there listening to the relational significance of John’s Gospel composed in relational terms? Indeed, “do you love me *whole-ly in the primacy of relational involvement?*” Then “Follow me whole-ly” (Jn 21:15-19).

### “Remember Me Whole-ly”

In churches and seminary classes preparing students to lead worship and the practice of Communion specifically, attention is given to *anamnesis*, the Greek word for ‘reminder’ or ‘remembrance’. Jesus told his disciples over the bread and cup “do this in remembrance [*anamnesis*] of me” (Lk 22:17; 1 Cor 11:24). *Anamnēsis* in Communion, it is taught, is rooted in ancient Israel’s practice of Passover, a major part of which involves remembering God’s saving acts (e.g. Num 9:2; Dt 16:1-8; Jos 5:10; 2 Kgs 23:21; Ezr 6:19; Mk 14:12).<sup>13</sup>

In OT Hebrew, the word for “remember” is *zâkar*, and has a full array of significance. When God ‘remembers’ in the OT, this refers to God’s faithful relational involvement. After the flood had passed, God made a covenant with Noah ensuring God’s ongoing involvement with Noah, every living creature with Noah, and all generations to come—that is, with all God’s creation thereafter. And God put the rainbow in the sky and said that by it “I will *remember* my covenant between me and you... between God and all living creatures...on the earth (Gen 9:12-17). For God, remembering was and is in the context of covenant relationship, and remembering was and is the vulnerable relational dynamic that he never stops being involved in. In other words, God’s remembering is always in relational terms and not referential in terms, for example, of something, events or situations.

For God to be vulnerable means both that God delights when his people respond in compatible reciprocal relational involvement, and, negatively, that God’s vulnerable

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<sup>13</sup> However, scholars also note that it is inconclusive and mostly speculative about actual roots of Jesus’ words in his so-called words of institution. See, e.g., Maxwell E. Johnson, “The Apostolic Tradition” in *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*. For further reading on the historical origins of the Eucharist, Geoffrey Wainwright and Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, eds. *The Oxford History of Christian Worship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).



involvement is being deeply affected by our sin. Nevertheless, God has continued to engage with his creation; most notably in the incarnation of Jesus and the presence of the Spirit. The ancient poet queries “What is *’enôsh* [human person] that you are mindful of [*zâkar*, remember] him...that you care for [*pâqad*, connoting God’s intimate and beneficial involvement] him?” (Ps 8:4). Here *zâkar* signifies more than God’s being mindful and aware of someone or something, but that God is whole-ly and intimately involved with us.

In many ways, our rite of remembrance, Communion, is practiced with the same sense of dutiful observance as when peoples and nations observe anniversaries of certain national or global historical events. For the latter, interested persons call on society to commemorate these usually tragic past events with “days of remembrance” (e.g. for genocides, Sept. 11 and the like). Calls are issued to “never forget” so that a similar tragedy never happens again. Then, once the day has passed, we generally forget as we get back to our daily routines of life. In both the East and West, these commemorations are somber occasions engaged with much tradition and ceremony. It seems to be part of our human nature to commemorate events that have affected us or our ancestors deeply, to connect with each other in bits of shared history, which even define who we are today. Do these remembrances have life-changing significance for their participants? For example, how do these remembrances make us better people so that similar human tragedies are prevented?

So the question for us Christians becomes, how is our participation in Communion any different from remembrances of other religious and historical events? More importantly, what did Jesus mean by “do this” and what is the significance of “in remembrance” of him? Does he want us to partake in Communion as a memorial to his death and resurrection—to “never forget” the cost he paid to secure our future life? Certainly we are thankful for his sacrifice and tell him so. Is the Eucharist a “sign” serving merely as a cognitive reminder to worshipers, as most Protestants believe? If so, how does a reminder change us? Is having this reminder weekly better than once a month? Or does Jesus want us to think we are metaphorically, or spiritually and mysteriously receiving his presence, as liturgical Christians believe? Does our participation in this sacred meal ensure our transformation to become more like Christ, as many evangelical pastors hope and claim, or lead to our deification as the Eastern Orthodox Church believes? And does this transformation to Christlikeness take place as we participate again and again over time, as some liturgical scholars suggest? All of these questions must be clarified and even corrected by paying attention to Jesus’ words: “unless you change and become *vulnerable like child-persons*” (Mt 18:3), and then “pay attention to what you hear *from my whole person in relational language*,” because “the measure of *the interpretive lens* you use will be the measure of *change* you get” (Mk 4:24).

John’s Gospel did not include the narrative of the institution of the Lord’s Supper where Jesus tells his disciples, “do this in remembrance of me” (Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24,25) and that the bread is his body and the cup is the blood of the new covenant (Mt 26:26-28; Mk 14:22-24; Lk 22:14-21). Rather, John’s Gospel unfolds the relational significance of the new covenant that Jesus inaugurated at the Lord’s Supper. John illuminates in two major movements the distinguished communion with Jesus (as discussed above) that embodies the new covenant.

First, John elaborates on Jesus' relational language in what are unmistakable allusions to the bread/body and cup/blood of the Lord's Supper, unfolding a matrix of connections in Jesus' relational words to intimate communion together:

- eternal life is experienced in relationship together as persons respond in relational trust ("believes in him who sent me," Jn 5:24; 6:29 with 40,47; 17:3, and, of course, integrated with 3:16)
- bread from heaven as himself, "the bread of life" (Jn 6:27, 32-35,41,48-51)
- to eat his flesh and drink his blood is to "have eternal life" in relational terms, and thereby to "abide in me and I in them" (Jn 6:54,56; cf. 15:4,9-11) in intimate relationship with Jesus behind the curtain, which the atonement sacrifice in referential language maintains at a relational distance, keeping those participants in front of the curtain as if the veil still exists in their relationship together—a relational barrier John records of Jesus' deep disappointment in the disciples not relationally knowing him (14:9).

Together with the Synoptic accounts, what emerges from John's accounts is the primacy of intimate relationship perceivable only in relational language.

Second, at that pivotal table fellowship (at the evening meal before Passover, according to John), Jesus' continued relational work of family love extends to its deepest relational involvement at this last meal with his disciples before he reaches the cross (Jn 13:1-18). We need to understand, and thus experience, the relational dynamics of this defining table fellowship, which most deeply illuminated the whole-ly communion that composes Communion to be whole and holy (uncommon). Here Jesus vulnerably embodied with his disciples the intimate involvement necessary that distinguishes relationship together with the whole and uncommon God without the veil, in the new covenant and new sanctuary (no more secondary sanctuary focused on secondary matter<sup>14</sup>). As John narrates, "Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love" (Jn 13:1) by washing their feet, the significance of which cannot be constrained to an act of hospitality or an example of servant leadership. This is the intimate involvement in reciprocal relationship that makes persons vulnerable.

Jesus engages in his most vulnerable relational act of washing the disciples' feet at to redefine them from inner out in intimate relationship together. The significance of Jesus' footwashing emerges beyond conventional perception when Peter refused Jesus, and was sternly corrected by Jesus. As I mentioned in chapter two, in relational terms, this interaction illuminated both the relational significance of Jesus' act and Peter's own theological anthropology defining his identity, which we need to understand in order to embody the new covenant relationship with Jesus and for depth of involvement together in Communion table fellowship. The deeper relational significance of Jesus washing the disciples' feet is expanded here:

If the context of his footwashing is not limited to only the situation and circumstances—as prevailing as they are just prior to his death—Jesus takes his

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<sup>14</sup> Previously referenced; for a fuller discussion of secondary sanctuary, see my earlier study, *A Theology of Worship: 'Singing' a New Song to the LORD* (Theology of Worship, 2011). Online at <http://4X12.org>, 1-8.

followers deeper into his relational context and relational process. For Jesus, the time now is not about going to the cross, rather “the time had come for him to...go to the Father” (13:1). This situation and circumstances neither define Jesus’ person (though they certainly will affect him) because he is defined by the trinitarian relational context of family; nor do they determine his action because he functions by the trinitarian relational process of family love. All of his actions thus are for relationship. As the embodiment of God’s grace, Jesus’ whole person functions to affirm the importance of the whole person and to constitute intimate relationships together as family—by redeeming and transforming the person and their relationships....

By extending God’s grace to his followers, Jesus makes his whole person fully vulnerable to his followers. Since God’s grace affirms the whole person—which reductionism resists—grace demands nothing less and no substitutes. And Jesus doesn’t allow anything less or any substitutes of his own person to be in direct relational involvement with them....<sup>15</sup>

While Jesus demonstrates his humility (as the Teacher, Lord, Messiah) to assume the footwashing work himself, even more significant is “the full extent” of his relational involvement (signifying his family love). Nothing less and no substitutes of Jesus’ whole person than he personally assuming this footwashing would be sufficient to constitute his relational involvement of family love—that is, as the embodiment of God’s grace. Furthermore, grace demands nothing less and no substitutes of persons to constitute the intimate relationships of family.... Likewise, in relation to his disciples no household servant could substitute for Jesus and nothing less than Jesus’ whole person could make evident this family love....<sup>16</sup>

Footwashing doesn’t represent so much how far (or “low”) Jesus is willing to go, as much as the feet are symbolic of the depth level of relational involvement Jesus engages with them. In other words, no level is too deep or beyond any limits for relationship together, which reductionism resists and tries to redefine. God’s grace demands this and constitutes this intimate relationship of God’s family. This not only makes Jesus’ whole person vulnerable but also makes his followers’ whole person vulnerable. What does Peter do this time with the face of Jesus?

If Peter’s perceptions of Jesus had changed, we could expect a different response than the time he tried to prevent Jesus from going to the cross. Yet, Peter’s response to Jesus washing his feet...is the strongest expression of categorical denial and refusal of Jesus’ action. Did Peter not learn anything from their previous confrontation? While he appears to have accepted Jesus’ pending death (cf. Mk 14:31; Lk 22:33), though with mixed reactions (cf. Jn 18:10-11), he has yet to experience redemptive change from reductionism....

Based on his reductionist substitutes and practice to define himself, that’s how he functioned in relationships. As the prevailing practice in human relations from reductionism, Peter also essentially compared people on a human totem pole. This

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<sup>15</sup> T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology: A Theological and Functional Study of the Whole of Jesus* (Christology Study, 2008). Online at <http://4X12.org>, 64.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 64-65

process of stratification placed Jesus at the top and Peter below.... Peter felt very strongly that his servile act (just as the cross scenario) was not worthy of Jesus.... Conversely, Peter would feel also that he was unworthy to have his Teacher, Lord, Messiah, God wash his feet, however strong the feeling. The latter feeling more fully explains Peter's relational rejection of the intimate involvement of Jesus' whole person in family love, and thus of God's grace—all while professing faith to the contrary. In his unworthiness, Peter was not open to the vulnerability of such intimacy, even despite Jesus being more accessible to him than at any other time.<sup>17</sup>

As never before, Jesus' person was now vulnerably present and available to his disciples for them to reciprocally respond to, hereby embodying God's relational grace. On the disciples' part, to complete the relational connection required only their compatible response by opening their hearts vulnerably to him, acting as subjects with the resolve of *kân* (cf. Ps 108:1). Earlier we discussed the difficulty Peter had with this relational choice, because he was not yet willing to be so vulnerable with Jesus. Peter still did not understand that this is how God's relational grace nullifies any and all relational barriers from reductionism—namely defining one's person from outer-in by secondary matter, as Peter demonstrated in feeling unworthy—thereby freeing his heart to the primacy of relational connection from inner out with the heart of God. Consequently, what could still not emerge was Peter's person in wholeness in the qualitative image and relational likeness of God. This is the relational choice we are faced with also, which will require examining the theological anthropology underlying our identity.

After washing the disciples feet, Jesus communicated further relational words to them, “I have *embodied for you the relational terms* that you also *be relationally involved vulnerably with your whole ontology and function as my whole person has been with you*” (Jn 13:15). His words here define unmistakably how he wanted them (and us) to function: in the same depth of love that his whole person (not as Teacher or Lord) had just vulnerably extended to them—not for ‘servant leadership’, which focuses primarily on serving that subtly makes the primacy of relationship secondary. Moments later, after Judas left their midst, Jesus reinforced this *new* command (God's terms for relationship): “Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another” (13:34). Their depth of relational involvement together (i.e. *agape*) would make evident to the world that they relationally knew the whole and uncommon God (v.35), which Jesus definitively stated is the relational significance of ‘eternal life’ (Jn 17:3). The remainder of John's account of this pivotal table fellowship expands and deepens Jesus' relational work of family love for his disciples, and inseparably his worshipers, to embody new their relationships.

As Jesus made primary above, reciprocal relational work together in family love is the deep significance of what Jesus meant, and still means, by “do this in remembrance of me.” These words, which are often merely taken to mean “don't forget,” are significantly transposed for our understanding to “*remember me whole-ly*”: for the relational purpose and outcome of our whole persons involved in face to face relationship (without the veil) with Jesus' whole person (not his parts, even as sacrifice), individually and corporately together to build each other up as God's new creation family, with the vulnerable depth of relational involvement of family love, and thereby function distinguished in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the Trinity, just as Jesus

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 65.

prayed to close his pivotal table fellowship (Jn 17:20-26).

Therefore, to “remember me whole-ly” in our practice of whole-ly communion that composes Communion, we must begin with letting Jesus wash our feet. That is, as Jesus is vulnerably before us to redefine our person, letting him wash our feet means we make the choice to be vulnerable too, to let our heart emerge from its constraints, and masks, and receive him and each other for intimate relational connection together. This is the necessary relational process by which we participate compatibly on God’s relational terms of grace in God’s relational context and process for the new covenant.

How Jesus is remembered has deep theological and relational implications. Anything less of the Face of God and in our face-to-Face response keeps God behind the curtain and maintains our response in front of the curtain, both of which signify worship in the old tabernacle/temple (Heb 9:8). The extent of our listening to Jesus’ words in relational language will be the determining issue, both in understanding the whole and uncommon God theologically and for the connection needed in communion together relationally. As Jesus’ made conclusive: “Pay attention to *all my words* you hear; the *hermeneutic* you *use* will be *the Jesus you remember*” (Mk 4:24).

Therefore, we must also address the predominance of the secondary in practices of Communion, which has long plagued Christ’s church, even in biblical times. The secondary has historically and currently obscured the primacy of relationship together. And we cannot continue in our theology and practice under the subtle assumption “we will not be reduced or fragmented” (as in Gen 3:4).

### **Fragmented Christ, Disembodied Communion, Renegotiated Ecclesiology**

In the history of the church, the theologies and practices of Communion have diverged widely. I contend that this divergence is the consequence of the referentialization of the Word. This diversity of theologies and practices of Communion have caused fragmentation of God’s whole church family by shifting the focus to the secondary over the primary. In one extreme example taken from the medieval church, the belief was that the real presence of Christ was in the bread and wine, therefore only priests could touch the elements. Additionally, out of concern about dropping crumbs or spilling the wine, celebrating the Eucharist become reduced to the priest holding and elevating the elements for the worshipers to only look at—reducing participation to ‘communion with the eyes’, which then eliminated blind persons.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps this history has no relevance for your practice but it illustrates the existing process of variable fragmentation of God’s new creation family, between clergy and laity, but also creating relational distance by focusing on secondary matters.

Our continued referentialization of the Word prevents us from being relationally reconciled to be “one as we are one,” as Jesus prayed (Jn 17:21-23). By referentializing God’s relational Word, we disembody Christ into parts and thereby de-relationalize him from the whole person composing Communion. Our diversity of theologies is not a benign or healthy condition, but even with good intentions this basically reflects a

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<sup>18</sup> As noted by Edward Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks Before the Blind: Medieval Constructions of a Disability* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 15-16.

fragmented Christ (cf. Paul's rebuke to the Corinthian church, 1 Cor 1:13), which then reinforces and sustains our relational distance, relational separation or relational brokenness.

In the global church today, there are two general approaches (reflecting their respective theologies) to Communion and other "sacred actions" (also called "signs," including baptism, ordination, marriage, etc.). These approaches are liturgical worship (or high church worship in sacramental churches) and non-liturgical worship (or low-church worship). Although our discussion in this chapter focuses primarily on Communion, the distinction raised throughout this study between outer-in involvement versus inner-out involvement applies to all sacred actions, regardless of what tradition they reside in. These two views are summarized thus:

Sacramental churches—Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and some mainline Protestant churches—regard the Lord's Supper, baptism, and sometimes other actions as special signs that *bestow grace* on those who receive them. Other Protestant groups believe that the sacraments by themselves confer no special power and do not necessarily indicate the presence of God. They tend to refer to sacred actions as *ordinances, actions to be observed because Christ commanded his followers to do so*. Regardless of their theology, all Christians agree on the importance of keeping these sacred actions and on the tremendous benefits that come *through their proper observance* in worship.<sup>19</sup>

The crucial phrase in the above quote is "through their proper observance in worship." The urgent issue for both liturgical and non-liturgical Eucharist is their common (not uncommon) practice that (1) emerges from referentialization of the Word, and (2) gives primacy to secondary outer-in aspects of the Eucharist. Observance with such practices disembodies Christ, which then derelationalizes whole-ly communion, thus making Communion common, because they diminish the primacy of uncommon relationship together—however unintentionally this happens. The consequence has been to subtly skew our practice, if not our theology, to less than "remember me whole-ly."

### **The Formal Common-ization of Liturgy**

Ever since the emergence of the church, the church has had to deal with the onslaught of heresies. In all their forms, these heresies have fragmented and disembodied Jesus' whole-ly integrated person. To combat heresies and provide uniformity among the churches, the early church Fathers, and many others since then, have set down doctrinal truths in "confessions of faith." These confessions of faith took the forms of, for example, "the rule of faith," and creeds (e.g. Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed and many other "statements"). In the pursuit of certainty, however, what has consistently emerged is formalizing the common-ization of theology and practice.

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<sup>19</sup> Robert E. Webber, ed., *The Sacred Actions of Christian Worship*, Vol. 6 (Peabody, MT: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1993), 3, my italics.

In liturgical churches today, such doctrinal statements and other “standardized” practices (e.g. the Church calendar year) are contained in “orders,” which function as templates for planning worship services (e.g. the Book of Common Prayer). These orders are also instructional to church members. Included in this body of tradition is the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving for the Eucharist. This Great Prayer is used widely in mainline Protestant churches; it is a lengthy prayer containing a leader’s spoken parts and congregational spoken responses, and can be adapted to fit the church season and needs of a local congregation. It is also used increasingly in evangelical churches that embrace ancient-future faith practices.

I mention this particular prayer because it represents problematic worship practices that are meant to ensure correct theology and uniformity of practices among churches. First, and not surprisingly, we are susceptible to referentializing set prayers presented in worship bulletins or PowerPoint slides for worshipers to follow, which would get us to say them “with lips but...hearts far from me,” thereby diminishing our vulnerable compatibility of involvement with God who is vulnerably present and intimately involved. Secondly, and to be expected, in the desire to ensure orthodoxy, there is a tendency to include many theological points through the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving. This poses the critical error of making the Eucharist (as well as the worship service) more cerebral with referential language/terms that minimalizes relationship together (e.g. with substitute simulations), whereby persons can avoid being vulnerable. In the absence of the primacy of relationship together, priority is given to secondary matters as substitutes for vulnerable hearts. An extreme example of this is a concern over how worshipers should “correctly” receive the elements: should they sit, stand, or kneel? Which hand goes under, and which is on top? Can the participants touch the “bread” or does the priest have to place it on the tongue?

The concern for these and any secondary matters will always be made primary in the absence of what is primary to God: the whole person, nothing less and no substitutes, in compatible reciprocal response to God’s whole person offered to us in communion together. Unless all of our secondary matters (even non-liturgical) is integrated into the primacy of this relational context, process and purpose, the relational outcome will not be whole-ly communion but something less or some substitute. And the shift from vulnerableness of our person to the substitutes from secondary matter can be very subtle, particularly because we assume liturgical traditions are unquestionably significant to God.

Consider further the matter of theological correctness based on referentialization of the Word. For example, in some churches (and this includes non-liturgical churches, discussed shortly) a person who has a relationship with Christ but hasn’t yet been baptized is not allowed to partake in Communion. Baptism is no secondary matter, to be sure, but one’s compatible relational response to Jesus in relational trust would have enough relational significance to Jesus to participate in his table fellowship of Communion. But those churches make chronological order (a secondary issue to God) the primary determinant for who can partake.

For liturgical (sacramental) churches, the critical problem is the theology (explicit or implied) that worshipers receive grace by going to church and participating in the sacraments (the rituals themselves, which includes when to speak and what to say). Yet, receiving grace in referential terms may appear theologically correct and still have no

relational significance for the participants (including God). That is an assumption from human tradition composed in referential terms, the very same belief that drives the outer-in worship that God rejects (Isa 29:13; Mt 15:8).

It may very well be that some worshipers in liturgical worship are compatibly involved with the Lord while participating in the sacraments, thus having relational significance to and making congruent connection with God. The issue of significance can be ambiguous; and there is a fine line between relational significance and referential significance, which can simulate connection with God. Because of our default tendencies not to be vulnerably involved, the question must still be raised in general whether some of the participation is based on familiarity and thus creating a comfort zone for us by default, such as knowing when to speak and what to say, much like following directions. When we come before the Lord on this basis, we easily become embedded in making primary what we do in various parts as the measure we give in worship over extending our person directly in relational involvement—with the assumption that the sum of our parts equals (defines) the whole, both of our person and church family. On this basis, who and what does God get?

