

The Essential Dimension & Quality for Theology & Practice

Discovering the Function of Music
as Basic to Significance in Life

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Prelude

This study is an in-depth examination of how basic music is to our everyday life. Our examination will follow a heuristic process to discover what is essential to God and those created in God's image and likeness. Accordingly, the study is designed for readers to actively engage this ongoing examination, as it unfolds chapter by chapter, with the previous chapter a necessary antecedent for readers to engage before the next chapter can unfold. In other words, this study engages an interactive heuristic process involving the whole person vulnerably discovering the Word in its whole significance, neither reduced nor fragmented. Therefore, by the nature of the Word nothing less and no substitutes must constitute our theology and practice in order for them to be significant.

On this basis, readers who are merely looking for information are discouraged from picking up this study. Likewise, those who are satisfied with the status quo and unwilling to consider change in their theology and practice, also disqualify themselves from participating in this examination. Moreover, those who think they can participate in their default mode (e.g. any reduction of their person and relationships) will soon be exposed for the limits and constraints they impose (unintentionally or intentionally) on this qualitative relational process amplified by the Word.

Therefore, this study is not for everyone and should only be undertaken by those willing to be accountable for both the above warning and openly verifying the integrity of their person and relationships. Anything less will ensure an insignificant outcome.

Chapter 1

The Amplified Word

The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple.

Psalm 119:130¹

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Psalm 119:105

My mother made me take piano lessons until I was 12 years old—for what became six laborious years of classical study cloistered in a conservatory instead of having more time to play outside with my friends. Rather than develop the skills of my first love (sports), I was constrained to the repetitive sounds of 88 keys; and these unrelenting keys always demanded my full attention in order to play the right sounds. Since playing the right sound required more than merely not playing the wrong notes, the sound of my playing became evident to my conservatory piano teacher that my heart wasn't into the piano, and that my mom shouldn't waste money on my lessons any more. Thankfully, without compromising, she didn't confuse the sound of music with my piano sounds. What a relief to be freed to have more time with my friends and develop my sports skills.

As I accelerated in sports, my physical development kept unfolding beyond my expectations. Yet, there always seemed to be a part of me that was different from the athletes around me. Curiously, as I excelled in sports (notably American football) I never became a “jock” nor considered myself to be one. There was a person inside of me that was different and never really wanted to live within those limits. I wasn't a Christian during that period of my life, so I really didn't understand what I was thinking and feeling. What do you think was going on inside me; how would you explain this distinct difference that I felt?

Interestingly, if not paradoxically, there was some quality inside of me that heightened a sensitivity to the qualitative beyond the prominence of the quantitative in life—whatever the quantity and however it was quantified. When this qualitative sensitivity was amplified, I felt different. Here's the irony to these dynamics: what amplified this quality is music; and, therefore, the primary amplification in my life can be directly linked back to my development in music. Little did I know at the time that music

¹ Unless indicated differently, all Scripture quoted are from the NRSV; any italics in the Scripture quoted throughout this study signify emphasis or further rendering of terms.

was wiring my brain with a quality not apparent to me. Without my musical development (albeit limited), my sensitivity to the quality of life would not have emerged in a context dominated by the quantitative. That dominance also exists in the human brain when the quantitatively oriented left hemisphere of the brain is more prominent in its development, and thereby assumes more control over the qualitatively oriented right hemisphere.² In other words, without this distinct quality I would have functioned within the limits and constraints of pervasive quantities in life, thereby not being free to be different in my person. However, any identity conflicts in our thoughts or identity dissonance in our feelings open the door that can (1) tell me *who* I am as a person, (2) distinguish for me *what* I am as the true person, and (3) challenge me in *how* to be that person. How so?

Music, when not reduced to quantitative sounds, expresses a quality that is usually not expressed by most persons. Typically, persons are constrained from sharing deeper, but music penetrates such constraints to trigger brain synapses that transition persons from quantitative control to qualitative vulnerability. Such vulnerableness then provokes deeper connections to persons and evokes inner-out expressions from persons, which bring out the quality in persons otherwise constrained, buried or lost. What's happening can be understood as a law of nature:

When this quality emerges, the whole person emerges; anything less is a reduced person, not whole but fragmentary, who is unable to function beyond the limits and constraints of such reductionism, thus whose identity and function are defined and determined by the quantitative.

The nature of the person has not evolved to resolve the difference between the quantitative and the qualitative. What has evolved is a more complex quantitative life, which we keep deferring to at the expense of the qualitative. The human default mode is dominated by the quantitative until redeemed by the qualitative. The context of this qualitative, when integrated with its relational process, together form the context and process that point us to how basic music is to everyday life. And their uncommon relational quality will lead us to understand how integral music is for our theology and practice to be significant. What will unfold in this context and process distinguished by the Word are the wholeness of life, the whole person and relationships in wholeness, all of which are constituted by the qualitative image and relational likeness of the Trinity. What unfolds, therefore, can only be defined and determined by God, whose whole and uncommon revelations in the Word are the constituting basis for all theology and practice of significance.

² For the scope of this discussion on the functional differences in our brain, see Iain McGilchrist in *The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Modern World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

Knowing Our Beginnings

Knowing the laws of nature depends on the scope of our knowledge about the universe. Understanding creation also depends on the breadth of our knowledge, but it further requires a depth of knowledge about the creator. These two epistemic fields of human knowledge and understanding are not mutually exclusive, yet, for example, the universe is often conflated with the breadth of creation and further confused for the depth of the creator. This is most consequential for all persons, human and divine.

When sound is amplified and light is intensified—for example, in the outer universe—what emerges can make us more knowledgeable. But such knowledge doesn't necessarily give us more understanding because it is merely referential information. Such limited information, of course, has quantitative value that may lead to more quantitative understanding; but this narrowed-down knowledge and understanding should neither be confused nor conflated with the quality of life. It is this quality that should have priority, and thus that needs to be pursued for the significance of life—that is, pursued for the whole of life, persons and relationships.

So, where do we turn for the breadth of this qualitative source? And what do we look for to understand its depth? Moreover, how do we ensure this outcome in this discovery process?

For this discovery to unfold we need to return to our beginnings. For our discovery to reflect reality and not our theories or assumptions about it, we must return to the beginning of life in order for our life beginnings to be known, renewed and then restored. Piano was part of my beginnings, yet that only stimulated the music basic to the quality of life underlying my beginnings. This connection is not my assumption since I disliked practicing the piano; the initial explanation for the quality that emerged in me is linked to functional workings of music. But this discovery cannot and doesn't stop here for our understanding to be complete. For this quality to emerge it has to be distinguished in its constituting beginning, the origin of which has to be definitive in order for the full nature of life's quality to be known, understood and experienced in its original condition. This distinguishing process has been elusive in human history, and even most Christians have only theories and assumptions about its reality in everyday life.

The origin of the human person has been defined in two different contexts with two different processes. Simply stated, one context is science that employs the process of evolutionary biology. The other context is the realm of God that engages the process of creation. The former context is based on the limits of human inquiry and thus depends on a limited epistemic source to define the parameters of life. The latter context is based on the scope of God's revelations and thus depends on the breadth and depth of God's disclosures to define the whole of life. The former process postulates in probability, thus posits only degrees of certainty about life. The latter process constitutes in absoluteness, thereby only constitutes what *is* of life. Having said this, the two are not mutually

exclusive, not necessarily in conflict, but also not interchangeable, and thus must by their nature be engaged accordingly. Therefore, knowing the difference between them is critical for our beginnings, and maintaining their difference is essential to get to the beginning of life's significance.

Christians commonly make assumptions about God's revelations, the disclosures of which are distinguished in the Word. These assumptions don't amplify the Word but more often than not they obscure the Word, if not displace it with what amounts to human terms speaking for God. A prime example of speaking for God is heard in Job. Basically, Job tried to understand his bleak circumstances by postulating from his limited beginnings and related narrow-down knowledge, in order to regain significance to his life. He certainly had reason to speculate about what was happening; but he had no absolute basis to draw conclusions definitive about both God and his life. Though unaware to Job, he was not at an inescapable crossroads for his life. In spite of his apparent self-assured beliefs in the face of contrary views posited by his friends, Job needed clarification and correction (1) so that he would indeed understand the significance of life, and (2) such that he would experience fully this significance constituted in its original beginning. For this clarification and correction to unfold, Job needed (1) unmistakable ontological humility about his source and (2) uncompromising epistemic humility in his thought process. In other words, Job had to come vulnerably face to face with the Word and listen to the Word amplified to him in the original relational terms of God's relational language communicating to him in the primacy of relationship together (as unfolds in Job 38:1-2 through 42:1-3).

Pause now for your own clarification and/or correction. Like Job, we are all faced with the crossroads of either having the Word amplified for our theology and practice to be significant, or diminishing the Word ("darkens my *words*," 38:2, NIV) on the basis of our knowledge and understanding (often signified merely in our assumptions).

The who, what and how of God that Job proclaimed "but now my eye sees you" (42:5) is the relational outcome of vulnerably engaging God with ontological and epistemic humility. Job's beginnings have now been reconstituted 'in the beginning' constituting the significance of all life. In subtle contrast to and direct conflict with Job's relational outcome, there are the variable substitutes by human terms for ontological and epistemic humility, which widely assume a quantitatively similar outcome yet one that is qualitatively different in its nature: the recomposed beginning for human persons that "your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God" (Gen 3:5). This consequential outcome is 'the beginning of reductionism', whose counter-relational workings recompose the human beginnings of all persons who are not ongoingly constituted in the only beginning integrally significant for life and for life to be significant.

Reductionism is an inescapable reality for all human beings. It encompasses the scope of sin amplified by the Word, which all Christians need to account for in their beginnings and to address ongoingly for the relational outcome with the Word to keep

unfolding. Yet, Christians in the church and academy have not fully grasped reductionism, addressed the scope of its workings in life, and thereby redeemed its consequences on their own persons and relationships. Instead, the subtle workings of reductionism have accessed our theology and practice to bias our interpretive lens to render that theology and practice to subtle illusions and simulations of so-called significance. The human condition of reductionism, our human condition, never goes unnoticed in the Word and is always exposed by the Word for what it is. Jesus confronted this bias and exposed its illusion and simulation in theology and practice, for example, as practiced by some Pharisees and prominent teachers (Mt 15:6-11; Mk 7:5-8). In such theology and practice, the Word is not amplified but nullified, made void of its significance. This is not readily recognized—as observed in the primordial garden beginning—nevertheless, in the bias of their tradition, priority is given to the outer-in quantitative in place of (or as a substitute for) the inner-out qualitative. Illusion and simulation have even shaped their music as an end in itself without its intrinsic quality, and composed their singing without amplifying the Word—perhaps even with the intensity of the music and the repetitive singing of words as commonly heard today.

Jesus labelled those persons as hypocrites (*hypokrites*, *hypokrinomai*),³ but not necessarily because they were willfully trying to deceive. We can more fully understand this term from its beginnings in ancient Greek theater, when persons take on a role different from their true identity and play it out as if it were. In the reality of everyday life, we all are ascribed roles as well as embrace our abilities, resources and titles, which all serve to compose our identity. And we roleplay this identity as if it signified our true persons, even without any willful deception. Jesus calls all such persons hypocrites (cf. Paul on Peter, Gal 2:11-14), and we are rightfully labelled if this is how we function. How common does this condition exist in our theology and practice today, do you see and hear this roleplaying in churches today?

This subtle reduction of life is the pervasive reality facing us that is critical to address vulnerably in our beginnings—that is, if we expect our discovery process to unfold beyond illusions and simulations. We are ongoingly facing this crossroads.

³ Hebrew and Greek word studies used in this study are taken from the following sources: Horst Balz, Gerhard Schneider, eds., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990); Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975); R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., Bruce Waitke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980); Ernst Jenni, Claus Westermann, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. Mark E. Biddle, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997); Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974); Harold K. Moulton, ed., *The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978); W.E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1981); Spiros Zodhiates, ed., *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible* (Chattanooga: AMG Publ., 1996).

Hermeneutic Harmony and Fidelity

The words of any language have a particular sound. To interpret a language properly requires having harmony with the sound of that language; dissonance, for example, makes a language sound unintelligible. Both listening to that language and speaking it involve this harmony in order to connect with its sound. Furthermore, the sound of the words of any language has a distinct fidelity. To interpret a language correctly requires reproducing the fidelity of the particular sound of that language; without that fidelity a language can sound ambiguous or even incomprehensible. Both listening and speaking that language involve this fidelity in order to fully embrace its sound.

For no other language is this more true than for the words of the Word:

Integrally having harmony to connect with the language of the Word's sound and having fidelity to fully embrace the Word's sound is simply irreplaceable for our biblical hermeneutic, and therefore irreducible for our theology and practice to be significant according to the Word.

In his classic words about knowing the truth and thereby being set free (Jn 8:31-32), Jesus raised the penetrating question that exposed the hermeneutic problem many current and potential disciples have with his words: "Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear *the sound of* what I say" (Jn 8:43, NIV). That is to say, they neither had harmony to connect with the sound of his language, nor had the fidelity to reproduce that sound to fully listen to his words. How often do the lack of harmony and the absence of fidelity with the Word exist among Jesus' followers?

Perhaps you have or are experiencing what his main disciples did in the following interaction. When Jesus vulnerably shared some deep words with his closest disciples, which he made imperative for them to listen carefully to ("Let these words sink into your ears," Lk 9:43-45), their lack of harmony and fidelity with his language rendered their hermeneutic incapable to "understand this saying; its meaning was concealed from them, so that they could not perceive it." And they didn't have the ontological and epistemic humility to pursue Jesus for the harmony necessary to connect with his words and for the fidelity to embrace him in those words. Consequently, in spite of all their time spent together, the Word wasn't amplified for them, such that near the end of Jesus' earthly days the Word vulnerably disclosed his sad frustration: "Have I been with you all this time, and you still do not know me?" (Jn 14:9)

What is revealed about the common gap in the disciples knowing the Word is not about a lack of referential information about the life of Jesus; the disciples possessed that information, as do many in the church and academy today. Rather what is missing and

thus absent in their presumed close relationship is distinctly the relational connection in harmony with the Word, consequently the lack of knowing the person of Jesus and not merely information about him. As is common in human relations, they were acquainted with fragments of Jesus from outer in, but they didn't know his whole person from inner out. In other words (specific words), the Word was not amplified for them in the fidelity that distinguished this critical difference: between the primary relational language of Jesus' vulnerable communication of his person to them (and us) and the secondary referential language of common discourse merely transmitting information—the inherent difference essential for harmony with the Word. With their interpretive lens centered on the Word from outer in, the disciples lacked the primary quality of relational language expressed from the inner out, even though they had the secondary quantity of referential language.

Past or present, this is the pivotal lack of harmony and fidelity that reduces the significance of the Word and its corresponding theology and practice. Compared to those disciples closest to Jesus, how much does this lack exist among his followers today, including among those in the academy and church leadership who possess an abundance of referential information about the Word? And how much of that information has become primary for the Christian faith, displacing what is truly primary for knowing and understanding the Word (cf. Jer 9:23-24)?

Amplifying the Language of the Word

Consider your beliefs (even theology) at this time, their beginnings and your Christian identity that has emerged from them. What is their source, and why is that source a valid basis for them? Also, how do you know when you stray from them?

In the poetic expression of the psalmist, we hear the rhythmic sounds that “The unfolding of *God's* words give light; it imparts understanding to the simple” (Ps 119:130). Light is essential to live in the darkness, therefore in further harmony the psalmist amplifies the fidelity of the Word: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps 119:105), in order that we truly know where we are and where we are going. Without this knowledge and understanding human persons are left in the dark, unable to distinguish what is significant for life in general and their life in particular.

Certainly, then, light is necessary for life and must not be reduced but intensified for its function to be fulfilled. This fulfillment, however, is only complete in the context of the light's source. Whenever light is disconnected from its source, that light is extinguished and no longer has functional significance—though it still may have symbolic value for those who live “as if.”

As the psalmist resounds, light emerges only in the context of the Word. Similarly, the dark matter of the universe will only come to light in the context of the

creator and cannot be assumed to exist on its own. At the same time, the context of light only unfolds in the process engaged by the Word/creator. In the context and process of the Word, light gives us understanding of the significance of life. Apart from this specific context and process, light is extinguished. Therefore, the context and process unique to the Word are irreplaceable and irreducible for us to know where we are and where we are going.

The Word's context and process are distinguished in specific terms that are not interchangeable with other terms. Of course, since the beginning this has not stopped persons from substituting other terms, even with good intentions (Gen 3:6-8). What distinguishes the Word is that it is always engaged in communication, which is always distinguished from mere discourse and its function to transmit information. Communication not only implies function addressed to others but its purpose necessarily involves connection with others. Moreover, this connection is not merely assumed but by necessity involves the true nature of connection: relational, not circumstantial or situational. Relational connection is often assumed, but that assumption is based on illusion or simulation—as characterizes participation in social media or occupies the activity in many families. When we examine the relational significance of communication on social media and in many families, the quality of relational connection is lacking in the quantity of those so-called connections.

By the Word's relational nature, the context and process of the Word's communication are only and always relational; and its communication purpose is just relational and its outcome is foremost relational, that is, for nothing less and no substitutes but reciprocal relationship together. Any light unfolding from the Word only illuminates, intensifies and embraces the primacy of the relational and thereby functions for the primacy of relationship together (cf. Jn 8:12). When this becomes just referential information in our beliefs, the light is extinguished in our identity and, at best, we are reduced to life "as if" (cf. Mt 5:14-15).

What is revealed by the Word is the reality, truth and fact that the communication in the Word's relational context and process is constituted solely by relational language. Referential language is incapable of composing the communication of the Word, unable to go beyond the nature of its limits and constraints. Only relational language amplifies the Word, while referential language reduces those communicative words to the limits of discourse and the constraints of transmitting information. Job highlights this difference in the experience of his beginnings, and the consequence of referential language in contrast and conflict with the relational outcome of relational language: "I had heard *much about* you by the hearing of the ear *in referential language*, but now my eye sees you, *your whole person in relational language*" (Job 42:5). All the referential information Job had accumulated about God didn't add up to truly knowing God; yet, in his lack of harmony and fidelity with the Word, Job still practiced discourse that "uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know" (42:3). Not until Job

humbly and vulnerably entered into God's relational context and process did God's relational language become distinguished and thereby the Word amplified to communicate for this relational outcome. Yes, indeed, the unfolding of the Word gave Job the light to see the whole of God, and thus to know the relational context of where he was and to understand the relational process of where he was going in the significance of relationship together. This primacy of reciprocal relationship together only unfolds and has significance in the Word's relational language.

Any and all truth from God only has validity on this basis: Communication from God does not emerge unless it is composed in the relational language of the Word. Knowing and understanding God are based solely on the quality of God's self-disclosures communicated distinctly in relational language—distinctly over and beyond the quantity of referential information accumulated about God that is variably transmitted in referential language (the difference in Jer 9:23-24). Moreover, the relational language amplifying the Word also unfolds in relational response with direct communication—for example, face to face (as in Num 12:5-8)—in order to illuminate where our person is in life and where we are going for the relational purpose to direct our feet in the path of life's significance (as the psalmist connects in Ps 119:133). Therefore, this relational communication from God is ongoing and always distinguishes God's intimate relational involvement with us—as opposed, for example, to a strict Father dominating his children.

Accordingly in this uncommon relational context and process, all of God's commands, laws, statutes, ordinances, decrees, etc., are not designed to control the human person. Contrary to what would be unilateral relationship, their integral purpose is for the human person to be whole (not reduced or fragmented) and thereby be whole-ly involved in reciprocal relationship together, and thus flourish in the wholeness of being created in the qualitative image and relational likeness of God. When amplified, the Word always distinguishes these directives beyond, for example, a code of conduct or identity markers to their qualitative function as the irreducible and irrevocable terms for reciprocal relationship together—God's relational terms distinguished in God's relational language. When so constituted, what emerges from them is the motivating basis for their communication in, with, and for the sake of *love*.

The language of love has been ambiguous since human beginnings, with much of that language rendered insignificant in human relations. Sadly but not surprisingly, such language of love has also been applied to the Word, even unknowingly and with good intent. Typically, referential language reduces God's law to a code of conduct without the Word's qualitative relational significance. By default, therefore, referential language quenches the love constituting God's law, even while highlighting its importance and promoting its obedience. Since love is disconnected from its source, its qualitative relational significance is obscured and its function reduced to a code of conduct about what we are obligated to do. This reduction may be subtle but its consequences are far reaching, as witnessed in the history of God's people.

For example, based on a referential hermeneutic, the book of Deuteronomy is perceived as the referential (albeit important and necessary) *Book of the Law*. This interpretive lens is contrary to God's relational language communicating directly to us the *Book of Love* for the relational purpose of our life having irreducible and irreplaceable significance in the relational quality of life together (as communicated in Dt 4:7; 7:8; 10:15; 23:5; 33:3). The reality unfolding from this is unmistakable:

When not amplified in relational language, the sounds of the Word have a different harmony and fidelity that lack the relational quality of love.

The clarification and correction we hear from the Word are not arbitrary or intermittent. They are the natural response expressed from the relational quality of the Word. Unfolding always from the ongoing relational involvement of love, the Word's feedback can only be and is always communicated in the Word's qualitative relational context and process. However penetrating the communication of the Word's feedback might be, there is always this issue:

The nature of the Word's response and the fidelity of specific feedback communicated are only fully discerned and can only be rightly responded to according to the Word's relational language.

This can be understood as another law of nature that is not subject to other terms, though from the beginning it has been subjected to the subtle reduction from variable human terms.

Therefore, the reality facing us, and that we need to face up to, is unmistakable. When the Word is not amplified in the nature of its relational quality, then (1) the sounds of relational language are silenced, (2) the relational terms of the Word are transposed to human terms, and (3) by default the Word is rendered to referential language and terms without relational significance. Our default mode routinely operates, for example, when our brains have been conditioned to favor the referential over the relational and become dominated by the quantitative in place of the qualitative—thus brains rewired from their original beginning. This is the inescapable reality of reductionism and its counter-relational workings that emerged from the beginning to compose the human condition, and that continues to evolve from the beginnings of many Christians into their default condition today.

In this reduced condition of the Word, what of significance will we see, hear and find in the Bible? What unfolds from the Word under these limits and constraints, confections and revisions? Jesus made it axiomatic: "The measure *of the Word* you use will be *the Word* you get," nothing more unfolds, therefore "pay close attention to what you hear *from the Word*" (Mk 4:24; cf. Lk 8:18).

We will not be able to answer these questions with the depth of knowledge and understanding necessary to get to the heart of the matter until the following emerges:

1. We vulnerably know where we are in our person from inner out, not centered on outer in.
2. We fully understand where we are going as that vulnerable person.

These are ongoing issues that we typically don't address in depth or fail to answer openly because of a bias from our terms competing with God's relational terms. Regardless of why, the Word is never silent on these issues and pursues us directly with feedback regarding them, always because of God's ongoing intimate relational involvement of love. God's relational response of love for the whole person also emerged from the beginning, in order to expose reductionism and redeem it in our persons. Whenever we are willing to listen carefully to the Word, we will experience the Word's relational response of love amplified in the following questions:

1. "Where are you *in your person and relationship together*?" (Gen 3:9)—the persons in the primordial garden conflated God's relational terms with their own terms, thereby reducing the wholeness of their persons and relationship together.
2. "What are you doing here, *given our relationship together*?" (1Kgs 19:9,13)—Elijah strayed off the path of God's purpose for him and didn't know where he was going, even as he served God.

Amplified in relational language, God is ongoingly communicating the response needed for our person, relationships, and life together in the church and academy to have the significance necessary to be whole, live whole, and thereby make whole, that is, whole in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the Trinity. Nothing less and no substitutes amplify the Word or will unfold from the sound of its words.

The Musical Harmony and Fidelity of the Word

Love is not some enhanced bit of information, technology notwithstanding. Nor is love a reference to some valued quantity, contrary to social media. Love is the *uncommon* relational quality that cannot be reproduced no matter the quantity. The mystery of love is how to resolve the existing quandary between the quantitative and the qualitative.

When Jesus questioned Peter about his love for him, it was about the relational quality of Peter's love for him and not Peter's situational denial of the Word (Jn 21:15-

19). When Jesus confronted the church at Ephesus about forsaking their first love, he was not questioning the quantity of their dedication and service to him, but exposing the lack of their relational involvement of love primary to relationship together (Rev 2:2-4). According to the Word in referential terms, love is merely what we do for God and others, and the greater the quantity the greater the love; in relational terms love is first and foremost the relational quality of our direct involvement with God and others in the primacy of relationship together, and the greater the intimate involvement the greater the love. The Word is amplified by love, yet this love only has harmony and fidelity with the Word in the irreducible relational terms of the Word's irreplaceable relational language.

The relational quality of the Word is routinely reduced, and thereby commonly misinterpreted, nullified of its relational meaning and made void of its qualitative depth, thus subtly rendered without its primary significance. To regain this relational quality, the Word has to be restored to its constituted nature and original composition.

When you hear the Word or any other words, what resonates in your heart and reverberates in your mind?

