

# *Jesus into Paul*

Embodying the Theology and Hermeneutic  
of the Whole Gospel

T. Dave Matsuo

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[www.4X12.org](http://www.4X12.org)  
[tdavematsuo@4X12.org](mailto:tdavematsuo@4X12.org)



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# Chapter 1            Introduced in the Beginning

**The unfolding of your words gives light;  
It imparts understanding to the simple.<sup>1</sup>**

Psalm 119:130

Modern science, notably physics, has attempted to provide a definitive answer to the question of Goethe's Faust: "What holds the world together in its innermost?"<sup>2</sup> After attempts by noted physicist Stephen Hawking to develop a "grand unified theory" (GUT) that would enable us, in his words, "to know the mind of God"—and that essentially would make a creator God superfluous—Hawking surprisingly gave up his quest for a complete comprehensive theory for knowing the world in its innermost parts. He concluded that this was not possible with the limited framework of science, because a physical theory can only be self-referencing; and, therefore, it can only be either inconsistent or incomplete.<sup>3</sup> In other terms, the whole cannot be achieved from mere parts, wholeness can neither be understood nor experienced from things which/who are only fragmentary.

Did Hawking learn anything from Paul: "For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?" (1 Cor 2:16)? Highly unlikely in probability terms. And unlike Paul's claim to "have the mind of Christ" (2:16; cf. Jn 15:15; 16:13-15), Hawking denies any view from outside the universe. Despite having given up on GUT, he continues to labor under the assumptions and hope of human shaping and construction, which have emerged notably from the Enlightenment but have roots more primordial than that. That hope for physicists has recently shifted to the Large Hadron Collider (the world's largest particle accelerator) to provide explanation for the vexing mysteries still eluding human knowledge.<sup>4</sup>

Turning to the world of neuroscience, Iain McGilchrist locates these heuristic and epistemic processes in the brain activity of the right and left hemispheres. He concludes that each brain hemisphere represents different views of the world. The left hemisphere, for example, looks at parts or fragments and then makes generalized abstraction, aggregated from the parts. It is the special capacity of the left hemisphere to derive generalities—the dominant function characteristic of scientists—but these generalities have nothing to do with wholes because, as McGilchrist rightly notes, they are in fact necessarily built from parts, aspects, fragments of existing things within the universe; these things in themselves could never have been generalized. This knowledge gained from putting things together from bits—the knowledge called facts—is the only kind of knowledge permitted by science (at least in theory if not always in practice). Yet, this resultant sought-after "certainty," on which the left hemisphere concentrates in its need to

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<sup>1</sup> Unless indicated, all Scripture is from the NRSV; any italics in Scripture throughout this study signify emphasis or further rendering of terms.

<sup>2</sup> For an overview discussion of this activity, see Hans Küng, *The Beginning of All Things: Science and Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Quoted and discussed in Küng, 15-24.

<sup>4</sup> See physicist Steve Giddings, "The physics we don't know", op-ed, *Los Angeles Times*, Jan 5, 2010.

be right, is also related to narrowness, with the effect that the more certain we become of something the less we see (perhaps like narrow-minded). Consequently, this knowledge, with its left hemisphere function, does not provide a good idea of the whole, but, at best, just a partial reconstruction of aspects of the whole.<sup>5</sup> And how we use this knowledge, and its underlying assumptions, may not only indicate the dominance of the left hemisphere but also will critically determine the breadth and depth of our perspective of the world and all who live in it. This is the hard lesson Job learned in both the limits and distortion of his knowledge and the hubris of his speculation about God: “Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know” (Job 42:3, NIV).

This may appear as an odd introduction to a study of Jesus and Paul, but in fact it points to the shared cosmology integral to their stories (cf. Jn 1:1-5; Col 1:15-17) and what unfolds in the universe from the beginning. Therefore, it is indispensable for this study to start ‘in the beginning’. From the limited framework of science, we need to shift to a further and deeper perceptual-interpretive framework that provides the lens necessary both to illuminate and to sharpen the focus on what emerged in the beginning. In the process, we engage theology (*logos* of God) and encounter the world in its innermost through the lens of theological interpretation—not leaving science behind but providing it with the *qualitative* perceptual-interpretive framework necessary for whole understanding and meaning of the *quantitative* reality it observes. This includes the reality that it ignores or is unable to perceive.

What Faust’s question raises are the primary issues of the breadth of the human condition and the depth of the good news for the human condition. Therefore, the question involves by necessity addressing the breadth of the first issue by responding with the depth of the gospel. Anything less and any substitutes of both neither get to the innermost nor are held together. These primary issues unfold in this study, as Jesus *into* Paul addresses irreducibly and responds nonnegotiable to both by embodying the theology and hermeneutic of the whole gospel.

This study combines and extends further my separate studies of Jesus and Paul: *Sanctified Christology: A Theological and Functional Study of the Whole of Jesus and The Whole of Paul and the Whole in His Theology: Theological Interpretation in Relational Epistemic Process*.<sup>6</sup> The full content of those studies is not included in this integrated study, so you may find it helpful or necessary at times to refer back to them. As we proceed in this study of the synthesis of Jesus and Paul, we will be further challenged in our perceptual-interpretive framework, in the epistemic process we are engaging, and in the theological assumptions we have not only for Jesus and Paul but of the innermost whole of the world and the whole of God beyond. Moreover, both Jesus and Paul ongoingly challenge our theological assumptions (including of the gospel, grace and faith) and make imperative listening to the communicative words from the God outside the universe, concurrently present and involved (Mt 17:5; Mk 4:24; Lk 8:18; Rom 10:17; Col 3:16).

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<sup>5</sup> Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Modern World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Reference: (Christology Study, 2008) and (Paul Study, 2010), online at <http://www.4X12.org>.



## The Epistemic Approach to the Whole

Engaging this deeper epistemic process is not a 180° turn from rationalized thinking (as in science) to faith, that is, as faith is often perceived without any valid basis other than a believer's own supposition (even presupposition). I am not faintly suggesting a leap over Lessing's 'ugly, broad ditch', the gap between reason and that faith. Nor does this involve maintaining some sort of dualism between the material and immaterial. This shift to a qualitative framework, however, does involve going further than the prevailing primacy of reason (notably since the Enlightenment) and deeper than conventional faith.<sup>7</sup> Admittedly, for some this will in effect widen the gap of the 'ugly ditch'—that is, by deepening our thinking and faith for this study, which is a necessary function in God's self-disclosure (cf. Lk 10:21) and thereby a necessary purpose in this study.