Though God's grace could be defined as referential grace, this theological distinction does not distinguish grace beyond common understanding. Because God's grace is distinguished just as relational grace, God's relational grace is distinguished by God's relational response of grace that functions only for face-to-face connection together. Therefore, we have no basis to assume that mere participation in sacraments—which is very susceptible to being about what *we* do from outer-in—imparts or earns grace, or has relational significance to God for the relational outcome of grace (cf. Eph 2:8-9). Worshipers are easily rendered into near objects (though outwardly we may appear actively engaged) expecting God to give to us in essentially a unilateral relationship, by which we assume we receive grace—a wrong assumption based on a referentialized grace. On such a basis, worshipers are hereby trying to get God to comply with their terms for relationship, intentionally or unintentionally. By referentializing grace, we shape grace into something other than the relational terms for covenant relationship with God; and the relational consequence emerges in our level of experience at Communion, which the world struggles “to believe and know the church's loving relational wholeness in likeness of the Trinity” (as Jesus prayed, Jn 17:21-23).

There is no question that the historical church needed to articulate its theology in order to distinguish itself against false teaching and practices. This struggle was evident as early as NT times, notably in Paul's letters (e.g. Gal 1:6-7). Similarly, there is no question about the good intentions of many church and worship leaders who seek to be faithful to God and his church through traditional liturgy (-ies). Yet, the pursuit of faith in doctrinal certainty and related certainties of practice required narrowing down God's relational context and process that is required to compose the relational response of faith. This increasingly limited, if not constrained, faith to a referential response constructed by conformity to various certainties so-called for faith.

In the uncertainty of modern times, and with the pervasive shallowness of faith in contemporary churches, the certainties of early traditions can have and are having renewed appeal. Among those persons are evangelicals from non-liturgical churches now in the ancient-future faith movement, who seek to reconnect their churches with the historical church by embracing ancient liturgical practices. By doing so they also hope to



combat rampant individualism and shallow worship in their churches. Yet, even having good intentions (which Peter excelled in), the issue is still the prevailing referentialization of the relational Word. On this basis, theological correctness and ecclesial uniformity remain only, in a sense, good ideas or even hopeful ideals. Moreover, the priority given to ensuring theological completeness and correctness based on a referential lens trumps the primacy that God gives to dynamic vulnerable relationship together. Therefore, they cannot compose the whole theology and practice required to “follow me whole-ly” for “remember me whole-ly”—the wholeness of persons and persons in relationship together as church, whom Jesus constituted only by his relational work in whole relational terms.

### **The Informal Common-izing of Worship**

As we transition to less traditional forms under the category of non-liturgical worship, this encompasses a wide range of practices, which cannot all be addressed in this study. Thus, much of this discussion will be generalized based on contemporary evangelical worship practices. While readers may worship in other kinds of churches, the concerns raised in this discussion apply across the non-liturgical worship spectrum.

Non-liturgical worship and Communion are overwhelmingly individualistic, despite occasional comments about the church as family, and as part of the global and historic church. The individualism and historical amnesia of evangelical churches are the issues that the ancient-future faith network seeks to change. In discussing this problematic individualistic focus, we need to distinguish clearly that the issue is not the individual’s personal and intimate relationship with Christ; this relationship is vital and necessary for each of us as Jesus’ followers. The problem is that we stop here, and essentially remain in our private relationship between ‘Jesus and me’, and do not mature in the relational progression that the complete Christology unfolds. As Jesus prayed for his church family, “to follow me whole-ly and be where I am relationally” is to be intimately together in his church family in relational likeness of the Trinity. The individual not integrated into the primacy of Jesus’ wholeness subtly displaces the central primacy of Jesus’ whole relational terms for the discipleship-worship relationship, with the individual’s terms for relationship—terms centered on the individual’s concerns, interests and priorities.

Many of our worship songs and sermons express and reinforce this individualism in the following ways: songs that focus more on I/me than on God, songs expressing “I/me” more than “we/us,” songs and sermons focused on Christ as an individual apart from the Trinity; sermons that focus on ‘God in my life’ (rather than I/we in God’s life), or only the individual’s relationship with God (rather than corporate relationship together as God’s new creation family).

Moreover, Communion in non-liturgical worship is predominantly practiced as the individual’s private time with Christ. For example, quite regularly the pastor has the congregation pray privately to confess sins and receive forgiveness before participating in Communion, which again is vitally necessary but must not stop here. This common practice expresses the view that Communion is primarily about Christ’s sacrifice for the forgiveness of the individual’s sins (though not including reductionism), and the individual’s part is to thank God (Eucharist is from the Gk *eucharistia*, thanksgiving).

Of course theologically and relationally, forgiveness is irreplaceable for us as disciples/worshippers. Yet, worshippers are thereby rendered as immature objects who repeatedly have to deal with personal sin, and are rarely urged on to functioning as mature subjects who share family love vulnerably together in relationships (cf. Heb 6:1-2). Communion must take participants further and deeper in theology and practice to *full soteriology*: not stopping at being saved from sin through forgiveness, but going on to what we are saved to, which is integrally whole relationship with God and together as daughters and sons in God's new creation family. In other words, if we are forgiven for our sin of reductionism, then this is evident only by our involvement in the relational process to wholeness; otherwise we remain in our sin as reductionism.

The most telling symptom of the overly individualistic and private character of Communion practice is that worshippers never make eye contact with each other. This lack, along with the lack of any relational connection together, precludes any sense of corporately *sharing together (koinonia)* as the new wine family. Jesus' table fellowship corrects this severely fragmented practice, but only if we listen to all his relational words, receive his whole person, and compatibly respond face to face, heart to heart, eye to eye.

Non-liturgical worship also often treats Communion with casualness and shallowness that render it completely without relational significance—and those in ancient-future faith would even say without referential significance. For example, at a church service that my husband and I attended on a Communion Sunday, the Communion elements had been placed on a table set to the side of the worship room. Worshippers were invited to partake (individually or with others) at any time during the worship service “at your leisure.” I suspect that this pastor regards Communion as a mere referential reminder of Christ's sacrifice. Yet the message that this process indirectly communicated was that Communion was not only an individual matter (or primarily so), but also that Communion wasn't important, or at least not central to worship but merely an adjunct.

In the non-liturgical Protestant view, worshippers participate in Communion because Jesus so ordained. The theological assumption underlying this practice is that Jesus instituted a memorial service, which has more likeness to secular days of remembrance than to Jesus' intimate communion at table fellowship. For these worshippers, while “do this in remembrance of me” carries more significance in functional terms than merely “don't forget,” what is highlighted for remembrance is Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, which fragments Jesus' person to parts (i.e. in an incomplete Christology, discussed below). Jesus' whole person (with complete Christology, also discussed shortly), who is vulnerably available for us to corporately receive and respond to, must correct such assumptions that non-liturgical worship embodies.

Ironically, liturgical and non-liturgical churches both reduce the primacy of relationship to lesser significance, and as a result their practices are more alike than different when it comes to what is primary to God—despite major differences in the secondary aspects of their respective practices. What these two traditions share is their underlying incomplete Christology, not to mention a reduced theological anthropology. Both theologically and functionally disembody Jesus' relational words, and de-relationalize his whole person. Both theologies and practices show little or no understanding of the primacy of our reciprocal relational responsibilities as God's new creation family together, because they have yet to understand the whole significance of Christ's disclosures beyond referentialized information composing doctrinal forms and

individualistic practice. The irremediable problem with referential information and any related knowledge is that any referentialized source cannot be translated into relational language and terms. It simply has been narrowed down such that its information and knowledge can, at best, only be about fragmentary parts of Jesus, without relationally knowing and understanding Jesus' whole person.

Liturgical worship demonstrates incomplete Christology by not paying attention to Jesus' relational language that gives primacy to the compatible response of child-persons in relationship together as God's new creation family. Even while liturgical worship may faithfully proclaim such ecclesiology, the practice fails to make vulnerable relationship with him primary over traditions, formalized orders, and set prayers, thus reinforcing indirect participation of worshippers. "Participation" comprised of either directed or expected actions (standing, sitting, coming forward for the Eucharist) may give the appearance of everyone's involvement, thus confirming the definition of "liturgy" (Gk. *leitourgia*) which is "the work of the people." However, such participation in worship traditions effectively are templates for behaviors that are susceptible to outer-in practice—that is, indirect relational involvement expressing only limited parts of a person. And conforming to templates eliminates opportunities for child-persons to shout-*in* to the Lord with joy.

Another problem that arises from an incomplete Christology, which generally characterizes non-liturgical worship in particular, is an overly christocentric focus. An overly christocentric practice of worship focuses primarily on (1) the cross, and (2) having our sins atoned for, thus (3) celebrating God's love as sacrifice that is primarily shown to us in the cross and salvation from sin. I am *not at all* saying to not worship Christ and thank God for atonement and forgiveness of sin. Rather, we need to grow from a *dominating* celebration of the cross in worship and mature beyond this limited focus (cf. Heb 6:1-2), for this focus reduces salvation to only being saved from sin (not including reductionism). Salvation that stops at only 'saved *from* sin' is only one part of the story (i.e. a truncated soteriology). For full soteriology we must grow in our practice to what we are saved *to* (adoption into God's new creation family, discussed further latter in this chap.). Remaining fixated on the cross in truncated soteriology is what Paul and the writer of Hebrews refer to as still needing milk, not yet ready or willing to grow-up to maturing on solid food (1 Cor 3:2; Heb 5:12). The cause of this stunted development to maturity is essentially an overly christocentric focus from a lens narrowed down by incomplete Christology. We need to grow in our development from milk to solid food. Our overly christocentric focus comes from incomplete Christology stemming from not having obeyed the Father's relational imperative to "Listen to my Son" (Mt 17:5), because the Son unmistakably illuminated and distinguished his relationship with the Father, and his relational work on the cross served the Father's relational purpose to relationally reconcile us with the Father in the whole of God's family together.

It is a major christological error in evangelical theology and practice (intentional or not) to remain overly christocentric in an incomplete Christology—which also exposes an underlying reduced theological anthropology. Remaining in and reinforcing christocentricity in worship exposes our immature ecclesiology as well, and also doesn't fully understand the purpose for which the Spirit is now present and involved with us. The issue is summarized here, and urgently needs to be addressed in both the church and academy.

When our theological interpretation disembodies Jesus' teachings and behavior from the theological trajectory and relational path of his ontology and function as Subject, then Christ is divided into these parts—resulting in an incomplete Christology no longer distinguishing the Jesus embodied in whole. An incomplete Christology has two critical repercussions, whose consequences have reverberated through church and academy today:

1. An incomplete Christology tends to be overly christocentric because it has diminished or minimalized the whole of God, that is, God's whole ontology and function vulnerably present and relationally involved not only distinguished as Subject but integrally distinguished as Son, Father and Spirit in the relational ontology of the Trinity.
2. Moreover, an incomplete Christology renders Jesus' theological trajectory to a truncated soteriology that may necessarily include what Jesus saved us from (sin, yet without sin as reductionism) but insufficiently involve what he saved us to—the whole relationship together as God's family in likeness of the relational ontology of the Trinity, whose primacy is 'already' in function only with no veil.
3. Therefore, an incomplete Christology assumes a reduced ontology and function for both Jesus and those who have claimed this fragmentary gospel. Consequently, what emerges from the Word and unfolds in the incarnation do not go beyond the hermeneutic impasse shaped by the limits of our human terms from the influence of reductionism—the sin of reductionism that a truncated soteriology is insufficient to save us from. If soteriology saved us from the sin of reductionism, by its nature this would necessitate being saved to wholeness.<sup>20</sup>

Wholeness and maturity in Christ are inseparable and need to be integrated in church theology and practice, just as Paul made definitive for the church (Eph 4:11-13). Yet, the path to maturity has been fragmentary, unfolding in ways assumed to be *new*.

This clarifies a related issue in non-liturgical worship in need of perspective for our understanding, which is innovation and experimenting with “new” forms in worship and Communion. Some churches, which may or may not identify as “emergent,” display a lot of enthusiasm and creativity in designing worship to provide affective experiences—for example, creating an ambience through visuals, smells, lighting, and activities like drawing and making things. I believe these efforts are often well-intentioned and indicate the desire—indeed the real need we all have—to make deep connection with God.

I urge such sisters and brothers to consider carefully the fact that changing outward forms of our behaviors and worship practices (even with something more qualitative) is never sufficient to make compatible relational connection with God on his whole relational terms. ‘Outer’ change (i.e. *metaschematizo*) will only result in ontological simulation (perhaps virtual, with only the appearance of change), which Paul warned the church against (2 Cor 11:14-15) and made imperative for us to stop

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<sup>20</sup> T. Dave Matsuo, “*Did God Really Say That?*” Online at <http://4X12.org>, 94-95.

conforming to the limits and constraints of human terms (*syschematizo*, Rom 12:2). Ontological simulation of meaningful worship leads to epistemological illusion (virtual reality); that is, we may *feel* something has taken place (the affective, qualitative experience) and incorrectly believe we are making congruent connection with God. However, this kind of experience will remain only situational, within a virtual context, and not establish us directly in relationship with God, because it is based on the secondary aspects of that particular worship service—reinforcing indirect (or virtual) connection with God without sustaining ongoing relational involvement directly with God.

If the creative and innovative forms are engaged integrally in the primacy of relationship together in God’s relational context and process of family love (discussed throughout this study), they will likely have some significance to the participants. Yet, here again, significance to be of significance must be measured in relational terms for relational significance, not in referential terms for referential significance. To paraphrase Paul speaking from God’s perspective: “Neither traditions nor innovation is anything; but the new creation family is everything!” (Gal 6:15)

The critical issue for Communion practices is that the referentialization of the relational Word and all outer-in practices disembodify and de-relationalize Jesus’ whole person, including his words, in an incomplete Christology. An incomplete Christology reduces Jesus to fragments (his sacrifice or teachings, e.g. “do this in remembrance of me”), which also renders God to secondary aspects of what God does (e.g. referential information about God’s acts, which are narrated in the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving). Incomplete Christology is an example of idolization of God, by shaping God through our biases and how we think Jesus ought to be and ought to be treated—that is, by reducing the whole of God to something less, which is what an idol is.

Based on an incomplete Christology, both liturgical and the non-liturgical approaches’ practice of new covenant relationship (behind the curtain Face to face without the veil) are often in function not much different from the Israelites’ unacceptable outer-in practice of the first covenant (cf. Isa 29:13). An incomplete Christology leaves us all at the cross, whether in theology (e.g. non-liturgical) or function (liturgical), still in front of the curtain with the veil over our hearts. With an incomplete Christology, ecclesiology of worship remains renegotiated, whether by liturgical worship or non-liturgical worship.

It’s time for maturing to reclaim and embody new the worship relationship for God that has relational significance to God, and to ourselves. After all these decades, on the one hand, of preserving liturgical tradition practiced from outer in, and on the other hand experimenting, exploring, and innovating with focus on secondary aspects of worship and Communion, maturity challenges us to make complete our Christology. This would require us to vulnerably receive, embrace and compatibly respond to Jesus’ whole person and respond compatibly with our whole person, whereby our Communion practices illuminate the relational reality of the intimate communion of shared life together as the new creation family—in both liturgical and non-liturgical worship.

## Relational Communion Composing the New Covenant

As discussed above, for the experience of Communion to have relational significance to God, and also to us, our Communion theology and practice must go beyond the past, merely in remembrance (*anamnēsis*) of his sacrifice that secures the future, as in “proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor 11:27). For Communion to go deeper, it must be composed by the very face of Jesus (not merely “body” and “blood” in ongoing communion with the whole of God (and God’s glory, 2 Cor 4:6), which unfolds in the new covenant composing God’s new creation family. The Face of God made vulnerable by Jesus cannot be reduced to the cross or remain on the cross but must be engaged face to Face in order to have reciprocal relational connection that is both compatible to and congruent with the whole of God’s relational response to us. This relational process converges integrally on the cross and behind the curtain; yet this relational outcome emerges only beyond the cross and without the veil to transform persons and relationship together. This is why only *complete Christology* composes relational Communion—not referentialized, which is reduced to transmit doctrinal information about God—necessary for the new covenant to be our experiential reality and not merely a truth remembered and affirmed.

Complete Christology (neither fragmented nor disembodied and derelationalized Christology) is irreplaceable for whole-ly communion since that alone embodies the new covenant relationship together; and the new covenant is the relational experience as God’s reconciled new creation family (God’s whole) behind the curtain for Face-to-face relationship with no veil. In other words, whole theology and practice are required from us.

The theological reality of Jesus’ “body and blood” is that we have been redeemed *from* the old and transformed *to* the new, which a truncated soteriology only saved *from* is inadequate for saved *to*. The practical reality, inseparable from the theological reality, is nonnegotiable practice of the person(s) redeemed and hearts freed to open vulnerably without the veil of relational distance, and therefore transformed in intimate relationship together in likeness of Christ’s wholeness.

Anything less in our theology composes referential illusions, and any substitutes in our practice engages in simulations of who we and whose we are in Christ—the virtual realities pervading our churches.

As discussed in the previous section, intimate relationship together is what whole-ly communion involves vulnerably from inner out. Whole-ly communion embodies the new covenant relationship and integrates our discipleship relationship and worship relationship; additionally, whole-ly communion transposes our Communion practices into *relational* Communion to be whole. Relational Communion does not preserve the old wine (e.g. “worship from outer in and hearts distant”) in old wineskins (focus on the secondary, constrained to templates from Christian tradition to follow at a relational distance), though some persons really do think the old is better than the new (cf. Lk 5:39). The following discussion puts complete Christology into whole perspective:

As the person Jesus vulnerably presented is received and responded to with the compatible vulnerable involvement in relationship together, along with the Spirit in the relational epistemic process, what unfolds increasingly in our theology and practice is the complete Christology and thus the gospel of transformation to wholeness. As the integral person, Jesus distinguished the most significant basis for knowing and understanding the whole of God, both theologically and functionally. This integral basis is most significant in three ways, which are sequential as well as a reflexive:

1. Jesus provides the epistemological key to open the relational epistemic process with the Spirit for whole knowledge and understanding of God.
2. Jesus provides the hermeneutical key that opens the ontological door through which the Spirit further discloses to us the whole of God, the triune God, the Trinity.
3. Jesus also provides the functional key that opens the relational door to the whole of God's ontology and function, the necessary way through which the Spirit transforms us to intimate relationship with the Father, belonging together as the whole of God's family (new creation and church) constituted in the Trinity.

The keys Jesus' integral person presents—which Paul develops further—need to be understood as conjointly theological and functional since these aspects should always remain together—though being functional has often not been part of the theological task. Most notable, as discussed above, when the complete Christology defines our theological anthropology, it by necessity also determines our whole ontology and function for relationship together face to Face with the whole ontology and function of God, nothing less and no substitutes.<sup>21</sup>

In complete Christology, Jesus is the hermeneutical key (e.g. “Don’t you know me yet? Whoever sees me sees the Father”), the epistemological key (“unless you change and become vulnerable like child-persons”), and functional-relational key (“follow me whole-ly” and “remember me whole-ly” as the new creation family) necessary for our full participation in God’s life. In God’s relational context and process of the new creation family, we are full members, namely daughters and sons who have been redeemed from sin of reductionism, adopted, and relationally reconciled to God and each other in the relationships to be whole. The relational outcome and ongoing relational imperative is our whole theology and practice, now, as the new creation ‘already’.

In a complete Christology, the person presented by Jesus is a function of his whole person—nothing less and no substitutes, thus irreducible in the nature of his incarnation involvement with the human context; and Jesus’ whole person is a function of relationship in the trinitarian relational context and process—also nothing less and no substitutes, thus nonnegotiable to the terms of any other context and process. In this complete Christology the whole gospel of God’s thematic relational action of grace emerges for the experiential truth of Jesus’ full soteriology (saved

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<sup>21</sup> T. Dave Matsuo, *The Gospel of Transformation*, 80.

both from and to), the significance of which is only for relationship together.<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, in complete Christology, the Son's wholeness is irreducible and inseparable from the Trinity. Jesus never functioned apart from the Father, always pointing to his irreducible relationship with the Father. And as Jesus prepared the disciples for his departure, he promised definitively to them the Spirit as his relational replacement, who would come and continue involvement with them relationally just as he had been with them (Jn 14:15-18,26).

The following summarizes how complete Christology antecedes trinitarian theology that is whole, and for our ontology and function to be whole (our theological anthropology and ecclesiology). Thereupon, wholeness in our theology and practice can and must transform our ecclesiology to be whole corporately together in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the Trinity. Inseparably, our ecclesiology of worship is also redeemed to be whole.

The need for our fuller and deeper understanding of the Trinity goes beyond to be merely informed about God, which perichoresis tends to do. We need this whole understanding (*synesis*) to experience the whole of God for relationship, as the early disciples' lack with Jesus demonstrated (Jn 14:9). This is the only purpose of God's self-disclosure vulnerably embodied in the whole of Jesus, making complete Christology the necessary antecedent for trinitarian theology. In the incarnation, the whole of God ultimately emerges and converges for this relationship together, which Jesus intimately disclosed in functional clarity and experiential truth: to be relationally involved with God as whole persons together in the whole of God's family constituted in and by the Trinity. Jesus' call is composed by this relational language and terms. The whole experience of this relational reality of God's whole without reduction of its relational truth (e.g. to referential truth) has been the integrating theme of the Trinity's relational response to our human condition "to be apart" from the whole from the beginning in the primordial garden. Indeed, the whole of God's desires were formulated even before creation to restore us to the whole in the new creation, to be completed by the Spirit in God's eschatological plan concluding with the Son partaking of the last Passover cup at the ultimate table fellowship (cf. Mk 14:25).