Words can reverberate in our minds when their volume is high—a common practice in modern worship music. But that reverberation is only temporary and should not be confused with words having high fidelity that linger in our minds. Words that resonate in our hearts have to have a certain harmony, that is, be consonant and not dissonant with our person—the ostensible issue about the use of traditional or contemporary music in worship. Without that harmony we would not pay attention to or just ignore those words. For example, how would you define the difference between a lecture and a song? And how would you describe the difference in listening to both? Each has a purpose and can fill a need. Based on all this, what do you think has had more significance in your life, lecture or song?

A lecture (or sermon) certainly contains more information (important or not) than a song, but it rarely has the quality of most songs. Now, what if we combined the best of both for a singing lecture. This could be the most significant if the quantitative secondary is integrated into the qualitative primary in order for integral expression in the relational process intrinsic to the communication of the Word and all words. The Word that resonates in our heart and reverberates in our mind must have the harmony and fidelity for this qualitative relational outcome. This brings us back to music because music is basic to the relational quality of life. Unlike any other medium, music can have the harmony and fidelity that resonates and reverberates in the depths of life—that is, the whole of life created in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the Trinity.

Music is not a human creation but a human expression that has evolved among all human beings. When not constrained to favorite genre or reduced to an end in itself, the intrinsic relational quality of music expresses the harmony and fidelity of the Word to deeply resonate in our hearts and ongoingly reverberate in our minds. The Word speaks

of the central function of music (e.g. 1 Ch 6:31-32; 25:6-7; Ps 45:8; 95:2; Lam 5:14-15) and of the primary response to “make music to God” (Jdg 5:3; Ps 27:6; 33:2; 92:1; 98:5; 147:7; Eph 5:19). The Word isn’t transmitting information about God that in effect assumes God likes to listen to music. On the contrary, the Word’s relational language communicates that music is the qualitative key to making heart-level connection with the Word’s relational context and process, so that the Word’s relational terms can be known, understood and responded to.

The outcome of this harmony and fidelity is the relational significance inherent to the Word, which is now connected, embraced and consummated in whole persons and their relationships together in wholeness. Therefore, the Word is amplified in the beginning and for our beginning with the significance distinguished by musical harmony and fidelity. Accordingly, any theology and practice related to the Word only have significance when compatible with its harmony and congruent with its fidelity. This is the theology and practice of the Word that resonates in the hearts and reverberates in the minds of those not reduced in their persons and relationships.

We don’t really need singing lectures/sermons to amplify the Word. We only need the inherent relational quality of the Word distinguished in the musical harmony and fidelity of the Word—“the Word in the beginning, who was with God and who is God” (Jn 1:1), and who continues to unfold to give us light to understand where our person is and where we are going in nothing less and no substitutes.

The Pivotal Word

This opening chapter presents us with the pivotal word in our examination, which challenges (if not confronts) us with the following:

We cannot expect the Word to unfold with the light necessary for our understanding and path to be significant, if we engage in the subtle workings of reductionism that (1) reduce the relational terms of the Word composed only in relational language, (2) disconnect us from the Word’s relational context and process and thus from having the relational quality of the Word’s communication, (3) render the harmony and fidelity of the Word to illusion and simulation in our theology and practice, whereby our persons and relationships are reduced to *be* without the significance of wholeness constituted in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the Trinity.

Whether or not we recognize the signs of reductionism, this is the human default mode that we all fall into, that is, unless we counter the inescapable human condition of reductionism ongoingly with our whole person from inner out so as to function in and live by the relational quality of the Word.

Therefore, as you engage this in-depth examination of the harmony and fidelity amplifying the Word, what in the Word up to now faces you? Based on your beginnings, “Where are you?” and “What are you doing here?” Do you truly have light for your understanding, so that what unfolds in your theology is significant, and do you truly have light for your path so that what unfolds in your practice is significant? That is, significant unmistakably for God, for you and others in the qualitative primacy of relationship together constituted in the intimate involvement of love—just as the Word amplifies.

The unavoidable reality facing us from the beginning currently follows:

We either engage the Word in the illusion of harmony and thereby simulate its fidelity by conflating or substituting our terms with God’s relational terms. Or we submit to the Word with ontological and epistemic humility, whereby we vulnerably involve our person from inner out to respond to the Word in the relational quality signified in the Word’s musical harmony and fidelity.

Anything less and any substitutes for the Word reduce the Word and nullify its significance in the composition of our theology and practice. Since nothing less and no substitutes for the latter above are significant, therefore all Christians, churches and related academy face this crossroads (either-or) and must make pivotal decisions that will determine what unfolds ahead.

This pivotal word waits for our transforming decisions and awaits the relational quality of our response to the vulnerable Word facing us. This heuristic examination will unfold only on this basis. “And *the Word* came to *those who were of his own relational quality* but his own people did not *listen, accept, receive and respond to his person amplified in the relational terms of the Word’s relational language*” (Jn 1:11).

Accordingly and decisively, in order to continue this examination, we need to pray ongoingly: “Direct my footsteps according to *only the relational quality of your word*; let no sin *as reductionism control me and thereby determine the outcome*” (Ps 119:133).

Chapter 2 Discovering Our Musical Beginning

How could we sing the LORD's song in a foreign *context, process and mode*?

Psalm 137:4

Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I don't *recall* you.

Psalm 137:6

Do you remember when you were a baby? What did you do when you first came out of the womb? It would be remarkable if you could recall your beginning presence in the world. Yet, if we could clear away the accumulated content in our brains, perhaps we would remember our beginnings.

Assuming a baby's auditory function is not impaired, the initial activity all babies engage in is to listen to sounds, notably the sounds directed to them. In fact, babies are able to discern more sounds than adults and have the most acute hearing than at any latter stage of their development. For example, there are about 800 different sounds in the total languages of the world, approximately 600 consonants and 200 vowels. Without any previous exposure to these languages, babies can discriminate all the sounds of all the languages.¹ Babies all over the world are found to have this "early universal perceptual ability." Furthermore, along with their innate discernment of the quantity of sounds, babies have a qualitative sensitivity to sounds from a parent, demonstrating also the relational awareness inherent to the significance of life from the beginning.

Unfortunately, everything goes downhill from this unique beginning, as a result of the combined effects of brain adaptations and human development in a narrowing-down process. As a baby develops, billions of the baby's brain cells are neutralized in order to reduce their exposure, thus reducing their qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness. This reducing process and reduced condition speak to the irony of human "progress"—notably apparent in modernization and globalization—all of which point to the consequence that the human condition has on our beginnings. The only way that the significance of substantively *more* can unfold from our beginnings is for redemptive change to restore us to the definitive beginning for all persons, from birth to the grave.

The overriding basis for our theology and practice to be significant is the amplified Word, the means of which could be understood in theory but not always implemented in function. The underlying means for our theology and practice to be significant, and thus for being significant and living daily in significance, is our anthropology (presumably qualified theologically to compose our theological

¹ According to research by Patricia K. Kuhl, "Early Language Learning and Literacy: Neuroscience Implications for Education," Sept 1, 2012. Available at ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3164118.

anthropology)—that is, how we define the human person and relationships and determine their function. Theological anthropology always has an underlying presence in our theology and practice, providing a means and basis for our persons and relationships, whether explicitly stated or implicitly presumed. The basis for our underlying theological anthropology is often not understood, and is usually assumed. Consequently, its means render our theology and practice less than significant and our function in variable discord with the harmony and fidelity of the Word.

Therefore, we can no longer merely assume our theological anthropology nor be unaccountable for its assumptions underlying ‘where we are’ and ‘what we are doing here’; our theological anthropology is the underlying means essential for what and who unfolds ahead, both in our current examination and in life together singing the new song, so we urgently need to discover what constitutes our beginning.

Discovering the Primal Sound

Because babies can discern the full fidelity of sounds in human speech in order to connect and communicate—even, for example, the ‘cooing’ of parents’ baby language—then we need to understand the *primal sound* in human life so that our beginnings can be restored for us to function in its significance. This functional change in our everyday life will require both being aware of and discerning the primal sound’s presence as well as its absence. However, this function will not fully emerge unless activated by the qualitative sensitivity demonstrated by babies.

This turns us back to the singing lecture/sermon raised in the first chapter. Babies probably have been trying to teach us since the beginning that human speech was not first heard in the sounds dominating today: the referential terms of prose composed in referential language, which is used in the secondary function of discourse for the purpose of transmitting information rather than the primary function of communication for the primary purpose of relational connection. Babies reveal to us that the sounds of referential language don’t have the harmony and fidelity for qualitative communication in relationship, but in fact take us in the opposite direction away from qualitative relational connection. Accordingly, looking to babies doesn’t cause us to regress but amplifies the primal sound for our *redevelopment*. Since the beginning (echoed by babies), primal humans are believed to have communicated by nonverbal sounds (tones, pitch, rhythm) of a protolanguage, the qualitative significance of which was basic to communication, and not merely the transmission of information. These rhythmic and tonal sounds infused human speech in poetry, which at its earliest was sung. Only later did prose evolve out of these musical beginnings.²

² See Oliver Sacks, for a discussion on perfect pitch, tonal communication and protolanguage in *Musophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain*. Also see Iain McGilchrist’s discussion on this qualitative process as ‘musilanguage’ in *The Master and his Emissary*, 102, 105.

As embraced by human babies at birth, what is being discovered here is what innately emerged ‘in the beginning’ that is definitive for what is inherent in our beginning. As babies amplify, what these rhythmic sounds composed—even for those with little if any apparent discernment (e.g. those with Alzheimer’s or autism)—was the distinguished relational quality of music, whose primal sound resonated in hearts and made basic relational connection between those engaged, much to the delight of all babies at birth.

In other words or non-verbally, the relational quality of music is the primal sound for human life created by God. A singing lecture/sermon would only have more significance than a mere lecture if it has the relational quality to resonate and not only reverberate with the listeners. Music is the most basic sound that integrally resonates in our hearts and reverberate in our minds, because, as babies teach us, it’s from the beginning—primal for all human beginnings and thus essential to be restored in our beginning. The clarity of this primal sound, however, only emerges in the harmony and fidelity of music’s relational quality, not in any other forms and expressions, including musical sound bites. This distinguishes the relational quality amplified by the harmony and fidelity of the Word communicated in relational language with relational terms for the relational purpose and relational outcome of reciprocal relationship together.

On this relational basis, the Word amplifies:

“The Lord is my strength and my song” (Ex 15:2); “He put a new song in my mouth”—distinguished from sound bites in referential terms (Ps 40:13); therefore, “...at night his song is with me” (Ps 42:8)—signifying the primal sound of God’s presence and involvement, which resonates in the heart just as babies enjoy with satisfaction (cf. Ps 131:2).

However, this primal relational process does not unfold in reciprocal relationship together without our qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness. That brings us to a crossroads.

The opening texts from the Word at the top of this chapter (Ps 137:1-6) illuminate human origins and discerning the primal sound basic to life and for life to be significant. In this pivotal decision point in the history of God’s people, they faced where they were in their theological anthropology and how they would function where they were. What is illuminated are the following issues: (1) human nature (ontology), either in reduced condition or whole from inner out, (2) human function, either fragmented from outer in or whole with nothing less and no substitutes, and (3) human relationships, either fragmentary with anything less and any substitutes or whole in the primacy of relationship together.

During their captivity in Babylon, God’s people were subjected to a foreign context in a process of enslavement, which basically sought both to define where they

were and to determine what they were doing there. Thus, God's people faced the pivotal decisions over these issues—decisions that only they could make or by default have the decisions made for them by deferring to that context and process. The pressures from a surrounding context complicate making these decisions, and Christians today can often be found deferring to their contexts and the processes prevailing in them.

Not surprisingly, their captors liked music. But they weren't asking for music that would resonate with their hearts, because their persons were reduced to outer in. Consequently, they wanted to be entertained by these captives with the mirth of songs in a language with which they had no harmony or fidelity. That is to say, they wanted the expressions of persons reduced in their persons and relationships, just as they themselves were; and where they were was dissonant to the primal sound and thereby had no consonance with the inherent relational quality of music. This was the reductionist context and process facing God's people. Thus, they urgently needed to decide who would define their human nature, what would determine their human function, and how their relationships would be with God, each other and those in the surrounding context.

In this pivotal juncture, God's people rightly asked: "How could we sing the LORD's song in a foreign *context and process*?" Certainly, from a cultural perspective, they could expose their culture to the Babylonians; or from a missionary purpose, they could introduce the Lord to them. But that was not the issue facing them. "Foreign" (*nekar*) is not limited to culture, ideology or geography. The Lord's song is only composed in relational language, communicating in a relational context by a relational process. Anything less and any substitutes for this function and purpose are not in harmony and fidelity with the Word amplified in this song, because they are foreign to it; thus, any such reduced expressions neither resonate with its relational quality nor reverberate in its primal sound. Therefore, the pivotal decisions facing God's people revolved around their inherent nature or ontology, their basic function, and their depth of relationship together. "Foreign," then, encompasses what is common, the norm, and what prevails in human contexts and processes—that is, the scope of reductionism composing the human condition. Accordingly, "foreign" is in ongoing contrast and conflict with the whole relational context and process of the amplified Word, who constitutes whole persons and relationships in the image and likeness of the whole of God.

This wholeness is the theological anthropology at stake here for all God's people, which revolves around the ongoing pivotal decisions facing us with anything less and any substitutes from the "foreign." This crossroads glares in our face and ongoingly confronts us. So, we have to ask rightly and basically also: How can we *be* and function, and have relationships together in a foreign context and process without having a theological anthropology of nothing less and no substitutes? And we either make the pivotal decisions necessary to distinguish our theological anthropology in wholeness, or we defer to surrounding context and process—which could also be a reducing Christian context and process—to define who and what we are and determine how we are.

Resorting back to our infancy in order to discern the primal sound is neither a regression nor a contradiction to our progression in life. On the contrary, it returns us to our innate beginning inherent to the persons and relationships created in the qualitative image and relational likeness of God's wholeness constituted in and by the Trinity. The regression and contradiction to our progression are always heard in the sound of anything less and any substitutes, which do not resonate with babies.

What, then, do you hear in your theological anthropology that discerns where you are and what you are doing here? The music we listen to, and how we listen and why, inform us of our beginnings. Furthermore, the harmony and fidelity of our music provide the key to knowing our *where* and to understanding our *what*.

Sound Bites or Soundboard

The function of music serves different purposes for persons, even if they don't like music. When I was a child, I wanted to play the drums but that sound was too noisy for my family. Reluctantly, piano became my default instrument. Still, the rhythm of the drum really reverberated in my mind, and I often used sticks or kitchen utensils to simulate that rhythm. Yet, to my knowledge, the drum rhythm only reverberated in my mind and its sound didn't really resonate in my heart. In contrast, for example, when I played the music of Moonlight Sonata on the piano, its sound resonated in my heart, which continues to this day. What's the difference in how music functioned for me both in my beginnings and currently?

Ironically, Beethoven composed the sound of Moonlight Sonata after he became deaf. How was that possible? Moreover, how could Beethoven hear this sound that has resonated in my heart from the beginning?

The drum sound that only reverberates in my mind and that piano sound that also resonates in my heart illustrate the different functions of music engaged by different listeners (not necessarily the players). For me, the drum sound basically was analogous to a **sound bite** that caught my attention, and that I used for a secondary purpose. That is to say, this sound functioned in my person from outer in, going in me only to my brain, which certainly is not unimportant but lacking deeper significance. This, then, also illuminates a vital key for us to listen to:

Sound-bite music amplifies only a reduced harmony of where we are and a reduced fidelity of what we are doing here, thereby resounding in a reduced theological anthropology defining our persons and relationships and determining how they function. Although not by design, therefore, sound-bite music functions to provide us with this critical feedback needing to be listened to and responded to integrally with our minds and hearts.

In basic contrast and inherent conflict, the piano sound of Beethoven that resonates in my heart is analogous to a **soundboard**. Soundboards serve to deepen the resonance of instruments, without which would leave those instruments lacking in the quality necessary to resonate in the hearts of persons and not be limited to reverberate in their minds. So, how did Beethoven function as a sounding board even after he became deaf?

Neurologist Oliver Sacks, called “the poet laureate of medicine,” offered this explanation:

Many composers, indeed, do not compose initially or entirely at an instrument but in their minds. There is no more extraordinary example of this than Beethoven, who continued to compose (and whose compositions rose to greater and greater heights) years after he had become totally deaf. It is possible that his musical imagery was even intensified by deafness, for with the removal of normal auditory input, the auditory cortex may become hypersensitive, with heightened powers of musical imagery (and sometimes even auditory hallucinations). There is an analogous phenomenon in those who lose their sight, some people who become blind may have, paradoxically, heightened visual imagery. (Composers, especially composers of enormously intricate, architectonic music like Beethoven’s, must also employ highly abstract forms of musical thought—and it might be said that it is especially such intellectual complexity that distinguishes Beethoven’s later works.)³

Beethoven’s brain likely indeed became hypersensitive after his total deafness, but this only addresses Beethoven from outer in and not his total person from inner out. To go deeper, I offer from the experience of my beginnings that it was the qualitative sensitivity emerging from Beethoven’s heart—released to new depths after his deafness—which formed the basis for him to integrate the secondary elements of music into music’s primary function: to go beyond just reverberating in the mind to encompass resonating in the heart.

Certainly, Beethoven’s music (notably Moonlight Sonata) doesn’t resonate in everyone’s heart. Nevertheless, what emerged unmistakably from Beethoven in deafness is the qualitative sensitivity of his person from inner out, which wasn’t defined and determined by the limits and constraints of his person from outer in. This is crucial to distinguish in theological anthropology and its underlying means in all theology and practice. In deafness, Beethoven not only heard the primal sound clearly but better knew where he was as a person and understood what he was doing musically as that person. Therefore, I say, without apology, that Beethoven was a soundboard resonating a whole theological anthropology distinguished from a reduced theological anthropology, and

³ Oliver Sacks, *Musicophilia*, 33.

whose music functions to help us hear the difference—functioning in basic contrast to and inherent conflict with sound-bit music and what it signifies.

Are these sounds helping you discover your beginning and composing what is basic to your person?

What is illuminated in our examination is the basic key in life from the beginning that is essential for us to listen to, embrace, and express:

The function of music as the soundboard amplifies integrally

1. the innate harmony of who, what and how human persons are created to be,
2. the inherent fidelity of living with the qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness to be those whole persons in whole relationships together,

thereby resounding in the whole theological anthropology integrally

- composed by the relational language and terms of the amplified Word, and
- constituted in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole relational context and process of the Word distinguished by nothing less and no substitutes of the Trinity.

From the very beginning, therefore, the function of soundboard music resonates with human hearts (a) to make vulnerable the ‘who’ and the ‘what’ essential for all life, and (b) to highlight the ‘how’ essential for life to be significant—resonating with nothing less and no substitutes for our response to be with nothing less and no substitutes.

The outcomes from sound-bite music and soundboard music are evident in the daily life of where persons are and what they are doing there. Their specific outcomes compose either the relational reality and experiential truth of the amplified Word, or its illusions and simulations amplified by reductionism. Whether the outcomes of those sounds are discerned or not, their effects are definitive for who and what emerges and determinative for how they will function in daily life. Based on this discussion, who and what would you discern in your beginnings? Given your beginning, how would you assess its current outcome?

Texting, Confirmation Bias, and Facing the Truth

There are three dynamics in the human context and process—a context and process routinely confused or conflated in our theology and practice with God’s relational context and process—which reveal (1) the underlying means of our theological anthropology and (2) their effects on persons and on the relationships affected by these

persons. The first dynamic is **texting**, a relatively new dynamic that extends the boundaries of emails beyond reason, and enhances social media with unrestrained imagination, and which has swept over the human context and process by idolizing its function (e.g. bowing down to Twitter).

Texting has become the prevailing dynamic of human contact, further reducing human contact to narrowed-down terms using shorthand communication in order to facilitate human interaction as well as to control the contact on one's own terms. The shorthand (with active fingers) of texting is the most convenient substitute for voice communication and has displaced the primacy of face-to-face communication with faceless contact and voiceless communication—further evidenced in the proliferation of emoji. The consequences of texting are exposing both the persons using this dynamic and the relationships engaged in this 'new normal' of what's primary.⁴ What is clearly evident is the lack, absence and loss of relational quality, which is ongoingly demonstrated in the lack, absence and loss of qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness.

What is your experience with this new normal? How would you assess your level of qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness in the midst of its parameters? Yet, regardless of its pervasiveness, what's exposed in this new normal is in reality merely an enhanced version of a human dynamic that has evolved from the beginning of the human context and process. This enhanced version, however, amplifies the human condition more distinctly by the nature of the contact it makes and the composition of the so-called communication it generates. Texting, in shorthand words, accelerates the consequences of the human condition, our human condition, while embellishing it with the illusions and simulations from reductionism, thereby unmistakably both revising the composition of persons and relationships away from their original beginning (constituted in Gen 1:27; 2:18; 2:25) and thus redacting the Word in reduced terms.

Our human condition persists in this revised composition when the second dynamic in the human context and process is engaged. Even more dominant than texting, though not as prominent, is human engagement in the dynamic of **confirmation bias**. In its subtle workings, confirmation bias encompasses the widespread pattern used by nearly everyone as follows: to interpret or selectively remember information—for example, from what we hear or read, even of the Word—in such a way that confirms and reinforces what we already believe, without an openness to test its validity. This dynamic pervades the human context more extensively than texting, which has become even a subordinate means serving confirmation bias, and dominates the human process by discrimination and stereotyping to support its thinking and position on matters. Since we all participate in this human context, it is highly unlikely that this human process hasn't influenced or shaped our human condition.

⁴ See Sherry Turkle for the functions and consequences of this technology in *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

When Jesus made the relational imperative for his disciples to “pay attention *closely and discern* what you hear *from me*,” he made it axiomatic that “the measure you give *or use to engage in daily life* will be the measure you get *back*” (Mk 4:24). Implied in the Word’s axiom is the reductionist measure of confirmation bias, which can only have reduced outcomes narrowed down by our biases—notably outcomes supporting, confirming and reinforcing our biases; nothing else or to the contrary is allowed to emerge as meaningful to pay attention to. Moreover, included in such reduced outcomes are relational consequences that reduce others by the process inherent in confirmation bias of discriminating against them as insignificant to pay attention to, and stereotyping them in those negative terms, as well as stereotyping in reduced positive terms those who support our biases.

Peter learned all this the hard way in a humbling (if not humiliating) experience with the amplified Word (Mt 16:21-23). When Jesus vulnerably shared with his disciples what was going to happen to his person—communicating in relational language and not transmitting information in referential language—Peter couldn’t process the Word amplified to him face to face (contrary to a text message). Rather Peter reacted to the facts and objected to the truth, essentially rendering them as fake news, whereby he discriminated against the Truth and imposed on the Word his stereotyped view of the messiah in reduced terms. Consequently, no way could this happen to his messiah, so he set the record straight by reprimanding Jesus for being wrong. The measure Peter used was confirmation bias, and the measure he got countered the trajectory of the Word, misdirected the relational path of Jesus, and reduced Jesus’ person and their relationship together to the narrowed-down terms of Peter reduced in his own person (“on human things,” v.23). Confirmation bias always has this reduced outcome and relational consequence.

What is unmistakably distinct in confirmation bias is the human dynamic that avoids the truth of life, and thereby denies the realities in life. Such denial of the truth keeps progressing as biases are imposed on the human context and process. Confirmation bias encompasses the human condition, thus it subtly incorporates two other pervading biases. The first of these biases is the biased influence we all experience from and exert in our particular surrounding contexts (whether family of origin, social, political, cultural), which notably has shaped our persons and relationships in the limiting process of contextualization. This unavoidable process is **the contextualized bias**. The second bias incorporated into confirmation bias is the biased influence we all demonstrate from the common workings of reductionism composing the human condition, which has had the assumed primacy (even antecedent to contextualization) to define our persons and relationships and determine their function in the constraining process of *common-ization*.

This inescapable process is **the commonized bias**. The process of contextualization has been misunderstood in our theology and practice, and the process of common-ization has been ignored or simply resigned to or accepted as an assumed reality—both consequential for our theological anthropology to remain reduced and not become whole.

Not surprisingly, this human condition is sustained as our human condition as Christians, as long as confirmation bias (incorporated with contextualized bias and commonized bias) continues to be engaged to deny the truth and realities of life, as well as to keep our persons and relationships from being *vulnerable* for the change necessary for their transformation. Where are you and what are you doing in all this?

Denial or being vulnerable are two antithetical dynamics that cannot be synthesized in any assumed dialectic, although there are illusions and simulations of such a hybrid in everyday life. Texting and confirmation bias are innately engaged in denial, whether intentional, understood or not. The human condition of our condition, amplified by texting and sustained by confirmation bias, raises issues for our theological anthropology. These issues must be resolved for the change needed to transform where persons are and what we are doing in our relationships. The first set of issues involves **the three inescapable issues of harmony**, prevailing in negative versions:

1. How we define the person—which is defined from outer in based more on the quantitative parts of what we do and have, whereby our identity (ontology) is based and our function as that person is determined.
2. On this basis, this is how our person engages in relationships with other persons—whom we define in the same outer-in terms, whereby all our reduced persons then reduce the depth level of involvement in relationship together.
3. This becomes the inescapable determinant for how we live as church—these reduced persons in reduced relationships together then become the defining basis and determining mode (the *default mode*) for how we practice our beliefs and consequently how relationships together function as the church and in its related institutions (notably the academy).