Rather, this deeper epistemic process involves turning our focus to revelations from outside the universe—neither assuming beforehand a reality exists beyond the universe nor assuming such reality cannot exist. Along with eschewing these two assumptions, the assumed superiority of the scientific method that privileges sight over other means of perception is chastened. Thus this epistemic process involves paying attention to disclosures which are “heard” more than seen—in a similar sense of purpose, perhaps analogous, to scientific monitoring of outer space to listen for any signs of alien life. That is, these disclosures are communicative action from the Reality beyond the universe, the access to which cannot be gained by any effort from within the universe, however sophisticated, dedicated or convicted the effort. Therefore, we have to assume that any disclosure is a self-disclosure initiated from a personal Being, whose “discovery” can only be known in the relational epistemic process constituted by the relational context and process of this personal Being's self-disclosure from the beginning. Anything less and any substitute of this relational context and process reduce the relational epistemic process to, at best, conventional observation, which becomes self-referencing (as Hawking concluded) and thus is consequential for the relational outcome for which these self-disclosures have been communicated to us. This reduction applies equally to scientific, philosophical and theological observations, including those by biblical exegetes.

Philosophy engages this conversation by addressing the basic issue of the knowability of God and by seeking to define concepts with precision and rigor of argumentation. Concepts historically attributed to God, such as omnipotence, omniscience, simplicity, immutability and impassibility, may appear to describe the God outside the universe, but essentially they tell us more about the unknowability of God. This is demonstrated in the work of Thomas Aquinas on the doctrine of divine simplicity.<sup>8</sup> This basic view that those within the universe cannot know the essence or being of God—nor are our words basically capable of speaking of the creator—gave rise to the voice of negative theology: we can make only statements of negation, saying just what God is not or cannot be, thus avoiding the limitation of language that is susceptible

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<sup>7</sup> It would also appear to be a shift from the left brain hemisphere to the right hemisphere, as McGilchrist defines their functions, which can be threatening for both the science community and the theological academy.

<sup>8</sup> Summarized by Brian Davies, “Simplicity” in Charles Taliaferro and Chad Meister, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 31-45.

to falsifiability. This position, however, both limits the epistemic process and gives some illusion about knowing the reality of God; consequently, it also limits or even precludes the reception and understanding of God's self-disclosures and the communication of positive theology for both the whole ontology and function of God and thereby of God's creation.<sup>9</sup>

In the philosophy of religion, such an omnipotent, omniscient, perfect God took creative action in the beginning to form the universe and all in it, after which this Being either left it on its own (deism) or continued to be involved with it—the extent of which varies with each specific view of theism. Both deism and theism depend on a particular interpretive framework which determines the epistemic process it engages. Perhaps deists need to return to monitoring the universe to listen to the signs of life coming from outside the universe. Yet, the classical theistic picture of God—as self-contained and all sufficient, impassible, etc.—is also not the God of thematic relational action found in the self-disclosures of the Word in and from the beginning. The interpretive framework from human shaping and construction has dominated philosophy's voice in this conversation. In part, this speaks to the Copernican shift in astronomy (the earth revolves around the sun) and its influence on philosophy: theocentricity was replaced by anthropocentricity. The direction of influence was no longer from certainty of God to certainty of the self but now from self-certainty to certainty of God. Küng identifies this *methodical beginning* emerging from the human being, the subject, one's reason and freedom, as a paradigm shift that culminates in a radical critique of the proofs of God.<sup>10</sup> In spite of this history, philosophical theology will hear a clearer voice to respond to for engaging this conversation. This is demonstrated, for example, by current scholarly efforts to clarify how many voices from outside the universe there are.<sup>11</sup> That work addresses the issue of the “threeness-oneness problem” and involves the theological and hermeneutic issues of the Trinity, whom I refer to in this study as the whole of God.

It is within this conversation that we need to go back to an earlier context on the Damascus road where Paul's story emerged, not began, and converged with Jesus' story. Even though Paul was an unrelenting Jew (Pharisee), his practice of faith revolved more around the terms of human shaping and construction than God's terms (cf. Dt 12:8; Judg 21:25; Rom 2:28-29). In other words, in functional terms the monotheist Paul was actually more anthropocentric than theocentric. Anthropocentricity was also identified by Jesus as “tradition” (*paradosis*), which focused on terms from human shaping and construction in substitution for God's terms (Mt 15:2, 6-9; Mk 7:8; cf. Paul's later understanding in Col 2:8). The significance of theocentricity was embodied by Jesus as the epistemological, hermeneutical and functional keys to the whole of God, God's whole and the wholeness of all creation. This is the Jesus who confronts Paul in his tradition and anthropocentricity on the Damascus road. Unable to deny this experience despite his prevailing interpretive lens, Paul asked the critical epistemic question: “Who are you?” (Acts 9:5; cf. Mk 4:41). By being exposed by the self-disclosure of the Light, Paul

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<sup>9</sup> Colin E. Gunton engages this philosophical discussion to refocus theology in a positive direction in *Act and Being: Towards a Theology of the Divine Attributes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> Küng, 43-53.

<sup>11</sup> A descriptive overview of this work, in interaction with systematic theology, is found in Thomas H. McCall, *Which Trinity? Whose Monotheism?: Philosophical and Systematic Theologians on the Metaphysics of Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

undergoes a paradigm shift in his perceptual-interpretive framework to deepen his monotheism, transforming him from anthropocentricity to theocentricity, and also from fragmentary human ontology and function to wholeness (Rom 8:5-6). This constitutes the whole that the Word outside the universe both enacted in the beginning and in vulnerable self-disclosure embodied for relationship together with the creation (Jn 1:1-3; Col 1:16-17, 19-20; 2:9-10).

As Paul learned dramatically, underlying the dynamics unfolding from the beginning are perceptual-interpretive framework issues. Whatever paradigm shift in the past defines our current worldview in general, knowingly or unknowingly, determines in particular the extent of the epistemic process we engage as well as the depth of our involvement in it. Obviously, these issues are consequential for the results we find, the conclusions we make, and, most importantly, for the relational outcomes we experience. Like the monotheist Paul before the Damascus road, we cannot merely assume that our theology is valid and our theological anthropology is significant, that is, in God's terms of being whole and not in our fragmentary terms.