As the Son fulfilled his earthly function to vulnerably embody God's family love downward to constitute his whole followers in the whole of God's family, his relational replacement, the Spirit, extends this family love by his reciprocal relational work to bring their new creation family to its ultimate relational conclusion. Trinitarian uniqueness emerges and integrally unfolds in complete Christology, which establishes the relational significance of the Spirit and his reciprocal relational work: as 'the presence of the ontological One and relational Whole' who continues to be vulnerably involved in relationship to distinguish and raise up to completion whole persons in whole relationships together in the qualitative image and relational likeness of God (2 Cor 3:17-18). Our theological anthropology cannot ignore the third person of the Trinity... but must also engage this person ongoingly in the relational epistemic process for the knowledge and understanding necessary

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<sup>22</sup> T. Dave Matsuo, *The Gospel of Transformation*, 198



integrally for the whole of God and for the whole human person (Jn 15:26; 16:13-15; 1 Cor 2:9-16) and for persons together in wholeness (Eph 2:19-22).<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, our Christology must be complete or else we are left to our own speculation and shaping of the whole of God in either becoming overly christocentric or by the process of idolization of God. Left to our own construction of God, worship and Communion are not only susceptible to but likely to ignore Jesus' words about Mary's relational significance in her worship relationship (inseparable from her discipleship), and who can speak to and for God (e.g. the shout-*in* child persons).

Complete Christology vulnerably illuminates the Trinity unmistakably for us. The Christian academy has been actively exploring trinitarian theology relatively recently. This is a move in the right direction for Western theology and away from the overly christocentric and juridical bias. However, this "shift" is explored in largely referential terms, relying heavily on information and concepts from philosophy to explain the interrelatedness within the Trinity, such as the concept of *perichoresis* (the "relational" interpenetration among the trinitarian persons). Relying on human reason for knowledge and understanding of God, who is transcendent creator of all things, will not bear fruit having relational significance to God. Such endeavor is countered by God in his words through Jeremiah (see Jer 9:23-24). Nor does referentialization of the Word by the interpretations of the wise and learned (as in Lk 10:21) illuminate the Trinity. In fact, God's pronouncement against human reason as the basis for knowing and understanding God is similar to God's rejection of worship that has no significance to him (Isa 29:13). Only complete Christology in Jesus' whole relational terms, to which we respond to the Father's relational imperative to "listen to my son" (Mt 17:5), will unfold in whole-ly communion.

With the increased interest in trinitarian theology is a companion focus on trinitarian worship in seminaries, worship institutes, worship conferences, and songwriting to correct overly christocentric worship that stays focused on Christ, his kingship and throne, and his sacrifice (a focus that fragments and de-relationalizes Christ). In non-liturgical evangelical worship, worship planners and leaders increasingly talk about and lead worship with the Trinity in mind. Yet, trinitarian worship typically is reduced to *referentialization of the Trinity*, that is, by merely including words and songs about the Trinitarian persons. In practice, this amounts to honoring the Trinity with lips but without the inner-out function of the whole person in intimate relationship together. If we understand the relational ontology of the Trinity, we understand both the primacy of relationship together *in* the Trinity and our being created in the relational likeness of the Trinity's primacy. Moreover, even though more songwriters are including the Trinitarian persons in their songs, worship leaders still tend to choose songs focusing on Christ<sup>24</sup>. Even trinitarian prayer—praying to the Father, Son and Spirit—doesn't necessarily directly involve their persons or our whole person vulnerably involved from inner out. Thus, merely having a trinitarian focus in worship does not ensure trinitarian worship that is whole. Therefore, trinitarian worship is defined as follows:

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<sup>23</sup> T. Dave Matsuo, *The Gospel of Transformation*, 253-54.

<sup>24</sup> Christian worship historian Lester Ruth tracks usage of contemporary worship songs (CWS) through CCLI; he has consistently shown that songs most used from this group are about Christ. See his updated numbers for CWS at <http://sites.duke.edu/lruth/public-presentations/>.

Trinitarian worship is the integrating focus and integral relational convergence of our (both individual and corporate) compatible reciprocal response to and vulnerable involvement in relationship together with the whole of God, nothing less and no substitutes, as the new creation family together. Trinitarian worship hereby composes the ecclesiology of worship in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God (the Trinity).

Worship needs to be “trinitarian” but only if trinitarian means *as* God’s new creation family in relationship together behind the curtain with no veil. The whole of God’s relational context and the trinitarian relational process of family love must be embodied by daughters and sons together with the Father, Son and Spirit to compose trinitarian worship (beyond a merely referential trinitarian worship). Embodying new the worship relationship can only be as the Father’s adopted and deeply loved daughters and sons—the relational outcome of Jesus’ relational work—in compatible reciprocal relationship together with the Spirit, who helps us embody our new identity as God’s very own family (Mk 3:33-35; Rom 8:14-17, 29; Gal 4:6-7).<sup>25</sup> And trinitarian worship can only be experienced without relational barriers common to human shaping of relationships, which further determines trinitarian worship as the whole reciprocal relational response to the whole and uncommon God.

To reiterate, whole theology and practice transforms us from our individualized and referential practices to embody new the ecclesiology of worship that functions in relational likeness of the Trinity, with nothing less and no substitutes. Referentialization of the Word and referentialization of the Trinity block this wholeness from emerging, thus are incompatible with whole-ly communion that embodies the new covenant, and incongruent for relational Communion to compose the new covenant. Referentialization of God and God’s relational communications in Scripture take place in academic theological and biblical study, sermons, worship songs, personal and corporate prayers, and personal Bible study—that is, in every level of our practice. When we finally shift away from the referentialization of the whole and uncommon God in all these forms, the new can and will emerge.

Complete Christology discloses the Trinity and composes full soteriology. Only full soteriology accounts for what God saved us *to* beyond incomplete Christology that focuses on saving us only from sin (in practice if not theology), yet likely not including sin as reductionism. We must come to know and understand that the purpose of Jesus’ relational work of salvation was to relationally reconcile us to the Father and each other in relationships that are both intimate and equalized (discussed below). This nonnegotiable shift in our theology and practice to full soteriology is required (not for conformity but by necessity) for further transformation of who, what and how we are corporately together by the redemptive inner-out change of *metamorphoō* (2 Cor 3:18), for our person and church relationships to be made whole. If this is not challenging or even threatening enough for us, all of this only emerges and unfolds to maturity in the ongoing process where the old must die for the new to rise—even the old we may assume to be new already.

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<sup>25</sup> For a necessary discussion on the Spirit’s irreplaceable function, please read T. Dave Matsuo, *The Gospel of Transformation*, chap. 6, “The Irreplaceable Replacement Person.”

## New Wine Family Emerges

For this transformation to continue to unfold, the Spirit is vulnerably present and intimately involved with us for reciprocal relationship, just as Jesus promised: “I will not leave you as *relational* orphans...the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send *as my relational replacement for you, will continue the relational work I’ve begun with you*” (Jn 14:18,26, NIV). To continue in the relational work of family love, in reciprocal relationship now with the Spirit, is the significance of Jesus’ words to “remember me whole-ly”—his whole person in life, not only in death—ongoingly and vulnerably involved for our own wholeness. We have been saved to be whole and to live whole as his followers and worshipers, inseparably as God’s new creation family.

It was no random occurrence that Jesus embodied God’s relational context and process at table fellowships rather than at synagogues or the temple. Table fellowship serves as both the original relational context of the new creation family that Jesus came to establish—just as Jesus’ table fellowship continues to compose whole-ly communion to which we are saved—and the relational process to functionally take our “permanent place...forever *in the Father’s family*” (Jn 8:35; cf. 14:2). For Jesus, this relational dynamic of table fellowship is the integrating function of *koinonia* in the church.

At Jesus’ table fellowship, persons like Mary compatibly responded to Jesus’ person, namely as a subject whose heart was freed by relational grace from any self-consciousness and any other constraints on her person from the human context. When intimate connection with God is made in likeness of Mary’s congruent connection with Jesus, this is the experience of the *new wine* that Jesus earlier composed in relational terms (Lk 5:33-39). New wine is qualitatively and relationally uncommon (holy): signifying what has been freed from the sin of reductionism (defining our person and others by outer-in criteria), which creates relational distance and barriers because it always functions in a comparative process with others to measure how one is doing, thereby making stratifying distinctions needing to be redeemed and made whole. Old wine in old wineskins embodies old the worship relationship, and accurately describes prevalent Communion practices today. The old is neither good (enough) nor better, although many of us prefer it or simply don’t want to change in relational terms (v.39).

Whether in general church life and practice, at a particular worship service, or specifically at the Communion table, we are integrally disciples and worshipers *together* constituting God’s new creation family. In this integrated whole practice, therefore, how we respond to Jesus’ call “follow me” embodies how we respond to his relational words “remember me whole-ly.” Accordingly, just as we need to understand that following Jesus means to make the relationship together primary over serving (based on Jesus’ paradigm for his disciples, Jn 12:26), so too we need to make relationship together primary in our understanding for communion of Jesus’ table fellowship. Only his primacy in whole relational terms composes Communion, and all *koinonia* in the church, that is whole in its theology and practice. Otherwise, we continue in some limited and even fragmented understanding of the significance of these distinguished gatherings. How might we take some steps to redeem the old?

When we come together at the Communion table, we need to come as family in a new relationally uncommon (holy) way, in relational likeness of the Trinity. That is, relational Communion takes place behind the curtain (on God’s relational terms of

grace), and with the veil (of relational barriers) removed. In so many of our Communion times relational distance prevails and earns the description of old wine Communion; old wine does not signify or cannot substitute for “my blood of the new covenant.” It is time to redeem Communion, to shift away from perfunctory Communion that lacks relational clarity and relational significance. We also need to shift from liturgical Eucharist in which we participate either as objects (e.g. by rote), or as the wise and learned whose Word has been referentialized. And we must shift away from primary focus on secondary matters, and shift nonnegotiable to the primacy of relational Communion that embodies the new covenant with the wholeness of new wine. I am sure God isn’t pleased with those of us who say, with persons in Jesus’ parable, “the old is good/better” (Lk 5:39).

For example, how have you experienced Communion? If my own experiences in a variety of settings (at various points on the liturgical spectrum) are common to many, Communion is highly individual and private—that is, very rarely do worshipers actually make any relational connection with each other as a worshiping family *together*. So, for starters—in making the shift from incomplete Christology, to complete Christology, to function in relational likeness of the Trinity—I suggest we take the step, the *very minimal step*, of making eye contact with each other as we partake of the bread and cup. (Ironically, dogs often make better eye contact than humans, and make better connections in so doing.) This would involve turning our heads and looking around, eyes open. As we continue with resolve (*kûn*) to engage the vulnerable reciprocal relational work with the Spirit, we will grow (mature) in opening our hearts to each other for relational connection together (cf. 2 Cor 6:11-13). This is what we can anticipate to be our relational reality, along with the poet who said “I run in the way of your *terms for relationships*, for you have set my heart free” (Ps 119:32, NIV). For some of us, this might involve first rejecting our self-consciousness and our comfort zone of staying private, that is, staying self-focused.

Another example for making Communion a relational reality is to combine “passing the peace” with Communion. Usually “passing the peace” (also called “meet-and-greet” time) takes place earlier in a worship service. This can be quite perfunctory, but often it is a warm catching-up time among worshipers. Imagine, then, at times shifting this sharing together as part of Communion—not mainly with friends and acquaintances but notably with strangers and others relegated to the sidelines. As persons finish relationally partaking of the elements together and responding in thanksgiving to the Trinity, turn to others and share hugs and some relational words of family blessing, such as simply “my sister,” “my brother,” or adding “you are the Father’s beloved daughter/son,” or “we are family together!”—because this is the undeniable reality of the new covenant and the experiential reality of the new creation church family.

The experiential reality of whole-ly communion with our whole and uncommon God composes joy deep in our hearts (and God’s also; cf. Lk 10:21). This is the *joyfull* relational outcome that Jesus desires for his disciples (Jn 15:10-11; 16:22,24) and prayed for (Jn 17:13). This *joyfull* relational outcome is also what Jesus likened to “new wine” that cannot be put into old wineskins (Lk 5:37-39). Jesus made definitive that old wine is incompatible with the new wine; likewise, referential terms cannot translate into relational terms. The former can only be constrained in old wineskins, while the new wine needs new wineskins in which to mature, emerge deeply, and then flow out shout-*in* to the Lord. Any influences from human shaping (e.g. some of our traditional practices of

Communion and incomplete Christology trapped at the foot of the cross) that fragment and reduce this experience of family together need to be questioned and redeemed, or simply discarded, in order to be transformed to the new.

This gets us back to all the preceding discussion about our compatible relational response of worship, with vulnerableness of child-persons who worship in spirit and truth (honesty of heart) along with Mary. Trinitarian worship isn't about what to do from outer in (e.g. talk or sing about the Father, Son and Spirit), but to live vulnerably as the new creation family, intimately involved together. In order for the new to emerge, we have to expose the old for what it is.

A major component of the old is assumptions and illusions we have made and function by, even by a rather blind faith. We wrongly assume that we can engage in relationship with God on our reduced or fragmentary terms based on what persons (God and us) have and do. Based on those criteria, we create ontological simulations of relational significance in worship, such as through creating ambience (as in some non-liturgical worship) as well as preserving some traditions (e.g. in liturgical worship). We create ontological simulation also focused on secondary matter (of which Christmas and Easter are prime examples, discussed previously). On the basis of our ontological simulations, we create epistemological illusions according to which we think we know God and have a good relationship because of the things we do for him (such as serve in discipleship and sing in worship). All of these construct the virtual realities found in our ontology and function, which we assume "will not *be reduced or fragmented*." Yet, God is asking "what are you doing here?" because Jesus is pained, "Don't you know me yet, even after all our so-called time together?"

For our understanding of these matters, we discuss briefly how Jesus exposed these assumptions in persons who claimed to be his own. The first assumption that some persons made with Jesus was that merely being present at Jesus' table fellowship signified making relational connection with Jesus. In two piercing discourses, Jesus challenged this very assumption. In one discourse, Jesus used a parable to expose the illusion that merely occupying space together or being in close proximity with him does not constitute making relational connection with him (Lk 13:22-27, NIV). In the parable, persons are trying to get the owner of a house to allow them in, saying, "we ate and drank with you" (v.26). But the owner (God) states, "I don't know you or where you come from" (v.27). In biblical times, saying "I don't know where you come from" was the equivalent of saying "I don't know you," so an emphatic denial is made here. Contrary to their assumptions and ours, Jesus did not, and still does not, assume the depth level of our relational involvement with him. Don't we make a similar assumption, thinking that by regularly "going to church" and, specifically, taking Communion we're participating in God's life on his terms for relationship? Hearing "I don't know you" in referential terms can easily be ignored as inapplicable to us, yet in relational terms we need to pay close attention for any illusions on our part.

The second related assumption is that God does relationship unilaterally, an assumption negated by Scripture. Throughout the OT and NT, God always sought reciprocal (never unilateral) relationship with his human creatures because that is his nature, and is the nature of covenant relationship with God. According to God's relational righteousness (nothing less than and no substitutes for who, what and how God is in covenant relationship), the whole and holy God holds himself accountable for *his*

relational covenant responsibilities. By always functioning according to who he says he is and by fulfilling his promises, he demonstrates that he can be counted on in relationship together. Based on his relational and not referential covenant, which is a reciprocal relationship, God fully expected the Israelites to be accountable for their relational responsibilities, foremost of which was whole-ly communion with “the Great Commandment” in the Shema: “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart...soul...might” (Dt 6:5)—that is, definitively from inner out giving primacy to their heart-level involvement with God. Jesus emphatically reinforced this relational responsibility (Mk 10:30; Mt 22:37).

The third assumption appears in Matthew’s Gospel, and is related to the first assumption, in a teaching by Jesus that is similar to the parable in Luke. Jesus foretold to his followers that he would reject some of them who claimed they had done ministry in his name—“did we not prophesy...drive out demons...perform many miracles?” (Mt 7:22-23). Jesus replied, “I never knew you.” Both in the parable noted above and in this account, the persons tried to connect with Jesus through the secondary substitute of what they did (however impressive), and Jesus denies knowing them. They wrongly assumed something took place relationally, which exposed their lack of understanding of the relational dynamics of intimate connection. Don’t many of us do a lot of ministry and service for God with the expectation that our efforts will result in knowing God, and with the assumption that he knows us?

Usually in worship, we focus on *we* knowing *God*. Obviously, to know God is necessary in our disciple relationship (as well as the goal of spiritual disciplines). If this is not our relational priority, we need to take to heart Jesus’ pained response to his *closest* disciples at the last table fellowship: “Don’t you know me *yet*...even after I have been *with* you such a long time?” However, the reality of reciprocal relationship is that we cannot know God without God knowing us in relationship. Likewise, we cannot *not* know God and he know us. God cannot relationally know any of us whose hearts are not vulnerable to him for intimate relationship together, nor can we relationally know God on that same basis. This is what Jesus is illuminating when he told the Samaritan woman that the Father seeks those whose hearts are vulnerable and embody new the worship relationship in spirit and truth (Jn 4:24).

In other relational words, if we try to involve God in relationship on our common terms based on what we do, usually in service or ministry in a comparative process, this renders his relational grace unnecessary and keeps us relationally distant from God. Nullifying God’s relational terms of grace violates the covenant relationship together (unfolding from Gen 17:1), and God will not participate. God will not be reduced to our common terms because God is holy (uncommon). Are we listening to Jesus in the above examples? We need to seriously and honestly consider what and who we present to God, how our communication is to make relational connection for communion with God, and the depth of our relational involvement in worship. Do you think God knows you relationally because you assume God is all-knowing? This is what we have to ask ourselves.

God’s terms for relationship are righteous because they are based on the whole of who, what, and how God is in covenant relationship. God’s relational righteousness is how God is ongoingly involved with us. This is the significance of his relational

language, relational messages, and his terms for relationship together. Psalm 119 illuminates God's righteous terms for relationship together, his terms that we can count on him for compatible reciprocal response, and which God wants to count on us for (e.g. Ps 119:7,75,137-38,164). Can God count on us for our relational righteousness (the whole of who, what, and how we are as new covenant "partners"), which Jesus said must go beyond that of the outer-in practice of some Pharisees (Mt 5:20)? For example, is 'who, what, and how we are' nothing less and no substitutes for our whole persons, together as God's family that practices the depth of involvement with each other in *agapē* (not as sacrifice), just as Jesus has loved us?

We must take Jesus' words seriously in order to grow further and deeper in our own accountability to be relationally righteous. For example, why is there often a lack of qualitative depth and vitality in worship among church and worship leaders, as well as congregations? Is this due to secondary issues or an underlying primary issue? There is a casualness and a shallowness that many worshipers convey, not to mention the sense of entitlement and self-centeredness among some worshipers, expressed in complaints more about personal preferences than God and the church family. Yet, the phrase "I didn't get anything out of the sermon" cuts both ways: on the one hand, the sermon didn't meet someone's personal expectation (not necessarily their need); on the other hand, the sermon may not have taught anything of relational significance to the congregation. It is necessary to talk about the above assumptions that persons make about their involvement with God in worship. It is likely that church leaders themselves are embedded in these assumptions, along with the ontological simulations of 'family' and epistemological illusions based on those assumptions. To how many of us would Jesus say, "I don't know you or where you come from"? The assumptions you make will be the communion together you (and God) get.

Jesus' paradigmatic relational words in Mark 4:24, are further transposed here for Communion: the communion we practice will be the Communion we get; and, conversely the Communion we practice reflects the communion we experience. For example, have you ever thought about *who* God gets as you individually and corporately with others partake of the Communion elements? What do we embody at Communion beyond formalized theology (for liturgical Eucharist) or a memorial service (non-liturgical Communion)? How we answer these questions both as individuals and corporately as God's family reflects our theology and practice, and our assumptions about the meaning of "do this in remembrance of me."

These understandings and assumptions have been formed and shaped by what Christians in the global North have paid attention to, practiced and passed down in forms of Christian traditions and other templates for practice. The shift of the center of global Christianity away from the North to the South should cause us to question why this shift doesn't humble us to vulnerably examine our practices and our theological assumptions. And to question why we hang onto our old wine and wineskins, since our efforts don't distinguish us as uncommon (holy) in relational likeness of the Trinity.

On the other hand regarding this shift, despite numerical growth of the church in the global South, we also must not automatically assume that growth in numbers in those churches reflects deep relational significance to God's heart either. We can never assume such matters; God doesn't. God always want to know "What are you doing here?" Regardless of where we come from, the Communion we practice is the gospel we claim

for ourselves and proclaim to others. The gospel that transforms us into God's relational whole composing the new creation family "to be one as we are one" struggles to find expression in our practices of Communion as relational Communion. And a telling symptom of this struggle for expression is Mary's invisibility wherever we are proclaiming the gospel—contrary to Jesus' own relational words (Mk 14:9)—both her invisibility and the absence our reciprocal involvement with God in the depth of her relational likeness. Jesus still calls us to "follow me whole-ly" with *kûn* of resolve and sense of determination to take up our relational responsibilities in the new covenant relationship that the Spirit is now here to help us in. Thereby, "remember me whole-ly" can emerge in us as the new wine family.

To paraphrase Paul's inclusive critique, "neither *liturgical tradition* nor *non-liturgical innovation* is anything; but the new *wine family* is everything! (Gal 6:15).