These ongoing interrelated issues are critical for the necessary accountability of our identity and function in order to be vulnerable for their change. The pivotal shift from the beginning in the primordial garden illuminates the consequences of being reduced from “embodied whole from inner out and not confused, disappointed in relationship together” (Gen 2:25) to “embodied parts from outer in and reduced to relational distance” (Gen 3:7-8). To this day, this shift continues to evolve with ongoing consequences; and their implications directly challenge (indeed, confront) our theological anthropology and hold us accountable for its assumptions defining our identity and determining our function.

This unmistakable shift to reductionism highlighted in negative versions of the three inescapable issues of harmony in our identity and function is further exposed in interaction with **the three unavoidable issues of fidelity** (prevailing in negative function) for all our practice, which are necessary to account for in all moments of our life:

1. The presentation of our person in the everyday contexts of life—which focuses on the outer-in parts of our person presented to others that define our primary identity and determine our prevailing function, thereby conveying to others who and what we *are* based on these reduced facts, not complete reality—an ongoing presentation of self (e.g. “naked from outer in...”) that is limited by covering up the vulnerable from inner out and enhanced by favorable masks.
2. The integrity and quality of our communication from that person presented to others—in which our communication becomes shallow, ambiguous or misleading in the presentation process with others, and how this communication compromises the integrity of open relationship necessary to be honest and vulnerable together (e.g. “the woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate,” Gen 3:12).
3. The depth level of involvement in relationship to be significant—consequently, contrary to the significance of inner-out involvement in our contacts and connections, the involvement level engaged in reduced relationship is shaped by our identity presented from outer in and its related communication, and thus determined by levels of relational distance, not depth (e.g. “...they covered up,” “I was afraid because I was naked, and I hid myself,” Gen 3:10).

Regardless of where we are and what we are doing here, we all are accountable ongoingly for the type of person presented, the nature of our communication and the level of involvement engaged in our relationships. These are unavoidable issues of fidelity that interact with the three inescapable issues of harmony, which define the person presented and determine relationships on that basis both in everyday life and in the church. Interrelated and interacting reflexively, these defining issues influence and shape our lives—even in the commonest expressions along the full breadth of the spectrum locating anything less and any substitutes for wholeness of persons and relationships. Therefore, until we resolve these issues in our theological anthropology, our theology and practice will not be in the harmony and fidelity of the Word, thus with the relational quality of life.

Given the reality of our condition, would you consider change as urgent and, indeed, nonnegotiable for our identity and function today?

Given how entrenched the first two dynamics are in the human context and process, changing their influence so that our condition will indeed be transformed in this present life is (a) neither forthcoming simply because we recognize it, and (b) nor to be expected simply because we want it. This change, however, is possible for persons and relationships when they become vulnerable distinctly by the depth of involvement in the third dynamic in the human context and process. While the least popular and the most challenging of the three dynamics, the dynamic of **facing the truth** offers the most hope, satisfaction and fulfillment for persons and relationships.

Facing the truth is always contingent on being vulnerable. Yet, being vulnerable is not an easy decision to act on, given the biases influencing the thinking in our minds and the feeling in our heart. This directs us back to the primal sound of music.

From the beginning, the primal sound of music has evolved in human history. Music has evolved either as sound bites shaped by adapting to the limits and constraints of human contexts, or as soundboards composed by adaptations from the openness (variable vulnerability) of human contexts. One genre of music is of notable interest for our discussion, not because of its style but for its relevance. This is the country music developed in the U.S.

Country songwriter Harlan Howard defined the essence of country music as ‘three chords and the truth’. Though not consistently fulfilled in country music history, speaking truth has been the defining norm in its songs. When the harmony of their three chords has the fidelity of truth, country songs have reverberated in listeners’ minds—with the unmistakable reality that the song speaks of where they are in life and what they are doing there. When those songs include the depth of feelings (e.g. pain, sadness, anxiety and anger) inherent to that reality, country music not only reverberates in persons’ minds but penetrates deeper to resonate in their hearts. Speaking truth and facing it in everyday life defines and determines country music at its best. Yet, the fact of the matter is, for country music to fulfill its speaking-truth purpose is always contingent on being vulnerable—the vulnerableness to face the rawness of reality in our human condition.

In my opinion, country music has consistently demonstrated a vulnerability to speak the truth of our human condition. Having said that, on the other hand, while country music speaks the truth of existing reality, it lacks the deeper truth underlying both the human condition and the necessary experiential truth and relational reality to transform this condition. Perhaps few in country music have vulnerably faced the Truth in order to experience its reality, whereby they can also speak the Truth that will integrally resonate in hearts and transform hearts—transform from the reductions and fragmentations inherent in the human condition to the wholeness of persons and relationship amplified by, in, and for the Word.

In the musical beginning of the human person, as discerned by babies at birth, the primal sound penetrates the innermost of the person from inner out, whereby the whole person is made vulnerable to the truth of “where you are” and “what you are doing here.” When music resonates the truth in harmony and fidelity with the Word, its relational quality amplifies the underlying means for persons and relationships to be transformed from their reduced condition to their wholeness. This wholeness has often had a deceptive composition when not in harmony and fidelity with the Word (e.g. “you will not *be reduced*...*but* be like God,” Gen 3:4-5). Amplified by the Word, their wholeness is constituted in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the Trinity, the irreducible whole of God, resonating in nothing less and no substitutes.

Thus, the relational quality of music is indispensable for facing the truth of our life and of our working theological anthropology underlying our persons and relationships in everyday life. Furthermore, the relational quality of music is irreplaceable for resonating the truth to the depths of our hearts as it reverberates in our minds—that is, the truth in unmistakable harmony and fidelity. Accordingly, what emerges in this relational context and process of truth about the human condition is the relational outcome vulnerably amplifying the Word with “songs of joy” (as in Ps 126:5)—that is, the only truth-filled expression of what’s resonating in the heart.

It is the truth of this essential relational outcome that is missing from the essence of country music, as well as lacking in many Christians (including Christian sound-bite music) that otherwise would distinguish the experiential truth and relational reality resonating in their persons and relationships, as well as in their churches.

Distinguishing the Harmony and Fidelity of Relational Quality

The truth resonates in music functioning as a soundboard, but this basic harmony and fidelity are often confused with sound bites. The relational quality of music is not always distinguished by players and less so by listeners. One reason is that the music doesn’t have the right harmony and fidelity to be distinguished with significant depth, which characterizes sound bites. On the other hand, even when the music is in the right harmony and fidelity, that harmony and fidelity must be correctly discerned to understand the music’s relational quality. The primal sound of music amplifies the relational quality of life, but this relational quality is only distinguished in harmony and fidelity with the amplified Word communicated to us in relational language. What is this harmony and fidelity that resonates in persons’ hearts, yet that eludes many persons?

‘In the beginning’ the human brain was wired to recognize the qualitative and relational dimensions in life (demonstrated in Gen 2:25).⁵ Yet, even when this relational

⁵ See related studies in neuroscience by Antonio Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010), and by John T. Cacioppo and William Patrick, *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008).

quality is recognized, this does not mean that it is understood by the brain. Our brains encompass the person only from outer in. Despite how extensively the brain encompasses the person, it does not penetrate to the innermost to embrace the whole person from inner out. ‘In the beginning’ only the human heart embraced the whole person—constituted from the innermost (*nephesh*, Gen 2:7) in ongoing function by the heart (*leb*, Prov 4:23; 14:30; 27:19)—who is otherwise fragmented to one’s parts (most notably the brain). What is essential for our beginning is the primary priority of the qualitative in life over any and all of the quantitative, and its integration with the primacy of the relational (Gen 2:18).

In spite of the origin of human beginnings, adaptations have taken place to make the heart less vulnerable as well as to rewire the brain.⁶ As these adaptations have evolved, the relational quality of life is less recognized much less understood. Consequently, as our hearts become less vulnerable, our person shifts to the dominance of the brain (mainly in the left hemisphere) and to the prevailing function of the person from outer in (demonstrated in Gen 3:7). It is this current human (our) condition that needs to be changed (as in *redemptive* change) in order for us to distinguish the harmony and fidelity inherent to the relational quality of life.

What was initiated from the beginning in the primordial garden and continues to evolve in the human condition is distinctly the reduction or loss of **qualitative sensitivity** and **relational awareness**. In this subtle yet unmistakable reduction, the quantitative has assumed priority and the relational has been rendered secondary, perhaps tertiary—that is, reduced in function though not necessarily in ideals. The qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness inherently functioning in the beginning to both recognize and understand the relational quality of life have now become dysfunctional, even in the theology and practice of many Christians and their underlying theological anthropology. But, how do we know that this qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness truly functioned in the beginning to help us live with and thus in the relational quality of life?

Persons today vary in their level of qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness because persons function at different levels of the basic harmony and fidelity that distinguish relational quality of life. This basic harmony and fidelity are innate to all persons who are created in the image and likeness of their Creator (cf. Gen 1:26-27). For us to clearly recognize this invariable harmony and fidelity is to discern the invariable image and likeness of God. Likewise, to discern this irreducible harmony and fidelity is to clearly realize the irreducible image and likeness of the Trinity. Now we have just gone from the Creator to God to the Trinity, because this is a crucial progression to clearly recognize then realize the image and likeness that constitute the innate harmony and fidelity distinguishing the relational quality of life.

⁶ For further discussion about this rewiring, see Ski Chilton with Margaret Rukstalis and A.J. Gregory, *The Rewired Brain: Free Yourself of Negative Behaviors and Release Your Best Self* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016).

This progression illuminates the light unfolding from the Word that gives us understanding beyond our human level of knowledge (Ps 119:130). If our image and likeness remains based on the Creator, all we have is referential information noting this fact, which merely tends to be filed away in our brain with no further significance. If our image and likeness proceeds to God, we may have more than information but commonly limited to a view of God as *Object*—for example, the object of our beliefs, worship, service, and the impersonal (read *de-person-ized* and *de-relational-ized*) object of our image and likeness. If, however, our image and likeness advances to the Trinity, we are faced with not the Object but now the irreducible whole of God as Subject, resonating in nothing less and no substitutes but the Trinity—whose Trinitarian persons (1) distinguish the relational quality intrinsic to life and (2) constitute human persons in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the integral Trinity.⁷

What the light unfolding from the Word illuminates, therefore, is the face of the Trinity—resonating in the innermost of persons and relationships functioning in their innate image and likeness. What the face of the Trinity (the integral face of Trinitarian persons) communicates to us face to face nonnegotiable and constitutes in us irreducibly is (a) the primary priority of the qualitative over the quantitative and (b) the primacy of the relational over any other function. Persons and relationships, thereby in the relational context and process of the Trinity, are constituted in the essential relational quality basic to life—innately and inherently, thus irreducibly and nonnegotiable.

Distinguishing the qualitative image and relational likeness of the Trinity distinguishes the harmony and fidelity inherent to the relational quality of life. Functioning as persons innately in this qualitative image and relational likeness amplifies the harmony and fidelity of the relational quality inherent to the wholeness of persons and their relationships together—just as constituted in and by the Trinity. Nothing less and no substitutes can neither constitute our image and likeness, nor our function by, in, and with the relational quality basic to life. And vital to this relational process, our function becomes distinguished by the depth of our qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness, which deepens solely on the qualitative relational basis of our ongoing reciprocal relationship together with the qualitative relational Trinity. Irreplaceably, then, it is the experiential truth and relational reality of this whole relationship together that redeems and transforms us from anything less and any substitutes, and thereby restores our persons and relationships to nothing less and no substitutes. The wholeness of our image and likeness depend on this experiential truth and relational reality.

What sounds in your beginnings are you hearing, discerning or discovering?

⁷ For an extended discussion on the Trinity, see my study *The Face of the Trinity: The Trinitarian Essential for the Whole of God and Life* (Trinity Study, 2016), online at <http://www.4X12.org>. For further discussion on the qualitative image and relational likeness of the Trinity, see my study *The Person in Complete Context: The Whole of Theological Anthropology Distinguished* ((Theological Anthropology Study, 2014), online at <http://www.4X12.org>.

The Experiential Truth and Relational Reality Resonating

Any theological anthropology lacking the qualitative image and relational likeness of the Trinity—who is distinguished only by the Word amplified in relational language—is a reduced theological anthropology. Just including the image and likeness of God is insufficient to reverberate much less resonate for persons and relationships. Likewise, any theology and practice without the experiential truth and relational reality of the Trinity is rendered insignificant. The nature, function and purpose of the Trinity are incomparably relational and uncommonly qualitative, thus beyond the limits of the human context and the constraints of the human process. Stated simply, the validity of these two inclusive contentious statements is based on knowing and understanding the Word (1) amplified in relational language, (2) embodied in qualitative relational terms, and (3) vulnerably present and relationally involved by the integral face of the Trinity illuminated in the Trinitarian persons

Knowing and understanding the Word distinguished by the above three requires us to be in the same harmony and fidelity of all three. In contrast and conflict, for example, the Word is not (1) amplified in referential language, (2) embodied merely in quantitative terms, and (3) present and involved with anything less than the unreduced whole of God, that is, the Trinity; consequently, any knowledge and understanding of the Word based on these latter three are fragmentary reductions of the truth and reality of God, and are reflected accordingly in a reduced theological anthropology and insignificant theology and practice. In other words, they are not in harmony and fidelity with the relational quality of life constituted by and in the nonnegotiable Word, the irreducible whole of God, the integral face of the Trinity.

Once again, however, to be in the right harmony and fidelity requires our being vulnerable to both the qualitative and the relational in order to connect directly with the integral face of the Trinity. What is distinguished unmistakably in this vulnerability is *the face*, that is, the primary presence of the person (*paneħ*, as in Ex 33:14; Num 6:25-26, cf. 12:6-8). *Face* necessarily includes the primary presence of our person, if indeed we are vulnerable in the qualitative and relational. When we vulnerably connect face to face with the Son, the Father or the Spirit, we connect with the integral face of the Trinity in the intimate involvement of reciprocal relationship together (as in Jn 14:9-10; 2 Cor 3:17-18)—the primary priority and function for all theology and practice. As the disciples discovered by Jesus' exposure of them, they neither intimately knew the Son nor, thus, the Trinity, because they were not vulnerably in face-to-face intimate relational involvement with the Word vulnerably amplified to them.

The absence of intimate relational involvement face to face also commonly exists in not knowing the Spirit—the Spirit as person and not a force or notion of love. The primary presence of the Spirit as person is directly involved in ongoing relationship with us (as the Word amplified, Jn 14:15-17), whose face is vulnerable to our face (as in Eph

4:30) in reciprocal relationship together. This truth and reality seems to elude or is lost for many Christians. For example, how many songs and prayers have you heard frequently expressed that call out to the Spirit to come into their lives? Why? Even with the best of intentions, the Truth is contradicted and not experienced, and the relationship is countered and not a reality.

When we vulnerably enter into this face-to-face intimate relational involvement with the Trinity, this relational outcome follows:

the experiential truth of the relational quality of the Trinity constituting us from inner out in the Trinity's qualitative image and relational likeness, which unfolds immeasurably in **the relational reality** of reciprocal relationship together in wholeness with the Trinity.

Nothing less and no substitutes resonate the truth and reality of life in our hearts to make them integrally the experiential truth and relational reality.

This outcome is not merely the truth and reality referenced in the Word and then noted in our belief system or filed in our theological folder. To whatever extent that truth and reality may reverberate in our minds, this is the experiential truth and relational reality that resonates in our hearts (1) to functionally distinguish the relational outcome unfolding from vulnerably knowing and understanding the Trinity face to face, and now (2) being relationally constituted experientially in the Trinity's qualitative image and relational likeness. Integrated in this relational outcome, in order to keep distinguishing the experiential truth and relational reality of the Trinity's relational quality in our persons and relationships, is **an intensified qualitative sensitivity** and **an inclusive depth of relational awareness**, which resonates in unmistakable harmony and fidelity with the Trinity, with the vulnerable human heart, and with the involved connections in relationships. Nothing less and no substitutes bring forth this relational outcome, and anything less and any substitutes never resonate as the experiential truth and relational reality of our persons and relationships in wholeness as in the Trinity.

This essential harmony and fidelity of relational quality composes our beginning in the unique wholeness of the Trinity. The extension of our beginning must continue to be in harmony and fidelity for our persons and relationships to unfold whole as well as uncommon (whole-ly) to the human condition (cf. commonized). When theological anthropology is composed according to wholeness, it amplifies the harmony and fidelity for our persons and relationships to *be* and function in wholeness—regardless of what commonly prevails in the human condition and permeates our surrounding contexts.

Progress in discovering our musical beginning is ongoingly challenged by other sounds, and confronted by illusions of truth and simulations of reality. This is the

expected workings of reductionism that we can count on throughout our examination.

So, in vulnerable terms, where do you find your person and relationships? Are they compatible with the experience of the truth in the Word amplifying the Trinity? And are they congruent with the reality of the qualitative image and relational likeness amplified in the Trinity? Experiencing a reality of anything less and any substitutes in our theology and practice reduce the above from their whole beginnings and recompose them in sound bites with a harmony and fidelity dissonant to the inherent relational quality of life essential in their innate image and likeness. Whenever dissonance happens, discerned or not, the face of the Trinity is grieved.

Chapter 3 **Transitioning from Words to the Word**

And the Word became flesh and lived among us.

John 1:14

My tongue will sing of your word.

Psalms 119:172, ESV

**As you sing psalms and hymns and *soundboard* songs among yourselves,
singing in harmony and fidelity to the *Word* in your hearts.**

Ephesians 5:19

The experiential truth and relational reality of our persons and relationships resonate just when distinguished by the Trinity. They resonate ongoingly solely when the Word is amplified. The composition of much theology and practice, however, amplifies words instead of amplifying the Word—words which reduce the truth and relationship with the Trinity from their experiential reality. This results in a harmony and fidelity analogous to sound bites, which could reverberate in our minds but can't resonate in the innermost of our persons and relationships for our theology and practice to be significant.

Such a result is illustrated in a “Peanuts” comic. The boy Linus (the comic’s residential theologian) shares a fact of central interest with his sister Lucy, who is jump roping at the time. Linus: “Here’s something I’ll bet you didn’t know.” (Lucy keeps jump roping.) “The Bible contains 3,566,480 letters and 773,893 words!” (Lucy keeps on jump roping without a word to Linus, nor even looking at him for a moment.) Finally, Linus says, “You’re just not interested in theology, are you?”¹ In contrast to Linus’ words transmitting information to Lucy, listen to Dennis in the comic “Dennis the Menace,” who communicates this vulnerable prayer as he kneels at his bed before going to sleep: “I’d kinda like to make this person-to-person. Do ya mind?” His prayer seems to resonate with his mom as she listens in wonderment, while his dad appears somewhat bewildered or amazed.² Our young friends illuminate the transition from words to the Word, and what has significance in our theology and practice.

This chapter focuses on the essential transition from those words to the Word. By the nature of the experiential truth and relational reality, this transition is necessary in order for our theology and practice to have the significance to resonate in our persons and relationships. For this transition to be essential, it must by necessity involve going through pivotal stages that will increasingly require the harmony and fidelity of the

¹ Created by Charles M. Schulz, *Los Angeles Times*, August 22, 2016.

² Created by Hank Ketcham, *Los Angeles Times*, July 1, 1977.

Word, as well as progressively demand our response and involvement to be composed by the Word (“person to person”) rather than by words.

From Referential Truth to Experiential Truth

If country music is indeed ‘three chords and the truth’, then even more so Christian music should resonate as ‘three chords and the experiential truth’. For this composition to resonate in our theology and practice, it has to be in the clear harmony and fidelity of the Word. As the three inescapable issues of harmony and the three unavoidable issues of fidelity (discussed in chapter 2) get resolved in our persons and relationships, we are faced with the Word to constitute the Truth for our persons and relationships to experience beyond mere words. That is, we are faced with the Word as the Truth (Jn 1:14; 14:6), who communicated face to face in relational language to counter the words of truth in referential language—“person to person, do ya mind?” Thus, we are faced with this pivotal stage of transition from referential truth to experiential truth, so that our theology and practice will be significant to resonate in our persons and relationships.

When the first persons in the primordial garden possessed the truth, it was unmistakably communicated by God in relational language. This truth was then countered by the subtlety of referential language informing them that “you will not *be reduced*...” (Gen 3:2-4). By accepting this information as the truth, those persons in effect revised the truth they first experienced with God to only the reference of it, thereby opening the door to compose truth in other terms not in harmony and fidelity with the Word. The question we are faced with at this point in human history, just as those persons faced in the beginning, is: “Did God really say *those words*?” (Gen 3:1) in a language that revised the original language of *how* God spoke, thereby opening the door to the underlying question of “What did God really mean in saying those words?”

The genius of reductionism encompasses how it manipulates persons with words. Referential language is its most subtle means. For example, when human language shifted from poetry to prose, the quantity of words displaced the quality of words, whereby referential language dominated—which we see prevailing subtly in Christian theology and practice. Accordingly, anyone who hears the Word in a “foreign” tongue is encouraged, relegated or forced to listen to words, whereupon one asks “What did those words really mean?” This is how referential language transposes the Word to words, and then composes the truth with what we think it really means. The common result prevailing in theology and practice, past and present, is *referential truth*. From the beginning, referential truth emerged from those “*whose eyes will be opened and who will be like God, knowing good and evil*” (Gen 3:5). Since this defining beginning, referential truth has been composed in variable human terms determining “what God really means by those words.”

More specifically, John 1:1 either declares in referential language or communicates in relational language that “The Word became flesh and lived among us.” How many of you have this in your theological files as the referential truth of the incarnation? Based on that, how do you experience “the Word becoming the flesh of his person from inner out and living among us as that whole person for the primary purpose of relationship together”? No amount of words can resonate in the harmony and fidelity of the Word to embrace this experiential truth in relationship together. At most, all there is to embrace in referential language are the words of referential truth. But, and this is critical for our transition, the genius of reductionism is to disguise the words of referential truth to appear no different than the truth experienced in the Word, and many Christian traditions of theology and practice have formed on this reduced basis. Jesus exposed the difference in the resounding critique: “This *kind* honors me with their lips but their hearts are far from me...teaching human-*shaped words* as doctrines. You abandon *the Word* and hold to your traditions *in referential language*” (Mk 7:6-8). Later, the palpable Word exposed a prominent church dedicated to what amounted to the referential truth, without embracing the primacy of experiential truth directly involving the Word in relationship together (Rev 2:2-4). From the early church through church history, the truth was an ongoing issue in fighting false doctrines. Creeds were developed to separate the truth from falsehood, yet essentially did not distinguish experiential truth from referential truth—with the common result, even in reciting creeds today, that “those people honor me with *the words of* their lips but their hearts are far from *the Word.*”

The Reformation returned to the primacy of the Word, yet for the most part did not clearly distinguish experiential truth from referential truth, thus did not fully transition from words to the Word. As evident throughout church history, the truth is that referential truth never resonates in the harmony and fidelity of the Word—no matter that it may not appear any different from the experiential truth of the Word. That’s the genius of reductionism.

Words can be comprehensive or shorthand versions of a language lexicon. As descriptive as words in referential language can be, they are unable to define the essence of the Word beyond descriptive information. As accurate as that information can be, it is insufficient to determine the truth of the Word, whereby to experience the truth of the Word beyond face to face, vulnerably to “person to person if ya don’t let your mind control ya.” In other than words, the Word in relational language takes our person preoccupied with referential truth to our innermost resonating with the experiential truth heart to heart, person to person in the primacy of face-to-face relationship together.

Listen to the harmony and fidelity of the Word (taken from Dt 5:4; Num 6:25-26; Ps 80:3; 2 Cor 4:6) used to compose this song:

The Face of God³

(Dt 5:4; Num 6:25-26; Ps 80:3; 2 Cor 4:6)

1. The face of God has opened
the holy God be praised
the face of God is present
O whole of God be thanked

2. The face of God is involved
the grace of God be praised
the face of God interacts
O whole of God be thanked

3. The face of God still remains
the faithful God be praised
the face of God stays focused
O whole of God be thanked

4. The face of God gets affected
the love of God be praised
the face of God so forgives us
O whole of God be thanked

5. The face of God not common
the holy God be praised
the face of God not two-faced
O whole of God be thanked

³ Composed from the Word by T Dave Matsuo and Kary A. Kambara. Printable sheet music available online at www.4X12.org.

6. The face of God, face of God
the whole and holy God *is*
the face of God, face of God
is the whole and holy God.

Amen, amen, amen!

And in contrast to all the words you've heard about 'grace' as referential truth, listen to the harmony and fidelity of the Word (adding Ps 67:1) used to compose this song:

Face to Face⁴

(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.

⁴ Composed from the Word by T. Dave Matsuo and Kary Kambara. Printable sheet music available online at www.4X12.org.

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.

Would you like to transition from referential truth to experiential truth? Then, you need to transition from the words prevailing in theology and practice to the Word. That will require transitioning from referential terms to relational terms—the next pivotal stage.