We cannot underestimate the importance vested 'in the beginning' for our understanding the whole as well as our need to be whole. And we can neither allow this to be diminished by science nor minimalized by philosophy as well as theology. Essentially, its importance involves no less than the search for identity, human identity, not in social terms but in primary terms of creation. Accordingly, this identity is inseparable from the identity of the Creator outside the universe, whose intrusive action set in motion the relational dynamic that "holds the world together in its innermost" in the beginning, ongoingly from the beginning, to and through the end. The whole—in which human identity is defined and by which it is determined—constitutes the identity of God, the whole of whose creative action composes the universe and all in it. This created whole, however, was sadly fragmented by reductionism—the contrary of wholeness—making necessary the whole of God's salvific action to transform human being and thus all creation to be whole. Nothing less than this identity can be whole, and any substitute for this whole identity is only reductionism. This reductionism and its counter-relational work are consequential for the fragmentation of life constituting the human condition, not *in* the beginning but *from* the beginning—as demonstrated in the primordial garden (Gen 3:1-7). Therefore, the search for identity has had a long history of human shaping and construction; underlying this history is the shift of ontology from inner out to outer in, and thereby the shift in function from qualitative to quantitative (cf. Gen 2:25 and 3:7). And, most certainly, this shift has restricted the epistemic process to limited (narrowed-down and fragmentary) knowledge and loads of information; moreover, it has prevented the involvement necessary to go further and deeper in the epistemic process for whole knowledge and understanding.<sup>12</sup>

There is a dynamic interaction of distinct variables which converge in the human shaping and construction of identity. Further understanding of this interaction will be helpful, if not disconcerting. Self-determination is the underlying dynamic that needs to be understood in human shaping and construction. The presence of self-determination may be apparent in an individualistic context like the United States but how is this relevant in collectivistic contexts? The reality is that self-determination is never pursued

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<sup>12</sup> McGilchrist locates this shift in the prevailing activity of the left brain hemisphere and its dominance in shaping the modern world. *The Master and His Emissary*.

in a vacuum or in isolation from the self's surrounding context; it is always a process in relation to others outside of oneself, thus self-determination can be both by an individual and a collective. The underlying dynamic of self-determination is made definitive by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 6, which overlaps with self-autonomy in Mt 5 and self-justification in Mt 7). This prevailing effort, which constitutes human shaping and construction (cf. the tower of Babel, Gen 11:1-4), focuses our interpretive lens on what to pay attention to and what to ignore (cf. Gen 3:4-6). Moreover, it also signifies an outer-in ontology and function, which depends on rationalizing in its acts of determination and consequently defines self and relationships by quantitative parts, aspects or things for easier determination. In further understanding, the quest for self-determination is inseparable from a search for identity, which conjointly leads to the quest for certainty. Here is when the underlying dynamic becomes more obscure. With the elusive nature of certainty in the universe and in the absence of wholeness, the definition of certainty by necessity becomes reduced and narrowed down to what we can control and thereby be certain about. Then, of course, this dynamic engages the variable of fear, which easily becomes the driving force behind human effort—extending self-determination into self-justification. McGilchrist associates this quest and reduction of certainty to the dominance of the left brain hemisphere in its need for certainty and to be right. In light of ambiguity and mystery, the left hemisphere tends to react with premature over-interpretation, which requires reduction and narrowness of what is seen for more certainty.<sup>13</sup>

Whether or not this dynamic interaction is accurately associated with the left brain hemisphere, the brain confirms distinct patterns existing in how the human person functions and how we see the world—even at some point from the beginning, evolutionary development notwithstanding. Helpfully, this reality in human function is made more accountable for us to address by necessity. With the inability of human effort using a quantitative framework to find what holds the world together in its innermost, we tend to maintain a lens focused on the outer in to avoid the unresolved issues (personal, collective, global) involving the inner out; consequently, we continue to depend on quantitative aspects, parts, things to substitute for the deeper qualitative levels of life which elude us. For example, MIT professor Sherry Turkle, founder and director of the MIT Initiative on Technology and Self, describes how we have changed today as technology offers us substitutes for connecting with each other face-to-face, and how technology redraws the boundaries between intimacy and solitude.<sup>14</sup>

This prevailing shift to substitutes and secondary matter can only be reductionist and its consequences (epistemologically, ontologically, relationally) increasingly pervasive in all levels of life, including the church and academy and their theology and practice. The relational consequences are even more far-reaching than the epistemological: not fully receiving the whole gospel; not wholly knowing (i.e. beyond quantitative information) God, who is vulnerably present and intimately involved, in the qualitative depth of relationship (e.g. in contrast to the quantitative extent demonstrated by the disciples, Jn 14:9); not experiencing the whole of relationship together in likeness of the whole of God and therefore unable to witness to the world this wholeness that

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<sup>13</sup> McGilchrist, 79-83.

<sup>14</sup> Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

holds it together in its innermost (in contrast and conflict with Jesus' prayer, Jn 17:20-24)—all the above emerging from the human shaping of relationships.

The necessary alternative to counter this reductionist shift is a qualitative perceptual-interpretive framework that restores ontology to inner out and the primacy of function back to the qualitative—restoring both divine as well as human. An inner-out framework does not ignore the *out* as unimportant or separate it in an artificial dualism. Nor does a shift to the qualitative mean to idolize and get absorbed in an ambiguous world of metaphysics; neither to get lost in subjectivism nor to merely surrender to fideism. But this qualitative framework also does not yield to the dominance of rationalism, and it challenges the explanations and certainty concluded from a quantitative outer-in epistemic process with a chastened reason whose interpretive framework (*phronema*) and lens (*phroneo*) have been made whole (as Paul later made definitive, Rom 8:5-6).

In contrast to the quest for certainty—as defined by the quest for self-determination and a search for identity—we need to get back to the significance of faith. However, there is a deeper understanding of faith necessary by its beginning nature to realize in order to engage in wholeness and not in reductionism as in the common perception and practice. In the relational epistemic process, faith is the qualitative relational response from inner out that emerges from what is *heard*; and what is heard is clearly communicated and made definitive by the communicator, notably through the embodied word of Christ, just as Paul illuminated (Rom 10:17). Therefore, the extent of one's faith is directly contingent on how well one *listens* to the word communicated (cf. Mt 17:5; Lk 8:18; Mk 4:24). This can only be understood as a reciprocal relational dynamic, not a mere subjective experience. In other words, faith is a relational action signifying relational language, thus neither a mindset nor a state of mind defining what one believes. The relational outcome is the reciprocal relationship, in which this relational response of faith has the basis (*hypostasis*) for being able to count on the whole of God disclosed in relationship together. That is, this is the confidence in qualitative relational terms, not a certainty in quantitative referential terms, of the whole of God vulnerably present and relationally involved, not just a part of God. Along with this basis, the relational response of faith also has the qualitative evidence (*elenchos*) necessary to go deeper in reciprocal relationship together than what the quantitative can observe—the *hypostasis* and *elenchos* to be reciprocally involved in the relationships necessary to be whole (Heb 11:1,39).<sup>15</sup> This type of qualitative certainty is further and deeper than the limits inherent in and the narrowness associated with quantitative certainty. The qualitative certainty of the Whole self-disclosed from outside the universe and the confidence in the Other's presence and involvement, and thereby being whole together,

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<sup>15</sup> Greek and Hebrew 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); 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).

stands in contrast with quantitative certainty that is only fragmentary and has certainty only in one's own knowledge, however limited.