## Communion Together in the New Relational Order

But what is the path for us to get to that elusive outcome, "to be one as we are one" in such a way that we're not just passively waiting for this to happen (which assumes God does relationship unilaterally)? We have to get down to our reciprocally shared relational responsibility in the vulnerable relational work of becoming like child-persons. Initially, yet ongoingly, this means that the old wine of fragmented ontology (e.g. of the wise and learned) in old wineskins of constrained function in the comparative process (giving primacy to what we do and have) must die, that is, let go of and turned from. As the old dies, what can emerge and flow now is the new wine of our whole person (as child-persons) in the new wineskins of the new relational order not determined by human distinctions in a comparative process—which Paul fought for (2 Cor 5:16-17; Gal 3:26-28; Col 3:9-11). The old wine is our ontology and function embedded in the sin of reductionism, which is also what Paul equally fought against in order for the relational outcome from the whole gospel to emerge.<sup>26</sup>

The sin of reductionism is unmatched in its influence to reduce our theological anthropology by transposing the primary with the secondary criteria of defining the person by what we do and/or have—by which we measure ourselves in the comparative process with each other (as Paul critiqued, 2 Cor 10:12)—in opposition to God's relational grace (cf. 1 Cor 4:7). This is the main struggle for wholeness in our theology and practice for all of us. Yet, God's relational grace provided the relational path for us to engage reciprocally with the Spirit in order to prevail over the sin of reductionism, and is sufficient for the new wine family. In this reciprocal relational process, relationship together is always primary for our practice; in this primacy all our situations and circumstances are secondary and subordinate to the primacy of relationship. By our primary relational involvement, our human contexts are perceived and defined by God's relational context in the relational process of *reciprocating contextualization*, which

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<sup>26</sup> Paul's joint fight for the whole gospel and against any reductionism is discussed by T. Dave Matsuo, *The Whole of Paul and the Whole in His Theology: Theological Interpretation in Relational Epistemic Process* (Paul Study, 2010). Online at <http://4X12.org>



provides us with the understanding we need to extend the primary in our situations and circumstances to live whole as the new wine family, and also to make whole the old wine in our human condition.<sup>27</sup>

Previously in chapter two, we discussed that receiving God’s relational grace means that we can come before God freed from needing to measure up to outer-in criteria (feeling either better or less than others) in a comparative process of reductionism. This measuring-up issue precipitated the first debate over the new wine, in which Jesus rendered secondary human distinctions and related practices not only insignificant but contrary both for primary human identity and for the primacy of relationship together (Lk 5:33-35). On the basis of Jesus’ polemics against reductionism and his relational work for whole-ly communion, we are equalized without distinctions before God—that is, God doesn’t look at outer-in criteria to define us—and our hearts are freed to come forth without relational barriers for Face-to-face connection in his relational context and intimate relational process. The relational outcome is that we are freed for intimate and equalized relationships as God’s new creation family, which is the only significance and purpose for following Jesus’ whole person (not solely his sacrifice) behind the curtain into the Father’s intimate presence (Heb 10:19-22).

When I was a new Christian, I didn’t understand what Jesus meant by “the last will be first, and the first will be last” (Mt 20:16). I pictured the last person in a line coming to the front and first person in a line going to the end of the line. So what? I thought. As a more mature Christian having studied the Bible for many years, I also incorrectly interpreted what Jesus meant by “whoever wants to be first among you must be your servant” (Mt 20:26), and other such burdensome statements. I took those words referentially and made serving primary, as too many of us do. I was always focused on serving, and could have continued to focus on serving—that is, defining my person by what I did as God’s servant—as long as it didn’t include taking the lead in any way, which would entail failing. My discipleship wandered in the wilderness of the primacy of serving in ministry (including playing guitar in worship) for decades. Through it all, my heart was lonely, and I longed to deeply experience God, to know God. Even practicing spiritual disciplines didn’t bring the relational connection I needed and hungered for. I remember asking for prayer to experience and know God’s grace at the heart level, and God answered me.

Jesus pursued me for the following: to make our relationship together primary over serving (Jn 12:26), first dying to defining my person by what I did serving in ministry (Eph 2:8-9); to make myself vulnerable before him with honesty of my heart about my inadequacy, my sin of reductionism, and my fears about failing and rejection; to be forgiven and receive God’s relational response of grace (“my grace is the *only* sufficient *basis* and *ongoing base for relationship together*,” (2 Cor 12:9), thus rejecting my self-determined terms (e.g. of making ‘what I do’ in service/ministry primary).

I have been lovingly corrected for my wrong interpretations and assumptions. God has freed me from my sin of reductionism, and freed my heart to compatibly reciprocate in intimate communion at Jesus’ table in the Father’s presence, Face to face

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<sup>27</sup> A full discussion of reciprocating contextualization is found in the complete Christology of T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology*, Chap. 7 “Jesus and Culture, Ethics, Mission,” 199-204.

with the veil removed! Here is my permanent place where I belong as daughter, a full member in my Father's new wine family (Jn 8:35), which now includes taking the lead to help further build God's family in reciprocal relationship with the Spirit. This is the relational process of dying to the old (the sin of reductionism) and claiming God's relational grace as that which now defines my person, my theological anthropology in reduced ontology and function thus made whole. I share with you from my own experience in the desire that it be helpful and encouraging for sisters and brothers to experience the whole and uncommon God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement—which is the primary God has always wanted with all of us. It is for this relational reality of what we are saved to, that Jesus established the new covenant, to reconcile us together in intimate and equalized relationships. It is only these uncommon relationships that will distinguish us as God's family (Jn 13:35)—distinguish from the common pervasive in discipleship and prevailing even in churches.

By God's relational terms composing his relational response of grace, our hearts are set free not just for individual freedom but most importantly for intimate and equalized relationships together in wholeness as family. With all masks, other relational barriers, and constraints on our person removed, our hearts are free to open wide to each other in family love, to be involved with each other according to the three major issues for all practice: in the integrity of the persons we present to each other, the relational quality our communication, and the depth of relationship we engage with each other.

The ancient poet deeply knew this when he wrote “I run in the *way of your terms for relationships* for you have set my heart free (Ps 119:32, NIV). The Hebrew word for “set free” is *rāchab*, to broaden or open wide (ESV translation says “when you enlarge my heart”). All of these denote that our hearts are set free, not to pursue our self-interests with a sense of entitlement, but free to be involved with each other in the love we have experienced from Jesus, that is, God's family love (*agapē*, not about sacrifice, Jn 15:9). Paul extended this family love (including correcting them in order to build them up) to the Corinthian church, asking for their love in reciprocal relationship together: “In return...open wide [*platynō* to open wide, make wide] your hearts also” (2 Cor 6:11-13).

What we gain by dying to the old so that the new can emerge has no significance in referential terms, but becomes fully distinguished only in relational terms (cf. Paul's language in Phil 3:7-9). What we gain is the outcome of the only alternative to reductionism—that is, the wholeness of God's relational response of grace in relationship together, thereby fulfilling God's definitive blessing (Num 6:24-26)<sup>28</sup> that Jesus whole-ly embodied new (as Paul illuminated for the church, 2 Cor 4:6; Col 3:15). What is more, God's words “my *relational* grace is sufficient for *relationship together*” (2 Cor 12:9) communicate both God's relational terms and relational messages from God's heart to ours. As we vulnerably receive God's relational messages further, our hearts are also enlarged further to compatibly respond, notably in the worship relationship of the ecclesiology of worship.

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<sup>28</sup> The familiar words of God's deeply relational definitive blessing are illuminated for our deeper understanding of God in T. Dave Matsuo, *The Gospel of Transformation*, 41-81.

## New Wine Family Distinguished

Relationships based on grace must (*dei*, by its nature) be characterized in two vital and observable ways: intimate and equalized, which emerged from Jesus' relational involvement with persons, notably in his table fellowships initiated by the first new wine fellowship. These relationships must be intimate, because, as relational grace embodied by Jesus requires, hearts need to be open and vulnerable to God in compatible and reciprocal relational response, and by extension to each other. To be vulnerable for intimacy, however, we have to go beyond the limits of the secondary and our preoccupation with it—as demonstrated at the first new wine fellowship. More specifically, intimate relationships aren't constrained by self-consciousness in a comparative process focused on human distinctions.

It is vital to understand that because God does not define human persons by human-shaped outer-in criteria and categories, God's relational response of grace deconstructs both these human distinctions and their resulting stratifications and hierarchies in relationships which constitute relational barriers—the significance of Jesus cleaning out the temple. God hates our human constructions because they fragment persons and create and maintain distant and even broken relationships—all antithetical to his created order and in conflict with human ontology and function created in the whole of God's qualitative image and relational likeness. In other words, God disfavors reduced theology and practice. And all human distinctions of outer-in criteria formed by what we do (e.g. achievements, jobs, roles, performance) and what we have (e.g. resources, attributes, spiritual gifts) are equalized before God by the necessity of grace for everyone.

Equalization is a necessary process in order for persons in God's family not to remain fragmented in the relational condition “to be apart” as relational orphans, even while being church members. Equalization frees relationships from vertical and horizontal relational barriers, making possible the depth of relational involvement in likeness of Jesus' relationship with the Father, which is the relational outcome Jesus prays for (Jn 17:21-26). This relational outcome of equalization for all persons “in Christ” is summarized by Paul: Christ destroyed the relational barriers (the old reductionist criteria of outer-in distinctions that created relational distance and barriers (Eph 2:11-18; Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 12:13; Col 3:11), including but not only based on race/ethnicity (“There is no longer Jew or Greek”), class (“slave or free”), and gender (“male and female”).<sup>29</sup> Mary, Levi, and Zacchaeus all experienced being equalized by grace, redefined from inner out in their respective relationships with Jesus. Their intimate connection necessitated the process of equalization, otherwise this relational outcome does not emerge as a relational reality.

These dynamics illuminate for our understanding how God “shows no partiality” (*prosōpolēmpsia*, respecter of persons, favoritism, Rom 2:11; Eph 6:9; Col 3:25; Jas 2:1, cf. Acts 15:9), because God looks only at the heart, inner out, whereas humans who function from self-determination look outer in (1 Sam 16:7; cf. 2 Cor 5:12). For us to emerge and flow as the new wine, our new wineskins must function without partiality (the old). We are certainly challenged, then, to critically examine, on the one hand, the

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<sup>29</sup> For an urgent perspective about human differences in the church, please see T. Dave Matsuo, *The Person in Complete Context: The Whole of Theological Anthropology Distinguished* (Theological Anthropology Study, 2014). Online at <http://4X12.org>, chap. 7.

favoritism we show to scholars, celebrity pastors, and celebrity worship leaders. This partiality has even solidified into marketing terms like “branding,” as in “the Mars Hills brand,” or other megachurch or multisite church “brands.”<sup>30</sup> Branding is notably applied to celebrity pastors, whom church members favor, depend on, and serve contrary to the primacy of God and what distinguished the new wine family.

Paul rejected the reductionism behind such function because it led to fragmenting the church: “Has Christ been divided?” (1 Cor 1:10-13) based on human shaping of the secondary over the primary (4:6-7, cf. 2 Cor 10:12). The new relational order is incompatible with the old wineskin of distinction-making and partiality, and we need to specifically die to defining ourselves and others from outer-in criteria prevalent in churches today, criteria we are so familiar with: success in numbers, TV viewership, books published, website hits, reputation, latest technology. Most important, we need to die to how these distinctions determine how we function in relationships with each other, which determine a church’s identity and function. Similarly, we are challenged to examine *who* we ignore, for example, persons we don’t feel comfortable talking with because they’re “different” from us—which paradoxically can include direct relational involvement with God.

It is also critical for our understanding that favoritism is similar in function to personal preferences, such as who we prefer to sit with in worship, our music preferences, or our preferred style of worship. Preferences are natural to have, but my preferences are not more important than yours, and vice versa, or they become self-interests revolved around ‘me’. This is an important issue that applies to how we incorporate secondary matters in worship. For example, many worship leaders in non-liturgical worship are college age or young(er) adults who prefer the music to be loud. But high volume is both harmful to everyone’s hearing, and particularly uncomfortable for older persons. Loud music being played in the sanctuary at the end of worship service also drives out persons who otherwise might have stayed to talk together. Oversaturating sounds make relational interaction difficult, and perhaps this becomes a convenient mode to ignore or avoid deeper connection. What must define the worship leaders is the primacy of relationship together, which must determine their decisions for that which builds up the new wine family in love. In this example, worship leaders must function in the intimate and equalized relationships of the new relational order, where persons in leadership don’t impose their preferences (or self-interests) just because they have those roles and functions; and the rest of the church must not just sit as observers or they reinforce the old wine as OK. Of course, our old patterns become convenient for us to stay where we are and not become vulnerable to the new wine.

Intimate and equalized relationship corporately together need to be what we expect from ourselves and each other when we come together to embody the worship relationship corporately. We need to be able to count on each other for the three major issues for all practice—the persons we present together before God, the integrity of our

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<sup>30</sup> E.g. “In a rush to expand their brand, larger churches can easily discard small churches’ unique history.” Bob Smietana, “Flip This Church,” *Christianity Today*, June 2015. Or, “Consider the Chicago-area Willow Creek Community Church, one of the bigger ‘brands’ in the non-denom world” from the blog article by Bryan Cones, “A Christian Walmart for the poor? Willow Creek’s new care center,” at: <http://www.uscatholic.org/blog/201306/christian-walmart-poor-willow-creeks-new-care-center-27430#sthash.L3OHZTa1.dpuf>.

corporate communication, and the depth level of corporate relational involvement. Related to these issues, two further examples need consideration. One is the matter of performance in worship. The other is joking in sermons.

Performance in worship is incompatible with intimate relationship, because it is a unilateral dynamic: the singers, musicians or dancers perform, and everyone else is rendered to a position to listen or watch perhaps actively. In terms of embodying new the worship relationship as child-persons involved compatibly in reciprocal relational response to God, a performance presents a subtle substitute. If the performer considers his/her performance as directed to God (which renders God to passive object, euphemistically labeled ‘audience of one’), the rest of the worshipers are left on the sidelines. If the others are prompted to participate, there is ambiguity about where the response is directed (performers or God), and about the nature of ‘who is given’ and ‘who God gets’. In a performance, there is no direct communication with relational terms for relationship together (referential terms at best), and any depth of corporate relational involvement with God is subtly substituted with simulations, which then leaves everyone with illusions after the performance. Moreover, performance creates unequal (stratified) significance of persons that fragment relationships with subtle relational distance in the corporate context, which is supposed to be a time for the new wine family to share in together—the distinguished communion of intimate and equalized relationships together in wholeness.

The second example of what we can count on each other for brings up the issue of jokes in sermons. This may appear picky or rigid with over-seriousness, yet hopefully will be edifying or chastening. There’s nothing wrong with some humor in sermons, but it is unedifying to make certain kinds of jokes. For example, jokes that stereotype persons (e.g. male preachers joking about their wives’ shopping habits), or jokes that simply draw attention to the preacher’s wittiness, and which may have no correlation or significance to the sermon’s subject matter. While many worshipers like a lot of humor in sermons (i.e. they like to be entertained), certain kinds of jokes create relational barriers. I believe some preachers use humor to hide behind, rather than take the lead to be vulnerable with the new creation family. That is to say, humor becomes a substitute for their hearts extending to the others for intimate and equal connection to build the church family in wholeness. Such leaders cannot be counted on for the three major issues for practice—the integrity of the person presented, the quality and content of communication, and the depth of relationship engaged. And those who reinforce these leaders with loud laughter or applause also sustain church practice of diminished persons in minimized relationships, thereby implying “the old is better.”

Intimate and equalized relationships in the new covenant compose the new relational order that the writer of Hebrews elaborated on in his important discussion about Christ’s relational work (Heb 9:8-10). The writer declares for our understanding that the new covenant is not only better than the old one (Heb 8:6) in a comparative process, but God has made the first one obsolete (8:13). The old order (the metaphor of “the first tent” or tabernacle) remains standing and functioning until it is replaced (not merely reformed) by “the new order” (*diorthōsis*, 9:10, new order, to correct throughout)—that is, the new *relational* order distinguishing the new wine church family. We don’t see this qualitative *new* very much—if at all—in our worship practices. In many respects, it seems that the first tent is still in place, and that the curtain to the

vulnerable presence and intimate involvement of the whole and uncommon God still hangs between us. Yet, we can change if we are resolved and determined (*kûn*) as child-person subjects for God to receive who and what are his: the measure we give...!

### **Referentialization of Jesus' Table Fellowship**

The new relational order of the new covenant based on God's relational grace is exciting to anticipate emerging and unfolding in churches today, not just for the future at the ultimate table fellowship. One final discussion in this chapter is needed for our deeper understanding of the incompatibility of Jesus' relational work of establishing his followers together in intimate and equalized relationships, and a human shaping of "equal" relationships that tries to generate equality from outer in. Ironically, this human shaping focuses on Jesus' table fellowship.

Just as the Word and the Trinity suffer from referentialization, the referentialization of Jesus' table fellowship needs to be mentioned, because there are inadvertent relational consequences on the new relational order. Referentializing Jesus' table fellowship is reflected in two interpretations that have the intentions to equalize persons, but do not. They are: (1) table fellowship as a paradigm for an ethics of inclusivity, and (2) as a paradigm for equal-gender church leadership. These two paradigms intend to elevate marginalized persons to equal status at Jesus' table, but inadvertently reinforce reductionism. These do not represent the equalized relationships based on God's relational grace, so we need to understand the difference for our theology and practice to be whole.

Those Christian ethicists who see Jesus' table fellowship as an ethical paradigm of inclusiveness for church practice focus on the fact of Jesus' inclusion of marginalized persons (among whom women are listed<sup>31</sup>). This fact of inclusion becomes an ethical example for Christians to imitate, but is a product of a particular interpretive framework, and is not the proper approach to human diversity.<sup>32</sup> Imitation of Jesus' behaviors is an outer-in approach that does not address the deeper issue of the outer-in process of distinction-making in conflict with the inner out relational function of grace (what Paul signifies in his shorthand term 'in Christ', Gal 3:28). The concept of "inclusivity" as an ethical category begs the questions: Who are the "included" (the *un*-marginalized)? How did they get that way?

To think in terms of inclusion is to operate with a narrowed-down category of included-excluded, which still operates in the dynamic of making distinctions based on outer-in criteria from human contextualization of gender, race/ethnicity, occupation, and other human differences. Distinction-making is implicit whenever certain persons are singled out based on their difference. In practice, any distinction-making involves comparison and competition that implies "different" is "less." Inclusivity as an ethical category operates essentially by making distinctions, pointing to a reduced theological anthropology of persons and relationships, both of which are antithetical to God's relational response of grace 'in Christ' (and thus contrary to Paul in Gal 3:28). For example, in one ethicist's view, God's kingdom is "gestured in open conversation with

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<sup>31</sup> Richard Burrige, lecture outline for a seminary course, "New Testament Ethics": August 7, 2007, 4b.

<sup>32</sup> For a fuller discussion of ethics of Jesus' table fellowship, please T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology*.

women...to welcome sinners, and to treat women as equals.”<sup>33</sup>

In the second interpretation, biblical feminism sees Jesus’ table fellowship as the paradigm for church and church leadership, a round table that has no hierarchical head.<sup>34</sup> Equality characterizes this table fellowship. Inclusiveness and equality indeed are important and necessary parts of wholeness, yet they are only parts and not wholeness in themselves—even the sum of the parts does not equal the whole. If inclusiveness and equality are not the inner-out functions in God’s relational context of family on God’s whole terms of relational grace, then inclusiveness and equality are just outer-in social structures. Moreover, there is a subtle problem that if changes we make in our attempts at equality are only structural (outer in), then attempts at inclusivity and equality are only ontological simulations. Unless the underlying reductionism dies, this “table in the round” inadvertently maintains and reinforces the very exclusivity and hierarchy in relationships that it seeks to eliminate by utilizing the same basis of defining persons by what they do or have (e.g. talent, leadership skills, even spiritual gifting). The ontological simulation thus reinforces and further embeds persons to fragments in reduced ontology and function, which cannot determine relationships together in wholeness but only fragmentary relationships together. The result can only be cycling through the same issues over and over, which, for example, we have seen recurring in civil rights in the U.S.

These two views show us that however good our intentions may be, they need to be examined through the qualitative-relational lens of the Word that gives light, not a predetermined referential lens that creates fog. There are many interpretations about Jesus’ table fellowship, and we need to carefully examine (even with suspicion) of the interpretive lens used whenever we study them. It’s easy to be attracted to interpretations of Scripture that appeal to equality, or even intimacy, but the only interpretations that will be distinguished in uncommon (holy) practice are those that fully listen to Jesus’ whole person—not just his teachings, not just his sacrifice, and not even as a role model to imitate—listen vulnerably with our whole person, in ongoing reciprocal relationship with his relational replacement, the Spirit.

The experiential reality of this new relational order began with Jesus’ table fellowship, and this experiential truth becomes the interpretive lens to understand that “follow me whole-ly” embodies “remember me whole-ly.” Integrally, the new relational order is celebrated in full significance whenever we come together to celebrate whole-ly Communion—in the ongoing unfolding transformation of God’s new family in relational progression of intimate and equalized relationships together in wholeness.

Wholeness is not an end in itself, a condition for the individual to feel better, though the individual person does feel better. Wholeness is the integral well-being experienced from inner out by both the person and persons together as church family in the relational reality of being together with our Father, as daughters and sons, in relational likeness of Jesus’ relationship with the Father (Rom 8:29). Wholeness is the relational outcome of being loved (*agapē*) by God for the only purpose of reciprocal relationship together and, therefore, comes with the relational responsibility to be whole

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<sup>33</sup> Allen Verhey, “Ethics” in *Dictionary of Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 198.