From Referential Terms to Relational Terms

For our persons and relationships to truly experience the Word, then their underlying means of theological anthropology must by nature (not out of obligation) be in the harmony and fidelity of the Word composed in relational language. That means our theological anthropology must be composed in relational terms rather than referential terms. The shift to relational terms is evident when we are resolving the three issues of harmony integrated with the three issues of fidelity in order for our persons and relationships to be vulnerable from inner out. If you haven't already discovered, this is not an easy transition since it takes us to the experiential level—shifting from the dominance of our minds to make vulnerable the prominence of our hearts. To face the truth, we cannot be in denial. To experience the truth, we cannot avoid being vulnerable.

The reduced state of the human condition functions in referential terms, which is the default mode even for Christians no matter how much change they've undergone. In his vulnerable prayer, Dennis added "Do ya mind?" because he knew that "person to person" wasn't normal for praying—at least in the prayers he heard. Referential terms amplify the counter-relational workings of reductionism. Subtly, the lexicon for referential terms has been composed by variable human shaping from every context of persons all over the world. Even unknowingly, persons use this lexicon to define their identity and to determine their function. Today, the most common purveyor of referential terms is from the information on the internet. I think it is a critical error to consider all of this information as neutral, because its terminology is formed by the reductionist process inherent to the human condition, thereby reducing us even as our default mode.

Given the dominance of referential terms entrenching us even in the most common human contact (such as texting), how do our persons and relationships transition to relational terms? The short answer is to transition to the Word, which, again, is no easy transition given the pervasive shaping by referential terms of our everyday life.

The Word in relational language incarnated the person from inner out, whose relational quality amplified the integral face of the Trinity to live among us. In no other words, the Word incarnated the trajectory of God more vulnerably than ever before, now intimately present and involved in the Word's vulnerable relational path. In contrast to those in likeness who didn't accept him (Jn 1:11), how do we receive and embrace the Word beyond merely words, that is, to resonate in our hearts for significant relationship together?

The Word also unequivocally made it conclusive (beyond definitive) that "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6). His declaration is typically considered definitive in referential terms, but how does that resonate in our hearts to experience in the significance of relationship together with the Trinity? "No one *connects in relationship together* with the Father except through *the Word*. If you know *the Word in relational terms*, you will..." (Jn 14:7). How so?

The Word incarnates in his whole person the Way, the Truth, and the Life. In contrast and conflict with merely the information from those referential terms, the Word illuminated in his person (1) the relational Way to wholeness, (2) the experiential Truth of the relational outcome vulnerably involved with the Way, and (3) the relational reality of our persons and relationship together in wholeness by "person-to-person" involvement directly with the whole-ly Life. In relational terms alone, the Word amplifies the Way, the Truth, and the Life in the relational quality necessary by their nature to resonate in our hearts the Word's experiential truth and relational reality. Anything less of the Way and the Truth, and any substitutes for the Life reduce the integral face of the Trinity and the wholeness of our persons and relationships, therefore rendering all variations in theology and practice without significance.

The Word vulnerably revealed his whole person to us solely in relational terms, and his relational purpose for sharing his person would not be fulfilled in referential terms. It is crucial for us to understand this relational process, because it is countered by the human condition just as the primal sound was displaced by prose in human discourse. The relational quality of the Word is revealed in its incomparable harmony and fidelity, which must be discerned to distinguish the Word from mere words. This discernment requires qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness, functions which are usually lacking in adults but are found in unbiased little children. This reality was the basis for the Word jumping with joy with the Spirit, while saying “I thank you, Father...because you have hidden *our persons* from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed *us* to infants: (*nepios*, Lk 10:21). The harmony and fidelity of the Word resonate only with persons who are vulnerable from inner out—whose essential function resonates with the significance of their musical beginning.

By his conclusive relational terms and process alone, the Word connects with us, ongoingly is involved with us, and is the only basis for our reciprocal response (1) to be compatible with the Word’s theological trajectory and (2) to be congruent with the Word’s functional relational path. To be compatible and congruent in our theology and practice, our persons and relationships must by nature (not the obligation of referential terms) be vulnerable to the Word, so that words don’t preoccupy us with the secondary and allow us to be in our default condition of relational distance. This vulnerable transition to relational terms is unlike the path that the early disciples engaged with the Word. They didn’t know the Word in relational terms to possess in their hearts the experiential truth and relational reality of the Trinity (Jn 14:9-10), despite the fact that they had variable referential terms about the Word in their mental possession.

Like the early disciples, our default condition today is relational distance, which is the most common mode of function in our daily life. Our default condition and mode emerge from reductionism’s counter-relational workings, and this influence subtly directs our persons and relationships away from being vulnerable from the inner out. That process fragments our persons and relationships to outer in, and this is consequential for reinforcing and sustaining our default condition and mode in two common ways.

The first way exposes the further genius of reductionism by the use of what appears as relational terms in discourse but in reality are only presenting substitutes for the underlying function of referential terms. Recently, there has been a marked increase of relational terminology in theology and practice. ‘Relational’, not to be confused with the significance of relationship, has become a signpost to be relevant in contemporary theology and practice—perhaps the buzzword for reverberating in the mind. Yet, when examined closely, the depth of the term usually goes no further than its referential counterpart. Moreover, maintaining boundaries in abusive times has qualified relationships with constraints to mitigate being vulnerable from inner out; the inadvertent relational consequence is that relational distance is maintained and our default condition

sustained. Relational in referential terms, in other words, is not in harmony and fidelity with the Word—even if its use reverberates in practice—resonating the whole person vulnerably living among us only for the relational purpose and outcome of reciprocal relationship together face to face, person to person, heart to heart.

The first way, which is subtly consequential for reinforcing and sustaining our default condition and mode, points to the second way: Answering the need to change from inner out for the sake of *new* relationship together in wholeness by the subtle avoidance of change and denial of its need in our persons and relationships. Those who function within the limits and constraints of the status quo in their life, for example, will overtly or covertly deny any need for change, significant change. Those who want more, but are reluctant to pursue it for whatever reason, will typically avoid change in their person and relationships—even when advocating for general change. Such persons in these categories will either resist or avoid the definitive blessing of the Word on God’s family, with the relational consequence of remaining reduced in their default condition and mode.

The Word’s definitive blessing (Num 6:24-26) has reverberated in the words of God’s people, from its origin to current practice. Yet, it rarely resonates in our hearts, because the blessing is rendered in referential terms that are unable to communicate the significance of the Word for the experiential truth and relational reality of the blessing’s relational outcome. This relational outcome is communicated whole only in its original composition in relational terms.

The face of God is not a referential term informing us about God. *Paneh* (face) denotes the vulnerable presence of the person, not merely as a profile but present from inner out. Face (e.g. as a symbolic image or an anthropomorphism) could certainly be important as a referential term, but it does not have the relational significance to resonate in our hearts, and thus warrant the imperative to seek after always (cf. Ps 27:8; 105:4). In *paneh* as the relational term, however, it is not mere light that shines on us but the very heart of God. Furthermore, when God’s face is illuminated, the vulnerable presence of God is distinguished in the intimate involvement of face-to-face reciprocal relationship (the covenant relationship together), not in unilateral relationship with the people of God.

Thus, in the beginning, the face of God constituted this **relational equation**: For human persons from inner out to be in vulnerable face-to-face relationship together, both with the face of God and with each other. God’s definitive blessing is based on these relational terms, and it is relationally enacted solely for this relational purpose in order to complete this essential relational equation. Therefore, as God’s face is vulnerable face to face with the persons and relationships in God’s family, this vulnerable connection unfolds in the only relational outcome of God’s definitive blessing: “give you peace.”

‘Peace’ is a term connoted by various emphases (e.g. in Greek terminology) and augmented by many words (e.g. by pacifists and others lacking peace). The most significant meaning for *shalom* is the well-being of persons and relationships in nothing

less and no substitutes but wholeness—the wholeness constituted in the God of peace (cf. 1 Thes 5:23; 2 Thes 3:16) and by the peace of Christ (Jn 14:27; Col 3:15). Yet, this wholeness is not merely “given” unilaterally by God’s face. ‘Give’ is another term connoted by various emphases (e.g. a selfless act or *quid pro quo*) and augmented by many words focused on that to do and how to do it. So, what does God enact in giving and how does God enact it?

The ontology and function of God defines the face of God’s theological trajectory and determines the relational path of the Word’s presence and involvement (as in 2 Cor 4:6). God’s ontology and function are whole when distinguished by the integral face of the Trinity, whose relational quality constitutes the Trinity’s wholeness that illuminates “the Face who give you wholeness.” Only on the basis of whole ontology and function does the relational process of the Word unfold to this relational outcome.

In relational terms, the Trinity is neither giving unilaterally nor giving to get something back (*quid pro quo*). Giving by the Trinity has a relational function in wholeness for the relational purpose of wholeness for persons and relationships to receive. For this relational outcome to unfold, however, change is necessary for those persons and relationships. The Hebrew term for “give” (*siym*) has various shades of meaning that signify to bring change and establish a new relationship together. In relational terms, the Trinity’s definitive blessing responds face to face to bring *redemptive change* (the old dies so the new rises) in order to establish the new relationship together in wholeness. God’s peace is the wholeness created in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the Trinity, and later covenanted with Abraham (Gen 17:1-2), and now fulfilled by “the Word vulnerably present and intimately involved with you.”

The relational path and outcome of the Word do not unfold for us unless we transition from words in referential terms to the irreducible and nonnegotiable relational terms of the Word. Anything less and any substitutes for the Word are composed by words in referential terms. And we cannot reduce or renegotiate the Word down to our terms and expect to have face-to-face relational connection—“person to person, do ya get it?” Moreover, ongoing face-to-face relational connection with the integral face of the Word will not go deeper until we transition from relational terms to the relational reality of reciprocal relationship together in wholeness—the wholeness distinguished by the Word. This deeper transition challenges if not confronts our words.

From Relational Terms to Relational Reality

Acknowledging God’s face and affirming the integral face of the Trinity are essential in the transition to the Word. Some consider this face merely a common anthropomorphism, but this dismissal of face has relational consequences not taken into consideration. Though referential terms may not dismiss this face, those words also have

relational consequences. Acknowledging and affirming this face in relational terms are necessary to avoid relational consequences with God, yet this alone is not sufficient for the face-to-face relationship together to be the relational reality resonating in our hearts—thus insufficient for our theology and practice to be significant. The transition from words to the Word doesn't navigate on a wide road but on the Word's narrow relational path (Mt 7:13-14, 21-23; Lk 13:24-27).

Face to face must be integrated functionally with person to person. That is, in reciprocal response to the Trinity's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement, our response must be vulnerable with our whole person from inner out. The ancient poet summed this response: "I have sought your face with all my heart" (Ps 119:58, NIV, qualifying Ps 105:4). Person to person doesn't emerge to be distinguished with face to face until "all my heart" distinguishes the person. Anything less and any substitutes from outer in neither resonate in the person nor resonate for the person presented to the Trinity for their reciprocal relationship together to be a functional reality—not the representation of words. Because of the subtle workings of reductionism, the ancient poet requests: "Search me, O God, and know my heart, test me and know my thoughts" (Ps 139:23). And all in the church should know that 'anything less and any substitutes' exists even in those increasing in "your love, faith, service, and patient endurance"—all exposed in their hybrid theology and practice because "*the Word is the one who searches minds and hearts*" (Rev 2:19,23).

Face to face integrated functionally with person to person is **the essential relational equation** necessary for the relational reality to be the experiential truth of nothing less and no substitutes. The Trinity has fulfilled (in the beginning through the present) the first half of the relational equation with the integral face of Trinitarian persons; the other half of the equation waits to be fulfilled by our person(s). The amplified Word constituted this relational equation in wholeness "in the beginning" (Gen 1:1; Jn 1:1-2); but evolving from the beginning, this relational equation has been incomplete because the other half of the equation has not functioned in the essential relational quality to fulfill it. This is the relational consequence of reductionism and its counter-relational workings, which encompasses all of sin. Yet, the composition of sin in most theology and practice does not define **sin as reductionism**, therefore such theology and practice become determined inadvertently in some way by the sin of reductionism. This is the genius of reductionism, which Christians often don't recognize because of a **weak view of sin** that doesn't understand the truth and reality of sin as reductionism. Our condition today reflects the relational consequences.

A weak view of sin can also compose theology and practice using relational terms. How so? Let's examine Peter further for one example of how this happens. When Jesus call his first disciples to "follow me," Peter humbly responded by telling Jesus "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man" (Lk 5:8). In Peter's view, he rightfully didn't measure up to the Lord, yet was his view of sin inclusive of sin as reductionism?

The defining key for discipleship is “Follow me,” which is definitive only in relational terms. What the Word amplifies, however, is conclusive solely in person-to-person relationship together. Peter certainly came face to face with Jesus in his discipleship, but was that integrated with person to person to complete the relational equation essential for discipleship? His underlying view of sin is critical for answering this question and for understanding Peter’s theology and practice composed even using relational terminology. Face to face, Jesus made the relational imperative for discipleship unmistakable in order to fulfill its relational equation: “Follow *me*,” that is, not necessarily “the Lord” or any other name ascribed to him for his identity, but “must follow my whole person, and where *my person* is, *is how you must be relationally involved person to person*” (Jn 12:26). Was the discipleship composed in Peter’s theology and practice using relational terminology in harmony and fidelity with the Word, such that he fulfilled the relational equation made irreducible and nonnegotiable by the Word?

Later, when Jesus queried his disciples about his public identity, he really wanted to know how they specifically saw his person (Mt 16:13-15). Peter answered with a confession of faith that first used the name most prominently given to Jesus, and then he used the relational terminology typically associated with him: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Mt 16:16). Peter’s view of sin isn’t evident in his response—a response which reflected the Father’s revelation to him (16:17)—but the question remains if he fulfilled the Word’s relational equation.

Peter’s bias (both contextualized and commonized) soon did appear to expose his view of sin when the Word further revealed vulnerable matters. Thus, the Word confronted him for being incompatible with God’s improbable theological trajectory and being incongruent with the Word’s vulnerable relational path (Mt 16:21-23). What transpired is that Peter reduced Jesus’ person by the stereotype in his bias about the messiah; what also was exposed is the lack of significance in his relational term for the Son—the person lacking qualitative relational significance.

The person of Jesus lacking qualitative relational significance may have a face in relational terms with the result to be face to face with the Word, but person to person does not and cannot emerge to have as the relational reality with the Word. Peter demonstrated this at a pivotal interaction with Jesus’ whole person. As the Son prepared to fulfill his relational purpose on the cross for the Father (cf. Mt 26:38-44), he gathered his family together for their last table fellowship (Jn 13ff). At this pivotal relational connection, he made his person the most vulnerable to complete his relational involvement of love with them to unequivocally fulfill the relational equation person to person (13:1). The Son’s person vulnerably opened further to them by involving them in his footwashing (13:2-5). His whole person made the depth of his relational involvement of love with them the relational reality, but only by his person and not by serving them (as those words are commonly interpreted), nor by his primary role as “Teacher” and title

as “Lord” (13:12-15)—the related roles and titles many Christians assume in their discipleship presumably in following Jesus. What did our colleague, friend and brother Peter do in this pivotal face to face with Jesus’ whole person involved with him person to person, without the relational distance created by roles and titles?

Peter had his role also (student) and title (servant) to compose his identity as disciple. Therefore, face to face could not be integrated with person to person to complete the relational equation with the Word. “You will never wash my feet” (13:8). How could his Teacher and Lord do such a menial thing, and how could Peter participate in such shameful behavior? Based on how he defined himself and Jesus, he needed to wash Jesus’ feet. When the Word amplified the crucial difference between just face to face and face to face integrated with person to person—“Unless I *am relationally involved person to person with you*, you have no *partnership (meros)* with me *in fulfilling the relational equation essential for our reciprocal relationship together in wholeness*”—Peter’s weak view of sin without reductionism was exposed. Accordingly, since he defined his person and presented it to Jesus in reduced terms, plus defined Jesus’ person and engaged relationship with him in those terms, all demonstrated his lack of harmony and fidelity with the Word because his view of sin could not resolve those three inescapable and three unavoidable issues discussed earlier. Without the view of sin as reductionism, Peter’s discipleship was reduced to face to face at best. “Then, Lord, not just my feet but my hands and my head as well” (13:9).

Obviously, Peter didn’t integrate face to face with person to person in order to fulfill his half of the relational equation. For this reason alone, the Word later keeps pursuing Peter’s person with “Do you love *my person*?” and “Follow *my whole person*” (Jn 21:15-22)—still waiting for Peter’s person to fulfill his half of the relational equation with the vulnerable relational involvement person to person essential for their reciprocal relationship together to be whole.

The relational reality of the Word is irreducible; it is the ultimate fulfillment of God’s definitive blessing, who face to face “brings the change necessary person to person for new relationship together in wholeness *person to person*” (Num 6:26). Therefore, we need to recognize that the transition to the Word is nonnegotiable, and thereby we are accountable to the Word for this:

The transition to the Word is incomplete when just face to face. The transition to the Word amplifying the integral face of the Trinitarian persons becomes the relational reality when face to face is integrated by person to person to fulfill the essential relational equation of reciprocal relationship together in wholeness, nothing less and no substitutes.

This is the only theology and practice that resonates in the experiential truth-filled harmony and fidelity of the Word.

The Relational Messages of the Word

Referential terms and words depend on their quantity to get their information transmitted to others. Relational terms could depend on their words to get across their message to others, but too often those messages are received merely as information taken from the Word to compose our theology and practice. In all this, what is not recognized and then not received, and thus lost, are the relational messages communicated face to face by the Word directly to us person to person.

Basic to all communication—even in discourse transmitting information—are specific messages, sometimes explicit but usually implicitly expressed. All communication has not only a content component but also a relational aspect that helps us understand the significance of the communication's content. This relational aspect is found in **the three relational messages**, which are distinctly expressed by sounds, gestures or indirect words. In his relational imperative for his disciples to “listen carefully and pay attention to what's communicated to you” (Mk 4:24; Lk 8:18), the Word implied these relational messages. Therefore, it is crucial for these three relational messages to be discerned in order for deeper understanding of the message communicated. In the three relational messages, a person communicates (either intentionally or unintentionally) to others one or all of the following messages:

1. Something about one's person; for example, how one sees, defines or feels about oneself.
2. Something about how one views the other(s) in the interaction; for example, how one sees, defines or feels about them.
3. Something about their relationship together; for example, in what way one defines that relationship and/or what it means to that person.

Any or all of these three relational messages always qualify the content component of all communication; and they give us a deeper basis for knowing that person and a further understanding of how to respond back.⁵ So, it is essential for us to distinguish the relational messages both in what we hear from others and what we say to others.

These three relational messages are basic to relational language and thus intrinsic to the Word. All communication from the Word amplifies vital relational messages to us, thereby to qualify the content from merely words face to face to the Word person to

⁵ The conceptual dynamics of human communication are discussed in a classic study by Paul Watzlawick, Janet Helmick Beavin and Don D. Jackson, *Pragmatics of Human Communication: A Study of Interactional Patterns, Pathologies, and Paradoxes* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1967).

person. Receiving these relational messages gives us integrally (1) the qualitative-relational basis for knowing the Word as the experiential truth, and (2) the whole understanding of how to respond back to the Word for the relational reality of “new relationship together in wholeness.”

On the basis of the three relational messages, identify what the Word is communicating in the following:

1. “Follow me”—what is Jesus saying about his person, then about your person, and then about the relationship between you?
2. “Don’t you know me after all our time together?”—what is Jesus saying about his person, then about your person, and then about the relationship?
3. “Do you love me?”—what is Jesus saying about his person...about your person...then about the relationship?
4. “Unless I am relationally involved with you person to person, you have no partnership with me.”—what is Jesus saying about his person...about your person...about the relationship?

Given the relational messages communicated by the Word, how would you assess what Peter received and understood from the Word in each of these four interactions?

When we understand the importance of relational messages to qualify the content of communication, we are able to embrace the experiential truth and relational reality of the Word resonating person to person. The Word amplifies the harmony and fidelity of the relational quality inherent to persons, whose identity (ontology) is defined and function is determined by the qualitative image and relational likeness of the Trinity—just as music resonates the primal sound of human’s relational quality. Therefore, by the Word’s vulnerable presence and intimate involvement are communicated the relational messages clarifying:

1. What is primary for the Word, and integrating all else (the secondary) into the primary.
2. What is integral for the Word, and thus necessary to be in harmony and fidelity with the Word.

The experiential truth and relational reality of the Word’s relational messages clarify these two nonnegotiable and irreducible dimensions essential for defining our theology and determining our practice.

Integrating the Secondary into the Primary:

What is primary for the Word is the whole person from inner out, who is vulnerably involved in the primacy of reciprocal relationship together person to person.

Anything else, including all aspects of serving (Jn 12:26), is secondary and must be integrated into the primary, that is, if we want to have harmonious fidelity with the Word. The relational language of the Word constitutes the relational involvement of love as the primary priority of the person(s), whose love first and foremost is vulnerably involved in the primacy of relationship—just as Peter had to learn even while face to face. As the church in Ephesus also discovered in their stringent theology and rigorous practice, there are always relational consequences whenever the secondary takes priority over the primary.

To establish the primary of the Word as the ongoing priority, the primary must be distinguished from the following:

All else must be seen, considered and acted on as secondary—not necessarily unimportant but not be confused with the primary—and thereby responded to by integrating that secondary into the primary in order to maintain and continue in the primary priority of the Word.

Without receiving the relational messages of the Word and embracing their essential priority, secondary matters will easily assume priority over the primary and thereby render the person and relationship to less significance, perhaps overlooking them with good intentions of serving. However, the relational messages of “Follow me” and “Do you love me?” are unavoidable when we truly transition to the Word.

Resonating What’s Integral for the Word:

The church in Sardis, like many mega-churches today, reverberated with a reputation of being alive. But, the Word gave it a wake-up call because, in truth and reality, the church didn’t resonate in what’s integral for the Word (Rev 3:1-3). In spite of Peter’s stature as an apostle, do you think he resonated in his discipleship with what’s integral for the Word (cf. Paul’s assessment, Gal 2:11-14)?

The Word wept over his people because “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace” (Lk 19:42). This peace is not composed by common terms used in the human context, because the Word’s peace is *uncommon*, uncommon peace to all that is common (Jn 14:27). Since the Word was fulfilling the definitive blessing of the integral face of the Trinity (Num 6:24-26), the peace amplified by the Word person to person constituted the relational quality of *wholeness*—nothing less and no substitutes for persons and relationships in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the Trinity’s wholeness. Integral for the Trinity is the incomparable ontology and function of the Trinitarian persons as whole yet integrated in relationship together as One. Any reduction of this ontology and function (e.g. by common-izing) fragments the Trinity and renders the Trinitarian persons and their relationship together without wholeness. The essential integration of person to person for wholeness is integral

for the Word, therefore the Word never allowed Peter to reduce his person and ongoingly held Peter's person accountable to be whole in person-to-person relationship together—"Do you love me *person to person in reciprocal relationship*?"

The Word amplifies in relational messages the primacy of the relational involvement of love. Based on the uncommon ontology and function of the Word, love is the relational quality of the whole person vulnerably connected to and ongoingly involved with others distinctly with the qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness integral to the Word. Contrast this involvement with love focused on what to do for others rather than primarily on their person. When our person from inner out becomes integrated in the depth of involvement in relationships person to person, we embrace the relational messages that transition our persons and relationships to the Word. When our person and relationships are transformed to wholeness in ontology and function, we emerge whole to resonate what's integral for the Word—and resonating the relational messages of love to others over any of the secondary.

The integral face of the Word integrated person to person brings us the relational outcome of "the change necessary for new relationship together in wholeness" (*siym* and *shalom* in Num 6:26). The Word resonates when this relational outcome is our experiential truth and relational reality.

The Word Resonating in the Relational Outcome

The Word was amplified in the flesh face to face in order to resonate for relational connection person to person, who otherwise would simply become an *object* of our beliefs, worship and discipleship. Some persons made that vulnerable connection, while others chose not to. "To the persons who relationally responded to the Word person to person, he constituted them in the relational outcome to become children of God and belong in his family" (Jn 1:12). Resonating is a key function for this relational outcome, the idea of which may reverberate in our beliefs, worship and discipleship but lack the harmony and fidelity of the Word resonating in the experiential truth and relational reality of this relational outcome.

The Word is amplified also in the metaphor of the shepherd, who gathers and leads his sheep together as one flock (Jn 10:2-6,14-16). Like the shepherd and the sheep, the Word resonates with persons who follow him person to person into one family together. If the Word didn't have the relational quality to resonate in persons from inner out—for example, "calling each person by name...as his own"—those persons wouldn't be moved to respond vulnerably to the Word person to person into one family together. This is the relational outcome initially covenanted with Abraham (Gen 17:1-2), insured by God's definitive blessing for "new relationship together in wholeness," and now fulfilled by the Word person to person to constitute the Trinity's new creation church family (Lk 22:20; Jn 11:52; 17:20-23; Eph 2:11-22; 4:23-24; Col 3:10-11). Like the

function of the shepherd, however, those persons would not be moved to respond into one family unless the Word resonated person to person with them. Like the sheep, however, persons need to discern the voice of the Word and not listen to words, in order for the relational outcome to be this new creation church family.