The *hypostasis* and *elenchos* can be claimed because God's self-disclosure functioned only on the basis of nothing less and no substitutes. This is the basis by which the Word from outside the universe was embodied to be present and involved with human persons, with nothing less than and no substitutes of the whole of God. This Word is also the *pleroma* (fullness, complete, whole) of God Paul illuminates in his cosmology (Col 1:15-17,19). These were not only the terms of God's self-disclosure and embodiment but also the terms for the relational response of faith: nothing less than and no substitutes of our whole person from inner out (cf. Jn 4:23-24). Only God's terms are compatible both for engagement in the relational epistemic process to know the whole of God and for involvement in reciprocal relationship together to be whole. The early disciples learned the difficult lesson that human terms by definition cannot be whole, whether in the epistemic process or in the practice of faith, much to Jesus' frustration and discouragement (e.g. Mk 8:17-18; Jn 14:4-9).

The issue between faith and reason is also taken deeper by Jesus, not in the sense of widening the gap but in terms of their function in the epistemic process. As *logos* from outside the universe, the Word embodied the hermeneutical key for the whole of God. In this function Jesus not only embodied words from outside the universe but, just as importantly, he also made definitive what was necessary to engage the relational epistemic process to receive the Word vulnerably unfolding to illuminate the whole of life. Jesus exalted very clearly in a moment of leaping or dancing for joy: "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and revealed them to *young children*; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will" (Lk 10:21). With this clarification, Jesus made definitive both the relational outcome of God's terms and the relational consequence of human terms in the epistemic process of understanding the whole of God's self-disclosure. He was not suggesting that God's revelation was selectively given to only certain persons, and thus not available to all. His only focus here is about knowing and understanding God's self-disclosure, which is grasped not as observers (however astute) but understood only by involvement in the relational context and process by which God communicates. And he reminded his disciples how blessed they were to be receiving God's disclosures in this vulnerable relationship (Lk 10:22,23).

The "young children" (*nepios*), about whom Jesus was so excited, is a metaphor for a person from inner out, not from outer in: an unassuming person just being whom God created—with a heart open and involved, a mind free and adaptable to the improbable (i.e. able to go outside of the box as characteristic of most children). More specifically, this "child-person" functions by using the mind ingenuously in likeness of the whole of God, without unnecessarily complicating matters or overanalyzing things, yet not over-simplistic or foolish, thus compatible with the qualitative presence of God—a mind distinct from what prevails in the human context. Most important, therefore, this child-person's mind does not function apart from the heart in order to entrust one's whole person—nothing less and no substitutes—to be vulnerably present and intimately involved in God's relational context and process for the relational epistemic process necessary to know the whole of God. Moreover, while the mind of a child is considered immature and undeveloped according to prevailing terms, this metaphor includes the

function of a perceptual-interpretive framework that is unrestricted by predispositions and biases. As our mind grows in development, we also put on different lenses that tend to become more and more restricting and essentially reductionist (e.g. imagination, creativity, spontaneity decrease)—as in the trained incapacities often from higher learning. This ironic development describes “the wise and intelligent or learned,” who, as Jesus directly implied, depend on their rationality (*sophos* and *synetos*) without epistemic humility. Consequently, they fail to function as the whole person from inner out necessary by nature to engage the relational epistemic process to receive God’s self-disclosures and know the whole of God in relationship together—resulting in the relational consequence to labor in fragmentation and not truly be whole.

The difference in perceptual-interpretive framework between the child-person and the wise and learned is the difference between the qualitative and quantitative, the relational and referential—perhaps also the difference between the right brain hemisphere and the left. This difference is critical for defining which epistemic process we engage and for determining how we engage in that epistemic process. This difference critically determines the level of involvement of our participation in the epistemic process and, if it is the relational epistemic process, whether relational connection will be made for a further and deeper epistemic outcome. This critical difference was clearly distinguished when Jesus explained his use of parables (Mt 13:11-17). When the epistemic process involves God’s self-disclosures, this difference means the difference between the relational outcome of knowing God more deeply and the relational consequence of not truly knowing God or of merely having fragments of information about God. The former is whole while the latter can only be some form of reductionism, even when aggregated and generalized.

These are the qualitative relational terms embodied by Jesus as the hermeneutical key for the relational epistemic process to the whole. God’s terms are clearly definitive, and thus irreducible and nonnegotiable, which is why the Father made it the key imperative: “Listen to my Son” (Mt 17:5). And why Jesus makes it the relational imperative: “Pay attention to how you listen” (Lk 8:18) and “Pay attention to what you hear; the *level of relational involvement* you give will be the *extent of reciprocal relationship together* you get” (Mk 4:24), and then “Follow me.” The imperative in Mark 4:24 needs to be integrated with Luke 10:21. The “measure” (*metron*) we give and get that Jesus refers to involves our perceptual-interpretive framework that we use, which determines (measures, limits) the level of participation in the epistemic process for God’s self-disclosures. The above difference in frameworks signified by the child-person and the wise and learned is clearly made definitive by Jesus for “the level of relational involvement you give will be the extent of reciprocal relationship you get, both in the relational epistemic process and in relationship together”—for either a relational outcome or relational consequence (Mk 4:24-25). Therefore, the relational context and process—that Jesus embodied for our participation in the relational epistemic process to the whole of God, God’s whole and our wholeness—cannot be diminished or minimalized by human shaping and construction without the loss of whole knowledge and understanding, as well as what it means to be whole. Nothing less and no substitutes are the irreducible and nonnegotiable terms the whole of God embodied.

As this study unfolds Jesus’ story, we will further discuss his hermeneutical key, including his being the theological and functional keys to what holds together the world

in its innermost, in and from the beginning, and therefore the keys to be whole together, to live whole in the world and to make whole the human condition.

What hopefully is clearly emerging in our discussion is the following: Responding adequately to the question of “What holds the world together in its innermost?” necessitates the relational epistemic process to the whole, thus the focus of our lens and its perceptual-interpretive framework cannot remain quantitative from outer in and nonrelational. The whole that holds together in the innermost is not a quantitative condition from outer in that can be observed and verified in quantitative terms, and accordingly described merely in referential language. The whole is a qualitative ontology from inner out that involves the relational dynamic initiated from outside the universe—nothing less than the relational dynamic of grace. This qualitative relational Whole further engages the world and all in it by the relational context and process, for which there can be no substitute. Where or when the whole of God is not vulnerably present and relationally involved, then the whole is elusive and wholeness is lost (cf. Ps 30:7b). The good news is that God’s self-disclosure in relational context and process continues to be present and involved, which those in the world must by nature engage in the relational epistemic process in order to know the Whole, and thereby be made whole in likeness.