<sup>34</sup> Letty M. Russell. *Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1993).

as his family, and to live whole together in the world, and to make whole the human condition both in the church and the world.

And to reiterate, *agapē* is not primarily about what to do (nor about what God does) but is primarily the depth of relational involvement in the primacy of relationship with God, each other and others—in relational likeness of God’s relational involvement with us. *Agapē* is God’s family love that frees us: from the limits of reductionism, from the constraints of fear (of failure or rejection), fear which leads us to hiding our whole selves in self-consciousness and even self-preservation, from comparing ourselves with each other, and from other causes of relational distance—all of which, without being free from, maintain the veil and keep us in a condition “to be apart.” In wholeness we are free to reciprocate relationally with God in love and each other in intimate and equalized relationships, and therein also experience wholeness (peace) in relationship together as the outcome of the gospel of peace (wholeness). Thus, we deepen our understanding of biblical wholeness with the following definition:

Wholeness is the conjoint function of the whole person involved in the relationships together necessary to be whole—transformed relationships both equalized and intimate. The whole person is defined from the inner out signified by the importance of the heart in its qualitative function, who then joins together in relationship with both God and other persons with the involvement “in spirit and truth” in the new relational order that distinguishes the new wine family—uncommon (holy) communion in the relational righteousness of nothing less and no substitutes composing whole-ly communion

By listening in relational terms to Jesus’ whole person, we will grow together in the relational progression that leads to the wholeness required in our theology and practice in order to embody new the discipleship and worship relationship.

Grace, new covenant and ecclesiology of God’s relational whole converge in Jesus’ table fellowship. These relational dynamics that Jesus embodied in whole relational terms at these table fellowships are essential for us to understand in order to experience the following as new wine family together: relational grace as the basis and ongoing base, new covenant as the relational context and process, and ecclesiology of the whole as the family dynamic in which worship is the integral focus and integrating congruence of our (individual and corporate) reciprocal relational response and vulnerable involvement in relationship together with the whole and holy God for the ecclesiology of worship. This is the whole-ly communion together that must by its nature embody our worship relationship *new* as the new wine family. And that which distinguishes us as God’s new wine family is the transformation in intimate and equalized relationships—the relational outcome of God’s relational grace which is our sufficient basis and ongoing base for relationship together in wholeness with the whole and uncommon God.



## A Suggested Communion

The following is a suggestion for transforming Communion from its common practice(s) of either an individual and private time, or a formalized pattern to a “new and living way” in the dynamic flow for Communion behind the curtain (or with the curtain torn open) with the veil removed (cf. Heb 10:20). As usual, any suggestions for worship come with the caution to not think in secondary terms of ‘what to do’ but how to be involved in the primacy of relationship together in family love.

Sometime before worship service begins, set up a double curtain with an opening in the middle but remained closed. These don’t have to be real curtains, but something just to give the sense of a curtain that can be parted. Place the Communion elements on a table behind the curtains.

At the beginning of Communion, someone read Hebrews 9:11-12, or simply explain the relational significance of Jesus’ relational work on the cross: Jesus, as our High Priest, entered behind the curtain into God’s intimate presence; there he made the sacrifice of his body and blood once and for all to not only free us *from* our sin (of reductionism) but also *to* relationship together as adopted daughters and sons into God’s very own family. It is vital to emphasize the necessity for those who follow Jesus to follow him behind the curtain.

A leader has everyone imagine a mask or veil over their faces and hearts (alternatively, use a piece of paper or one’s hand). Give persons some quiet moments to imagine this. The leader explains that our sin, namely the sin of reductionism, is a relational barrier with God that every one of us has to ongoingly deal with, from new Christians to long-time Christians—this needs to be taught to the worshipers previous to this Communion. All relational barriers are like a veil over our hearts, preventing us from being in God’s intimate presence ‘Face to face’ and heart to heart. Since God’s vulnerable heart is always extended to us for relational connection together, God is always seeking worshipers who will respond to his relational provisions of grace with their whole, vulnerable person. That means to join with Jesus in his sacrifice, putting to death the sin represented by these masks and veils. Then read (preferably not a leader) Hebrews 10:19-22.

Persons are called to come to the table. Each must enter through the curtain one at a time, holding their ‘veil’ or mask (a real item or use their hand) in front of their face. All gather around the table set with the elements. Leader reads paraphrase of 2 Cor 3:12-18.

All partake of the elements together. Then, together we throw off our veils/masks. The leader says, “Jesus said, ‘these are my brothers and sisters’.” Everyone share hugs together as the leader reminds all that we are full members together as daughters and sons composing God’s new creation family, for equalized and intimate relationships together, without distinctions and the veil.

Sing “Whole-ly Communion.”

## For Your Theology and Relational Response

Consider deeply the following song to be sung as you and others gather for Jesus' table fellowship, where God's relational grace brings you Face to face to "remember me whole-ly."

### Whole-ly Communion<sup>35</sup>

1. Here at your table  
you call us from afar  
You, O Jesus, to you
2. Here behind the curtain  
we join you, old to new  
You, O Jesus, in you
3. Now without the veil  
we see God, Face to face  
You, O Jesus, with you
4. In your very presence  
whole of God, O, whole of God  
Father, Son and Spirit

#### Bridge:

Here at your table—  
Here behind the curtain—  
Now without the veil—

#### Final verse:

In your very presence  
whole of God, O—whole of God  
Father, Son and Spirit!

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<sup>35</sup> ©2015 Kary A. Kambara & T. Dave Matsuo. Sheet music in printable pdf is available at <http://4X12.org>.

## Chapter 5 Who and What We Give, Get, and Celebrate

**Let those who boast, boast in this, that they understand and relationally know me, that I am *who, what and how I am.***

Jeremiah 9:23-24

**In him, you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.**

Ephesians 2:22, NIV

What images come to your mind when you consider what mature disciples look like, along with mature worshipers, and a mature church? How we picture these will depend on the criteria we use to define ‘mature’. For example, some among us may immediately think of mature in terms of age—of grey-haired persons, and those who have been church members for decades. Might mature Christians be senior pastors by virtue of their role/function, and be missionaries that have sacrificed to serve the church or to spread the gospel? Or persons that have a lot of knowledge about Scripture, such as preachers and teachers? Are mature Christians persons with advanced academic degrees in theology, biblical studies, worship studies, or spiritual formation? In other words, does maturity come with possessing resources and credentials?

Why is the issue of maturity important for worship? Maturity is important because the criteria we use to define maturity, and who we perceive as mature persons in our churches, will influence who and what we give, get and celebrate in worship corporately. Accordingly, to further elaborate on Jesus relational paradigm: The maturity you celebrate (i.e. boast in and about) will be the worshiping community you get, which includes the goals for all members. Moreover, who and what we boast in and about will be reflected in the church’s presence and involvement with its surrounding community, determining what others outside the church see and conclude about God. The integrity of the church’s identity is vital for its witness.

The word in the Old Testament for “boast,” *hālal*, means to celebrate and denotes rejoicing and praising God. *Hālal* is the word in the imperative *Halelu Yah* (hallelujah), “Praise the LORD.” “Boast” is given its definitive basis most clearly in Jeremiah:

“Thus says the LORD: “Do not let the wise boast in their wisdom, do not let the *capable* boast in their *abilities*, do not let the *privileged* boast in their *resources*; but let those who boast boast in this, that they understand and know me, that I am the LORD” (Jer 9:23-24).

This is not the shallow boast of cognitive information that fragments and reduces God down to God’s attributes and actions (the divine parts of what God has and does), but is the deepest possible boast of knowing and understanding God in our innermost by relational connection and involvement. This boast is to ‘sing’ (embodied boasting, if you wish) as God’s very own family who are qualitatively *tāmīym* (whole with nothing less

and no substitutes) and who function in the primacy of relationship with *sēdāqâh* (relational righteousness). We have been embodied new from inner out because God's relational response loved us first ("first" as both in primacy and in the order of action), therefore our boast unfolds reciprocally 'singing' the new song in response to the whole and common God.

In English, boasting has both positive and negative connotations. The more common usage of 'boasting' is the overt negative sense of bragging, beating one's own drum, and any other kind of self-aggrandizement—always about the fragmented parts of what persons do or have. Yet, this self-serving boasting takes on more subtle forms, such as embellishment of one's self in the presentation to others of one's life. Social media seems to flourish on this sense of boasting, which also involves enhancing one's life by selective sharing or virtual sharing. Self-focused boasting is normative in the human context, because it is simply part of the competitive-comparative process of trying to establish one's self-worth on the basis of outer-in criteria of what one does or has. On the other hand, the positive sense of boasting gets eclipsed in common usage, but positive boasting in worship is important for us to understand.

Yet, self-focused boasting is also normative in many worship services, because it is our default mode of boasting. What becomes problematic is that the significant difference between the two senses of boasting gets blurred in our understanding and practice. In this chapter, for the sake of clarity, I refer to the negative sense of boasting as 'immature boasting' and the positive sense as 'mature boasting'.

There is a direct correlation between maturity as God's people, our identity as God's new creation family, and 'boasting', which is vital for us to understand in order to corporately undergo the inner-out change necessary to embody new the worship relationship. At stake is whether or not the boasts we make in worship have relational significance to God. Also at stake is nothing less than what we are building together as the church.

The boasts we make in worship, if they are mature (uncommon, holy) rather than immature (common), will distinguish our celebrations with our whole identity of both who we are and, inseparably, whose we are. Our boasting will either reveal whose we are as relationally belonging to our transcendent triune Creator God who Jesus vulnerably embodied and disclosed, or as 'belonging' to some undistinguished God of our shaping (which we previously identified as the idolization of God). Therefore, we begin this final chapter discussing the interrelationship between boasting, maturity, and our new identity, and thus, who and what we give, get and celebrate wherever and whenever we come together to worship the whole and uncommon (holy) God.

## **The Vulnerable Process to Mature Celebration**

The Gospels narrate that the journey to maturity for the disciples was an up and down process, and so it is for us today. Likewise, the glimpses we have of the nascent churches in Acts, the epistles, and the book of Revelation also tell us of the up and down process to maturing as Christ's body, that is, the new creation family in the 'already'. In chapter three of this study, we discussed the surprising and counter-intuitive conclusions about what 'mature' means to Jesus, to Paul, and to the writer of Hebrews (to review, see

pp. 56-67).

Briefly, when the disciples were asking about “who is the greatest...,” they were engaged in a comparative process (Mt 18:1). Jesus told his disciples then (and now) that we must “change and become like *child-persons*” or else we “will never *participate in God’s life*” (Mt 18:3). Jesus also made a surprising statement in his praise and thanks to the Father “because you have *disclosed yourself* to little children” but “have hidden *your self-disclosures* from the wise and learned” (Lk 10:21, NIV). Little children, as mature child-persons, represent the ontology and function necessary to perceive, receive, and compatibly respond to God’s vulnerable self-disclosures, according to God’s relational terms. The implicit message in Jesus’ words is two-pronged: (1) Immature persons that Jesus refers to as ‘wise and learned’ give primacy to quantitative outer-in criteria by which they define persons (themselves, God and others), and on this basis they function in relationships; (2) in contrast and conflict, mature persons have vulnerably received and responded to God’s relational grace as the only basis to define their person and others in the primacy of relationship with God and others. Maturity has nothing to do with our resources and credentials, nor does our stature based on these have any significance to God.

Although our thinking may affirm the above distinctions, our intuition may resist. Common intuition shaped from our human contexts tell us that we should become like the ‘wise and learned’ in order to mature enough and have the needed resources to participate and be productive in God’s life, just the opposite of the vulnerableness of child-persons. Isn’t that the impression we get in church, for example, as to who are the most qualified persons to teach, preach, lead worship, and nurture the church family? Aren’t the wise and learned the persons who Paul wrote about, the ones who have the gifts necessary to serve as prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, in his letter to the Ephesian church “to equip the saints...for the building up of the body of Christ” (Eph 4:11-13)? How do we address this apparent contradiction?

### **Immature Boasting’s Far-Reaching Consequences**

To help our thinking about the above questions, we need to understand what Paul also says about what constitutes wisdom in his first letter to the Corinthian church, part of which is paraphrased as follows:

“In the wisdom of God, the *human context* did not know God through *its own* wisdom.... God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.... God chose the *child-persons who are regarded as ‘less’ or unqualified* to shame the wise *and learned, to nullify human-determined qualifications*, so that no one might boast in the presence of God” (1 Cor 1:21,25,27-29).

For Paul, the ‘wise and learned’ (per Jer 9:23; cf. Lk 10:21) have wisdom from the common’s human context, which is fragmented information about God as an object to study, attained with the common’s interpretive framework (1 Cor 1:22; 2:8; cf. Rom 8:5-8). This human wisdom is not the wisdom that comes from intimately knowing God by heart-to-heart (i.e. face to face) relational connection (cf. Col 2:2-4,8). Paul could speak

first-hand from his personal experience about the different processes/sources of wisdom, for he had excelled in his former context of Pharisaism, which was characterized by scholarship in Torah and oral law (tradition of the elders), and intellect. According to the standards of his human context, he had much to boast about (Phil 3:4-6). Yet, once Paul experienced, received, and compatibly responded to Christ Face to face (2 Cor 4:6), his heart was set free.

Paul came to understand that all his efforts and achievements that had formerly defined his person and constructed his identity, were barriers to knowing Christ intimately. This is why he considered all his former achievements and status as worthless compared to the experience of knowing Christ in relational terms (Phil 3:7-8; cf. 1 Cor 1:8). Paul's person, his theology and practice were made whole from inner out, which demonstrates the transformation (*metamorphoo*, 2 Cor 3:18) of a member of the 'wise and learned' to the ontology and function of the child-person. Paul, along with Mary (Mk 14:9) and the children praising Jesus in the temple (Mt 21:15-16), illuminate irrefutably the whole theology and practice required of all of us in order for our worship to mature in new wine, to emerge and flow.

Wisdom, in God's terms, is the understanding of the whole that we gain only in relationship with God; this is the relational outcome that includes by necessity our compatible reciprocal response in faith (relational trust)—just as the OT makes clear (e.g. Dt 4:6; Ps 111:10; Prov 1:7). Only this relationship together composes the boast that has any significance at all to God, and this singular boast is that persons "know and understand me" (Jer 9:24). This relational boast is also Jesus' definition of eternal life (Jn 17:3). Moreover, it is for the maturity of this relational boast to be our ongoing experiential reality that the Spirit has been given to dwell in us now, to continue in the compatible and congruent relational connection necessary to know and understand God (1 Cor 2:6-13).

For clarification, Jesus did not (and does not) disparage persons in the academy. The issue that Jesus made definitive is that when persons define their person (and others) on the reductionist basis of outer-in criteria of what they have/do (e.g. knowledge, degrees, and titles), this in turn determines how fragmentary they engage in relationship; that is, they inevitably engage in a competitive-comparative process because they need to determine how they measure up compared to others. The academy commonly values 'civility' in its discourses and dialogues among its participants, ongoingly stressing the need to be irenic. Yet, without addressing the underlying reductionism that fragments persons (to parts of what they do/have) thereby reducing the whole person, relational barriers are the inevitable consequence of the competitive-comparative process; and civility only creates an illusion in discourse and simulates so-called good dialogue, without penetrating relational barriers and vulnerably engaging each other for relationships to come together.

As it is, the academy prepares future church leaders (including worship shapers and leaders), unknowingly nurturing them in the competitive-comparative process of the wise and learned. Child-persons, of course, don't have the stature requiring higher-level credentials. These future leaders bring this mindset to the churches and, in turn, nurture the churches in the same. For this reason, my husband and I have been praying deeply to God to transform to wholeness the academy's interpretive framework and lens. For example, those who teach (or are preparing to teach) subject matter that pertain to God's

relational priority and the church's ontology and function can provide important and needed experiential resources to help build up the new creation family (cf. Mt 13:52) in the new relational order of intimate and equalized relationships. Certainly there are such educators available, but the competitive-comparative process of the theological academy is systemic, notably because the Christian academy increasingly is shaped by (and competes with) secular higher education on the latter's terms. The relational consequence is further reinforcing and sustaining the embodying old of who and what we give, get, and celebrate.

What the persons who function as the 'wise and learned' engage in, and this is why Jesus and Paul clearly reject it, essentially amounts to boasting in themselves, about what they (or their respective institutions, even churches) do or have. Overt boasting (bragging) is not the usual mode for Christians in corporate worship (though they may brag in private) because we Christians know we ought to be humble. However, the person who only gives the outward appearance of humbleness without the inner substance of it is involved in a masquerade (*hypokrisis*, assume a role, like an actor), which both Jesus and Paul warned against (Lk 12:1; 2 Cor 11:13-15, cf. Gal 2:11-13). *Hypokrisis* is antithetical to relational righteousness, so the person functioning in *hypokrisis* (i.e. *hypokritēs*) cannot be counted on to be the person they present in relationships, the integrity and content of their communication, or the depth of relational involvement they appear to engage. That is, *hypokritēs* is not the worshiper who worships in spirit and truth (with honesty of heart) the Father seeks (Jn 4:24). So, for Christians, boasting generally will not be bragging, but indirect and subtle. This presents problems worse than outright bragging because of their masked forms (as displayed in 2 Cor 11:13-15). Whatever its form, immature boasting has unavoidable relational consequences.

Indirect and subtle boasting have familiar forms. For example, subtly putting someone else down through joking or snide remarks is an indirect way of engaging in the comparative process to make oneself look 'better'. The purpose of putting others down (however light the comment may seem) is to put oneself up, that is, to *boost*-boast about oneself. Moreover, to try to pass off put-downs of others as joking only adds to the hurtfulness of the comparative process, and harms relationships. And laughing reinforces and sustains the relational condition "to be apart."

The degree of boasting—overt, indirect, subtle—has no significance; it is the same underlying dynamic from reductionism in various forms. Therefore, as our qualitative-relational interpretive framework and lens mature, we will perceive more readily the subtle boasting that often seems minor and harmless. We also need to fully understand that the inevitable relational consequence of this self-serving kind of boasting—even if very subtle—is relational distance caused by its comparative process, which stratifies relationships whereby persons are considered as better or less. Any degree of immature boasting in worship is particularly alarming because worship is relationship specific to God; the relational purpose is to boast about and celebrate who, what and how God *is* (not fragmenting his person from his actions). Yet worship is also a time to build up the new creation family in intimate and equalized relationships together in God's likeness—a time to boast *in* God, in the reality of who and whose we are.

A few more examples of immature boasting in worship will help us recognize the underlying reductionism, which is often not apparent to us. For example, during corporate worship, church and worship leaders often boast in and about the criteria of, for

example, celebrity and popularity (e.g. celebrity pastors, scholars, popular writers, celebrity worship leaders), and titles (e.g. presidents of Christian institutions and organizations). The boasting about these persons is usually not so subtle but ‘disguised’ as expressions of respect and honor. They may receive applause or even standing ovations—a response that sadly is less frequent for God but to be expected when who and what are celebrated take this form.

On the subtler side, church and worship leaders may—and even without realizing they are doing so—shift the focus to either themselves or others, and away from God. Some pastors tend to mention their own accomplishments, as well as the successful results of their ministries—usually success is described in numbers. Pastors also praise congregations for meeting or exceeding fundraising drives, about which the congregation applauds heartily for themselves. We can all think of many more examples of subtle and overt boost-boasting in worship that takes the focus away from God, thus diminishing relational clarity of whose we are and thus who we worship. We should be alarmed at our participation in the comparative process inherent in such boasting because it always comes at the expense of God and others implied as less.

For these reasons, Jesus opposed any practice that even unintentionally composed fragmented function, which Jesus simply referred to as the ‘wise and learned’. Jesus singled out the ‘wise and learned’ because ever since the primordial garden, humans have given priority to the human reason and referential knowledge by which to define their person as ‘better’ (cf. Gen 3:5-6)<sup>1</sup> in a comparative process with others (cf. also Jas 3:13-17). We can substitute ‘wise and learned’ with any other outer-in criteria of human distinctions by which we boost-boast, all of which reflect the deeper issues summarized here:

When our theological anthropology defines the person by what they possess and can do, then boasting is both expected and necessary to establish our identity, worth and comparative standing in relation to others, including God. This is the expected self-determination and the necessary self-justification which ongoingly emerge from the scope of reductionism’s presence, influence and workings unless recognized, redeemed and transformed in our theological engagement by ‘the presence of the whole’ for the relational outcome of whole theology and practice. Moreover, this relational outcome emerges in the presence of the whole only from the relational imperative of epistemic and ontological humility—just as Paul functioned in his practice and made definitive in his theology.<sup>2</sup>

Immature boasting in corporate worship is not a neutral harmless character flaw. This function of boasting is insufficient for and antithetical to the following: (1) the relational involvement (i.e. as child-persons) necessary to know and understand God, and thus to participate in God’s life on God’s relational terms; (2) to build up the church to maturity in family love (Jn 13:35; Eph 4:16; Col 3:12-16), the distinguishing indicator of which is intimate and equalized relationships together (Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 12:13; Col 3:11) in

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<sup>1</sup> For an essential discussion on the pivotal interaction in the primordial garden, I urge you to read T. Dave Matsuo, “*Did God Really Say That?*” *Theology in the Age of Reductionism* (Theology Study, 2013). Online at <http://4X12.org>. 22-27.

<sup>2</sup> T. Dave Matsuo, “*Did God Really Say That?*”, 37.



relational likeness of the Trinity (as discussed in the previous chapter).