Accordingly, the Word resonates in the relational outcome of persons who have vulnerably come together person to person in the experiential truth and relational reality of the church family in wholeness. Beyond merely reverberating like various churches do, this church is the integral family in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the Trinity, just as the Word's family prayer amplified to resonate in his *sheep* (Jn 17:20-26);

When the Word challenged Peter's relational involvement of love in reciprocal relationship together person to person, his relational purpose was for this relational outcome. Whenever Peter responded to the Word person to person, this would be his relational outcome also. On this relational basis, the Word further challenged Peter to "nurture my sheep person to person and grow my family in the new relationship together of wholeness" (Jn 21:15-17). Peter eventually did integrate face to face with person to person for the Word's relational outcome to resonate as the experiential truth and relational reality for the church family (e.g. 1 Pet 1:3; 2:9-10).

Like Peter, Christians and churches have struggled to transition to the Word person to person in order to resonate with significance in our theology and practice. How well do you think churches have experienced this relational outcome? And how would you assess the relational reality actually existing in churches and whether they resonate this relational outcome? Do you think the Word weeps over us for not being vulnerable with "*who gives us wholeness?*"

The significance of our theology and practice will resonate only when their relational outcome resonates the Word vulnerably in our person and relationships together as the Trinity's church family (Eph 2:21-22; 2 Cor 3:16-18; Col 3:15). In Paul's ecclesiology (notably composed in his Ephesians epistle), he made definitive the church in wholeness together as one, which the Word constituted in relationship together with the Trinity. As the new creation church family, Paul made it imperative for the church to "Be *very* careful then how you live" because of the subtle workings and influence of reductionism (Eph 5:15). On the basis of the experiential truth and relational reality of the Word's relational outcome, Paul further makes imperative for the church family to use the inherent function of music as the soundboard to speak the truth and resonate the clearest for the church's persons and relationships to be whole together with the Trinity: "*Function whole in reciprocal relationship with the Spirit for the relational purpose to sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs as the soundboard among yourselves person to person, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the harmony and fidelity of the Word*" (Eph 5:18-20, cf. Col 3:16).

In Paul's ongoing integral fight both *against* reductionism and *for* the gospel of wholeness (Eph 6:10-18), the relational purpose of his theology and practice revolved on the Word's relational outcome resonating in the persons and relationships of the church family. Given the pervasive presence and influence of reductionism, his relational purpose was irreducible and his relational process nonnegotiable so that the integral face of the Word could resonate clearly in the new creation relational outcome person to person with the Trinity.

When this new creation relational outcome resonates in our person and relationships together as one church family with nothing less and no substitutes for wholeness, we complete the transition to the Word and fulfill our half of the relational equation to be whole—face to face integrated person to person.

Therefore, where are you, church? And what are you doing here? Does the Word weep over you because you still don't understand what brings you wholeness, or does the Word resonate in your relational outcome?

Chapter 4 **The Depth and Quality of Our Witness**

Together with the Spirit, you will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth.

Acts 1:8

Sing to the Lord a new song...proclaim his salvation...among all peoples.

Psalm 96:1-3, NIV

**For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the *family* of God...
the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now.**

Romans 8:19,22

The Word resonates in the relational quality inherent to our musical beginnings. When our qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness are not at the level of harmony and fidelity with the Word, our identity and function do not resonate the relational purpose, process and outcome of the Trinity’s new church family and the gospel essential for it. In such a reduced condition, we have to ask along with “where are we” and “what are we doing here”: Beyond our words, to whom and to what do we witness, both individually and together?

In the divisive climate pervading many contexts of the world, the global church is faced either with struggling over accountability for its theology and practice or with acting on a compelling opportunity for the gospel. Consider this interaction between two friends in the U.S. context, one with mixed conservative political views and the other with mixed liberal views:

One confesses to the other, “Honestly, church is where I was taught about generosity, caring, giving.” The other responds back with suspicion, “Uh-huh...then why do so many evangelicals love Trump?” The first one answers hopefully: “Some folks lost their way in exchange for political power, but true believers know better.” The other immediately challenges: “Uh-huh. Then why are they staying quiet?” With concerned uncertainty, one answers: “Maybe they’re busy being generous, caring, giving”—whereupon, with rolled eyes the other says in disbelief, “Un-huh....”¹

¹ By Scott Stantis in “Prickly City,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 7, 2018.

“True believers” should know better what living our faith means, and that these are compelling times to witness for the gospel. But “maybe they’re” just not being accountable in their theology and practice. We, the church, are facing this crossroads.

The Key Witness

In a court trial, witnesses are called to testify on behalf of someone or some issue. The relevance or irrelevance of testimony greatly depends on the significance of the witness. Certainly, the integrity of a witness is crucial for any testimony. What is even more vital for a witness’ significance is how closely the witness has participated in the matter on trial to determine the level of testimony. The person closest becomes the key witness to testify. In the court of public opinion, this process doesn’t usually rule because biases obscure integrity and dismiss the relevance of facts, while stereotypes determine the significance of witnesses and who among them is the key.

All Christians and the church testify in the court of public opinion—on many issues pertaining to God or not—whether aware of their witness or not. Those who are aware either shape their witness according to public influence, or they determine their witness in spite of public opinion, perhaps even countering public influence. Especially consequential in our witness, all Christians and the church are witnesses in the court trial of the human condition and its redemption. Who has integrity in their witness? Who has the significance to give relevant testimony? Based on their participation, who become key witnesses?

Amplified by the Spirit, the Word definitively established all his disciples in the court trial of the human condition—in which the Word and the sin of reductionism are adversaries, with the former prosecuting the latter: “You will be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8; Lk 24:47). Whether the trial will end with redemption and salvation (the redemptive transformation and reconciliation) greatly depends on the significance of our witness. So, in this trial “my witnesses” can only be key witnesses. How so?

In the court of public opinion, what reverberates correlates directly to the pervading mindset. In the trial of the human condition, only testimony that resonates from inner out has significance. Therefore, the Word resonating from inner out is *the key* for our witness to be the key as “my witnesses.” Yet, the key is determined solely by the Word in relational terms, irreducible and nonnegotiable to referential terms. Thus, to be the key witness requires being able to personally testify the following:

1. To have fully transitioned to the Word from inner out, which requires the whole person in harmony and fidelity with “Follow me, my whole person.”
2. To have fulfilled our half on the relational equation for following the Word, which involves our person vulnerably connected ongoingly with “me” in order to be “my.”

This makes the testimony of “my witnesses” distinguished just by the primacy of reciprocal relationship together, which resonates with the Word in irreplaceable relational dynamics.

The Vulnerable Witness

To be “my” assumes the relational response to “me,” which cannot be assumed because the relational response is only distinguished by the relational dynamics integrally made definitive and constituted by the Word. What are these integral relational dynamics that can neither be assumed nor defined and constituted by *words*?

Whether witnesses are key witnesses depends on their level of participation in the matter on trial. When the Word highlights “witness” (Greek *martys* and its verb *martyreo*), the term denotes one who has knowledge of a matter and can confirm it because of participating in the matter. In the Word’s relational language, what is highlighted is not an observer of facts or information, no matter how accurate and true the observation. For example, testifying with the propositional truths of the gospel do not constitute a key witness because the level of participation doesn’t go deep enough. The Word highlights *who*, not *what*, and illuminates the relational participation of the witness directly with the Word. Beyond words, “my” is inseparable from “me” since they both embrace the same relational dynamic of involvement—the involvement required in order to constitute key witnesses not as observers but as persons vulnerably involved in reciprocal relationship with the Word.

The relational involvement of “my witnesses” is vulnerable because it is engaged from inner out. This vulnerable involvement unfolds in relational dynamics defined and constituted by the Word—strictly on the basis of the Word’s relational terms and not by any other words in referential terms. Relationship with God is not unilateral, thus God doesn’t do all the work in the relationship, nor do we. Yet, God does define the terms for relationship together, which are irreducible and nonnegotiable to our terms; the latter terms usually make us and the relationship less vulnerable.

The most-used term for God’s relational terms is “commandments,” which commonly get reduced to referential terms. When asked which commandment is the

greatest, the Word centered on the relational involvement essential to God’s relational terms: “love the Lord your God with *your whole person*,” then “love your neighbor as your *person*” (Mt 22:36-39); the Word amplified that “these two *terms for relationship together are the relational basis for all the law and the prophets*” (v.40)—and rightly “more important than *any and all burnt offerings and sacrifices*” (Mk 12:33). Later, the Word interjected a pivotal relational term (“new commandment”) that is integral to the two greatest ones: “love one another. Just as I have loved you, *on this relational basis* you also *be relationally involved to love one another*” (Jn 13:34). Moreover, it is this relational involvement of love that distinguishes “By this everyone will know that you are **my** disciples *following me, and thus are my witnesses*” (13:35).

All the definitive terms for relationship together with God center on the relational response of love, and they converge in *the vulnerable relational involvement of love*—unfolding from inner out in the relational dynamic of reciprocal relationship together person to person. The Word vulnerably initiated the intimate relational involvement of love with us to experience his relational reality—not merely to know, but “just as I have loved you...” (cf. Jn 15:9). Peter’s feet were washed and his love questioned, so that he would vulnerably fulfill his half of the relational equation and be distinguished as “my witness.” Now the other half of the relational equation also needs to be fulfilled by our person vulnerably from inner out in reciprocal relational involvement of love—not by our sacrifices, offerings, or what we *do* in obedience—first with God and next with one another. Fulfilling our half of the relational equation then clearly distinguishes us as “my disciples,” who “follow me” in the reciprocal relational involvement of love to be “my witnesses”—persons vulnerable from inner out who testify against reductionism in the human condition in order to be relationally involved in love for our neighbor as our own persons.

The Relational Equation Expanded and Multiplied

Among Christians, love is routinely defined in terms other than the vulnerable relational involvement of having intimate connection both with God and with each other. That happens when words substitute for the Word, with the consequence of reducing love to terms without relational quality. However, love is not something we do, nor is love merely giving something to others, no matter how important that may be. Just as the Word clearly enacted, love is the vulnerable relational involvement of the person extended to other *persons* (not objects of giving), who then can be ongoingly shared with others together in relationship. The NT *agape* and OT *hesed* amplified by the Word illuminate how we are to be relationally involved vulnerably with others. This relational involvement is not understood merely from teachings, nor based on following a code of

conduct or formula. This vulnerable involvement is first the relational reality experienced from “follow me” in relationship together. Without experiencing his vulnerable involvement of *agape* in ongoing intimate relationship, disciples can only generate love by what they do—which was all Peter did in response to “Do you love me”—and not by the relational involvement based on their own relational experience, as exposed by “you will never wash my feet.” This makes imperative the importance for us to define Christ’s love not merely by what he did on the cross, sacrifice notwithstanding but not definitive of love. These are the quantitative reductions of love, the words of which fragment the qualitative relational nature of the Word constituting the Trinity. And the narrative of the Word is the love story of the Trinity’s relational involvement extended to us to distinguish “my disciples,” and thus expanded and multiplied in us to resonate as “my witnesses.”

The Word used the metaphor of the vine and the branches to describe this relational process (Jn 15). We tend to perceive this as a static structural arrangement that is necessary for quantitative results (“fruit”). This shifts the focus from the dynamic process of intimate relationship that the Word makes definitive. Three times he mentions the reciprocal effort “to remain” in each other (15:4,5,7). The word “remain” (Gk. *meno*) means to remain, dwell, abide; when applied to another person, it denotes the relational involvement necessary to remain connected. This is the same word used by Jesus to describe his authentic (Gk. *alethes*) disciples intimately involved (“hold,” *meno*) with his “teachings,” that is, *logos*, his essence, his person (Jn 8:31) as distinguished by the Word (Jn 1:1ff).

When there is this depth of relational involvement, there are distinct relational outcomes experienced in this relational process. One outcome is to know God intimately, which the disciples at that stage didn’t experience as the relational reality (Jn 14:9). A further outcome is the vulnerable experience of uncommon (apart from the ordinary) *agape* involvement, not only received from the Son but also from the Father (Jn 15:9; 17:26). These relational outcomes underlie the fruit his disciples bear. This fruit does not reflect the quantitative results of what we do; this fruit witnesses to the relational outcome of being intimately involved with the Word as “my disciples” (15:8). The specific relational outcome witnessed to is the experiential truth and relational reality of the relational quality of the Trinity’s *agape* involvement. This fruit of the vine, therefore, can only be seen illuminated as the *agape* involvement with others, which the Word made definitive to clearly distinguish “my disciples” (Jn 13:35) who resonate as “my witnesses.”

Furthermore, “to remain” is a reciprocal relational effort because it involves the relationship requiring relational work by each one. The Word *remains* in us with his *agape* involvement, as he further shared about the progression of the vine (15:9). But he also said, “Now remain in my love.” God doesn’t do all the relational work, nor do we,

but we have our part in the relationship. This relational equation is fulfilled only by ongoing reciprocal relational work. Our relational work includes obedience – the relational act of submission (15:10). This may seem like a contingency to experience his love or to be his friend (15:14). Yet, it is crucial for discipleship to understand that these really are not conditional statements but relational statements. What comes first in these verses is his love, not our obedience (15:9).

Obedience is the relational way we vulnerably submit our whole person from inner out to him for intimate relationship, which includes our submission in ontological and epistemic humility. This relational submission of obedience has the relational outcome of further experiencing his love (Jn 14:21,23). Love is not some substance he gives us and thus we possess it; love is *who* and *what* we experience from the Word in *how* the Trinity is involved vulnerably with us and treats us. Love is not a feeling; it is what we relationally experience of the Trinity in our heart that increasingly transforms it and resonates in and from it. Love is not something we do, or even that the Word does; it is what we ongoingly share together reciprocally in intimate relationship. Through the relational submission of obedience our whole person is made vulnerable to him for this relationship. This reciprocates how the Son also defines his own obedience to the Father for the purpose of this relationship and remaining in his love (15:10b).

In his closing prayer to the Father for all his disciples, the Son shifted from the vine-branches metaphor to the relational reality the metaphor symbolized: the intimate relationships uniting them together as one family by family love (Jn 17:20-23). The bond of these intimate relationships, which is rooted in the relational process engaged in *agape* involvement, witnesses to the world of the experiential truth and relational reality constituted by the Word (vv. 21,23). The Word redefines our quantitative reductions of what witnessing involves; and he radicalizes our common notions about evangelism by deepening our focus from merely what he did to the relational quality distinguishing his intimate relational presence and involvement of love.

Certainly, if not yet obvious, to be at this depth level of witness necessitates remaining (participating) ongoingly in his love. We cannot underestimate this relational issue in our discipleship of how we “follow me” because a great deal hinges on it: the experience of complete joy for the individual disciple (Jn 15:11), the integrity of the corporate life of his followers as the church, and what the world can expect from “my witnesses.” Despite our struggles with secularism, modernism, postmodernism, and any other -isms, we need to give greater attention to this relational issue—both for our condition in divisive times and for the fragmented contexts of the human condition.

Key witnesses are “my,” who by integral relational dynamics are vulnerable witnesses relationally involved with “me.” They are the only significant witnesses to testify in the trial of the human condition and its redemptive transformation and reconciliation because of having distinguished the following:

1. The depth of reciprocal relational involvement with the Word.
2. Incorporating this reciprocal relational involvement of love with each other to distinguish the Word's family.
3. Ongoingly being vulnerable with their person from inner out to address any sin of reductionism first in their own person and then each other for the church family to be whole (as in Heb 12:1; Eph 4:15-16; Col 3:14-15).
And then on this relational basis,
4. Extending their relational involvement of love to their neighbor in the human condition, as if their own person, in order to testify of the experiential truth and relational reality of the Word's relational work of redemptive transformation and reconciliation, as well as the good news of the new creation relational outcome in nothing less than wholeness of persons and relationships together.

When these relational dynamics are integrally distinguished in the human condition, the relational equation is also multiplied to embrace humanity and all creation.

Therefore, "with the Spirit, my witnesses resonate with the hearts of all persons, peoples, tribes and nations in the human condition, as they sing the new song to follow me..." (cf. Lk 24:47-48; Mt 28:19). Yet, the new song is not a mere song that's new (contemporary worship notwithstanding); the new song only resonates "speaking the *experiential truth in the relational involvement of love*" (Eph 4:15). Unlike country music's 'three chords and the truth', speaking the truth in love is not an end in itself. Rather, with the new song functioning as the soundboard in relational harmony and fidelity with the Word, "we must *mature* in every way *intimately involved with him...*" so that "*our reciprocal relationship together in wholeness resonates in the church family's growth in expanding and multiplying itself up in love*" (Eph 4:15-16).

By "*testifying of the Word's salvation...among all peoples*" (Ps 96:1-3), the new song resonates the redemptive transformation and reconciliation of humanity into the new creation church family, which all of creation longingly waits for as nothing less and no substitutes (Rom 8:19-22). For this relational outcome to be the experiential truth and relational reality, our understanding of salvation (soteriology in theology) needs to be complete and our practice of evangelism needs to be whole to resonate the new song, which much theology and practice currently lack. This addresses us directly to the new creation that must by the nature of complete soteriology resonate in our persons and relationships.

Our Identity and Function as the New Creation

By our sin as reductionism, our identity and function have been reduced and fragmented from their wholeness created in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the Trinity. Even if we have been forgiven of our sin, it is only the forgiveness of sin encompassing reductionism that redeems us to be transformed to wholeness and reconciled in the new creation of the Trinity's family. If we have only been forgiven and not made whole in our identity and function, then at most we have experienced only **half of salvation** (a truncated soteriology in our theology) and remain fragmentary in our practice.

In truth and reality, if our forgiveness encompasses sin as reductionism and thereby have been redeemed from our sin (i.e. the condition of reduced identity and function), then by the nature of salvation we have been transformed from our fragmented condition to our new condition of wholeness. The experiential truth and relational reality of being saved *from* sin as reductionism constitutes being saved *to* whole ontology (identity) and function. We can't have the former without also including the latter. This integral relational process and outcome are inherent to "the gospel of wholeness" (Eph 6:15), which resonate in the harmony and fidelity of the Word's **complete salvation**.

If our witness of the gospel and our practice of evangelism are just about an incomplete salvation, we don't have the depth in the integrity of our identity and function to be "my witnesses." Without the depth of wholeness, our witness doesn't have the credibility to sing the new song, to speak the truth in love to the human condition, and to resonate for its redemptive transformation and reconciliation. Thus, we all urgently need to examine the depth of our witness and to be accountable for our credibility.

Complete salvation fulfills **the other half of salvation** that unfolds in the redemptive reconciliation of our persons and relationships to the new creation family. This half of salvation not only frees us from sin as reductionism, it also raises up the new identity and function for which we are accountable to live ongoingly in wholeness—just as Paul made the relational imperative for the new creation church family in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the Trinity (Col 3:10-15; 2 Cor 3:16-18). The new identity and function, however, need to be unmistakably distinguished from common identities and functions that are often associated with Christians—even among the "true believers know better" stated by the conservative friend at the beginning of this chapter.

If we testify about only the first half of salvation without the other half, we misrepresent the Word. No matter how many words of truth support such testimony, the credibility of our witness has been compromised. The identity and function of "my witnesses" only have integrity in the complete salvation to wholeness—that is, the new of our identity and function as the relational outcome of our *participation* in the relational involvement of love with the Word.

The new creation identity and function are irreducible, and therefore nonnegotiable to our biases and shaping, as well as uncompromising to any other influences in our life. As discussed earlier about our theological anthropology (in Chap 2), in the new creation restoring the original creation, nothing less than being whole constitutes our identity (ontology), and no substitutes for living whole determine our function. Anything less and any substitutes are not the new creation—no matter how prominent in churches and among Christians—and render our identity and function to a default mode reflecting the human condition. The genius of reductionism and its counter-relational workings is to wire our brains with a mindset that (1) our identity hasn't been compromised (“you will not *be reduced*”) and (2) our function hasn't lost credibility (“you will be like God”). In contrast and conflict with the new creation, such a reduced condition of identity and function doesn't redeem the human condition but in reality reflects, reinforces and sustains it.

The new creation constitutes identity and function from inner out, making secondary or irrelevant any matters from outer in. For our identity and function to be from inner out, any and all of our outer in must by necessity *die* in order for the new from inner out to *rise* (Rom 6:2-13; 8:5-14). These are the relational dynamics of salvation that integrally **saves us from the old** and inseparably **saves us to the new**. Like Peter, the new does not unfold without a struggle because the old has been deeply entrenched to define our identity and determine our function; and changing from the old can raise various feelings and concerns to block rising in the new.

The Spirit's person, however, is present and involved in ongoing reciprocal relationship together for the relational purpose to help us in the vulnerable relational process to the relational outcome of the new creation (Jn 14:16-18,26; 16:13-15; Acts 1:8; 2 Cor 3:15-18; Rom 8:15-16; Eph 2:22). Thus, our identity and function are distinguished as the new creation first and foremost by our vulnerable relational involvement in reciprocal relationship together with the Spirit, that is, the person and not a force, a power or a notion of love. This relational involvement requires our person to be vulnerable from inner out. Why so vulnerable? Because the Word removes the veil from our outer in and the Spirit frees us from inner out to be vulnerable with our whole person—the only relational posture for the new creation ontology and function transformed into the image and likeness of the Trinity (2 Cor 3:16-18).

According to the Word, to be freed constitutes our persons to be vulnerable with the whole of who, what and how we are as the new creation, because the veil signifying our reduced condition is removed. Accordingly, to keep the veil on either by our choice or by default is to remain in our reduced condition—no matter what we claim and proclaim about the gospel. Therefore, singing the new song is essential for our identity and function to be whole as “my” with “me.” Pause now to reflect on the new song, composed in the key of the Word with the Spirit, and sung with Paul (made definitive in 2 Cor 3:16-18):

‘Singing’ the New Song²

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

² By Kary A. Kambara and T. Dave Matsuo, 2011. Music available online at www.4X12.org.

[embrace the whole of God]

[embrace the whole of God]

[embrace the whole of God]

When our veils are removed, it is unavoidable for the new creation to be vulnerable in the human condition, which includes our condition as Christians in churches. For our identity and function to be vulnerable from inner out may appear to put us in a defensive posture. On the contrary, the experiential truth and relational reality of the new creation frees our identity and function—for example, from any anxiety or shame about our self-worth not measuring up—whereby we are able to embrace others in the relational involvement of love for their redemptive transformation to new creation wholeness also, and for their redemptive reconciliation to belong to the new creation family together (2 Cor 5:5,16-20). When we are vulnerably involved in this integral relationship of love, our identity and function resonate (1) to fulfill the depth of relational quality as “my witnesses,” and on this relational basis alone, (2) to expand and multiply the relational equation constituted by the Word to grow the new creation family.

However, the new creation is neutralized or rendered void in our identity and function whenever, for example, our identity is defined by what we do and have from outer in—that is, the veil is put back in place to mask our innermost—and our function is determined by secondary matters (as discussed previously). In other words than the Word, any identity and function based on the subtle yet prevailing workings of the outer in all counter the integrity of identity and function based primarily yet irreplaceably on the inner out; moreover, this fragments the new creation identity and function from wholeness and compromises the relational quality of their witness, thereby disabling the resonance of the new song. This may not be apparent, notably due to a reduced theological anthropology underlying our theology and practice. Yet, the subtleties of reductionism pervade the theology and practice in churches and related academy throughout the world. This is apparent in the wide-spread fragmentation of the global church (e.g. by denominations and brands)—fragmentation reflected also in local churches—and is reinforced and sustained by the prevailing referentialization of theological education into separated compartments.³ Apparent or not, the reduced condition of our theology and practice rightfully raises questions for our identity and function about the significance of the gospel, and about the integrity of those who claim it, and the credibility of those who witness for it.

Once again, “Where are you?” and “What are you doing here?” are ongoing concerns amplified by the Word, and the Spirit is always involved to clarify, correct and convict from inner out.

³ This discussion of the theological academy is detailed in my study “*Did God Really Say That?*” *Theology in the Age of Reductionism* (Theology Study, 2013). Online at www.4X12.org.

Singing the new song with a compromised identity and function becomes merely a sound bite, which at best may reverberate the various words of salvation but can never resonate as the soundboard for the Word's gospel of wholeness. The latter unfolds solely from the new creation ontology and function. This brings our persons and relationships together to another crossroads. Either we continue with our persons and relationships in the relational consequences of compromised identity and function, or we vulnerably involve our persons and relationships in the relational outcome of the new creation ontology and function made whole with nothing less and no substitutes. The path we take, by choice or by default, will determine the depth and quality of our witness in everyday life.

The Musical Witness Resonating in the Human Condition

Our witness inevitably undertakes a path that either will reflect, reinforce and sustain the human condition, or will work for its redemptive transformation and reconciliation. With the nature of reductionism, there is no in-between path or hybrid theology and practice for our witness, because anything less and any substitutes for wholeness fall into a reduced version reflecting the human condition.

The human condition is certainly variable in its multi-faceted condition and effects on human life. But the sin of reductionism underlying the scope of the human condition does not have degrees of bad-to-worse, nor does it affect human life along such a spectrum. Sin has no such distinctions (Jas 2:10, cf. Gal 3:10), and wholeness cannot be shaped by any aspect of reductionism or it is no longer whole. The new song speaks the truth to the human condition only because it resonates the experiential truth and relational reality of the new creation, which even all of creation longs for (Rom 8:19-22). This resonance distinguishes the soundboard of the Word from sound bites of other words.