To paraphrase the ancient poet quoted at the top of the Introduction: “The unfolding of your words from outside the universe gives the illumination necessary for whole understanding so that the simple ‘parts’ can be reconciled and made whole” (Ps 119:130). And as the poet further said: “But when you hide your ‘face’ and no longer communicated the words from your mouth, I was dismayed, that is, experienced the loss of what holds us together in our innermost, and consequently became fragmentary” (Ps 30:7). Indeed, he affirmed: “The whole of God from outside the universe blesses his human family with wholeness” (Ps 29:11)—just as the creator God enacted in the beginning (Num 6:24-26). Nothing less and no substitutes are sufficient to define the whole, Who and what unfolds in and from the beginning; and nothing less and no substitutes are adequate for the study of Jesus and Paul and their synthesis.

The time, whether in modernist context or postmodernist, is imperative for us to embrace the qualitative perceptual-interpretive framework necessary to engage the relational epistemic process in order to return to the roots of whole identity in the beginning, and then to discover the whole all of us together can *be*, with nothing less and no substitutes. This is the Word in the beginning we need to listen to, who addressed the breadth of the human condition and responded with the depth of the gospel for wholeness. Will we let the Word speak for himself, or will we essentially end up speaking for him, even with good theological intentions?

## **Theological Issues Preventing the Whole**

When science understands the limitations of its view from only inside the universe, there can be modesty in proposing a physical theory as merely self-referencing and as a result necessarily incomplete, if not inconsistent. This epistemic position can only be beneficial for all of us, specifically for the whole since it limits illusions about it. Where scientists do not exercise such epistemic humility, this has the effect of preventing the whole by promoting inconsistent and incomplete universal claims which can only be



illusory of the whole. The lack of epistemic humility is consequential for all of us despite the progress science has achieved, for example, in technology and medicine. These advances in the quantity of life, however, should not be confused with improving the quality of life<sup>16</sup>; and in actual function these advances direct us away from and not toward wholeness. The narrowing of our interpretive lens—limiting what we can see—for the cause of certainty and, of course, for the sake of self-determination always prevents any knowledge and understanding of the whole since it restricts the whole from emerging. This whole is not some idea of a whole from inside the universe itself but the whole interposing from outside the universe. Unfortunately, this restriction does not prevent the illusion of the whole since creating any epistemological illusion and ontological simulation of the whole are the genius of reductionism.

This process and the issue of epistemic humility also apply to theology. If theology is indeed directed by revelation from outside the universe, its formulations should be other than self-referencing; and its understanding needs to be more complete by the nature of the knowledge available from outside the universe. Yet, theology has long labored under a counteracting dynamic: between what God reveals and what we attribute to God; between what God says for and of himself and what we say for God and impose on him; between God's terms and reduced terms of human shaping and construction. Some may locate this dynamic in the hermeneutic circle. But the former is whole and the latter is not just some part that can be interpreted into the whole of God; the latter is fragmentary and from reductionism, which is always incompatible with the whole. And comfort should not be taken in the latter's place in tradition, prominence in the academy and acceptance in the church.

For example, if the Bible is read through someone's idea of what the perfect being outside the universe *must* be like, as in classical theism, whose words become primary for theology, ours or God's? The philosophical influence on theology, which still exists today, has shaped or constructed a different picture of God than the God of thematic relational action and response in Scripture, definitively embodied by the Word. The classic doctrine of God, existing in systematic and biblical theologies, does not fit the image of God embodied by the face of Christ, as the monotheist Paul "discovered" and wholly understood (2 Cor 4:4-6). This reshaping emerged when concepts from Greek philosophy were used as the framework, which was later refined by the epistemological program of foundationalism to establish a basis for certainty. The quest for certainty emerges again with the consequence of narrowing the words of Scripture. Most importantly, the reshaping of God emerges when interpreters of Scripture end up listening to themselves talk about God rather than listening to God speak for himself. Nicholas Wolterstorff defines this as 'dogmatic' interpretation: dogma governs our interpretation of Scripture for our divine discourse, not God's communication of God. Interpreting Scripture in light of itself involves the hermeneutic circle: interpreting the parts/words in the light of the whole and the whole in the light of the parts/words<sup>17</sup>—just

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<sup>16</sup> This is witnessed in the increasing medicalization of life from the womb to death where the medical condition of persons is being overly diagnosed with subsequent unnecessary intervention and treatment, which may result in more harm than benefit.

<sup>17</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, "The Promise of Speech-act Theory for Biblical Interpretation" in Craig Bartholomew, Colin Greene, Karl Moller, eds., *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 73-90.

as the ancient poet said, “The unfolding of your words gives light” and understanding of the whole to those who listen carefully and do not speak prematurely “of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know,” just as Job learned (Job 42:3).

Yet, this counteracting hermeneutic practice continues to be a critical issue. When theology does not listen to the words of Scripture in the relational context and process constituting the relational epistemic process, then theology assumes an interpretive framework to engage a limiting epistemic process that leaves theology on its own to speak prematurely “of things it did not understand, things too wonderful for it to know on its own.” This condition of theology in its actual function also directs us away from and not toward the whole. This epistemic view of God only functions to limit or even prevent the understanding of God’s whole on God’s terms, that which is necessary for us to rise above epistemological illusion and be whole, and to be transformed from ontological simulation and live whole. This reductionist direction is further illustrated in evangelical theology, despite its doctrine of the authority of Scripture and emphasis on the gospel of salvation—by those known as “people of the Book”, who apparently often lack the whole Christology of the Word, which this study will unfold in Jesus’ story.

The issue for evangelical theology is certainly not the *place* of the Bible but rather the more subtle distinction of the *function* of the Bible, that is, in what God defines these words to be and how God determines these words to serve. From a theological perspective, Kevin Vanhoozer defines “the most important fact about the Bible is that it is the voice of God addressing the people of God. ...The Bible is simultaneously an instrument of divine *action*.”<sup>18</sup> He goes on to identify the prime hermeneutical imperative of simply letting God’s Word accomplish the purpose for which it was sent. Divine action is certainly theological but it is not the action of systematic theology, propositionalist theology, doctrine, much less philosophical theology. Divine action is communicative action composing the whole of God’s relational context and process for the primacy of reciprocal relationship together to be whole. What is primary to God is nothing less, thus irreducible, and no substitutes, thus nonnegotiable. All else is secondary to God. Therefore, the communicative action of God’s words and terms cannot be muted by the voice-over of human words and terms.