The challenge to us is to redeem this immature boasting, essentially implying subtly “Hallelu *us*” or “hallelu *me*”, to mature boasting of both *Hallelu Yah* and embodied boasting *as* the new wine family involved together in intimate and equalized relationships. This challenge requires us to become vulnerable with our whole person, which then makes imperative our epistemic and ontological humility acknowledging who and what we really are—not in comparison to others but openly with others in relationship together. Yet, to meet this challenge, redemptive change from immature boasting (i.e. common boasting defined and determined by human contexts) to mature boasting (which composes shout-*in*, discussed earlier) is not a matter of reforming by degrees. Rather, the nature of redemptive change requires dying to the old so that the new can emerge. We must die (individually and as a corporate body) to our old interpretive framework and its lens that boast in and about (celebrate) those secondary outer-in criteria. This is nonnegotiable if we are to emerge as the new wine family who are composed of intimate and equalized relationships, without the unavoidable relational barriers in a comparative process and its stratified relationships.

This redemptive change transforms *from* and *to* the following: *from* fragmented reduced persons *to* whole persons redefined by God’s relational grace; *from* constrained old wine function as ‘wise and learned’ *to* new wine function as shout-*in* child-persons; *from* boost-boast in quantitative outer-in boasting in competitive-comparative process *to* mature boast in inner-out qualitative criteria in qualitative-relational involvement in intimate and equalized relationships together; and *from* fragmented individualistic celebration *to* reconciled whole persons in whole relationships to ‘be one as we are one’ that Jesus prayed for (Jn 17:11,21-23)—composing the relational outcome of embodying new the discipleship-worship relationship. To apply Jesus’ relational paradigm further: “The boast you make in worship is the church’s relationships you get.”

This is a core issue for all who follow Jesus: persons relationally involved to be ‘where I am’ and participate in the Father’s new wine family behind the curtain without the veil, who worship the Father in spirit and truth (i.e. with vulnerable honest hearts).

### **The Threat of New Wine**

We saw that maturing was an up and down process for Peter, as reflected in his boost-boasting (Mk 9:5-6, 14:29-31), and so it is for us today. As long as the immature boasting of reductionism remains in place in our worship, whole persons will struggle to emerge and grow. This condition, however, is not an issue merely about the individual worshiper but is a corporate issue involving the entire congregation—that is, it is a vital family matter. It is not adequate to think that only select persons need opportunities in corporate worship to express their shout-*in* to the Lord free from constraints and self-consciousness. All the members need to be encouraged, nurtured, and even challenged to grow in this way. And all the members need to affirm each other, and enact together embodying the new wine, from inner out (cf. Eph 5:15-20). This is essential “for building up the body of Christ, until we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity [*teleios*, complete purpose and outcome], to the measure of the full stature of Christ’s *wholeness*” (Eph 4:12-13), which Paul’s relational work fought for in family love while jointly fighting against reductionism.

Church and worship leadership in particular have the relational responsibility to take the lead in the steps necessary for transforming our worship practices, with the resolve and determination of *kûn* (as the psalmist demonstrated, Ps 108:1). This requires them to lead with their own vulnerable shout-*in* worship in the inner-out function of their whole child-person, thereby embodying new the worship relationship distinguished with their discipleship relationship. For this inner-out function as child-persons, this would require them to undergo the redemptive change of dying to the old so that the new wine can vulnerably emerge and flow. (The words from Isaiah come to mind here: “a little child shall lead them,” Isa 11:6). My husband and I have been praying for these church leaders, wherever they are, to make this uncommon relational response.

Everywhere in the global church, church leadership especially is challenged for this most important relational responsibility, thereby “to equip the saints” (*katartismos*, Eph 4:12). Whole understanding of this is thus summarized: “Their definitive purpose and function is *katartismos* (from *katartizo*, to restore to former condition for complete qualification) of church members to embody the whole ontology and function of God’s new creation family. Paul assumes for church leaders in their purpose and function in *katartismos* that their own persons have been and continue to be [restored to being new again, Col 3:10] and [being made new from inner out, Eph 4:23].”<sup>3</sup> Paul was distinguished whole in his uncommon ontology and function from inner out in God’s relational primacy, and is therefore the model for church leadership to pay attention to—along with Mary’s leadership.

Great care needs to be taken that the persons taking the lead by vulnerably embodying the new wine (as Mary did in her discipleship-worship relationship) are not rebuked, ridiculed, put down, teased or constrained in any way. Rather, church leaders must intentionally, with family love, affirm and encourage the inner-out expressions of worship by all persons. Remember Jesus’ affirmation of Mary as one who embodies the gospel (Mk 14:9). Church leaders also must take the lead to correct (in family love) persons who react negatively, just as Jesus corrected Martha and the other disciples who hassled Mary. Again, persons who worship shout-*in* with vulnerable hearts freely give who and what are God’s, his daughters and sons who worship in spirit and truth (i.e. with vulnerable hearts), and who delight our Father’s heart (Lk 10:21). May these expressions come to delight all our hearts as well.

Building each other up in family love is the family relational responsibility—first and foremost of church leaders, but also of worship leaders and all the members—that Paul illuminated in his letter to the church at Ephesus, paraphrased here:

To correct and nurture all the members in the vulnerable ontology and function of child-persons, for the new wine to emerge and flow in worship, for encouragement in building up the new creation family into wholeness in the qualitative image of the whole of God (nothing less and no substitutes), and in the intimate and equalized relationships in relational likeness of the Trinity—to embody the wholeness of Christ (cf. Eph 4:12-13; 4:22-23; Col 2:9-10).

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<sup>3</sup> T. Dave Matsuo, *The Whole of Paul and the Whole in His Theology: Theological Interpretation in Relational Epistemic Process* (Paul Study, 2010). Online at <http://4X12.org>, 238.

Our identity as God’s new wine family depends on our resolve of *kûn* to bring forth the new wine, which can only happen in compatible reciprocal relationship with the Spirit. Otherwise, we will end up trying to be new by our own efforts (e.g. innovations), thus the new wine will be constrained by old wineskins, and everyone will go back to thinking the old is good enough or better (cf. Lk 5:39).

The presence and example of shout-*in* of child-persons will threaten many persons—especially church leaders, but also worship leaders and church members who define their person by secondary outer-in criteria (a narrowed-down and fragmented perception of the person that ignores the qualitative-relational function of the heart). This outer-in mindset biases their perception of God by narrowing God down, for example, to static attributes God has, like transcendence, holiness, majesty, glory, omnipresence, omniscience, and contemporary ascriptions like wonderful and awesome—in superlative terms in a comparative framework.

The narrowed-down mindset and lens also define God by what he does, such as his actions in creation, miracles, and other great demonstrations of power—all perceived apart from their relational significance, that is, de-relationalized from God’s whole relational purpose. Accordingly, this fragmented and reduced definition of God determines how worship should be designed with the bias toward what is worthy of such royalty. Many derive their vision of worship from the images of worship in the book of Revelation, which John saw in visions: The visions of worship in a great throne room in the book of Revelation (Rev 4-5, 7), with elders falling prostrate before his royal throne, the whole diversity of humanity, angels, and creation praising God in incomparable worship. What many Christians take from these visions is the huge gap between God’s superlative worthiness and our relative unworthiness in a comparative process (cf. Peter refusing Jesus’ footwashing). We then construct our vision of what worship is worthy of this God, in outer-in terms. This dynamic echoes Peter’s definition of himself and Jesus by their roles in the comparative process of ‘better’ and ‘less’, and on that basis determined how Peter related to Jesus with the relational barrier of the veil still over his heart.

The point in all of the above is this: church and worship leaders, and church members who define themselves and God in the above ways, will resist and constrain expressions that challenge their preconceived notions of what God wants from us, which are determined by their narrowed-down mindset. Such resistance will likely be promoted as the correct ‘belief system’ about God, but this reasoning has not yet vulnerably received the Father’s relational imperative to “listen to my Son” (Mt 17:5)—thus gives priority, for example, to the Rule of Faith over the primacy of relationship together. Nor has this reasoning paid attention to Jesus’ relational imperatives to “consider carefully what you hear *from me*,” which includes “unless you humble yourself and become like child-persons....” (Mt 18:3; cf. Lk 10:21).

Because of this resistance, they will make it very difficult for persons functioning with the vulnerableness of child-persons. They will somehow communicate that these child-persons are “different,” or anomalies, which is another way of communicating the distinction of ‘less’. Recall that in a similar though more direct way, Martha and other disciples harshly rebuked Mary’s whole person as she stepped out to respond to Jesus with her vulnerable involvement (Lk 10:40; Mk 14:3-5). This constraining dynamic directly conflicts with the new relational order of intimate and equalized relationships

that Jesus embodied in relationship with persons, notably at his table fellowships and his washing the disciples' feet, to establish persons together in the new creation family.

The negativity toward Mary was not unique to Mary, and cannot be attributed only to sexism, because sexism is but one expression of the underlying fragmentation and reductionism from an outer-in interpretive framework. Other persons who functioned in wholeness and similarly received negative reactions (for the same reason that Mary did) include Levi, Zacchaeus, the shouting children in the temple, and the ex-prostitute who washed Jesus' feet with her tears (Lk 7:36-50). Each of these persons responded to Jesus with the compatible reciprocal response and congruent relational connection necessary to embody the new relational order to whole-ly compose new the worship relationship. In their responses to Jesus, they embodied the celebration of who and what they were in compatible reciprocal relationship, inseparably celebrating *whose* they were. In their various ways, these persons model for us the whole ontology and function in the new relational order of intimate and equalized relationships engaging the Father's family love, in spite of the negative reactions from others that so often limits and constrains our involvement to the status quo.

Yet, the reality is that wherever and whenever the new wine emerges, the presence of the sin of reductionism will seek to constrain it, put it back into an old wineskin of self-concerns and self-consciousness, and thus self-constraint. The consequences will always be place on the other person(s), either to hassle the person, as Mary experienced with Martha and the other disciples (Lk 10:40; Mt 26:8-10), or to actually get the person to withdraw in some way, that is, to diminish the person by conforming to what's common.

To any among us who suppress (if only in our private thoughts) those functioning from inner out as child-persons, Jesus opposes us. Jesus opposes our fragmented and reduced ontology and function (that of the 'wise and learned') that tries to constrain wholeness of persons, just as he opposed and corrected Martha and the disciples who tried to constrain Mary in her whole ontology and function, discussed earlier (in chap.3). Reduced ontology and function in no way is able to make relational connection with the whole and uncommon God. It is indispensable for our maturity also to understand that Jesus nonnegotiablely opposes the presence and influence of fragmented and reduced ontology and function, including persons who impose their reductionist practice on others (also discussed in chap. 3; cf. Mt 18:6-10; Gal 2:11-14). These are incompatible and incongruent for our discipleship-worship relationship to make relational connection with God, insufficient for our immature boasting to be transformed to mature boasting, and fatal to our identity as the new creation family in whom God can dwell by the Spirit. When the churches we build are constructed from reduced ontology and function (expressed in immature boasting), then we are engaged in the subtle practice of ontological simulation with epistemological illusion. The unavoidable relational consequence is the experiential reality "to be apart" from the wholeness Jesus embodied new for his church family.

Therefore, for those of us who are like Martha and the other disciples, we need to receive Jesus' hermeneutic correction seriously, in humbleness and with fear (cf. Phil 2:12-13). We also need to learn from child-persons such as Mary that negative reactions and relational consequences come with the territory of following Jesus on his uncommon relational path. It is only as we are equalized together in intimate relationships—behind

the curtain with the veil removed—will we embody the new relational order that is the distinguished outcome of being relationally reconciled with each other (Eph 2:13-22; Heb 9:8).

Whenever others tell us we should not be like Mary, but be more like so-and-so (add the name of someone having distinction from their achievements, reputation or renown), we can and must count on the Spirit to encourage our hearts with Jesus' relational words to ongoingly give us light and understanding (Ps 119:98-100, 130). Jesus' whole person—involving all his relational words and actions with persons throughout the incarnation—is the key to our whole function. Certain words in particular will be vital to our hearts' whole function with nothing less and no substitutes (such as Lk 10:21; Mt 18:3), behind the curtain with the veil removed. Yet, we can't be selective of his words but simply must "listen to my Son" and "pay attention to what you hear, the measure you give will be the measure you get."

With Jesus as our hermeneutical, epistemological and functional-relational keys, *who* and *what* we give to God and each other in these intimate and equalized relationships constitute the new wine family. These are the relationships in which we as new wine must corporately be involved, in the dynamic of family love (in relational likeness of the Trinity), wherever and whenever we come together corporately in our family times of worship. In these distinguished worship times, there can be no distinctions made on the basis of human differences. Rather, we need to see ourselves and each other and function together, compatible and congruent with how God is involved with us, showing no favoritism, but vulnerably present and intimately involved with us.

We need the resolve of *kūn*, such as Mary demonstrated, to stay compatibly and reciprocally involved with the Spirit for all the relational work we are called to embrace together—nothing less and no substitutes!

## **Whose We Are!**

How would you describe in family terms your experiences in corporate worship? On the one hand, it is not unusual to hear pastors refer to their churches as "family." They often quickly add that there are always difficult persons and oddballs in every family, and they might also say matter-of-factly or tongue-in-cheek that family relationships are always "messy." Generally these comments are made lightly, even in a joking manner, and the congregation chuckles in agreement. On the other hand, most churches give greater priority to the biological family unit. Based on this appearance of priority between the church family and the biological family, the overall message is that the local church need not take itself too seriously as family. What then are we communicating to our Father about who we are, and more important, whose we are? How is this compatible and congruent with our identity as God's new creation family—the family Jesus saved us to and Paul made conclusive as the only relational outcome?

It is vital for us to transpose our thinking about church to new creation family, because Jesus' purpose in coming into the human context was to reconcile persons into an uncommon (holy) family in which the whole and uncommon God would dwell ongoingly by the Spirit (Jn 14:16-21,23; Eph 1:4-14, 2:14-22). Jesus came to establish us together to be the whole and holy (uncommon) family in which God is our Father, and

we are the daughters and sons (Rom 8:14-17, 29). In unmistakable relational terms, Jesus spoke of the primacy of his Father's family over the secondary place of the biological family, not to diminish the latter's importance but to put it into the larger context of God's relational whole (e.g. Mt 12:48-50; Jn 19:26-27). This also makes secondary and subordinates the specific identity of any particular local church to the global church, the experiential truth of which may be difficult for many independent churches to accept given the fragmented experiential reality of the global church.

Throughout his time on earth, Jesus consistently used family language (as did Paul) because he was vulnerably involved in nothing less than the relational work of establishing the Father's family. Jesus said that his followers would extend his relational work even further (Jn 14:12). Paul took up this relational work with the vulnerable depth from his innermost, and we are likewise challenged to continue building together this new creation family above any other priority (Gal 6:15; Eph 4:24). Embodying new the discipleship-worship relationship is why our mature boasting is so important to God, and irreducible to anything less and nonnegotiable to any substitutes.

Our corporate identity needs to emerge in wholeness so that corporately 'what we give' in our boasting (Mk 4:24) will truly mature in likeness of the whole and uncommon God. For our boast to fully mature, we need to understand the integral relational work Jesus accomplished while on the cross—beyond his sacrifice for atonement our sins. Consider carefully the following excerpt from an important discussion that corrects our narrowed-down view of the cross. The common narrowed-down view of the cross misses the fuller disclosure of the Trinity's relational work to reconcile us into the Father's family:

The prevailing cross still used today needs to be reconstructed with Jesus' whole person building his kingdom *into* his church family. When the second criminal asked Jesus to remember him in his kingdom, Jesus equalized him and embraced him in whole relationship together. This was not a unique circumstance but an integral extension of the whole person and relationships Jesus embodied. In his whole ontology and function on the cross...Jesus was building his church in the primacy of whole relationship together as family when he connected his mother Mary and his beloved disciple John in new creation relationship together distinguished by family [Jn 19:26-27]. Our cross must, by the nature of his cross, also be constructed to build his new creation family.

His new creation family...certainly requires redemptive change...for this reconciliation to be composed in the primacy of whole relationship together. Redemptive reconciliation requires hard choices and deep changes from inner out. This unavoidably necessitates epistemic and ontological humility, just as Jesus made requisite in the first beatitude for the identity formation of those belonging to his family.... To build his family Jesus clearly distinguished the primacy of his family over what is only secondary, and which cannot be used to displace or be a substitute for the primary position and function of his family. For example, "Who is my family...persons who respond relationally to my Father is my family" (Mt 12:48-49). Biological family represents only one of many ways that preoccupation with the secondary reduces the primacy of his family (as Paul made definitive, Rom 14:17), all of which require redemptive change. These of course are hard changes to choose,

likely getting to the roots of our own identity or self-worth. All of this by design converges on the cross, that is, when whole-ly constructed.<sup>4</sup>

The significance of the cross is that Jesus accomplished the integral relational work of family love that was necessary for full soteriology—saving us from the human condition ‘to be relationally apart’ and embedded in the sin of reductionism, to relationally belong as daughter and son in the Father’s family. By establishing John and Mary (Jesus’ mother) together, Jesus subordinated the biological family to the Father’s new creation, thus composing our primary identity in Christ into which all our other identities are contextualized by the process of reciprocating contextualization (mentioned earlier). All secondary matters must be integrated into this primary in order for the primacy of the new creation family to emerge and mature.

The cross’ full significance is given greater clarity by the fact that ‘the cross serves the Father’ for his relational purpose to establish his uncommon family (us), in which the Trinity can “come to them and make our home with them” (Jn 14:23) and “As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us...I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one *family*” (Jn 17:21,23). In relational congruity then, the cross we claim must, by the nature of Jesus’ cross, constitute God’s new dwelling. As long as our boasting in the cross remains narrowly focused on Jesus’ sacrifice, we will (continue to) fail to mature in our boasting, because we will not have anything further to boast about other than Jesus’ sacrificial death. Yet, as stated earlier, the writer of Hebrews urged his readers/listeners to move beyond such basics to maturity (Heb 6:1; cf. v.6).

What, then, are we building when we come together to worship? That is, are who and what we boast in about the integration of who we are and whose we are as the new creation family, or merely a simulation of it? Jesus gave priority to the Father’s family above all other identities to illuminate the primacy of relationship together in wholeness and what has primary significance to God. Is this the measure we use to determine the measure we give? Who and what we give will be who and what we get and celebrate.

## **Light and Salt**

Our new and whole identity as the whole and holy God’s very own family becomes distinguished only in intimate and equalized relationships that we engage together. In view of our new and whole identity, let’s consider what our worship relationship communicates. Does our corporate identity as God’s new creation family have relational clarity whenever we gather in corporate worship beyond merely a disembodied-derelationalized concept in our theology? Do we function in our new identity from inner out on the basis of God’s relational grace, or is there immature boasting? Is the primacy that God gives to his distinguished family clearly embodied in our worship? Is our compatible relational involvement with the Spirit evident by our vulnerable involvement with each other without the veil of relational barriers (Eph 2:14,22)? In other words, does our boasting in the Lord embody new our corporate

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<sup>4</sup> For the full discussion from which this excerpt was taken see T. Dave Matsuo, *The Gospel of Transformation: Distinguishing the Discipleship and Ecclesiology Integral to Salvation* (Transformation Study, 2015). Online at <http://4X12.org>, 316-17.

identity by making who and what we boast in and about (whose we are) evident in the depth of relationships of family love we engage in worship—as Jesus made imperative in his new command (Jn 13:34-35)?

If we answer ‘yes’ to all of the above, then we are corporately embodying the wholeness (peace) of Christ (Col 2:9-10, 3:15-16) in which all the members have wholeness and well-being (*šālôm*, biblical peace), fulfilling God’s definitive blessing (Num 6:24-26). Now *that* is something distinguished to boast in and about with *joy-full shout-in!* If our hearts are not stirred up by this experiential truth, then this relational outcome is not an experiential reality but, at best, a referential affirmation.

Contrary to many theologians, worship thinkers, spiritual formation mentors, and even Christian psychologists, identity formation in wholeness does not take place by outer-in change—which only mirrors change shaped from the surrounding context (*syschematizo*, Rom 12:2). That is, we do not undergo inner-out redemptive change necessary for transformation (*metamorphoō*, Rom 12:2; 2 Cor 3:18) by the following: merely by attending worship services over time; by cognitively learning the Christian vocabulary (‘churchspeak’) and “sacred” actions (kneeling, prostrating); by even raising hands and shouting praise; by practicing spiritual disciplines; as the outcome of baptism and Communion (though these last two have deep relational significance to our corporate life together as the new creation family when participation is vulnerably involved from inner out in relational terms over referential terms). Rather, the process of identity formation in our innermost as our Father’s daughters and sons is a function only of compatible and congruent relational connection with God in Face-to-face relationship on God’s relational terms—the relational outcome of which in reciprocal relationship together is the distinguished identity of God’s new creation family.

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus illuminated for us the relational-functional process of identity formation of who we are as his disciples and, inseparably, whose we are as the Father’s children, in the Beatitudes (Mt 5:1-12). In essence, the Beatitudes take us through the relational work of bringing our heart vulnerably exposed before the Father, and dying to the self-determination by which we constructed our competing fragmented identities upon secondary outer-in criteria. We must bring these before the Father with our heart fully exposed in its deepest need. From this critical point forward, our hearts go through a process with the Spirit’s deep working that frees our hearts, heals and makes them whole by reconstructing anew our identity in relational trust and wholeness. While this is an individual process we each must go through, it is integrally what we share together in the new creation family.<sup>5</sup>

Jesus then clarified the necessary ongoing qualitative-relational function in our new identity that would distinguish us as the Father’s own daughters and sons. Jesus used the metaphors of light and salt (Mt 5:13-16) for the clarity and depth of our identity, which must be reflected not just in our theology, but inseparably in our practice, summarized as follows:

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<sup>5</sup> For the in-depth discussion of the Beatitudes and rest of the Sermon on the Mount, I recommend T. Dave Matsuo, *Jesus into Paul: Embodying the Theology and Hermeneutic of the Whole Gospel* (Integration Study, 2012). Online at <http://4X12.org>, Ch. 8 “The New Wine and Old Wineskins,” 211-247; or, T. Dave Matsuo, *The Gospel of Transformation*, chaps. 5 and 9.