Most Christians don't grasp the breadth of the human condition because they don't understand its depth entrenched in reductionism. This mindset readily both limits the human condition to certain areas and underestimates the influence of reductionism even in our own condition.⁴ Under these limits, how can we witness for the redemption of the human condition—before we can even testify to its transformation and reconciliation? Ideals have no significance for the human condition, and simulations only reinforce and sustain it. Even with the best of intentions, such witnesses are not “my witnesses” since they lack the experiential truth of what they have been saved *from*, much less the relational reality of what they are saved *to*. Lacking that credibility, how can a witness resonate in the human condition?

⁴ For an expanded discussion of the/our human condition, see my study *Jesus' Gospel of Essential Justice: The Human Order from Creation through Complete Salvation* (Justice Study: 2018). Online at www.4X12.org.

“My witnesses” resonate in the human condition because they are in complete (read whole, *pleroma*, Col 1:19-20; Eph 1:23; 3:19; 4:13, cf. Jn 1:16) harmony and fidelity with the salvation of the Word and his gospel of wholeness. This relational outcome emerges because “my witnesses” are vulnerably involved from inner out in the reciprocal relational involvement of love with “me” person to person. This relational experience resonates in the innermost of “my witnesses” because it resonates “my” relational quality constituted in “me.” Whenever relational connection is made, it resonates even in the human condition because it amplifies the primal sound that touches what is innate in all humankind. When that relational connection is made by the relational involvement of love, it resonates in the innermost of persons regardless of their condition because all persons were created in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the Trinity, and thus designed with the relational quality to be whole in relationship together. Without witnesses resonating from inner out by the relational involvement of love, persons in the human condition only have the testimony of words transmitted to them, and not the Word to embrace person to person for their experiential truth and relational reality of complete salvation.

Therefore, resonating is essential for our witness (1) to testify in the innermost to the relational quality of “my,” (2) which resonates what is constituted in the innermost of “me,” (3) who resonates what constitutes the wholeness of the Trinity in relationship together as One. In these *trinitarian* dynamics, only the significance of the primal sound in persons musically resonating as “my witnesses” has significance to “me” and to the human condition, because only the relational quality of this innate primal sound resonating gets to the innermost, first to be in integral harmony and fidelity with the Word and, then, for the complete salvation of the human condition’s redemptive transformation and reconciliation. Without exception, anything less and any substitutes are insignificant. Why, given all that has transpired in church history?

Along with reductionism, a common denominator residing in the human condition is music. Since the beginning, music has served as the central source and primary means of resonance among all persons, peoples, tribes and nations. Prose in human discourse has not duplicated it, in spite of any so-called linguistic advances in the human lexicon. The primal sound of music integrates the essential harmony and fidelity for the inherent relational quality of life. Thus, this resonates in the innermost of all human life because it touches the heart of what we all need, desire, if not long for and seek. The Word keeps amplifying these qualitative relational terms, which no quantitative referential terms can replace.

When their defining table fellowship concluded, Jesus led them in singing a hymn (Mt 26:30). It was tradition to sing praise antiphonally at the end of the meal. But, was

Jesus merely observing tradition? Throughout the incarnation, the Word critiqued the practice of tradition when “their hearts are far from me” (Mt 15:8). The function of music has always served as either a sound bite or a soundboard, with the latter becoming a qualitative expression of the heart rather than the former’s quantitative expression of the lips (as the Word critiqued). Accordingly, singing at the end of their time had a greater purpose for the Word. What was that purpose? We need to understand the Word’s purpose because that purpose continues to unfold today, often in conflict with purposes composed by our words.

I strongly affirm that the Word anticipated what soon unfolded and thus prepared his disciples in their identity and function to fulfill the purpose the Word had for them and for all of us who “Follow me.” As the Word completed his relational purpose on the cross, the curtain of the temple was torn in two (Mt 27:51; Lk 23:45-46); this opened direct access to the relational quality of God for intimate relationship together (Heb 10:19-22). To make intimate connection with the qualitative presence and relational involvement of the whole of God (the Trinity), the Word and the Spirit had to remove our personal veil also in order for this integral relational process and outcome to resonate in the innermost of our persons and relationships together—thereby to transform us to the relational quality in the image and likeness of the Trinity (2 Cor 3:16-18).

This transformation, however, is not a singular moment of change but distinctly an ongoing relational process of transformation. As the writer of Hebrews made imperative for any person to join the family of God’s witnesses, we must actively and ongoingly disconnect from the sin that subtly entangles us and easily distracts us in reduced identity and function (Heb 12:1). This ongoing process requires a strong view of sin as reductionism, which then in forgiveness saves us *from* any fragmentation in our identity and function as well as inseparably saves us *to* wholeness.

The resonance of the Trinity’s relational quality is essential for any and all disciples to be distinguished unmistakably as “my disciples” (Jn 13:35). These are the persons who are vulnerably involved in the reciprocal relationship of love with “me,” so that they will resonate in the new song from inner out as “my witnesses.” By singing at the end of their table fellowship, the Word amplified the primal sound in their innermost in preparation for their hearts to be vulnerable to enact the musical witness of relational quality needed to resonate in the human condition. The Word acted in his relational involvement of love to prepare them (us), knowing that nothing but the new creation identity and function can constitute this musical witness that solely distinguishes “my witnesses” for the gospel of whole and uncommon peace.⁵

It is unequivocal, however, that this relational outcome unfolds only with the relational work of the Trinity, with the Spirit fulfilling the primary relational work from the Word (as in Jn 16:12-15). In fulfilling our half of this relational equation, what this reciprocal relationship together constitutes is incomparable in human life:

⁵ To further understand ‘whole and uncommon peace’, see my study on *Jesus’ Gospel of Essential Justice*.

The disciples, past and present, demonstrate the credibility of their witness when the new song resonates in their identity and function to illuminate the new creation transforming persons and relationships, and reconciling them to be whole together as one family—the whole family that all of creation longs to have resonate in its entrenched condition of reductionism.

Yet, the new creation family resonates as *one* only when it also has consonance. This is the witness facing us together as the church.

The Symphonic Witness of the Church as Family

“My witnesses” have the depth and quality essential to “my” and constituting of “me.” *What* is essential to “my” and *who* constitutes “me” are attributed to the Trinity—the whole of God not reduced to or fragmented by the identity and function of just any one of the Trinitarian persons. The new creation resonates in the primal sound by distinguishing the Trinity, but it must also, by the nature of the Trinity, have consonance to be in harmony and fidelity with the Trinity. The consonance, however, of witnesses as “my” with “me” cannot be fulfilled by individual witnesses (or even by their sum), because the identity and function of “my witnesses” only have consonance together as *one*, just as the Trinitarian persons are One together. The Trinity’s One is to be whole, whose function is synergistic—the synergism that the sum of all the individual parts do not add up to be whole. Therefore, the new creation family resonates synergistically in consonance with the Trinity; and thereby the credibility of witnesses is established when their singing of the new song has both this resonance and consonance in their identity and function together in synergism as the church family.

Our identity and function integrally in resonance and consonance with the Trinity can be summarized as follows:

What resonates with the Trinity is our heart, that is, our whole person from inner out. When our innermost is not reduced or fragmented—“a heart at peace,” in wholeness (Prov 14:30, NIV)—our heart “gives life to the body” (*basar*, the outer part of the person); thus, the heart serves as the integrating function for the whole person (inner and outer together). This integrating function is the basis for our heart resonating with the Trinity, since this is the essential likeness in wholeness of each of the Trinitarian persons. In addition, the resonance of the new creation of our persons incorporates our relationships in new relationship together in wholeness (the *siym* and *shalom* of God’s definitive blessing, Num 6:26), which the Word constituted as

the Trinity's synergistic family in consonance with the whole ontology and function of the Trinity as One.

The relational outcome of the new creation integrally resonates with consonance as the new creation church family, whose identity and function in synergism are distinguished by the qualitative image and relational likeness of the Trinity. This relational outcome unmistakably constitutes the church as family in the relational quality of the Trinity as One, and is therefore irreducible and nonnegotiable by the church to anything less and any substitutes.

There is an *integrating process* underlying for witnesses to be “my” with “me,” which is crucial to understand for our theology and practice to be significant in their essential dimension and quality. The resonance of our identity and function made new integrates *whole theological anthropology* with the Word's *full Christology* and *complete soteriology*. But “my witnesses” don't stop here so that they will be integrated in what constitutes “me.” This integration is the consonance of our identity and function synergistically together as one church family—the integral resonance and consonance integrating whole theological anthropology, full Christology and complete soteriology together with *the whole ecclesiology*, which completes the relational quality essential for *whole theology and practice*. The Word amplifies and is amplified in only this harmony and fidelity restoring the primal sound to the innermost of human life.

As the Word prepared his disciples to resonate as “my witnesses,” he constituted them only to “all be one...” (Jn 17:21). This constituting expression was composed beyond the limits of what traditionally has been considered the Son's high priestly prayer, but more deeply expressed as his formative family prayer intimately shared with the Father (Jn 17). The integrity of his disciples being essential to “my” and constituting of “me” was at stake here. Accordingly, his family prayer constituted them in the only consonance that resonated the experiential truth and relational reality of his family: “that they may become completely one” (17:22-23). This Trinitarian prayer for the Trinity's family is irreducible and nonnegotiable for the church as family. However, his prayer has a contingency (“may”) for its relational outcome, because relationship together with the Trinity is never unilateral but always reciprocal in the relational involvement of love—“so that the love with which you, Father, have loved me may be in them, and I in them” (v.26). The Trinity has fulfilled the defining half of the relational equation, so now the other half needs to be fulfilled by the church—“that we truly are one, just as the Trinity is One.”

Paul later amplified the Word's prayer in order for the church family to resonate (Eph 1:16-23), so that the church has the consonance constituted in the relational involvement of love with “me” (Eph 3:14-19). The old Paul (Saul) gave his life to fragment the church, but the new Paul, who was transformed from inner out and reconciled by the Word person to person, gave his whole person for the consonance of

the church in wholeness. “How fragmented is the Word? Thus, how can the Word’s church family be so fragmented?” was the substance of Paul’s confrontation of the church in order to be united together as one “just as the Trinitarian person are One” (1 Cor 1:10-13). This contingent relational outcome involved **the integration process**, first of theology then of practice. The new Paul’s confrontation of the church resonated with the integration of his restored whole theological anthropology with his newly established full Christology and recent complete soteriology, and then with the consonance of the whole ecclesiology essential for the experiential truth and relational reality of the new creation church family—integrated to be persons in synergistic relationship together of wholeness in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the Trinity. Although Paul never articulated the Trinity in referential terms and words, his relational language in harmony and fidelity with the Word distinguished the whole who, what and how constituting of and consonant with the Trinity and the Trinity’s family. In this integral relational process with the Word and the Spirit, it was Paul and not Peter who integrated—not in unilateral but reciprocal relationship together with the Word and the Spirit—the ecclesiology essential for the church to be whole: the whole ecclesiology made definitive by Paul (e.g. in Eph 2:19-22; 4:11-16; 1 Cor 12:4-6, 12-16).⁶

So, where are you, church? What are you doing today? Where are your church leaders in their identity and function? Are they consonant with the Trinity’s family, or are they promoting their own “brand” to compete with other fragments of the church, and thus counter the global church family as nothing less and no substitutes for the Trinity as One? What is your witness both in our condition as Christians and in the human condition? Does your witness resonate the primal sound innate to human persons, to thereby be consonant with the wholeness in the innermost that all persons, relationships and creation long for without anything less and any substitutes?

What “my witnesses” are facing with “me” is the integrated witness in harmony and fidelity with the Word amplified in whole theology and practice. That is to say, by the Word and not by words, we as the church family must distinguish the credibility of our witness together truly as family by **the symphonic witness**, which integrates our persons and relationships together synergistically as church into the complete harmony and full fidelity of the Word. Without the consonance of the symphonic witness, the integrity of any local church and the global church is simply fragmentary; the unavoidable consequence compromises its credibility for proclaiming the gospel of wholeness because it has yet to claim the whole gospel’s experiential truth and relational reality—a fragmented church no matter how much it appears to resonate (cf. church in Sardis, Rev 3:1-2).

⁶ To understand how this unfolded, see two of my studies: *The Whole of Paul and the Whole in His Theology: Theological Interpretation in Relational Epistemic Process* (Paul Study, 2010), and *Jesus into Paul: Embodying the Theology and Hermeneutic of the Whole Gospel* (Integration Study, 2012). Online at <http://www.4X12.org>.

Therefore, only the symphonic witness of the church as family will resonate with the consonance (1) “so that the world may know that you *Father* have sent me and have loved *our family* even as you have loved me,” and (2) “so that the world may believe that you have sent me *also for their redemptive transformation and reconciliation into our family*”—just as the Word prayed (Jn 17:21,23). Once again, the contingency (“may”) exists in this formative family prayer, waiting for the symphonic witness of the church as family to fulfill our half of the relational equation.

In our condition as Christians and the human condition, anything less and any substitutes are always competing to counter nothing less and no substitutes for the wholeness of the Trinity and our persons and relationships together as the Trinity’s family. Our theology and practice will not be significant until it is distinguished vulnerably and ongoingly in whole theology and practice just as the Word amplified integrally as essential for “my” and as constituting of “me.” What then distinguishes the symphonic witness of the church as family?

Just as the Trinitarian persons *belong* as One, all the persons in the Trinity’s church family *belong* because they have been redeemed and *adopted* (Eph 1:5-7; Gal 4:4-7; Rom 8:14-16). Belonging to the church as family involves more than being a mere member but being the true daughters and sons of God. However, as witnessed in biological families, just bearing the identity of sons and daughters doesn’t create harmony; perhaps dissonance is the norm in families (including the church) rather than consonance.

To compose the symphonic witness, the identity of persons in the church is rooted in their adoption to belong, not by bearing the identity of God’s child but by transforming their identity from inner out. This extends the integrating process from theology to practice in order to distinguish whole theology and practice. Integrating our practice addresses the contingency in the Word’s family prayer. To fulfill this contingency for the church, Paul fought for the wholeness of the gospel (Eph 6:15) that the Word constituted. Therefore, each person adopted into the Trinity’s church as family has to be reconciled with the whole theological anthropology that defines their identity and determines their function by the primary from inner out; this primacy makes all other identities and functions secondary, irrelevant or void. Thus, Paul makes definitive for all adoptees in the following paraphrase:

“You are no longer strangers and aliens, nor servants and even honored guests in God’s family” (Eph 2:19); furthermore, your identity in the Word’s family “is no longer Jew or Greek...no longer slave or free...no longer male and female; for all your persons from inner out are one identity” (Gal 3:28); moreover, “as persons transformed to the new creation in the image and likeness of the Trinity, there are no existing human distinctions that define your identity and determine your function—including roles and titles, as Peter learned” (paraphrase of Col 3:10-11); therefore, it

is imperative that “the wholeness of the Word be the defining determinant for the innermost of your persons, who constitute the church family as one” (Col 3:15).

Because of the ongoing influence of reductionism and its counter-relational workings, Paul made imperative this integrating process for our theology and practice to be whole, to remain whole in everyday life, and to make whole the fragmentation in the human condition.

In this integrating process of church practice, all adoptees are **equalized** in their identity and function—that is, without the human distinctions (such as physical, mental, social, cultural, economic, and the like) making them different. These distinctions not only make them different, but because they inevitably engage a comparative process, they are labelled according to a hierarchy of “better or less.” Such distinctions used to compare one another emerge directly from a reduced theological anthropology that defines persons and determines their function by the outer in of what they do and have; the unavoidable consequences from comparative distinctions fall into mirroring the human condition to the extent beyond just reflecting it but reinforcing and even sustaining it, rather than transforming the human condition.

The symphonic witness of the church cannot have consonance without the equalized identity and function of its persons and relationships. This may seem like an idealized truth rather than an experiential truth, a virtual reality rather than a relational reality. To be equalized in function, however, does not mean that each adoptee has the same role in the family. Nevertheless, it is essential for the person’s identity not to be defined by that role or title—thus not labelled as ‘more’ or ‘less’—and that the function of each adoptee has the same qualitative relational position, value and belonging in the family, in order for the church to be one as the Trinitarian persons are One in their different roles (1 Cor 12:12-26). We cannot claim to be the new creation without this transformation of our identity and function, which becomes inseparable from the reconciliation of our persons into transformed and thus equalized relationships together as the Trinity’s church family.

The symphonic witness of the church integrates the above redemptive transformation with redemptive reconciliation both into the Trinity’s family and within all the persons and relationships of the church. As the redemptive change for new relationships together in wholeness unfolded from God’s definitive blessing (*siym* and *shalom*) and was fulfilled by the Word, the Trinity’s church family reconciles persons and relationships in equalized relationship together—nothing less, or the persons and relationships have not been transformed. Unequalized identities cannot be reconciled into the equalized relationships necessary to be one in the relational likeness of the Trinity. Unequalized identities function in their different distinctions of ‘more or less’ to directly counter—however subtly or even inadvertently, as Peter discovered at his footwashing—being reconciled from inner out in the qualitative image of the Trinity. This includes the

identity distinctions of male and female maintained in the church (e.g. by complementarians), an existing condition which Paul exposes as dissonant for the integration of redemptive transformation and reconciliation. The gender issue is crucial to address because its effects prevail in all humanity and pervade our persons and relationships in the church. Salvation will never be complete without resolving the gender issue.⁷

Therefore, only transformed equalized persons reconciled in transformed equalized relationships together have the essential depth to compose the symphonic witness of the church as family in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the Trinity. Nothing less and no substitutes for the church and its persons and relationships have consonance together to be in complete harmony and full fidelity with the Word as “my witnesses,” and thereby, on this qualitative relational basis alone, resonate in the human condition.

The contingency (“may”), however, always looms overhead, ready to dampen our ideals and to fog our theology and practice. Any identity and function for the church and its persons and relationships that are not integrated by redemptive transformation and reconciliation become fragmented from their constituting wholeness (in relational distance from “me”), thereby rendering them to reductionism’s counter-relational workings in anything less and any substitutes. In order to counter this prevailing dissonance both in local churches and in the global church, only the integration of our theology and practice into wholeness (not fragments or their sum) brings the relational outcome for the church and all its persons and relationships to resonate in consonance with the symphonic witness distinguishing the church as the Trinity’s family. In this relational outcome, the contingency is removed by the experiential truth and relational reality of the church family as one, with the integral identity and function unmistakably in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the Trinity—therefore, witnessing symphonically in the innermost with the primal sound, solely by the gospel of wholeness, only with this gospel, and just for its good news indeed.

Living in the experiential truth and relational reality of this integrated relational outcome, churches and their persons and relationship can gather together as family at the Communion table to share together in their whole and uncommon (holy, for whole-ly) fellowship together, beyond a mere tradition or formality and merely as individuals—the qualitative relational significance of *koinonia*. In the new covenant communion fellowship (Lk 22:20; 2 Cor 3:6), persons from inner out are vulnerably involved in the reciprocal relationship of love because their veils have been removed to join them

⁷ To address this issue at the innermost, see Kary A. Kambara, *The Gender Equation in Human Identity and Function: Examining Our Theology and Practice, and Their Essential Equation* (Gender Study, 2018). Online at www.4X12.org.

together intimately as one family. On this integral relational basis, then, they can celebrate being together as the whole and uncommon global church.

Now church and all its witnesses, in complete harmony and full fidelity with this experiential truth and relational reality, join vulnerably together in resonance with the song “Whole-ly Communion,” and then musically celebrate intimately together in consonance as “The Global Church Celebrating.” By the complete harmony and full fidelity of this integral relational response and relational involvement, the Word will know where we are and what we are doing here, without any other words from us.

Whole-ly Communion⁸

Mt 9:10-13; Heb 10:19-22; 2 Cor 4:6

This song is composed to be sung during Communion.

Heartfelt and heart-filled

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—

⁸ By Kary A. Kambara and T. Dave Matsuo, 2014. Music available online at www.4X12.org.

Final verse:

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

The Global Church Celebrating⁹

Note: “uncommon” is the meaning of “holy” that distinguishes God in the Bible

1. You God are whole and uncommon,
Distinguished beyond all the common,
None to compare, none to compare
You God are whole and uncommon.
2. Your Word is whole and uncommon,
Distinguished from all in the world,
Here to transform, here to make whole
Your peace is whole and uncommon.

Chorus 1:

- Praise— the whole and uncommon (*“Praise” is shouted*)
God beyond all that is common,
You have transformed, you make us whole (*shout freely with beat*)
Your family whole and uncommon.
3. We are not parts of the common
Fragmented apart from God’s whole,
We are transformed, we are made whole
Peace together whole and uncommon.
 4. We are God’s whole and uncommon
Distinguished family from the common,
No longer old, raised in the new
Now together like the Trinity.

Chorus 2:

Praise— Father, Son and Spirit, (*“Praise” is shouted*)
Thank you for family together,
You equalized, you reconciled (*shout freely with beat*)
All persons, peoples and nations.

⁹ By T. Dave Matsuo and Kary A. Kambara, 2018. Music available online at www.4X12.org.

5. We shout with joy in our hearts,
Clapping, dancing inside to out,
No longer apart, no more orphans
God's family whole and equal.
6. We sing the new song from within,
Proclaiming joy to all the world,
Here is your hope, here is your peace
Wholeness together beyond common

Chorus 2:

Praise— Father, Son and Spirit, (*"Praise" is shouted*)
Thank you for family together,
You equalized, you reconciled (*shout freely with beat*)
All persons, peoples and nations.

[*everyone shouting, clapping, dancing to the Trinity*]

Yes! Yes!! Yes!!! (*shouted, and repeat as desired*)
All persons, peoples and nations.

Chapter 5 The Sounds of Theology Heard for Practice

**Say to those who prophesy out of their own imagination:
“Hear the Word of the LORD!”**

Ezekiel 13:2

**Now to *the Spirit* who...is able to accomplish abundantly far more
than all we can ask or imagine.**

Ephesians 3:20

Since you are eager for spiritual gifts, *function* in them for building up the church.

1 Corinthians 14:12

If you were asked the curious question, “What does God sound like?” how would you answer? You probably wouldn’t have an answer, yet you likely have given God a voice in one way or another. What God sounds like takes form in theology, which we have constructed with a plenary of voices to give various sounds ascribed to God. Our theology sounds the voice of God either with the words assuming to speak for God, or by allowing God to have the defining Word to speak for himself. All these sounds and words are voiced in basic speech that is used (1) to articulate a reality or a sense of it, and (2) to communicate that reality or transmit that sense.

On the one hand, the sounds and words articulating a sense of reality engage human imagination, which extends the limits of rational thought and may go beyond the constraints of the mind. On the other hand, human imagination is problematic when its sense of reality is incongruent or incompatible with the reality of life, that is, as constituted in its origin by its source. This issue is critical not only for our theology but also because the sounds of God in our theology are heard to form our practice.

This chapter outlines the vital interaction between human imagination, the Word and the Spirit, as noted in the above opening Scripture; and it defines the limits, constraints, and the necessity of each for our theology and practice to be whole and thus significant.

Christians would all have the answer for what God sounds like if we listened more carefully. The current challenge, if not confrontation, facing our theology and practice comes from the Word addressing all the words composing our theology and practice. The Word amplifies “Where are you?” and “What are you doing here?” because

the pervasive condition of theology and practice today (1) doesn't listen carefully to the Word, and thus (2) doesn't know the Word, or ignores him, and even counters and contradicts the amplified Word (e.g. when we call the Spirit to come)—using synonyms, simulations or illusions, thereby substituting words for the Word. The Word calls us back to our musical beginnings and the primal sound that resonates in our innermost, because then the voice of God will be clarified and the sounds speaking for the Word will be corrected by the Spirit “abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine” (Eph 3:20); and Paul reinforces this interpretive process for all voices in the church, so that it will make the church whole in relational significance together (1 Cor 14:12).

The Rhythm of God's Theological Trajectory

In the transformation of Peter's person, his theology and practice finally resonated in harmony and fidelity with the Word to be in rhythm with the Trinity's theological trajectory. He declares without his previous bias: “For we did not follow cleverly devised *narratives* when we made known to you the *Word*...[who] received *the relational response* from God the Father when that voice *communicated* ‘This is my Son, my Beloved’... So we have the prophetic message *made whole*... No *true* prophesy of the *Word* is a matter of one's own interpretation *and imagination* because no *sound of God* ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God, *not for God*” (2 Pet 1:16-21).

To be in rhythm with the Trinity's theological trajectory is to be in relational connection to hear God's voice communicate directly. Just hearing the sound of God's voice, however, is insufficient to discern the Word communicated, even while assuming there is a relational connection—as Paul illuminated about speaking in tongues (1 Cor 14). This relational connection requires our ontological and epistemic humility to let God speak for himself with the Word, rather than assume to be speaking for God with our words based on hearing fragments of what God sounds like. Peter, for example, previously spoke not only *for* God but also spoke *to* the Word, defining what God sounds like (Mt 16:22) and determining how the Word should function (Jn 13:8). Peter's theology and practice were based on prevailing tradition and the religious status quo (e.g. Lk 9:33) and were not in rhythm with the Trinity's theological trajectory—nor were they congruent with the experiential truth and relational reality of the gospel (as Paul exposed in Peter and other church leaders, Gal 2:11-16). What Peter thought God sounded like were sounds dissonant to God's voice; these were the out-of-rhythm sounds composing his theology that he heard for composing his practice. As his theology and practice were

eventually clarified and corrected, the humbled Peter learned that the rhythm of the Trinity's theological trajectory has a distinguished sound, which cannot be duplicated by just any sounds composed by even the most orthodox of beliefs (cf. the church at Ephesus, Rev 2:2-4). Thus, he humbly affirmed Paul's theology and practice as definitive to respond to the diversity of theology and practice existing in the church (2 Pet 3:15-16).