In contrast to what is primary to God, the burden of evangelical theology is having taken on the weight of secondary matters, not unimportant yet not as important to God—for example, the certainty issues of doctrine, a systematic theology, the integrity of a propositional theology of the Bible, a detailed exegesis of the biblical text for information, and issues related to the Rule of Faith. Theological and biblical scholarship, however, are relevant only when they say something significant about what is *primary* as defined by God. Setting aside for the moment our quest for certainty and related fear, the underlying quest for self-determination and its conjoint search for identity, what emerges about the primary for God is only and always about being whole in relationship together, in ongoing conflict with the sin of reductionism. ‘Nothing less and no substitutes’ is not a concept but the relational dynamic by which the whole of God is vulnerably present and intimately involved for the basis (*hypostasis*) and evidence (*elenchos*) necessary for the reciprocal relational response of faith (Heb 11:1) in the relationships together necessary

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<sup>18</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “The Voice and the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal about the Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology” in John G. Stackhouse, Jr., ed., *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 71.

to be the whole of God's family (Heb 11:39). This relational outcome is the primacy of God's whole on God's terms, which Paul will make definitive as his story unfolds and makes whole the words of God (Col 1:25).

What is primary to God challenges our view of the gospel and necessarily takes it to the depths of relationship when our gospel is not whole. What is primary to God, and thus to the gospel, is often unintentionally reprioritized to a secondary place (e.g. saved *from* sin is usually emphasized over saved *to* whole relationship together), and/or unknowingly reshaped to a reduced meaning preoccupied by human terms attending to secondary matters. The latter is illustrated by the loss of God's presence, not theologically speaking but functionally in our practice, such that even the theological task and biblical exegesis are engaged with relational detachment or distance, whether for personal comfort or due to a quantitative framework from outer in and, per McGilchrist, the dominance of our left brain hemisphere. The implication, of course, is not being involved in the relational context and process necessary for the relational epistemic process to know God. It is certainly discomfiting to interact relationally with the vulnerable presence and intimate involvement of the whole of Jesus (the *pleroma* of God) face to face, just as Paul experienced on the Damascus road and Peter resisted in Jesus' footwashing (Jn 13:6-8). We cannot deny the benefit of focusing on secondary matter in order to maintain relational distance; but we have to account for its relational consequence on our theology, our gospel and our faith. This burden of evangelical theology is better rendered as a substitute, if not an excuse, for the primacy of whole relationship together, both with the whole of God and with the whole of God's family, thereby exposing its underlying human shaping of relationships. Until this burden, substitute, excuse and its human shaping of relationships are redeemed, its practice will continue in a counteractive dynamic preventing the whole.

One of the ironies of focusing on Jesus is the susceptibility of our focus becoming imbalanced. This can be the view we often receive from the Synoptic Gospel narratives, but not the view of Jesus that John's Gospel paints. If we are predisposed in our view of Jesus, even though the Gospel of John focuses on the Word in the beginning, it would be easy to overlook the whole picture he provides and maintain a christocentric picture in unity with the other Gospels. Yet, this neither accounts for the cosmology integral to Jesus' story nor accounts for Jesus' disclosure of the whole of God, notably of the Father (Jn 1:18; 5:19; 7:16; 10:38; 12:45; 14:9-11, 20; 17:21). An overly christocentric focus is theologically inadequate to account for the whole picture: the whole of God in trinitarian theology; God's self-disclosure in Scripture for its whole (not a mere unity) in biblical theology; the triune God's thematic relational action in creation for both a whole cosmology and theological anthropology; and the whole of God's thematic relational response to the human condition in the whole (not truncated) of soteriology; and thus the whole gospel, not only with the incarnation but from the beginning. As will unfold in this study of Jesus' story, the complete Christology is not christocentric but theocentric, whole monotheism as Paul learned. An incomplete Christology, however christocentric, prevents the whole, the whole ontology and function of God and of those 'in Christ'. These are theological issues which elude our awareness when our systematic or biblical theology and doctrine appear to have certainty; yet, the narrowness often associated with this certainty is also not as apparent, which likely points to the shortsighted limits of our interpretive lens or perhaps even speaks to the dominance of our brain's left hemisphere.

The need for certainty in doctrine, notably among evangelicals influenced by modernism's scientific paradigm of foundationalism or by postmodernism's rejection of any metanarrative, has often been driven by fear in its quest for self-determination in a surrounding context which is, at best, adversarial and, more likely, hostile and in reductionist conflict with the whole of God. Yet, we must not allow our identity to be defined by their values and determined by their measures (*metron*). This need, quest and related fear have narrowed the vision of theology, which has constrained the Word from God to speak for himself. The consequence of this on human identity has been immeasurable, other than to say that the identity is less than whole. The identity of *who* and *what* we are, and the necessary theological anthropology implicit to it, is not only rooted in the beginning with the Word but also constituted in the innermost by this Word from the beginning in order to be whole. Therefore, human identity is both inseparable from the Word in the beginning and contingent on the Word from outside the universe from the beginning. All other words in the search for identity in its innermost are the human shaping and construction from reductionism, which has been working against the whole also from the beginning (Gen 3:1-7). These beginnings are necessary to understand because they are basic to who and what are whole, God's whole only on God's terms.

A history of human shaping and construction has evolved 'in front of', 'within' and 'behind' the text of the words from the mouth of the God outside the universe, resulting in fragmentary systematic theologies and incomplete biblical theologies assuming to answer what holds the world together in its innermost. The epistemological challenge facing this condition is the absence of the whole; the functional challenge is the loss of wholeness. Unless theology, along with philosophy and science, can meet these challenges, it is rendered insignificant at best and counteracting the whole at worst, thereby reflecting, reinforcing or sustaining the human condition without understanding the depth of response composed by the gospel.

The ongoing concern in God's self-revelation is always for the human condition 'to be apart' from the whole; and the communicative action of the Word always defines the whole as God's whole only on God's terms; and the thematic relational action of the Word, namely the relational response of the embodied Word, always determined what is necessary for this wholeness, and therefore is solely for the relationships together necessary to be God's relational whole on God's qualitative relational terms. If we do not understand God's concern, we will not adequately listen to *what* the Word defines. If we don't fully listen to what the Word defines, we will neither have whole knowledge of *who* came nor have whole understanding of *what* has come to determine the wholeness of human ontology and function.

## **The Nature of the Message (in "the unfolding of your words")**

When we focus on listening to the words in language, we may or may not be focused on communication from another. Words in referential language are commonly what we use to transmit information to talk *about* something and to express how well we can talk about it, notably to explain it. *It* can also be *about* someone, such as God, in our discourse. Yet that other being remains impersonal if the focus is not on communication; the focus on words in referential language becomes an I/we-it relation rather than the

I/we-you relationship involving communication. In referential language the other is just an object while in relational language the other is always a subject. This distinction is critical for determining the message unfolding in the words in and from the beginning.

“In the beginning” (*re'siyt*, Gen 1:1; *arche*, Jn 1:1) are words which can denote first as to time, place, order or in terms of leadership; the starting point or cause of something commencing. Are these just words in referential language to transmit information, or is this communication from the Other outside the universe—perhaps both? The primacy of the latter can include secondary aspects of the former. Primacy given to the former, however, is incompatible with the latter and thus does not lead to the primacy of communication in relationship; moreover, it remains fragmentary—whatever its assumed precision, consistency and certainty—unable to be whole.