Wholeness of identity as Jesus' followers is a relationship-specific process engaged in the practice of the contrary culture clearly distinguished from prevailing cultures (including popular Christian subcultures), which Jesus made definitive in his sanctified life and practice and outlined in the Sermon on the Mount. Clarity and depth of his followers' identity is rooted in the following: *what* we are in the relational progression of reciprocal relationship with Jesus, and thus *who* we become intimately with the Father in his family together, as we also reciprocally work with the Spirit in *how* we ongoingly function.

The clarity of the light and the depth of the salt are the relational outcome of this ongoing intimate relationship with the Trinity. Any identity formed while distant from this relationship (which happens even in church) or in competition with this relationship (which happens even in Christian subcultures) diminishes the basic identity of being the whole of God's very own ("the light") as well as deteriorates its qualitative substance ("the salt"). Certainly, then, the whole presentation of self to others is crucial to the identity of Jesus' followers. This is the importance of Jesus interrelating identity with righteousness in conjoint function. While identity informs us of who, what and how we are, righteousness is the functional process that practices the whole of what, who and how we are. Identity and righteousness are conjoined to present a whole person in congruence (ontologically and functionally) to what, who and how that person is—not only in Christ but in the whole of God, the Trinity. Righteousness is necessary so that his followers can be counted on to be those whole persons—nothing less and no substitutes, and thereby distinguished from reductionist practice (Mt 5:20).<sup>6</sup>

When our identity has clarity and depth, it functions as light in distinctive wholeness and as salt in its qualitative presence. Light and salt express the distinguished identity of who we belong to. When not made ambiguous or diminished, light and salt 'boast' by reflecting and giving witness to the whole and uncommon God. Therefore, whenever and wherever we come together in corporate worship, our identity as God's whole-ly created new wine family must function as light and salt in order to be distinguishable from common function of stratified/hierarchies in relational distance. Remember that persons' hearts are kept distant or hidden (even from themselves) when they are fragmented and defined by only quantitative parts (what they do or have), and are therefore not whole-ly available for intimate connection with other hearts.

Who, what, and how we function compose our relational righteousness that God can count on us for, a vital aspect for our identity to be whole and uncommon, in likeness of God. Any relational distance diminishes our functioning identity from God's new creation family in intimate and equalized relationships and shifts us into something much less, or some poor substitute that effectively creates a competing identity that is not able to illuminate whose we are. Rather, in this competing substitute identity, we have created an ontological simulation (with epistemological illusion) of who and what we are as (1) Jesus' followers and thus (2) God's church, both of which re-shape God in the process of idolization of God, which we noted earlier.

Competing identities unavoidably result in immature boasting in worship. Relationally, when we corporately present a competing identity to God, God cannot

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<sup>6</sup> T. Dave Matsuo, *The Gospel of Transformation*, 199.

relationally count on us to be his uncommon family, the relational implication of which is the point of the first commandment in the OT (see Ex 20:4-5). Whenever we compromise who we are and whose we are, we can only expect our identity as salt to be reduced to a shallowness and our identity as light to be fragmented into ambiguity—determining the limits of who and what we give and thus can get and celebrate. This critical condition lacks our relational righteousness, whereby we engage in both *hypokrisis* and all kinds of boost-boasting to try to make up (or cover-up) for our lacks. Even with our best intentions we often present competing and compromising identities to God in worship, which of course continues to limit and constrain who and what we and God gets and thus can celebrate. And we should not expect anything more if this is the script narrating our discipleship-worship relationship.

### **Unmasking *Hypokrisis***

Maturing to wholeness certainly goes far beyond what I had imagined, requiring of me not what I expected (vulnerable inner-out change), along with not requiring of me what I did expect (easier outer-in change to measure-up in a comparative process). An unexpected necessary change was from my immature boasting in worship, as just discussed, to mature boasting. Looking back on my long journey, I had often felt that something deep and significant was missing in my worship experiences and relationships, even as part of music teams and as a worshiper in the pews. That ‘something’ was that God usually seemed far away from my heart. I also sensed that my identity as God’s daughter did not go very deep (I can be honest about it now, but I wasn’t back then).

Yet, this did not make sense to me, given that I was worshiping God, or so I assumed and thus believed. Once in awhile I “felt” God’s presence, yet worshiping (as well as praying) did not adequately bridge the experiential gap between God and my heart, but I kept trying. Now I understand the reason for the experiential gap: *God* wasn’t far from me; rather, *my* heart was far from God (and I’m not referring to the misleading presence of mere emotional affect), keeping relational distance though I abundantly “honored” God with my lips. My immature boasting (from defining my person, God and others by outer-in criteria) reflected the lack of wholeness in my person, which played out somewhat like an actor in a play. This is exactly the *hypokrisis* that Jesus exposed in some Pharisees (discussed earlier, Mt 15:8), and that Jesus warns us against (“the yeast of the Pharisees,” Lk 12:1).

*Hypokrisis* is playing out the masquerade of immature boasting in worship, that is, the ontological simulation and epistemological illusion that immature boasting hides behind—as if wearing a mask that presents a different identity of who and what we are. We may look as if we’re really boasting about and worshiping God by coming to worship, singing, serving, doing all these church things, even at some sacrifice to ourselves. These simulations and illusions are always substitutes for whole persons in whole relationships that are intimate and equalized in Face-to-face connection with our Father without the veil. We all engage in this *hypokrisis*-masquerade, at one time or another, not for the purpose to simply deceive but as a convenient substitute. We cannot necessarily discern this in our own practice, yet God always does because he sees behind it into our hearts (Acts 1:24; 15:8; Rev 2:23).

It is my view that immature boasting is far more pervasive in worship (and all of

our church practice) than we would want to admit. This isn't unique to Christians but just mirrors what is common in our surrounding contexts. I hope readers are willing to examine honestly the presence of immature boasting of the *hypokrisis*-masquerade that you hear (or that you yourself engage in) in worship; or, at the very least, I hope you will be open to even considering its presence. If our identity is not clearly distinguished by wholeness of persons and relationships, then we cannot escape the reality of substitutes and secondary matter occupying our worship practice. So much of corporate worship today participates in immature boasting that it is normative, and has shaped Christian worship culture to a great extent. That is, much of worship is *embedded* in convenient substitutes and secondary presentations of who and what we are, especially with subtle forms that are convincing and appealing to a common lens.

I suggest that—and I say this from understanding my own *hypokrisis*—*hypokrisis* in worship has figured largely in the church's diminishment (either quantitatively or qualitatively) in the global North. If the church is not actually dying in the global North, or if evangelical churches can look beyond their large attendance, they have certainly become undistinguished from the common sociocultural context in its relationships. The light and salt of the church's witness by our identity as God's (e.g. Jn 13:34-35; 17:21,23) does not have much clarity and depth; and this identity often seems to merely be one part of our identity along with all the other identities that we present to others that are based on human distinctions.

Besides the role functions in church practice already mentioned, other frequent bases for Christians' primary identity (in actual practice if not in theology) are denominations, race, ethnicity, gender, age, class, nationality/patriotism, political views. If our primary boasting (whether by our words or actions) includes any of these distinctions, then we are inadvertently creating or maintaining relational divisions—the fragmentations and reductions that diminish who and what we give, get and celebrate in worship. Everyone loses out because the church's identity is ambiguous and lacks depth: God, who does not receive who and what are his; ourselves, who don't experience the blessed relational outcome in the truth of whose we are; and the rest of the world, left with little understanding of God's response to its relational human condition 'to be relationally apart' because they do not see in us or experience from us the wholeness of *who we've become* and *whose we are*.

Despite all of our good intentions and desires to worship God faithfully—as well as to proclaim the gospel effectively in worship services and beyond—there persists the heart of the matter. This persistent issue involves where our heart is and thus the primary focus in our practice, in spite of correct theology. An unexpected irony for us to understand is this: God's heart is more available to us for intimate relational connection than our hearts are available to God. This is why Jesus keeps knocking at the door of the church's heart (Rev 3:20).

When we ongoingly are involved in Jesus' relational context and process for reciprocal relationship together, then our identity as his followers and the Father's new creation family can grow in clarity and depth of whose we are. And only on this relational basis can we embody new the discipleship-worship relationship. The lack of clarity and depth in identity prompted Jesus to address some of the churches in his post-ascension discourse in the book of Revelation. To each of the seven churches, Jesus essentially paraphrased "the measure you give": "Let anyone who has an ear *listen with*

*the vulnerable heart of a child-person, listen in the primacy of relationship together to what the Spirit in compatible reciprocal relationship is saying to the churches about the ambiguity-or-clarity and shallowness-or-depth of your identity as mine*” (Rev 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22). We need to learn from his relational words to them (and us) by listening carefully, paying attention with our compatible relational involvement with the Spirit, with our clarified epistemology and corrected hermeneutic...

### **Jesus Chastening the Churches**

Whenever we come together to corporately worship God, we either function in our whole identity as our Father’s very own beloved ones, or else we function with a competing identity as something less (perhaps a social organization with a religious language and culture) or some substitutes. Accordingly, our boast is either the mature boasting of shout-*in* in the former, or the immature boost-boast of the latter. Something less and some substitutes are precisely what Jesus addressed in his post-ascension discourse to some of the churches (Rev 2-3), while affirming other churches for their compatible and congruent practice. The issue for the churches receiving Jesus’ clarification and correction was that their ambiguous and shallow identities reflected the common’s criteria by which they came to redefine themselves, which was no longer God’s relational grace for the primacy of relationship.

Jesus chastened the churches at Ephesus, Sardis, Thyatira, and Laodicea. He began with uncovering the church at Ephesus because “you have forsaken [abandoned] your first love” (Rev 2:4, NIV). Their “first love” acknowledges their previous compatible relational involvement with God in family love (cf. Eph 1:15-16), but it also implies another love (a substitute) that had taken the first love’s place. The church at Ephesus had shifted from the primacy of God’s relational terms to giving primacy to being doctrinally pure, which on appearance seems to be correct and what God would want. That’s the subtlety of reductionism. Whoever or whatever we “love” (give primacy to) is what we celebrate in worship, what we boast about and exalt. The three others similarly substituted for the primacy of relationship with something less, some secondary outer-in criteria by which they came to define themselves, and thus boast about in a competing identity.

This study will not fully discuss all these churches. For the present discussion, however, the following excerpt summarizes the competing identities that reflect how they defined themselves; their underlying criteria were all secondary matter that were given primacy in place of God’s relational terms for relationship together. Their criteria and terms for their identities determined their theology and practice, which embodied old the discipleship-worship relationship.<sup>7</sup>

These churches were not unique in church formation and they cannot be considered exceptions in church history. Each church has a counterpart in the contemporary church that must be taken seriously because of Jesus’ critique for his church to be whole:

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<sup>7</sup> T. Dave Matsuo, *The Gospel of Transformation*, 314. I strongly urge all church leaders to read the complete discussion from which this is excerpted.

1. Church at Ephesus—the theologically orthodox or doctrinally correct church
2. Church at Sardis—the successful “mega” church, or multisite church
3. Church at Thyatira—the activist, service oriented, or missional church
4. Church at Laodicea—the traditional status-quo church or consumer church of convenience.

All these churches have in common what continue to be critical interrelated issues needing epistemological clarification and hermeneutical correction: a weak view of sin not including reductionism, and a fragmentary theological anthropology reducing ontology and function.

It is crucial for the clarity and depth of our identity to learn from the above churches and Jesus’ challenges to them. Immature boasting based on outer-in criteria of secondary matter had displaced the primacy of relationship, thus clouding whose they were. Even though their specific contexts are located in ancient history, the relational issues are indisputably recognizable and relevant to our churches today; they are *us*. In his discourse, Jesus expressed his displeasure with them, holding them accountable for their practices that gave God ‘something less and some substitutes’ in place of their hearts being vulnerable and available to him. Yet, Jesus continued in loving pursuit of their hearts for intimate relationship together in whole-ly communion (Rev 3:19-20).

Our identity in wholeness as whose we are has to be relationally rooted in the depth of our ongoing relational involvement with God in our innermost. Jesus’ words to the churches speak to us today because how God did relationship back then is how God does relationship always. God is vulnerably present and intimately involved with us today, which is communication to us through his relational words and the reciprocal involvement of the Spirit. Our part is indisputably first to listen to the Spirit with vulnerable hearts (and minds), which may involve first dying to keeping our hearts unavailable to really listen to God’s heart, and dying to our old interpretive framework with its biases and preconceived notion about who and what have relational significance to the whole and uncommon God. In other words, embodying new the discipleship-worship relationship requires the whole theology and practice that emerges, unfolds and matures only from our epistemic and ontological humility, giving primacy to God and letting God speak for himself.

## **Growing into the Dwelling of God**

It is simply beyond words and human understanding that the transcendent and holy God is vulnerably present and intimately involved with his human creation: he has loved us immeasurably, has long desired to respond to our human relational condition ‘to be apart’ since creation, and has persistently sought persons to respond compatibly in reciprocal relationship together to compose “a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit” (Eph 2:22, NIV). Part of what is so remarkable is the vulnerability of God in all his dealings with humans. In Moses’ time under the first covenant, the dwelling for his presence was the temple, in the Most Holy Place behind the curtain (Ex 25:8, 29:45). God’s unmistakable desire was intimate relationship together, as he vulnerably

communicated to them, “I will place my dwelling in your midst.... I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people” (Lev 26:12). Yet, intimate relationship together was accessible only behind the curtain of God’s dwelling (Ex 26:33).

When the new covenant replaced the old covenant by the relational work of the Son (Heb 10:19-22), something even more improbable and remarkable came into being: the Father established that his family dwelling was now to be in our hearts corporately together (Jn 14:23; Eph 2:22), thereby composing his new creation family with the veil removed (2 Cor 3:18). To make our corporate innermost his dwelling is surely risky based on our susceptibility to distance our hearts from him; yet reciprocal relationship involved that risk to which God makes himself vulnerable for the sake of having whole-ly communion together. Therefore, by God’s family love and relational grace, God’s ongoing vulnerable presence in us by the Spirit has become our improbable and remarkable inheritance already today (2 Cor 1:22). Now we belong to God, and God belongs to us.

For this improbable and blessed relational outcome—composing “who and what we get”—the Spirit is present in our hearts for ongoing compatible reciprocal (not unilateral) relational involvement together. If this experiential truth of the Spirit (Jn 16:13) is referentialized, the Spirit’s presence and involvement will not be our experiential reality in reciprocal relationship. Without the Spirit’s presence in/with us for this relationship, we could not experience belonging to the Father’s family as daughters and sons who have been freed to uncommon Face-to-face, heart-to-heart relational connection without the relational barriers of the veil (Rom 8:15-16; 2 Cor 3:18). To reciprocally respond vulnerably, our hearts deeply need the Spirit to help us corporately make the intimate relational connections in wholeness together—with the Father and each other as sisters and brother—for the relational reality of belonging to each other in whole-ly (i.e. integrally whole and holy) communion.

Clearly, the Spirit is present not for us to remain isolated in our individual relationship with the Lord, but to grow and mature together into an uncommon relational dwelling context for God. This is how our identity as whose we are becomes clearer, deepens in its qualitative substance, and emerges to flow as the new wine family to celebrate whose we are.

### **The Spirit for Relational Belonging**

If what we are growing together relationally when we gather for worship is indeed the new creation family, then the Spirit is indispensable to integrally distinguish our persons, relationships and this relational outcome—integrating into wholeness together by the Spirit. There is no other purpose for the Spirit to dwell in us. Without the Spirit’s vulnerable presence and intimate involvement with us in our innermost, and without our compatible reciprocal involvement with the Spirit, what we may build together might as well be just another tower of Babel, or just another socio-religious group. That is, in terms of our relational experience in corporate worship (and beyond), without our reciprocal relationship with the Spirit, what we build together functions essentially as a relational orphanage—a place to come and have membership but not relationally belong together as family. When we gather together and relational distance characterizes how we

are (vertically with God and horizontally with each other), then any appearance of or talk about being church-as-family can only be an ontological simulation promoted by epistemological illusion.

God's very own Spirit is here with us now, dwelling in our hearts for compatible and reciprocal relationship together (Jn 14:26). Yet, the church (local and global) still needs epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction for how we see the Spirit's person, and how that determines how we function with the Spirit. Just as we must not fragment the Father and Jesus to mere parts of what they do or have, so also we must not fragment the Holy Spirit's person to just an aspect of his "power," as a force for us to use. The trinitarian persons equally share God's being as heart, God's nature as relational, and God's presence as vulnerable; the Spirit as person is one in ontology in the whole of God (the Trinity)—nothing less and no substitutes. Jesus' relational paradigm continues to correct us: "the measure you give *in relationship with the Spirit* will be the measure you *experience relationally belonging to us*" (Mk 4:24).

The two major ways we fragment and reduce the Spirit are familiar to us. First, we think of the Spirit as an impersonal power, the 'it' that bestows spiritual gifts, which we commonly misperceive in reduced terms of enabling what an individual has or does (e.g. teach, preach, heal, serve, speak in tongues). With this fragmented view of the Spirit, we pray for manifestations of the Spirit to enhance our preaching, our worship leading, our ministry, and bring forth fruit of our evangelism—all to witness to God's power.

Jesus, however, made it clear that the Spirit's relational purpose is for the whole of God to dwell in our hearts (Jn 14:16-23), thereby to compose us as God's intimate dwelling (Eph 2:22). In the primacy God gives to relationship together, the Spirit is vulnerably present and intimately involved with us corporately—just as Jesus was with his disciples during his incarnation. The Spirit is Jesus' relational replacement for this ongoing dynamic relationship together, yet, in a sense, more so. That is, the Spirit is intimately involved with our innermost to help us bring our innermost to the Father, by which we make face-to-face, heart-to-heart relational connection with our "Abba" (Rom 8:14-16; Gal 4:6-7). This is the relational belonging that Paul experienced to make his person whole, and what we need to and can experience also (2 Cor 3:16-18). The Spirit of truth (Jn 14:17; 16:13) herein extends Jesus' relational function as the relational Truth by both connecting our hearts with our Father's heart and sealing our belonging relationally to God's whole family (2 Cor 1:22).

For the maturing of our identity as God's new creation family, distinguished by our uncommon function in intimate and equalized relationships together, we need to pay attention to Jesus' disclosures about the Spirit and Paul's whole knowledge about the Spirit's central function for our ecclesiology to be transformed to wholeness.

Just as Jesus identified the Spirit as the integral key to what unfolds after his ascension (Jn 14:16-18,26; 15:26; 16:8-15; Acts 1:4-5, 7-8), Paul confirmed the Spirit as that key and affirmed his reciprocal relational work as the innermost of God's presence and involvement (1 Cor 2:9-16; 12:3-13; 2 Cor 3:17-18; Rom 8:9-16; Eph 1:13-14; 2:22). The synthesis of Jesus *into* Paul and their gospel of wholeness and its relational outcome of the new creation family unfold only in our whole understanding of the Spirit. Accordingly, as we transition from 'God's

relational context and process to transformation’...to ‘the relational outcome of wholeness’..., the composition of this outcome pivots on the Spirit—the irreplaceable replacement person.<sup>8</sup>

When intimate-equalized relationships is our experience corporately in worship, we are together all affirmed, all comforted, all encouraged, and further built up in the clarity and depth of our identity, unmistakably belonging to God’s very own family. This matures who and what we boast in and about, because who and what we get in wholeness frees us to celebrate God’s whole. Furthermore, the primacy of relationally growing together our Father’s family in family love as persons who relationally belong together, also must become the integrating context for all the spiritual gifts that are given to us by the Spirit. These are gifts to the family, not to individuals for self-promotion; and churches need to stop highlighting the individual possessing spiritual gifts. Paul illuminated this definitively in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 12), with special emphasis on the Spirit’s relational function for the primacy of relationally growing into wholeness God’s family. Paul further put into necessary perspective that being intimately involved together with the Spirit in family love (*agapē*) is how we are “rooted and established together” by relationally bonding us into wholeness (1 Cor 13; Eph 3:16-17, NIV; cf. 4:3; Col 3:14). This relational outcome certainly involves synergy (whole greater than sum of its parts), and yet it unfolds not as a mysterious process but from the vulnerable relational work of the Spirit in reciprocal involvement with us, ongoing and not unilaterally.

This brings us to the second major way we fragment the Spirit, which is to expect the Spirit to do all the relational work unilaterally. The Spirit does not engage in unilateral relationship, even within the Trinity (cf. Jn 16:13-15). Yet, we often, especially in Eucharistic prayers, invoke the Spirit for such various purposes: to be present in our midst; to make the sermon/teaching of Scripture come alive and speak to our hearts; to come upon and bless the Communion elements; to be poured out upon the congregation to unite us together. These invocations are for important relational functions, but when we pray this way, I doubt many of us are even thinking about our reciprocal involvement with the Spirit and our share of the relational work for this outcome. We need to address the assumption among us to think the Spirit will unilaterally do these things. The Spirit, as Jesus’ relational replacement, does not unilaterally cause things to happen and thereby contradict Jesus’ key words about our relational responsibility: “the measure you give will be the measure you get” (Mk 4:24).