When Peter contrasted following the Word with what amounted to "cleverly devised *fake news about the Word*," he testified about being an eyewitness to the transfiguration of the Word amplified by the Father. The credibility of his initial witness was minimized by his limited participation with the Trinity—focused mainly on the event at the expense of the relationship unfolding before his eyes. Later in his life, as he became relationally involved in the primacy of relationship together, the rhythm of the Trinity's theological trajectory was distinguished for him by the sound of the Father's voice communicating intimately with the Son. The relational quality of this sound unmistakably distinguished the theological trajectory of the Trinity, the rhythm of which vulnerably unfolded in relational terms (not the referential focus of a mere event) to resonate in the innermost of persons and relationships directly involved. Without distinguishing the relational quality of this sound expressed in relational terms, we could only speculate or remain clueless about what God sounds like; and that's exactly how Peter initially reacted at the transfiguration. The dissonant sounds in his theology heard for his practice had relational consequences that needed returning to be consonant with the Word. His vulnerable relational involvement finally engaged the relational connection necessary to discern the relational quality of the Trinity's voice essential for the Trinity's theological trajectory.

The sound of the Trinity's voice and theological trajectory is primal—constituted at the innermost of the Creator's life—and is expressed to resonate at the innermost of all other life, notably in the image and likeness of the Trinity. This primal sound is irreducible to any other sounds, even to distinct sounds (including "sacred" sounds) reverberating in the human brain. Such sounds could be convincing about what God sounds like, but they are only substitutes generated by the human mind that don't resonate in the innermost (1) to be in harmony and fidelity with the Trinity's integral voice, and (2) to be in consonant rhythm with the Trinity's integrated theological trajectory. According to the Word amplified in relational terms, the Trinity's integral voice and integrated theological trajectory are not polyphonic, on the one hand, to define different sounds for our theology and practice; yet, on the other hand, the primal sound resonates in the innermost of persons to determine the relational quality of various sounds expressing the heart of the whole person from inner out. Just as experienced from the Trinitarian persons, this involves the various sounds (not different in relational quality) vulnerably expressed by persons who are not reduced or fragmented to a narrowed-down function conformed to the limits and constraints of the outer in.

Various but not different sounds in relational quality are involved in reciprocal relationship together with the Trinity, in order to engage **the integral process of imagination** that further opens our heart to express the primal sound. This basic imagination, however, should not be confused with the imagination of the human mind that isn't in harmony and fidelity with the Word's integral voice, nor in rhythm with the Trinity's theological trajectory. These various and different sounds direct us to the limits and constraints of imagination, and the vital interaction with the Word and Spirit necessary for our theology and practice to be consonant with the Trinity, and thus whole in likeness and not fragmented by the different sounds heard for what God sounds like.

The Musical Hermeneutic for Whole Theology and Practice

In his interpretation of the Bible, Walter Brueggemann says this: "I think the clue to being able to engage [the Word] is to stop asking 'What does the text mean?' and start asking 'How does it work? What is the text doing? How do the parts interact with one another to create a field of imagination?'"¹ He expands on this imagination:

"I think that crafted, artistic speech is not descriptive but imaginative. It is an act of imagination that says "I am going to sketch out a world for you in what I am about to say.... What we have to recognize is that most of the 'real world' that we take for granted is also an act of rhetoric.... So I think we move in and out of worlds. And what has happened to the church, particularly the liberal church, is that we have been rhetorically constructing a world that is so like the dominant world that people can't even tell the difference. Liberals have just echoed culture. On the other hand, conservatives have compartmentalized, so they create a little bitty alternative world that doesn't relate to anything. This leaves us undisturbed in the dominant world, which is grounded in etiologies that are alien to the gospel."²

Brueggemann also talks about having a "thickness of relationship" with God in which this process of imagination unfolds, yet he appears limited in his understanding of the relational process with the Word in relational terms. This makes imagination too ambiguous to discern what God sounds like, and it opens the door for our imagination to hear sounds not communicated by the Word, whereby our words readily start speaking for the Word; this results in the dissonant sounds of theology not in consonance with the

¹ Walter Brueggemann and Clover Reuter Beal, *An On-Going Imagination: A Conversation about Scripture, Faith, and the Thickness of Relationship* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 34.

² *Ibid*, 53-54.

Word. Thus, Brueggemann's hermeneutic may have distinct qualitative value, but it doesn't get us to the relational quality of the primal sound resonated by the Word in direct communication to our innermost person to person. On the basis of the Word's sound, his hermeneutic lacks the music-like lens needed to discern this innermost sound.

The Word celebrated in exuberance over the interpretive lens of child-like persons, whose vulnerable hearts discern the primal sound of the Word revealed in the innermost (Lk 10:21). Their discernment of what is innermost to the Word is essential to interpret the relational messages communicated by the Word, all of which resonate music-like; and the relational context and process for this music-like interpretation require the vulnerable involvement in reciprocal relationship together to understand the Word. Their interpretive lens is in contrast and conflict with the hermeneutic used by "the wise and the intelligent." The latter give primacy to the mind over the heart, as they depend on their rational thinking, for example, about propositional truth over the experiential truth resonating only in the heart. These two hermeneutics collided later after the Word cleared out the temple of reductionism. In this redemptive change to wholeness, the children resonated with the Word and cried out "Hosanna to the Son of David." Perceived as presumptuous, their interpretation angered the learned leaders to debate with the Word about who knew best what God sounded like (Mt 21:12-16).

What the Word amplifies for us is not the contrast or conflict between generations, although the amount of education (formal and informal) persons have undergone is a key variable. The Word illuminates for us that the hermeneutic we apply to God's revelation is the interpretive lens we use in everyday life. That is to say, how we see our self, others, relationships, our situations and contexts, even the world, is the lens we bring to the Word. This lens is shaped by the type of education we have received, which results in the contrast and conflict illuminated above by the Word.

Unfortunately for the church and its persons and relationships, the hermeneutic dependent on the mind—and shaped by ancient Greek philosophy and the modern Enlightenment thinking—has prevailed in theology and practice through our own today. This includes the mindset that developed from informal education yet based on the same thinking. This narrowed-down lens has prevailed at the expense of what's primary to God and thus in life, rendering the heart to notions of subjectivity unable to be objective about the truth of God. Moreover, the relational consequences from this hermeneutic have rendered the Word without the innermost of the primal sound and thus without the relational quality essential for constituting "me" in consonance with the Trinity. This is the hermeneutic that transposes the relational quality of the Word into the quantitative information of words transmitted by the wise and intelligent speaking for God—words whose sounds may reverberate among Christians (notably in the academy) to compose their theology and are heard for their practice, but which don't resonate at the depth necessary to be credible as "my witnesses." All these sounds for theology are the dissonance heard for practice, which never become whole in consonance with the Word.

The limits and constraints of this narrowed-down lens may not be apparent in our theology but they are evident in our practice. For example, when religious leaders asked the Word “to show them a sign from heaven,” the Word exposed the lack of depth in their narrow lens. “You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times” (Mt 16:1-3). When the primary focus is fixated on the quantitative, the qualitative gets obscured or lost. Furthermore, the qualitative constituting God is always illuminated in the relational context and process of God’s self-disclosures. Therefore, any hermeneutic lacking qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness will not have the depth to know and understand the Word—ask the early disciples (Jn 14:9).

The Word is not ambiguous about the hermeneutic necessary to discern the sound of God’s voice. This music-like sound is distinguished from all other sounds because of the primal nature of its relational quality. Just as babies discern the sounds of all languages, notably from persons relationally closest to them, this hermeneutic has the depth of focus from inner out (1) to discern the primal sound resonating from the innermost of God, and (2) to understand the relational quality of the Word’s communication in relational language. The depth of this interpretive lens is evident in the qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness of its everyday practice, with the primary relational outcome of knowing and understanding the Trinity beyond and above any secondary matter (cf. Jer 9:23-24).

The ongoing issue for all of us is whether or not we practice this music-like hermeneutic in our current knowledge of God to give credibility to our theology and practice as significant. The interpretive lens everyone (without exception) brings to the Bible has been shaped already by our life contexts. How biased our interpretations of the Word are depends on whether the influence on our lens from our life contexts becomes our primary determinant for our theology and practice, or if it is maintained as secondary—without selective or subtle substitutions for the Word’s primary terms with our biased terms. This interpretation process is critical in order to distinguish the hermeneutic necessary for our interpretive lens to be in harmony and fidelity with the Word in the innermost, and thereby for both our theology to be congruent and our practice to be compatible with the Word at the depth of the innermost.

The Word further illuminated with the Spirit the key variables for this interpretation process and if the results will be integral or fragmentary. In the Trinity’s communication to change existing churches to wholeness, we return to the church in Sardis for this hermeneutic lesson (Rev 3:1-3). Apparent in the prevailing perception, this church had a reputation of being alive in a city that hosted many pagan cults, whose practices pervaded the surrounding context. A key variable here is that this church lived behind their reputation (*onoma*, name or brand used as a substitute for what a person

actually is). Even with their identity of being alive, the Word made no such assumptions about what they were and how they functioned, but rather examined them from inner out. Another key variable here is the basis for how the interpretive lens in use sees things, not in theory but in actual function. Without being influenced by the surrounding bias, the Word exposed what actually existed beneath the outer layer of “being alive.” By setting aside any secondary criteria (important or not), what only seemed apparent on the outside also became evident in the innermost that “you are dead” (*nekros*, the condition of being separated from the sources of life, thus being unaccompanied by something). This assessment wasn’t biased by the secondary but based on the primary interpretive lens that “I have not found your works *complete according to the interpretation* of my God”—that is, incomplete based on God’s whole terms and not as defined by the surrounding context, whose influence was and still is fragmenting for the church. How so?

In contrast and conflict with this church (and many churches today like it), the music-like hermeneutic exercised here by the Word makes definitive how to interpret ecclesiology so that the church will be complete, whole and not fragmented. Their “works” (*ergon*, function denoting what defined them) were not “complete” (*pleroo*, to fill up, make full or complete, see Eph 1:22-23; 4:11-13). Since no explicit sins in the surrounding context such as idol worship and sexual immorality were identified in the church’s practice (as occurred in the church in Thyatira, Rev 2:18-23), their incomplete works point to something more subtle or lacking. Based on the prominence of their interpretive lens from outer in—with the ‘in’ becoming obscured or lost with primacy given to the ‘outer’—their reputation signified only a substitute (*onoma*) of the true identity of who, what and how his church *is* and thereby functions. Secondary substitutes for the primary become illusions that a narrowed-down lens promotes in its theology and practice, all with relational consequences. While the Word’s polemic about soiled and white (*leukos*, bright, gleaming) clothes described those incomplete and a remnant who weren’t incomplete respectively, bright clothes symbolized those who participated in God’s life to be credible as “my witnesses” (Rev 3:4). This illuminates the primacy of relationship and vulnerable involvement together from inner out, which soiled clothes symbolized a barrier to or precluded. Any type of “soiled” clothes—whether stained by blatant sin or dirtied from subtle incomplete work—would have this relational consequence.

What the Word illuminated in this church for us to apply today points to the underlying context for human life, in which all surrounding contexts are based and from which they unfold. The influence and bias most prominent in all human life that has shaped human perceptual-interpretive frameworks and lenses emerged from the beginning in the human context of sin—that is sin as reductionism, which is evident in the human condition but not apparent to many (including Christians) in their identity and

function. This pervasive hermeneutic reinterpreted what is essential for persons and relationships, composing a ‘new normal’ for anthropology based on reduced ontology and function, whose compelling influence has pervaded theological anthropology to make Christian identity and function incomplete “according to the interpretation of my God.” Thus, any new normal is not natural, that is, not primal to its source of origin.

Lacking this interpretive depth in their hermeneutic, the reputable church in Sardis wasn’t complete in its identity and function because they used substitutes from reductionism to define their theology and determine their practice. Because their interpretation of sin did not encompass sin as reductionism, they engaged in subtle relational distance from the vulnerable presence and relational involvement of the Trinity—the separation from the source of life that rendered them *nekros*—likely unaware that their veil still remained and that their practice was engaged before God essentially “in front of the curtain” still covering God’s intimate dwelling to prevent intimate relational connection (as implied in Heb 10:19-22).

Thus, like the church in Ephesus (Rev 2:1-4), their hermeneutic lacked the qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness to interpret the relational quality of the *whole* of God, thereby (1) reducing the innermost of God and themselves to an incomplete condition and (2) sustaining them in variable fragments of theology and practice that cannot add up to being whole, just incomplete, however the fragments are composed. And, like all churches with such a hermeneutic, they needed a “Wake up” call from the Word, because their reduced theological anthropology and incomplete view of sin prevented their ontology and function as persons and as church from being whole—whole in the innermost “just as” the innermost of the Trinity that the Word prayed to constitute his family (Jn 17:20-26).

The Word amplified that “unless you change *from outer in to inner out* and become *child-like persons in your hermeneutic to discern the voice of God*, you will never *be involved in the depth of relational quality distinguishing my family*” (Mt 18:2). The musical hermeneutic gives us the perceptual-interpretive framework and lens (1) to discern what’s primal to the innermost of God and (2) to distinguish the primal sound of God’s voice resonating apart from any and all sounds reverberating from whatever source. When we are vulnerably involved in this irreducible and nonnegotiable interpretation process, the sound of our theology is whole from the depths of inner out and therefore heard in wholeness for our practice.

Take to heart the axiom from the Word amplified for us: “The measure of the hermeneutic you use will be the measure of your theology and practice you get”—and that will result in either *more* or *less* of the relational quality shared from the Word (Mk 4:24).

Uncommon Musical Theology and Practice

From the birth of human life and the early development of our minds to the latter days as human minds fade in dementia—and anywhere in-between that the human mind creates a barrier—the sound of music resonates the deepest, getting to the innermost regardless of the capacity of the mind or without the interference and bias of the mind. When our theology and practice at best reverberate in our minds but do not resonate in the innermost as music does, then our theology and practice will always be incomplete. The mind-shaped theology and practice are what commonly have prevailed, ongoingly composing a new normal, while musical (music-like) theology and practice only resonates as uncommon—and thus will only be heard when clearly distinguished from what’s common or a new normal (cf. Lev 10:10; Eze 22:26; 44:23).

The reasoned mind posits that “truth is truth”; and information from the Bible is used to support this proposition, whereby theology is defined. This narrow interpretive process, however, doesn’t necessarily result in how practice is determined. What the mind posits with good intentions easily falls into conventional wisdom or some other common convention, which then composes common notions of truth determining practice. Different notions of truth have emerged throughout church history—notably evident today in evangelicals to progressives—to compose a wide diversity of theology and practice never observed to this extent before. What is not so apparent in this diversity is how little of it resonates in the innermost to experience the relational quality of the Word as Truth; the relational consequence is to not experience the relational reality of the Word’s relational involvement of love in the primacy of reciprocal relationship together person to person. The notions could be present in theology and practice but the experiential truth and relational reality in the innermost is lacking or missing, making them incomplete no matter what they claim or proclaim. So, how do we define the Truth distinct from merely the notions of truth?

The issue facing us is less a propositional one and mostly (not totally) a relational one. Our theology and practice cannot be complete/whole (or *tamiym*, as Abraham was covenanted to walk with God, Gen 17:1) in the innermost and involve our whole person unless they are distinguished and ongoingly engaged just by the Word’s relational terms (as Ps 119:1-2 summarizes and Ps 119 defines). Ongoing reciprocal relationship with God at the innermost is the functional primacy and purpose of God’s law (and related categories), all of which define the relational terms of *how to be* involved together in the relationship of love and not about *what to do*—the essential difference distinguishing Deuteronomy as the Book of Love and not of Law. As discussed previously, *hesed* and

agape need to be interpreted and understood as the primary function of *how* and not the secondary of *what*. This is the unmistakable (though not always apparent) difference that emerges from reduced theology and practice (as evident in the churches in Sardis and Ephesus) and hybrid theology and practice (as evident in the churches in Thyatira and Laodicea), all in contrast to whole theology and practice.

The Tonal Change for Theology and Practice

We need to get past the limits of our assumptions and the constraints of our biases in order to go deeply with the Word into the innermost. The hermeneutic that the Word illuminates (as in Rev 3:2) is the music-like interpretive lens that sees the innermost of life (as in Rev 2:23), and thus discerns what is primal to constitute life (as in Rev 2:4). This involves the primal sound that babies discern, and the essential relational quality of what God sounds like that child-like persons hear/perceive, receive and embrace of the relational messages communicated by the Word in self-disclosure person to person. The relational quality of the primal sound points directly to the function of music as the key variable for the hermeneutic necessary to discern the sound of God's voice for our theology, which is heard for our practice to resonate.

Music in the right harmony and fidelity signifies (1) the relational quality that resonates the primal nature revealing the innermost of God, whereby (2) the primal sound of the amplified Word resonates in the innermost of child-like persons who receive the Word's communication in relational language. This heart-level interpretation process unfolds ongoingly to the relational outcome that the musical hermeneutic composes to make our theology and practice complete, whole in the relational quality of the Trinity.

This essential function of music, however, is not like a sound bite that may reverberate sounds in the mind, but goes no deeper. Rather than what's common in the diverse sounds of theology today, the significance of this function is like a soundboard that resonates deeper into the innermost—resonating at the depth that, together with the Spirit, clarifies, corrects and convicts us of interpretations of anything less and any substitutes, thereby countering and neutralizing the diversity of sounds speculating about what God sounds like. As the Word amplified above, anything less and any substitutes emerge and become the norm (or new normal) in our theology and practice when our perceptual-interpretive framework and lens don't get to the depth of the innermost and make primary the relational quality of life for our persons and relationships, our churches and related academy—and thus lack the relational outcome that we together will be complete/whole based on the perceptual-interpretive framework and lens of the Trinity.

Key Changes to Theology and Practice

So, as the Word amplified for his disciples, how do we undergo child-like change to have this musical theology and practice, resonating music-like in the innermost?

First and foremost, “whoever becomes humble like this child *will resonate in the innermost with musical theology and practice and be distinguished whole (nothing less and no substitutes) in my family*” (Mt 18:4). Becoming humble (*tapeinoo*) denotes to bring low, that is, down to the level of a child in order to counter the status levels commonly used, for example, to define “the greatest” (as the disciples pursued). Humility has been interpreted with much spin among Christians, perhaps with false humility prevailing in our identity and function. Given this practice, how willing are we to change as the Word makes nonnegotiable for all persons in his family?

Two dimensions of humility are critical to examine if we want to undergo child-like change: ontological humility and epistemic humility. Ontological humility is more comprehensive, and epistemic humility is subsumed by it, yet epistemic humility addresses a more apparent issue for becoming humble like a child. As the Word amplified for our identity and function, “the wise and intelligent” define themselves by the knowledge they possess, so epistemic humility is a pivotal change (perhaps transformation) requiring them to redefine their persons based on a new theological anthropology. Children who have yet to be shaped by such education (mainly informal at early childhood) have little or no difficulty with epistemic humility, having yet to make assumptions and form biases that create barriers to the innermost. In other words, they have yet to be socialized in what is common to the rest of us so-called more developed persons.

More challenging and confronting than epistemic humility is ontological humility, which is inseparable from epistemic humility but more comprehensive. ‘Who, what and how we are’ have different identities and functions when based on either ‘outer in’ or ‘inner out’. To be humble about the identity (ontology) of who and what we are from an outer-in focus is a consequential process because at stake is our status measured by the amount of ‘what we do and have’ in a comparative process of ‘more-less’, ‘better-worse’. Accordingly, ontological humility makes us vulnerable to being seen, labelled, and treated at the bottom levels of this human hierarchy. To survive in such a stratified context makes ontological humility anathema, and Christians have adapted subtly with notions of virtual humility that in reality are contrary when exposed at the innermost. Thus, ontological humility requires the radical change specific to our ontology and function in the image and likeness of the Trinity. Here again, children, who have yet to be

shaped by this comparative process, have no problem just being who and what they are from inner out, having yet to shift to the outer in to define their identity and determine their function. Of course, this period of childhood is short-lived and will increasingly require the radical change for them as well. Therefore, in whatever condition persons are living, the relational purpose of the Word is to change all of us from inner out to get us to the depths of the innermost, so that we can experience the relational quality of life constituted by the Trinity.

Ontological humility addresses how we function in the innermost. Epistemic humility addresses how we function in our minds. Since the function of the mind has prevailed over the innermost, we need to exercise **hermeneutic suspicion** about the discernment of sounds in theology heard for practice. What interpretive lens is used? How was the Word interpreted? Is it based on the quantitative over the qualitative? Where is the relational in all this? When used with humility and thus chastened, hermeneutic suspicion can help clarify and correct our interpretations and put them into deeper perspective. For example, balancing the quantitative with the qualitative, and not allowing the secondary to have priority over the primary. Moreover, without the humility of a child, we always have to account for ontological simulations and epistemological illusions that readily compose our theology and practice to render them insignificant; they don't resonate because they are composed without the depth of the innermost, even subtly composed by reverberating words speaking for the Word.

In the midst of the quantity of texts in the Bible, in order to perceive the relational quality of God we have to be vulnerably humble (both ontologically and epistemically) with our person to *behold* what distinguishes God—that is, as revealed in God's self-disclosure communicated in the primal composition of relational language. It is critical then that we are able to critique interpretations based on referential language; this is not optional because the significance of our theology and practice is not about referential information (no matter how scholarly), but only for relational connection (e.g. Ps 119:8,10) to intimately know and understand God (as in Jer 9:23-24, in contrast to Jn 14:9). This is the relational purpose, process and outcome of all theological education (both informal and formal), which by the nature of changing to its newfound relational quality distinguishes the innermost of God and thus what is primary to have priority always over the secondary (as summarized in Ps 119).

The music-like tone is the key for theology and practice to make the changes necessary to resonate the innermost of the relational quality essential for all life. This opens persons and relationships to the primal nature of who, what and how they are, distinguished only in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the Trinity.

The Quality of Infinite Dimension

The essential dimension for theology and practice is relational, which composes the integrating theme of God's revelation vulnerably disclosing the whole of God in irreducible and nonnegotiable relational terms for reciprocal relationship together. The quality of the relationship is also essential for the relational dimension to be of significance in our theology and practice. Therefore, our interpretive response to the Word is essential to be integrated with both the relational and the qualitative.

The qualitative is essential for music to resonate in the innermost, and this quality unmistakably underlies the music-like significance of musical theology and practice. The qualitative also gives balance to the mind by the function of **imagination**. Imagination is perhaps the most variable quality used by persons, and its function has been erratic in the human condition. Thus, imagination is the quality in music-like theology and practice that must be qualified if not chastened.

In many areas of life intentional imagination has diminished greatly in an increasingly quantified world, yet imagination emerges unintentionally in all human contexts because it's a significant part of what makes persons human. We all imagine (consciously or subconsciously) about something frequently, whether good or bad, productive or not. When imagination is cultivated, it can take us beyond the limits of our assumptions and the constraints of our biases so as to perceive and/or experience something more deeply. This qualitative process applies to the texts of the Bible, whose limits and constraints in quantitative referential terms have been exceeded—for example, by narrative interpretations and even by the composition of qualitative stories that integrate the texts beyond a quantity of information without coherence. We cannot expect the relational quality of God and life to emerge from the Word by remaining within the limits and constraints common to us.

Human imagination, however, can take liberties unwarranted by the Word, thereby misrepresenting, distorting, contradicting or countering the Word. Prophetic voices claiming to speak for God were chastened in their imagination and turned around to listen carefully to the sound of the Word amplified in the innermost (Eze 13:2). On the other hand, the quality of imagination is an important function (1) to help us discern the harmony and fidelity of the Word keyed in relational terms, and (2) to give us the understanding needed to experience the Word in the innermost, which would likely not unfold without imagination.

The quality of imagination is a vital dimension that music amplifies for theology and practice to be complete/whole, thus it is essential to constitute their significance. When intensified in harmony and fidelity with the Word, this quality of imagination also leads us beyond our limits and constraints to open us to the quality of **infinite dimension**. This uncommon dimension unfolds ongoingly for us to experience in the innermost. Note that this infinite dimension isn't linked to technological advances in algorithms from

artificial intelligence; AI may enhance our imagination but it doesn't intensify our imagination in harmony and fidelity with the Word.

At the close of his prayer echoing the Word's family prayer, Paul illuminated this infinite dimension for the church and all its persons and relationships to be whole:

“Now to *the Spirit*, who by *his amplified resources* at work within us, is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine *put together*” (Eph 3:20).

In his closing communications to this disciples, the Word intimated how much deeper he wanted to take them; but “when the Spirit's *person* comes, he will guide you into *this infinite dimension*” (Jn 16:12-13); and the Word's prayer made definitive that the quality of this dimension involves the amplified relational process constituted by the Word, which unfolds in the immeasurable relational outcome constituted in the intimate relationships together with the Trinity (Jn 17:3).