There are two major ways to understand “in the beginning”: (1) in the context of time and space, is ‘the beginning of time’; and, (2), within but not limited to the time-space context, is ‘the starting point of relationship’. These views are not mutually exclusive, yet how they overlap can redefine the message in these words. Traditionally, the first interpretation tends not to include the full significance of the second, even though creation may be affirmed and the Creator acknowledged. “In the beginning,” however, “was the Word” in person just to communicate, not words in referential language to transmit information. A traditional interpretation is theologically distorted because it, first, reduces the qualitative whole (including the cosmos and all things in the universe) constituted by the Creator to only quantitative terms, and as a result, secondly, diminishes the relational significance of *what* the Creator created. Rather, in these words with the Word, God communicated a definitive statement of God’s communicative action as Subject—in contrast to merely transmitting information as Object observed—that can only be fully understood as relational work, that which synthesizes the creative work. This relational work does not render the physical universe (or material) as bad or diminish its significance but provides the whole understanding and meaning for what holds it together in its innermost.

What is the nature of the message God communicated with the Word? The definitive nature of the message unfolding with the Word in and from the beginning is (1) cosmological, (2) relational, and (3) whole:

### **1. Cosmological**

As John’s Gospel records (Jn 1:1-4) and Paul affirms (Col 1:16-17), the source of the Word was conjointly from outside the universe and the source of the universe’s creation (Jn 1:10,18; 3:19). This cosmology is integral to the full identity of the Word and the quality and depth of the creative action communicated by the Word—whose dynamic context and process are unfolding from this source (notably recorded in the Gospel of Jn 1:4-5, 10-11,14,18; 3:19). This beginning is vital for understanding what unfolds.

Given the source, the Word cannot be reduced to be defined or determined in any manner by anything in the universe. If it were, this would result in the following: The Word is part of the universe itself; or diminished to some aspect (e.g. category, order, species) of creation, even created itself; or otherwise anthropomorphized in human terms. The parameters of the universe can only narrow the perception of reality outside the universe, which would constrain God in a box of human shaping and construction. Any of these reductions is consequential for the unfolding of the Word, reducing the

qualitative depth and significance of the message that we call the gospel. Moreover, given the source, it is only the Word in the beginning that defines and determines the universe and all in it, that is, only on God's terms and not on human terms. The cosmological nature of this message unfolding with the Word necessitates our epistemic humility and requires our ontological deference.

Therefore, only on this basis does the message of what unfolds and why become definitive. *What* the Creator created and *why* are understood not by the mere transmission of information by the Word in the beginning but only as the cosmological source of the message in integrated communicative-creative action as Subject for the primacy of relationship together. This integrally integrated dynamic constitutes the relational nature of the message unfolding with the Word.

## 2. Relational

*What* the Creator created and *why* emerged in the beginning only as 'the starting point of relationship'; therefore the what and why are inseparable from the communicative action that unfolds with the Word. The relational nature of the Word ongoingly engages in communicative action, not in the transmission of information. In further and deeper unfolding of this relational dynamic, the Word embodied this relational communication in the vulnerable self-disclosures of the whole of God (Jn 17:4, 6-8; Col 1:19; 2:9). In his crucial prayer-communication to the Father, what the Son completed (*teleioo*) in revealing God was not to merely exhibit God for observation in order to have some information or knowledge *about* God; that quantitative revelation is signified by the word *apokalypto*, which only refers to the object revealed. The Son, however, vulnerably *phaneroo* the Father, that is, more deeply "disclosed you to those whom you gave me"—referring specifically to those to whom the revelation is made in this relational context and process. *Phaneroo* signifies the further and deeper unfolding of the Word for the sole purpose of relationship together. Therefore, the nature of the message unfolding with the Word is always relational: "who came from the Father..." (Jn 1:14, NIV), "who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known" (Jn 1:18), "God so loved...gave his Son...send the Son" (Jn 3:16-17), "I am...to the Father" (Jn 14:6), "...they may know you..." (Jn 17:3), "I have made your name known to them...so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them" (Jn 17:26), "...what is heard comes through the word of Christ" (Rom 10:17), "Let the word of Christ dwell in you" (Col 3:16), "Listen! I am standing at the door *of your heart*, knocking; if you hear my voice and *respond to me*, I will come in to you *for reciprocal relationship together*" (Rev 3:20).

Our understanding of the message unfolding with the Word from the beginning does not emerge from the textual words in referential language. This is not merely having referential knowledge and information about God but critically involves the distinguished process of wholly knowing God, which is only the relational outcome of deep involvement in relationship together as Jesus' prayer above makes definitive (notably of eternal life, Jn 17:3). Therefore, communication from the Word is composed by the primacy of relational language and only secondarily by referential language. The significance of relational language defines, on the one hand, the qualitative ontology, relational nature and vulnerable function of the Word (signifying his glory, Jn 1:14) and, on the other, defines *what* was created and *why*. To define these secondarily by only

referential language immediately diminishes what was created and minimalizes why, along with fragmenting the Word who created in the image and likeness of the whole of God. That is to say, referential language essentially disembodies the Word unfolding from the ontological Source in the beginning and the relational nature from the beginning, thereby fragmenting the Word, for example, to teachings and then further disembodied into doctrines. Though the teaching and doctrine are *about* the Word, their referential language no longer embodies the Word for the primacy of relationship together. The implication is that the secondary becomes primary, which in actual practice favors human terms more than God’s relational terms. The relational consequence is relational distance that diminishes, prevents or even precludes the involvement necessary for qualitative relationship—the relational distance demonstrated in epistemic, exegetical, theological and discipleship activities both in church and academy.<sup>19</sup>

The reality is compelling, despite not prevailing: we cannot substitute referential language for relational language and have the relational outcome of intimate relationship together. Even neuroscience recognizes the limits and consequences of referential language with the development of prose, in contrast to qualitative communication expressed in poetry, singing and music—all of which predate prose in the development of communication.<sup>20</sup> Does this speak to the prominence of poetic style in significant portions of Scripture?

Basic to this relational language—implied in all communication, verbal and nonverbal, even during transmission with referential language—is imparting three *relational messages* implicit to what is communicated by sounds, gestures or words. These relational messages need to be distinguished for deeper understanding of the message communicated. All communication has not only a content aspect but also a relational aspect that helps us understand the significance of the content of communication. In these relational messages, which are usually implied, a person conveys to others one or all of the following messages:

1. Something about one’s self, for example, how one sees, defines, or feels about oneself; Jesus’ call to “Follow *me*” implies about his self that his whole person is vulnerably present and intimately involved, and is not about his teaching and example.
2. Something about one’s view of the other(s), for example, how one sees, defines or feels about them; *you* “follow *me*” implies that also your whole person is important, not what you have in resources or can do in service or mission as a disciple.
3. Something about their relationship together, for example, in what way one defines the relationship or what it means to that person; *you* “follow *me*” in *relationship together* implies about this relationship that it is very important to “*me*”, and is the primary priority over serving.