We are challenged to take up our relational responsibility for the three major issues for all practice with the Spirit: the person we present to the Spirit, the integrity and content of our communication, and the depth level that we engage in relationship with the Spirit. Any relational distance, which we have discussed throughout this study, that dealt with our relationship with Jesus also applies to our relationship with the Spirit. For example, when Jesus foretold that he will say to some persons who prophesied and did ministry in his name, “I never knew you” (Mt 7:23), the Spirit could say the same. The Spirit of Jesus is affected in the same way when we are not compatibly involved with him in our innermost where he dwells (“grieve,” Eph 4:30; cf. “quench,” 1 Thes 5:9;

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<sup>8</sup> T. Dave Matsuo, *The Gospel of Transformation*, 260. For vital in-depth study of the Spirit, please see chap.6 (259-84) from which this excerpt was taken.



“outrage,” Heb 10:29). The person of the Spirit gets deeply affected, just as Jesus did/does. We grieve the Spirit when we maintain relational distance by *de-personizing* the Spirit to an impersonal power, or by keeping our hearts hidden or masked, or when we function in fragmented and reduced ontology with something less and some substitutes for the vulnerability of child-persons (Heb 10:38 with v.29).

Just as I needed correction and redemptive change from functioning in *hypokrisis*, I have needed my interpretive framework and lens (*phronēma* and *phroneō*) regarding the Spirit to be redeemed to wholeness (Rom 8:5-6). I have perceived and treated the Spirit as some impersonal power source to be invoked as needed, depending on the situation and need. With my wrong *de-personizing* and *de-relationalizing* view of the Spirit, I tried to engage with the Spirit on my fragmented terms. Accordingly, I ignored the Spirit’s vulnerable presence and intimate involvement for compatible reciprocal relationship together. Instead of reciprocating in relationship together, I would, along with many other worshipers, essentially ask the Spirit to *do* something, such as to make the words of Scripture come alive and speak to our hearts, or to make Christ’s presence felt during Communion. I wanted so badly for the Spirit to do something powerful, even miraculous in us to change us.

Other familiar ways we pray narrowly to the Spirit is to empower us to preach, for ministry and evangelism, or even to know what to say in various situations. The focus of such prayers is usually about the results and outcomes we want to see happen; that is, our prayers inadvertently become about what we want to experience, and even quite subtly, centered around ourselves even though we might be praying for others at the same time. Such prayers to the Spirit are less about (or not at all about) the primacy of mature boasting in whose we are and helping persons grow in God’s relational grace to be whole, and for the integral relational outcome of our relationships together as God’s family. In this way, our prayers to the Spirit miss the Spirit’s person. These prayers become ontological simulations that are engaged in role-playing as an incomplete person (*hypokrisis*), which is contrary to the truth of the whole gospel (just as Peter functioned, Gal 2:11-14).

My ignoring the Spirit grieved him (Eph 4:30); it exposed my need to undergo redemptive change where the old (my determining the terms for relationship with the Spirit) had to die *from inner out* so that the Spirit could bring forth the new from inner out. The new embodies the vulnerableness of my heart for compatible reciprocal relationship with the Spirit as a child-person, only in qualitative-relational terms, not in quantitative terms of what I do or have. The Spirit has been persistently pursuing my heart for my compatible reciprocal relational involvement together. The deeply blessed outcome is that I now experience in my innermost relationally belonging to my Father in his very own family. In my Father, with the Son and by the Spirit I boast!

### **The Relational Dynamic of Belonging**

Belonging—how do you feel about relationally belonging in God’s very own family? In my life following Jesus, from the beginning point through many years, as my heart slowly emerged from behind masks of *hypokrisis*, I became aware of my deep loneliness—not about being physically alone but “to be apart” in whole relational terms—and my inner need to belong. The whole of God (the Father, Son, and Spirit) has

deeply responded to my relational condition by freeing me from sin of reductionism, *to* my place in his new creation family distinguished inclusively as daughter. Moreover, I've been growing in reciprocal relationship with the Spirit—even during the writing of this study. He has matured my boasting during this exciting time! I also anticipate expectantly, if not always assuredly, the further relational outcome in all willing churches of the emergence in new wine of intimate and equalized relationships with other sisters and brothers, so that God can receive all who are his and we can celebrate new the discipleship-worship relationship together.

Paul deeply experienced belonging to God, not as a static position or label, but in the dynamic relationship with the whole of God who transformed his whole person from inner out. His transformation (not a conversion) changed Paul from merely having citizenship in Israel as God's people to the ongoing relationship together in wholeness of belonging to God's new creation family now distinguished as son (Gal 4:4-7). Paul therefore fully understood all the relational dynamics involved in God's relational response to our human condition 'to be apart' and need to belong and thereby be made whole. It was Paul's particular relational responsibility to nurture this dynamic family reality of belonging together in the new creation family, and he was resolved with *kūn* in his life (and writings) to thus nurture, grow and mature God's new creation family, helping us today to understand that what we are save to is nothing less than belonging to God and each other.

For Paul, the relational dynamic of adoption involves the integrated outcome of belonging as possession, relationship and ontology. Those adopted 'in Christ' now belong to God, who "put his seal on us" (2 Cor 1:22) as the identification of ownership as God's possession (*peripoiēsis*, Eph 1:14). More importantly for Paul, in distinguishing God's relational whole from the human shaping of reductionism, those adopted into God's family also relationally "belong to Christ," the *pleroma* of God, thus relationally belonging to the whole of God ("belong" rendered in the genitive case, 1 Cor 3:23; Gal 3:29; 4:4-7). Equally important in this relational dynamic, since "Christ belongs to God" both relationally and ontologically, by relationally belonging (not ontologically) to Christ those adopted also relationally belong to each other as well as belong ontologically to each other in wholeness together (1 Cor 3:22; 12:15-16; Rom 7:4; 12:5, belong also rendered by *ginomai*, verb of becoming, and *eimi*, verb to be).

What unfolds in this theological dynamic 'in Christ' is the integrated outcome of belonging. The emphasis of the theology of belonging for Paul in his theological forest is on relational belonging and ontological belonging to signify the new covenant relationship and the new creation. Relational belonging dynamically interacts with ontological belonging in the new creation, and their interaction is the relational outcome of the full soteriology in being saved to wholeness in God's family together (2 Cor 3:18; 5:16-17; Col 3:10-11). Furthermore, conjoined with the integrated outcome of belonging, the relational outcome of adoption in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes (the theological dynamic of wholeness) is the relational ontology and identity of the new creation of God's family as the church (Eph 1:22-23).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> T. Dave Matsuo, *The Gospel of Transformation*, 211-12.

Dynamic relational belonging (“in Christ”) is signified by baptism. Baptism only has relational significance to God if we are baptized with our hearts vulnerable to God, expressing our compatible response in relational trust (faith) to Jesus’ call to “follow me whole-ly.” Being baptized is a step (one of ongoing steps) with the resolve of *kūn* to becoming a member who relationally belongs to the Father in his new creation family. In this relational process on this relational path with Jesus, being baptized embodies a mature boast celebrating the embodying new of the discipleship-worship relationship in wholeness together. Furthermore, as if relational belonging to God and each other were not enough to boast in, the further blessed outcome for us to fully receive and boast in is that God relationally belongs to us—the significance of who and what we get reciprocally from the significance of who and what God gets. Our hearts can know this as our experiential truth as we grow intimately with the Spirit, who dwells in our hearts as the experiential Truth for this relational outcome to be our experiential reality.

As we continue with the resolve of *kūn* to be vulnerably involved with the Spirit and with each other—that is, as we mature in our vulnerableness as child-persons together—we can anticipate the deep satisfaction of experiencing the Father Face to face (cf. Mt 5:6-9; Heb 12:14)). We can anticipate becoming distinguished (whole and uncommon) in our discipleship-worship relationship that stands in qualitative contrast to the common fragmenting of our surrounding contexts (cf. Jn 13:34-35). This happens because in this relational epistemic process with the Spirit, we become aware of what is qualitative (innermost) in ourselves and others, including God, and increasingly aware of the relational. Relational awareness and qualitative sensitivity mean recognizing and taking the opportunities all around us for making relational connection with others by making our hearts vulnerable to them in family love. Relational awareness is also sensitive to relational distance that indicates the need within the family for loving correction in some way. This is who and what we by necessity give as individual persons, but more so together as new creation family.

The relational epistemic process in intimate relational connection with the Spirit frees and transforms our focus (2 Cor 3:17) from the secondary of outer-in criteria (of what we do/have, e.g. of the ‘wise and learned’) in the comparative process. Our focus becomes sensitive to the qualitative in persons (starting with our own person) and aware of relationships (cf. Phil 2:4b). That is, our heart is freed *from* the self-concerns of self-determination and self-consciousness (cf. Phil 2:4a) *to* being vulnerable (like child-persons), which means making our hearts ready and available to God and each other for heart-to-heart connection in intimate relationship together, equalized without the veil of human distinctions.

Vulnerable hearts for relationship together is what Paul was asking of the Corinthians in place of their outer-in immature boost-boasting (1 Cor 4:6-7; 2 Cor 6:11-13). He made this plea with his own heart extended vulnerably to them, thereby demonstrating for us to learn that family love initiates as a subject (even in difficult situations), and doesn’t wait conveniently as a passive object for others to initiate.

Belonging, growing together, and celebrating who and whose we are corporately find their fullest expression whenever and wherever we gather for worship. Belonging,

growing together, and celebrating are inseparable because these are all dynamic functions of relationship. Our mature boasting as this distinguished uncommon family isn't measured in referential terms by outer-in criteria, but only by the clarity and qualitative depth of our relationships together—that is, by our relational righteousness that God can count on to be compatible and congruent with who, what, and how the whole and uncommon God is. Who and what we give, get, and celebrate—this is the new creation family in which God dwells whole-ly and is present uncommonly to the whole world!

The depth of this intimate involvement in family love is the function signified in Jesus' relational language in the Sermon on the Mount: "be vulnerably involved in family love as your Father is vulnerably involved, including with you" (Mt 5:48). Family love involves making ourselves vulnerable to each other, whereby we become aware of each other in specific ways, involved in the depth of our hearts—that is, growing in both sensitivity to the qualitative and awareness of the relational. Vulnerableness with each other necessitates listening well, responding to the other person as needed, allowing ourselves be negatively affected and still reciprocally sharing ourselves openly, even with critique (cf. Col 3:16-17). Vulnerableness also means growing increasingly in the depth of caring for others in their persons from inner out.

Relational language is an irreplaceable dimension in these relational connections of family love, which Paul illuminated beyond a list of virtues in order to mature in whole ecclesiology (e.g. Eph 4:25-32; Col 3:8-9). We must remove language (both spoken and through our nonverbal actions) that creates relational barriers (e.g. false presentations, hiding one's whole person, composing overstatements or illusions with words), and let family love compose our relational language to grow together (Eph 4:15; Eph 5:18b-20; Col 3:12-17). In and for family love, Paul urges the church in corporate life, notably in worship: "*with your whole person be relationally involved with the Spirit*" (Eph 5:18b), and extend family love to each other to compose mature boasting, paraphrased thus:

"Speak only in relational language that communicates whole-ly from inner out in psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 5:19-20; cf. Col 3:15-17).

Here Paul illuminates the vital function about music as the unique inner-out idiom of qualitative-relational language for worship. It is first important for us to understand that Paul is able to speak for God in God's relational language because Paul himself has been made mature in wholeness from inner out by God's relational grace (2 Cor 12:9). As a mature child-person, Paul uses his hermeneutical means (*aisthētērion*, Heb 5:14) in reciprocal relationship with the Spirit, who has transformed Paul's interpretive framework and lens (*phronēma* and *phroneō*, Rom 8:5-6). On this basis, Paul urges the churches to build each other up in family love, for which music plays a vital part. We must never let music be reduced to just a form or style and become a divisive issue among us.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> For a fuller discussion about the unique relational function of music in worship, see my study *A Theology of Worship: 'Singing' a New Song to the LORD* (Theology of Worship, 2011). Online at <http://4X12.org>, Verse 4.

Relationally belonging to the Father's new creation family includes our corporate relational responsibilities that we might not want to embrace, but they are a necessary aspect of maturing in the clarity and depth of whose we are. The poet of Psalm 149 summarized for us our integral relational response of worship that God seeks from those who worship in spirit and truth (honesty of heart requiring the heart's vulnerability). This integral response is the conjoint effort to mature in wholeness and fight against reductionism. Along with the imperative *Halelu Yah* (boast in the LORD, vv.1,9c) in our mouths (v.6a, NIV), there is a "double-edged sword" in our hands" (v.6b). Worship can never be sufficient and whole in its significance to God unless our praise is accompanied also by our opposition to and rejection of reductionism, first in our midst before we can address it in the world. And this will often necessitate penetrating the outer layers of immature boasting to get to the heart of our worship practice.

A double-edged sword in Scripture is a metaphor for God's Word (though the latter can be even the sharper of the two, cf. Heb 4:12). God's Word, like a double-edged sword, pierces deep into our innermost, where only God can see what lurks there. Not even we ourselves always know what we hide deep in our hearts. Exposing reductionism was/is the necessary function of the embodied Word's sword in order for wholeness to emerge (Mt 10:34-36). For God's people to hold this double-edge sword in our hands is to engage in the fight against reductionism—which is always conjoined with the fight for the gospel of wholeness, as Paul clearly illuminates for us. Our relational responsibilities that come with belonging in God's uncommon family converge in the reciprocal relational work with the Spirit in this integral fight both within our individual selves and among God's people. God's people take this conjoint fight into the world, but we cannot adequately, nor legitimately engage in what we do not practice ourselves. Thus the issue of being and living whole needs to be ongoingly addressed.

Certainly we humans aren't the judge who can compose judgment (cf. Mt 7:1). Yet, "to carry out a *legitimate* sentence" (Ps 149:9) means that God's people are to speak out and hold accountable each other according to God's judgments of sin as reductionism. The word for "sentence" is *mišpāt*, technically denoting justice, law, judgment, or verdict. Since God himself is the only judge, we as his people have the relational responsibility to represent him by the depth of relationship we engage in relationship with each other (the third major issue for all practice)—which requires the sword in order to compose whole theology and practice.

Sharing family love whenever we corporately come together means to be involved with each other for cultivating the wholeness of each member and wholeness in our relationships together, that is, wholeness of persons growing in God's relational terms of grace. This is the relational imperative made by the Hebrews writer (Heb 12:15; 13:9), and the basis on which Paul started and/or ended his letters to the churches with "grace and wholeness [peace]" (e.g. 1 Cor 1:3, 16:23; Gal 1:6, 6:18). Only on the basis of God's relational response to us by his relational grace are we able to be whole-ly his very own family, composing the basis of our mature boast—the nothing less and no substitutes of our "Hallelujah Whole" new song (p. 83 of this study).

*We* are the new creation family of the new covenant, God's relational dwelling context, a compatibly vulnerable people composed of hearts joined together in family love both in corporate worship and beyond. This is what Jesus prayed for (Jn 17:23).

Family love, engaged face to face jointly in intimate and equalized relationships, will be the evidence of our maturity, and embodies new who and what we are as new wine family (as Paul made definitive for the church, Eph 4:13-16). Therefore, it is vital to establish in our understanding that we cannot think that the curtain still exists in God's dwelling, which would create a division of those going behind the curtain from those still remaining as if in front (which some still function as). To clarify, throughout this study, going 'behind the curtain' refers to the only access to intimate communion with God in the new covenant. While the curtain no longer exists in God's dwelling, however, whether the veil is still present or removed from our persons and relationships continues to be an ongoing question only we (both individually and corporately) can answer in reciprocal relationship with the Spirit. Who and what we give will determine who and what we get and can celebrate.

### **'Singing' a New Creation Family Song**

Embodying 'new' our worship-discipleship relationship as the new wine family is the 'singing' of God's new song, as mentioned in the first chapters of this study. It bears repeating this essential relational dynamic for our worship-discipleship relationship to mature:

'Singing' is the integral relational dynamic of life that clearly distinguishes God's family in the tune of the new song composed in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God, the song of which worship is the chorus. And, worship is the integrating focus and the integral relational convergence of our (both individual and corporate) reciprocal relational response and vulnerable involvement in relationship together with God—the ongoing primacy of which is the sound of consonance significant to God's ear.

'Singing' the new song is the mature embodied boasting that Paul urged of the church in Corinth: "Let those who boast boast in the Lord" (1 Cor 1:31), which was his own boast. 'Singing' the new song fulfills the mature boast that we "*relationally* understand and know" who, what, and how God is (Jer 9:24-25).

There are no outer-in 'how-to's' for celebrating our God, only corporately bringing before him our whole persons and relationships—nothing less and no substitutes—in compatible and congruent relational involvement together. This is why there are no prescriptions for worship in the Gospels and epistles because the Spirit knows our susceptibility to want to know 'what to do'. Embodying new the worship-discipleship relationship is only the uncommon relationships—intimate and equalized together—in the new creation family that Jesus prayed for so that we "*relationally one and thus whole*" in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the Trinity (Jn 17:21-23).

Embodying new the worship-discipleship relationship requires whole theology and practice: (1) whole understanding of what God gives primacy to and therefore what has relational significance to him, that is, whole theology (not a fragmented theology of referential information about God); and (2) whole practice that involves us corporately

together in intimate and equalized relationships, which can only be engaged from inner out to compose persons and relationships in wholeness. These are the uncommon relationships that Jesus, Paul, and Mary illuminate for us to learn and grow from. For our vulnerable response in worship in particular, we need to learn from our sister Mary's lead as disciple-worshiper that, as Jesus affirmed, exemplifies the blessed relational outcome and compatible congruent response of the whole (not fragmented, reduced or re-shaped) gospel—the gospel of wholeness irreducible to anything less and nonnegotiable to any substitutes, whereby we also are transformed to shout-*in* child-persons whole-ly together.

In summary relational words, let's listen to the worshiper who was faced with two choices in a human (in this case hostile) context (Ps 137:4). When Israel was in exile in Babylon, their captors asked the Israelite worshipers to sing some songs. The conflict this raised for him is relevant for us today, or should be.

*“How could we sing the Lord's song apart from God's relational context and without God's relational language and terms?”*

To just sing (as requested, v.3) is just singing, without any relational significance to God, even though the songs are worship songs. This reduces God's worship songs to common function, to entertain or make persons merely feel better. To sing to the Lord, however, is communication (mature boasting) composed only in God's relational context by God's relational terms. Moreover, as Jesus has made clear throughout this study, to give *singing* is to get performance. But—to give ‘communication’ is to get relationship together. We can only give communication with communion when we ‘follow me whole-ly’ and ‘remember me whole-ly’, whereby we embody new the worship-discipleship relationship to celebrate together in wholeness.

Any challenges ahead in this journey to whole theology and practice in our worship relationship—whether overt or subtle—come with the territory of being the uncommon family of the whole and uncommon God. Thankfully, we do not face them as relational orphans; we have the whole of God dwelling in us by the Spirit! We need to understand, however, that a major aspect of the challenge for us is whether we are willing to recognize, acknowledge, and die to the influences of the sin of reductionism in our gathered worship (indeed in the entirety of our Christian practice).

When churches take the steps with resolve (*kûn*) to embody the new creation family—beginning with humbling our hearts to vulnerably receive Jesus' whole person, beyond only his teachings and ethical example—many persons will no doubt resist or even become hostile and leave (cf. Jn 6:66). Jesus will ask every one of us, “Do you also wish to go away?” (v.67).

For the rest of us who are willing to change and be transformed to wholeness, who and what God gets whenever and wherever we come together to worship him will delight God's heart, and make congruent relational connection with God that will satisfy our innermost—no longer “to be apart,” with the veil removed. Remember, God's face has already turned to shine on us, to meet us eye to eye, heart to heart (Num 6:24-26) for an improbable and deeply blessed relational outcome.

## For Your Theology and Relational Response

Consider the following song for your mature boast in the whole and uncommon God, in whom we are deeply loved and made whole. Theologically and relationally, we can always count on the Face of God for his vulnerable presence and intimate involvement with us! We can celebrate this experiential Truth only as our response is distinguished by this whole theology and relational reality.

### Face to Face

(Ps 67:1, Num 6:24-26, 2 Cor 4:6)

1. Your grace turns to us,  
always turns to us  
You meet us Face to face.  
Your grace turns to me  
always turns to me  
You look me in the eye.

Chorus A: Face to face, face to face  
Eye to eye, eye to eye  
You shine on us  
to bless and hold, and give us peace.

2. Your grace never turns  
away from us now  
nor turns your face from us.  
Your grace never turns  
away from me here  
nor shuts your eye from me.

Chorus A: Face to face, face to face  
Eye to eye, eye to eye  
You shine on us  
to bless and hold, and give us peace.

3. Your grace is your face  
always turned to us  
Your face connects with us.  
Your grace has your face  
always eyed on us  
Your face communes with us.

Chorus B: Grace with face, grace with face  
eyed by grace, eyed by grace  
You shine on us  
face to face, yes, eye to eye.



4. Your face is with grace  
always here with us  
Your grace sufficient.  
Your face is with grace  
always shares in us  
Your grace sufficient.

Chorus C: Grace with face, grace with face  
Eyed by grace, eyed by grace  
You shine on us  
face to face, yes, eye to eye  
to bless and hold, and make us whole.

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