Thus, try to imagine how deep the innermost of God can go. Then, imagine how deep you can go into the innermost with God; and, thereby, imagine how much can emerge from your innermost (both individually and together as church). Assuming your humble imagination, is it worth asking God for all that you can imagine?

Not only is this a legitimate effort to be engaged in, the Spirit's person is vulnerably present and intimately involved in our innermost for reciprocal relationship together, in order to unfold this relational outcome “abundantly far more, *infinitely beyond*, than all we can ask *and* imagine *put together*.”

The quality of our imagination makes deeper connection and involves our persons in reciprocal relationship with the Spirit, together with the Trinitarian persons as One, so that we will experience in the innermost the infinite dimension of the relational reality of the Trinity. Before the experiential truth of this relational outcome becomes our relational reality, the dimension of our theology and practice remains finite with limited quality, which raises questions about their significance. Our vulnerably humble involvement directly with the Spirit, however, always intensifies our relational quality to embrace the infinite dimension of the Trinity's relational quality in the innermost. The Word's harmony and fidelity composing musical theology and practice resonates **with** this relational outcome, in order that the church and all its persons and relationships will resonate **in** this relational outcome, so that we will be complete/whole to resonate **for** this relational outcome in the human condition.

Therefore, when we are touched by the relational quality of the Word, we are opened in our innermost to the presence and involvement of the Trinity. If we aren't moved in our innermost, what significance do our theology and practice have? When we are ongoingly involved in the primacy of reciprocal relationship together with the Trinity,

the relational outcome resonates in the most natural and primal relational response we can have in our innermost: the relational quality of our relational involvement in love for the most vulnerably humble response of worship.

As it resonates in the innermost, this uncommon relational outcome converges in the *finale* of musical theology and practice: “to *the Spirit’s person* be glory in the church and in *the Son and the Father into the church family infinitely ahead*” (Eph 3:21). Nothing less and no substitutes for the primacy of worship can distinguish the significance of theology and practice, as well as their relational quality in the innermost, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Accordingly, let the sound of this theology be heard for our practice:

The Whole-ly Trinity³

Holy denotes to be set apart from the ordinary, to be separated from the common, and thus to be distinguished as the uncommon from the common world. God is certainly uncommon, but our God is also whole—that is, the whole and uncommon Trinity. Whole-ly is the combination of whole and holy that distinguishes only the whole and uncommon Trinity.

Note: underlined words to be chanted, rapped, shouted, or any other style, in this rhythm but not sung; tempo increases after Bridge 1, then slows down after verse 6 to the end.

1. Praise God whole and uncommon

Father, Son and Spirit,

Praise God whole and uncommon

Father, Son and Spirit,

together as One

You are, are, are

the whole-ly Trinity.

2. Praise You Father, Son, Spirit,

Your persons together

Praise You Father, Son, Spirit,

Your persons together

whole and uncommon

You are, are, are

the whole-ly Trinity.

Bridge 1: O, O, O, O praise!

O, O, O, O praise!

³ By T. Dave Matsuo, ©2017. Music available online at www.4X12.org.

3. Glory be Father, Son, Spirit,
all present together,
yes, present together
yes, present together,
whole persons as One
You are, are, are
the whole-ly Trinity.

4. Thank You Father, Son, Spirit,
all involved together,
yes, involved together,
yes, involved together,
in relationships
with us, You are
the whole-ly Trinity.

Bridge 2: O, O, O, O praise!
O, O, O, O thank!
O yes, O yes, O yes, O yes!

5. Praise You whole-ly Trinity,
all present and involved, O
Praise You whole-y Trinity,
all present and involved,
Your persons together
whole relationship,
You're whole and uncommon.

6. Thank You whole-ly Trinity,
distinguished above all, O
Thank You whole-ly Trinity,
distinguished above all,
yet here for us all
to make us whole
and uncommon like You.

Bridge 3: So, yes, now yes, O yes!

7. Praise O thank the Trinity
with our whole and uncommon, Yes,

Praise O thank the Trinity
with our whole and uncommon:

Father, Son, Spirit

You are, are, are
the whole-ly Trinity,

You are, are, are
the whole-ly Trinity,
the whole-ly Trinity!

Chapter 6 The Finale of Theology & Practice in Music-like Significance

The human spirit is the lamp of the LORD, searching every innermost part.

Proverbs 20:27

Praise you LORD...let *all who* breathes Hallelu-you!

Psalm 150

In the vulnerable process of this study, what have you discovered that is essential to the Trinity and to those created in the Trinity's qualitative image and relational likeness? Can you identify the *common* influences in theology and practice today, and that need to be changed to uncommon? Have you understood how your theology and practice have been composed and what pivotal changes are necessary? Do you feel that you have examined the innermost and experienced its depth as never before?

The face of God has been revealed "to shine on you *from inner out*" (Num 6:25); and "the unfolding of your Word (*not our words*) gives light...to *child-like persons*" (Ps 119:130) in the primacy of relationship together "face to face" (Num 12:8), so that "*their innermost* is the lamp of the *Trinity*, searching every innermost part" (Prov 20:27). This relational outcome has been vulnerably fulfilled because the face of God "has *resonated* in our hearts to give the light of the *innermost* of the glory of *the Trinity* in the face of *the Word*" (2 Cor 4:6).

When our theology and practice resonate the innermost in harmony and fidelity with the Word, then our theology and practice in music-like significance rises to **the finale**: The worship of each Trinitarian person as One in the innermost, with nothing less and no substitutes for the primacy of this vulnerable relational involvement of love in reciprocal response to the Trinity.



The Face of God¹

Dt 5:4; Num 6:25-26; Ps 80:3; 2 Cor 4:6

1. The face of God has opened
the holy God be praised
the face of God is present
O whole of God be thanked

2. The face of God is involved
the grace of God be praised
the face of God interacts
O whole of God be thanked

3. The face of God still remains
the faithful God be praised
the face of God stays focused
O whole of God be thanked

4. The face of God gets affected
the love of God be praised
the face of God so forgives us
O whole of God be thanked

5. The face of God not common
the holy God be praised
the face of God not two-faced
O whole of God be thanked

6. The face of God, face of God
the whole and holy God *is*
the face of God, face of God
is the whole and holy God.

Amen, amen, amen!

¹ By T. Dave Matsuo and Kary A. Kambara ©2014. Music available online at www.4X12.org.



There are, however, many dissonant sounds of theology heard for practice, all of which have relational consequences most evident in times of worship. Worship services are the common sound heard across the diversity of churches today. The practice of worship is also the most common-ized condition existing throughout this diverse theology, which composes theology and practice not distinguished by the uncommon. Thus, much theology and practice (past and present) have been composed without its finale resonating the uncommon relational outcome in the innermost. That is, their composition has lacked the experiential truth (not just propositional truth) and relational reality (not mere reality assumed) of the relational outcome essential for our faith to be significant, so that our theology and practice will be whole.

The relational outcome of the Word is distinguished only when it resonates in our innermost with the integral harmony and fidelity amplified by the Word, whereby this uncommon relational outcome converges in the distinguished finale of uncommon worship—neither defined as a mere worship service nor determined by common practice. Yet, what is seen and heard in many worship contexts today are conducted lacking this relational outcome, even when reverberating with the function of music in diverse sound bites. It is crucial for us to understand these dissonant voices and sounds because of their relational consequences.²

Without this relational outcome constituted in the innermost, *who* and *what* of God have been distinguished in our theology and practice beyond human words?

The following song illuminates the God we worship:

God Distinguished (*Pala*)³

Pala is the Hebrew word defining to be wonderful, to distinguish and thus to separate from comparison with anything or anyone else. *Pala* not only describes but defines God (e.g. Gen 18:14; Ps 9:1), who alone is distinguished above all and beyond all comparison, yet is wonderfully present and involved with us (as in Isa 9:6). Only God is *pala* and is worthy of our worship.

² Further study of prevalent aspects of common-ized worship can be found in Kary A. Kambara, *A Theology of Worship: 'Singing' a New Song to the LORD* (Theology of Worship, 2011: online at <http://4X12.org>). See also her critical examination of worship language, *Hermeneutic of Worship Language: Understanding Communion with the Whole of God* (Worship Language Study, 2013); online at <http://4X12.org>.

³ By T. Dave Matsuo and Kary A. Kambara ©2015. Music available online at www.4X12.org.

Pala—pala—pala—! (sing strong, like a shofar)

1. You O God are beyond
(*declare*) and compare to nothing
 You O God stand alone!

 You be wonderful
(*declare*) beyond human words
 You the Word, wonderful!

2. You are distinguished
 beyond comparing
 You *are*, only you!

 You God are sep'rate
 compare to no one
 You have no equal!

Pala—pala—pala—!

3. You O God are beyond
(*tune of verse 1*) You alone distinguished
(*declare*) Wonderful, wonderful!

(*tune of verse 2*) You *are*, you only
 beyond and present
 Wonder-full the Word!

(*Repeat song*)

Ending: *Pala—pala—pala—!*



In addition to this reduction of God in our theology and practice noted above, without this relational outcome constituted by the uncommon, *how* is the holy God distinguished unequivocally from what's common? Directly related is how the face of God gets shaped by anthropomorphism, such that God's face gets diffused in the crowd of Christian faces, without being distinguished in relational significance. Moreover, without this uncommon relational outcome, what significance does our theology and practice have—that is, in the primacy of the innermost and not in the secondary (as the Word exposed, Mk 7:6-8)—to distinguish us unmistakably from what's common, and therefore to be constituted whole and uncommon by the holy God for the holy way of life together?

The Holy God & the Holy Way⁴

Taken from 1 Pet 1:15; 2:9; Isa 35:8-9; Lev 10:10

Note: holy means to be uncommon, distinguished from all common; whole-ly is the integration of whole and uncommon, thus whole-ly.

1. O holy God, the One who is uncommon,
You are the One and Only
Beyond and different from all
that is common!
2. O holy God, the One who is uncommon,
You are the Whole and Complete
Beyond and different from all
that is incomplete!
3. O whole-ly God, the One 'whole and Uncommon',
You are the Distinguished
Beyond and different from all
common, incomplete!

Chorus 1:

Holy, holy, whole-ly
You God are whole-ly
And whole-ly is the only
way you *are*!

⁴ By T. Dave Matsuo and Kary A. Kambara ©2019. Music available online at www.4X12.org.

4. O whole-ly God, the One who lives uncommon
You save us whole and complete
Beyond and different from all
 that is common!
Beyond and different from all
 that is incomplete!
Beyond and different from all
common, incomplete!

Chorus 2:

Holy, holy, whole-ly
Our God is whole-ly
And whole-ly is the only
 way we *are*!

5. O whole-ly God, your whole-ly way before us
To live our life day to day
Beyond and different *with* God,
 whole-ly together!
Beyond and different *like* God
—You *are*, so we *are*—
 whole-ly together!
Yes, beyond and different...
 whole-ly together!

Chorus 3:

Whole-ly God, whole-ly way
God saves us whole-ly
And whole-ly is the only
 way together!
O people of God!
Yes, whole-ly is the only
 way together!-----
O whole-ly way!
Whole-ly together!



The relational quality inherent to life always hungers and thirsts for more depth in our theology and practice (cf. Mt 5:6) when there is no finale resonating in the innermost. Even if our theology and practice reverberate in our minds, there will always be a lack in our innermost that remains missing until the finale resonates clearly distinguished.

Insignificant Sounds and Words for the Word

I have been to a wide spectrum of worship services; and the dynamics engaged also appear to have a diverse range, but there are commonalities to this diversity. The dynamic most lacking in worship is the relational dimension, which signifies that the experiential truth and relational reality of the Word's relational outcome is missing in the act of worship. A quality of worship engaged could be present to a certain extent, but the relational response integral to relational quality is not distinguished in all that may reverberate in these worship acts. Why, because the innermost of persons doesn't resonate to evoke the relational response expressing its natural finale—not the obligatory response or duty common to worship dynamics of whatever diversity. A clear example of this difference is seen in Mary (Martha's sister), who embodied the relational response of worship that resonated in and from her innermost; in contrast, Martha focused on her duty (Jn 12:1-3; Mt 26:6-13).⁵

If you examine your worship experiences, what do you think you would observe? Now imagine what would be better, and then imagine how this could happen.

In many worship contexts, worship is not the primary focus, in some cases not even a secondary focus, but rather a spiritual sound bite, or a performance or even entertainment to appease “consumer” interests, perhaps as an appetizer for the main attraction: the sermon. Spurred by the initial efforts of Swiss Reformer Ulrich Zwingli in the 16th century, the sermon became the central focus for the worship service, establishing the common tradition prevailing since. Most of what is heard in so-called worship is a musical prelude or arbitrary introduction to the sermon.

In any designated time earmarked as worship, the operating dynamics frequently function like a bot to digitize worship. Enhanced or not by technology, worship commonly gets reduced to what is analogous to social media. If you understand the relational consequences that social media has had on human connection, then you have a sense of how our worship has little if any relational significance to God. Worship has become a convenient and less personally involved engagement, which routinely gets preoccupied with secondary stuff at the expense of what's primary—the relationship and its essential involvement; and as a substitute for the primary, it promotes simulations and illusions of both relationship and involvement, even to the common extent of

⁵ See discussion of Mary by Kary A. Kambara, *Embodying New the Worship Relationship: Whole Theology and Practice Required* (Worship Study, 20115). Online at <http://4X12.org>.

manipulating those present with misleading practices and misinformation. In other words from the Word, churches today typically function as digital platforms/promoters to amplify this type of worship in order to intensify engagement in its brand by its members. Moreover, as in the worship, and consider how many become substitutes (intentional or inadvertent) for the relational response directly to the Word. Also, consider how much of what is heard or sung is really just an *invitation* to worship and/or an *intention* to worship the God elevated (notably with visuals or symbolic words) before the congregation, but the current controversy about limiting free speech in digital platforms like Facebook and Twitter, churches assume they have a freedom to worship without accountability. That is a misuse of the freedom that “the Truth will set you free” (Jn 8:31).

Now examine all the familiar sounds and words that compose the common designated time of relational response to God doesn’t actually unfold from all that attention—much to God’s disappointment and dissatisfaction.

Examine and consider the following (and any other sounds and words in your specific worship context):

- Key words such as **praise, thanks, glory** and **honor** pervade the composition of worship, but in reality they have no relational significance apart from the relational context and process of relationship together, not the mere context and process of a gathering. Here again, how many such words are used as merely the intention to worship without the actual relational response directly to God?
- Furthermore, the identity of God commonly highlighted with **he, him, a name** or **title** are all in the third person, which when sung only at best expresses an indirect response to God as a substitute for the direct response in reciprocal relationship together. What would you think about having a conversation with someone, and they only refer to you as “he or she,” “him or her,” or only use a name or title in place of “you?” There is no relational connection in this conversation, even though you both occupy the same space; this reveals the same dynamic in worship. For instance, when we ask “what’s in a name?” the most important answer that our attention should be focused on is *the person* who bears the name, rather than centered on any information related to the name. What we may know about the name may be important, but it is all secondary to the person. The issue we need to address in worship is not about *what* is the name in our songs and prayers but about distinguishing *who* is in the name, and thereby addressing, responding to, and being relationally involved with *who* and not *what*. This relational process for worship is illuminated as follows: “that those who love your name *will worship* you” (Ps 5:11). Yet, even when “you” may be used instead of “he” or the name to indicate more relational clarity, this neither guarantees the relational response nor composes the relational involvement essential for the finale.

All these expressions must be accountable to the Word's critique of such worship practice: "You honor my name with these words of your lips, but the relational involvement of your innermost is far from my person; in vain do you worship me...and maintain your worship tradition" (Mk 7:7-8).⁶

Examine and consider these worship dynamics further:

- **Hallelujah, awesome, faith, and grace** are typically heard in worship jargon, words which lose their functional significance when made secondary to the primary function of reciprocal relationship together. They only regain their significance when expressed in the relational response that resonates in the finale of our theology and practice. The dynamics of our act of faith composed in relational terms brings us face to face with God—in contrast to the referential terms (such as creeds) that only define our belief system; and God's relational act of grace (not merely a gift) involves us intimately with God's vulnerable face person to person. Yet, God's face cannot be reduced to the common use of the word awesome, which is routinely ascribed to anyone or anything in our common discourse today (especially by millennials). And the common word most heard in worship is "Hallelujah," which tends to become an end in itself rather than the relational response intrinsic to its meaning.

The relational process to this relational outcome constitutes the relational response that is natural to and thus vital for our worship to have relational significance to the Trinity. Vital for this relational process is the relational quality of the songs we sing, which need to resonate the finale of musical theology and practice.

Face to Face⁷

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.

⁶ How we use (misuse) God's name in worship is discussed more fully in Kary A. Kambara, *Worshipping God in Likeness of the Trinity: Not Determined 'in their way'* (Uncommon Worship Study, 2016), chapter 2; online at <http://4X12.org>. See also her broader examination in *Hermeneutic of Worship Language*.

⁷ By T. Dave Matsuo and Kary A. Kambara, ©2010. Music available online at www.4X12.org.

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.



In the following intimate relational response to the Word amplifying the Trinity, typically insignificant sounds and words are humbly changed in child-likeness to the innermost in order to involve us directly in the uncommon finale of our theology and practice—resonating music-like with nothing less and no substitutes to diminish the significance of our worship.

Hallelujah Whole⁸

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

Note: sing ‘Hallelujah’ (praise the Lord) or ‘Hallelu-*you*’ (praise *you* Lord).

(Freely)

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

⁸ By T. Dave Matsuo and Kary A. Kambara, ©2013. Music available online at www.4X12.org.

(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: All of You!



And to help us maintain this relational involvement and not fall back into our default mode—a common occurrence when the primary focus is distracted—it would be better to make explicit the relational term “hallelujah” by our direct relational response of “halleluyou!” “You” alone is the focus of worship—nonnegotiable even by the reverberating words of sermons.

With the primary focus on the Word undiminished, our relational response will not stop short of its finale nor be diluted by insignificant sounds and words, because “only you are awesome—you alone.”

Awesome Alone⁹

Note: Hebrew words *‘ares* and *yārē’* signify awesome. In contemporary language, we need to reconsider not only who but what is ‘awesome’ and how loosely we use the term, so that it will be restored to fully distinguish its significance.

1. You alone are awesome
Awe-full, revered
Only you are awesome
Awesome, awesome!

⁹ By T. Dave Matsuo and Kary A. Kambara, ©2014. Music available online at www.4X12.org.

2. God cannot be compared
You are beyond
You alone are awesome
Awesome, awesome!

3. God cannot be reduced
No one like you
Only you are awesome
Awesome, awesome!

(Repeat 3 verses)

4. Father, Son and Spirit
Whole and righteous
You alone, yes only you
Awesome, awesome!

(instrumental only)

(Repeat verse 4)

The Finale Integrating the Trinity's Family

If you review Peter's words as he followed Jesus, they often were substitutes for the Word. If you review his relational involvement with Jesus, he often didn't make relational connection with the Word; and he even countered Jesus, thereby preventing his responses from having relational significance to the Word. The relational quality of Peter's theology and practice was inconsistent at best and nonexistent at his worst. The most evident consequence of Peter's theology and practice is that it didn't resonate music-like to unfold the finale in the innermost—that is, the depth of the worship finale that relationally responds to the Trinity as One. This finale involves integrating in the innermost the relational response of all the persons together in the Trinity's family without outer distinctions (as Paul exposed the contradiction in Peter's theology and practice (Gal 2:11-14)).

This relational consequence is far-reaching in theology and practice today, as made evident by the fragmentation (so-called diversity) of the global church. Not apparent in this condition of the church is the finale lacking in the diverse worship

practices, which have not been accountable to the Word to be clarified and corrected about the level of relational quality in their theology and practice. As those belonging to the church as *one* like the Trinity, we all need to humbly acknowledge what has amounted to denial about examining our theology and practice, and “Wake up” child-like, because our theology and practice “have not been found complete/whole by the interpretive lens of the Word” (as was the case with the church in Sardis, Rev 3:1-2). Denial, for instance, about the relational consequences of a reduced theological anthropology or weak view of sin, is common among church leaders; even Peter was in denial about his level of involvement with the Word (apparent in Jn 21:17,20-21), until Paul’s wake-up call humbled him. In spite of where we may find ourselves, the palpable Word is unmistakable: “*Our ways are under the eyes of the LORD, and he examines all our paths*” (Prov 5:21); thus, palpably with the Spirit, “all the churches *need to know that I am he who searches your innermost, and I will respond to each of you according to your theology and practice*” (Rev 2:23, NIV).

Therefore, let us take to heart this truth and reality:

The resonance of worship in the innermost will be the pivotal key for us to get past the crossroads we now face into music-like theology and practice—just as music can resonate the deepest to touch persons like nothing else—whose finale will change us to the child-like persons belonging together, integrated as one in the Trinity’s family. The experiential truth and relational reality of this relational outcome resonates the deepest in worship, because this uncommon relational response involves us the most intimately with the Trinity face to face, and person to person with the Trinitarian persons as One.

Based on this uncommon reciprocal relationship together:

When this finale resonates in our innermost without being diminished, then our persons and relationships are integrated in the wholeness of the Trinity’s family—transforming and reconciling churches from their fragmentary condition into “one just as we are one, Father” (Jn 17:20-26).

“More than we can ask or imagine,” the Spirit’s person is vulnerably present and relationally involved to compose our musical theology and practice in the relational quality of infinite dimension (Eph 3:20; 5:19-20; 1 Cor 12:12-13), so that the uncommon peace of the Word prevails in our innermost over other words of anything less and any substitutes (Jn 14:27; Col 3:15). Embrace this experiential truth for your relational reality:

The Spirit of the Word¹⁰

Taken from Jn 14:15-27; 16:13-15; 17:20-23; Gal 4:6; Eph 2:22; Nu 6:24-26

1. 'I will not leave you as orphans'
'I do not leave you apart'
'The Father gives you the Spirit
the Father gives you the Spirit
in my name, in my name.'

Chorus:

- 'The Spirit lives with you'
'We make our home with you'
dwelling whole as family
"Abba Father, Abba Father"
2. 'I've sent you the Spirit of truth'
'I've left you the Spirit of Truth'
'You know him within you'
'He guides you and tells you
what is mine, what is mine.'
3. 'My peace I leave you, my family
My peace I give you, be whole!'
'The Lord shines his face on you,
the Lord turns his face to you
and makes you whole, makes you whole.'
4. The whole of God with us has shared
the whole of God with us is present
'that they may be one as we,
that they may be one as we'
'I in them, you in me.'

End: O my Father, O my Father!

¹⁰ By T. Dave Matsuo and Kary A. Kambara, ©2011. Music available online at www.4X12.org.

Whole-ly Peace¹¹

Shalôm is the condition of well-being in wholeness; *whole-ly* (whole and holy) is this wholeness uncommon to the world. Righteousness define the whole of who, what and how God is in relationships. Composed from Ps 85:10; Num 6:24; Jn 14:27, cf. Col 3:15

1. Peace and righteousness kiss,
and the face of God turns
to us and gives us peace,
Whole-ly peace, yes, whole-ly peace.

Chorus 1: Hallelu-*you*, the God of peace
Hallelu-*you*, the God of peace
Hallelu, hallelu-*you*, whole-ly peace
Hallelu, hallelu-*you*, O whole-ly peace.

2. Peace and righteousness kiss,
and the Prince of Peace comes
to us and gives us peace,
Whole-ly peace, yes, whole-ly peace.

Chorus 2: Hallelu-*you*, the Prince of Peace
Hallelu-*you*, the Prince of Peace
Hallelu, hallelu-*you*, whole-ly peace
Hallelu, hallelu-*you*, O whole-ly peace.

3. Peace and righteousness kiss,
“my peace I give,”
but just whole and uncommon,
Whole-ly peace, yes, whole-ly peace.

Chorus 3: Hallelu-*you*, Uncommon Peace
Hallelu-*you*, the whole-ly Peace
Hallelu, hallelu-*you*, our whole-ly Peace
Hallelu, hallelu-*you*, O whole-ly Peace.

4. Peace and righteousness embrace,
“my wholeness you have
be whole and uncommon,
my whole-ly ones, yes, my whole-ly ones.”

¹¹ By T. Dave Matsuo and Kary A. Kambara, ©2018. Music available online at www.4X12.org.

Chorus 4: Hallelu-*you*, my whole-ly One
 Hallelu-*you*, our whole-ly One
 Hallelu, hallelu-*you*, O whole-ly Peace
 Hallelu, hallelu-*you*, our whole-ly One
Shout underlined Hallelu, hallelu, hallelu-*you*, O whole-ly Peace
words Hallelu, hallelu, hallelu-*you*, my whole-ly One.



Therefore, only on this relational basis, with nothing less and no substitutes from other sounds and words, let us join together in our innermost, resonating in the new song, humbly vulnerable with our veils removed as never before, and be reciprocally involved with the innermost of the Trinity at **the integrating summit** of our finale:

Whole-ly Communion¹²

Mt 9:10-13; Heb 10:19-22; 2 Cor 4:6

This song is composed to be sung during Communion.

Heartfelt and heart-filled

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

¹² By Kary A. Kambara and T. Dave Matsuo, ©2014. Music available online at www.4X12.org.

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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