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<sup>19</sup> Decades ago, Helmut Thielicke tried to make the same point to his students: “The man who studies theology...might watch carefully whether he increasingly does not think in the third rather than in the second person. ...Consider that the first time someone spoke of God in the third person and therefore no longer with God but about God was that very moment when the question resounded, ‘Did God really say?’ (cf. Genesis 3:1). This fact ought to make us think.” *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 33-34.

<sup>20</sup> See McGilchrist, *The Master and his Emissary*, 94-132.

These relational messages are vital to distinguish because they qualify the content aspect of all communication. The content alone of the words “follow me” easily become redefined by our terms, as demonstrated by prevailing inadequate interpretations for discipleship. Words by themselves, apart from the context of relational messages (e.g. tone of voice, look on one’s face, face to face or looking away), have less meaning, perhaps no meaning, or may even mean the opposite. As these relational messages are received and understood from the person communicating, there is a deeper basis for knowing that person and a fuller understanding of how to respond back.<sup>21</sup> The significance of this relational language is found no more conclusively than in the Word’s likely most compelling communication to us: “Follow me.” And this study can be defined essentially as the unfolding of these relational words, which Paul hears not in referential content but in the distinguished relational messages from the Word.

The relational language of the Word is further composed of these three relational messages which integrally qualify the self-disclosures of the whole of God and help bring to light the needed understanding of God’s whole thematic relational response to the human condition unfolding with the Word. Besides within the surrounding context, the deeper significance of the Word’s words emerges in the relational context of understanding what the Word says of himself, or about other(s) or the relationship together, implied in his communication. The relational nature of the language and the messages from the whole Word are irreducible and nonnegotiable for the relational outcome constituted by the Word, in and from the beginning, of the relationships together necessary to be whole, God’s relational whole only on God’s relational terms. This relational dynamic from outside the universe is vulnerably present and relationally involved with the unfolding of the Word to define and determine the whole nature of his message in the gospel—the whole of Who and which Paul hears from inner out, relationally receives and vulnerably responds to.

### 3. Whole

When physicist Stephen Hawking gave up his quest to discover a grand unifying theory (GUT), he correctly concluded that human shaping and construction can only be self-referencing, and therefore inconsistent and incomplete. Only a view from outside the universe could speak of the whole in the innermost. This would appear to provide those who affirm God’s revelation the view necessary for the whole in order to be whole and live whole. Yet, this wholeness is neither the theology of the Word and related theological anthropology nor their correlated practice which prevails in the church and academy today. This absence or lack continues to demonstrate the pervasive influence of reductionism and its counter-relational work in understanding the unfolding of the Word in the beginning and his relational work from the beginning. In other words, this is an absence or lack to listen to the message of the whole gospel, which exposes the presence of gospel substitutes from our human shaping and construction (cf. Paul’s situation and claim, Gal 1:6-7, 11-12).

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<sup>21</sup> The conceptual dynamics of human communication are discussed in a classic study by Paul Watzlawick, Janet Helmick Beavin, Don D. Jackson, *Pragmatics of Human Communication: A Study of Interactional Patterns, Pathologies, and Paradoxes* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1967).



The relational dynamic from outside the universe does not emerge with referential language but only in the relational language of the Word for ‘the starting point of relationship’. The unfolding of this relational dynamic embodied nothing less than the whole of the Word, whom Paul later made definitive theologically as ‘the *pleroma* (fullness, complete, whole) of God’ vulnerably self-disclosed (Col 1:19; 2:9). Nothing less than the whole of God emerged from outside the universe and was embodied in the Word to be vulnerably present and relationally involved with us, without any substitute of his wholeness. ‘Nothing less and no substitutes’ is critical for understanding the whole of God emerging from outside the universe in the beginning and this whole embodied in the person of Jesus. Any fragmentation of the whole of God and Jesus—for example, by referential language transmitting only information about God—not only reduces the ontology and function of God but also redefines what creator God created and why. This is critically consequential for both an incomplete theology of God (particularly Christology) and for an insufficient theological anthropology; theology that essentially becomes self-referencing and thus inconsistent and incomplete, that is fragmentary and consequently unable to be whole much less live whole. What defines our ontology and determines our function either emerge from the whole ontology and function of God, or are defined and determined by human shaping and construction, even with theological certainty and the ontological simulation and epistemological illusion advanced by it.

The whole nature of the message unfolding with the Word is indispensable for our understanding of what we receive, believe and proclaim to be the gospel. Yet, this gospel is also fragmentary if it begins belatedly with the incarnation of the Word—rendered to an incomplete Christology and truncated soteriology in contrast to Jesus and in conflict with Paul, including an immature pneumatology and a renegotiated ecclesiology in contrast to Paul and in conflict with Jesus. This points ahead in our study to Paul’s ongoing engagement in his conjoint fight for the whole gospel and against reductionism of it.

Definitively *what* was created and *why* are contingent on the whole ontology and function of God, and therefore of the Word in the beginning, in whose image human being is created to be whole and in whose likeness all human ontology and function are created to live whole—to be and live whole together in relationship with the whole of God and God’s creation (Gen 2:18,25). The whole was not a product of some dialectic or abstract process; it was the relational outcome in the beginning of the whole of God’s communicative-creative action. The *whole* emerged only with the Whole from outside the universe to constitute the whole of the universe and all in it in the innermost. Moreover, the Whole does not become the universe (pantheism), nor is the universe all there is of the Whole (panentheism). The whole of God remains distinguished outside the universe and in the Whole’s likeness distinguishes the universe in the innermost to be whole. Though this wholeness was the reality in the beginning, reductionism fragmented the whole of human ontology and function and creation (Gen 3:7,10,17; cf. Rom 8:19-21). The good news, however, is the deeper unfolding of the Word to give the light to the innermost necessary to be whole.

Yet the whole gospel emerges from the beginning. ‘In the beginning’ put into motion the relational dynamic of the thematic relational action of the whole of God, whose relational response of grace unfolds from this ‘starting point of relationship’. To fast forward, the whole of God’s thematic relational response of grace was enacted

ongoingly throughout the OT to converge in the embodying of the Word in order to be fully disclosed and fulfilled. The integral relational work of the Word of God that unfolded in the incarnation must be contextualized from the beginning to fully understand the whole of God's (and Jesus') relational work composing the gospel.

Paul later defines the gospel as "the gospel of peace" (Eph 6:15), that is, "the peace of God" (Phil 4:7) and "the peace of Christ" (Col 3:15) from "the God of peace" (1 Thes 5:23; 2 Cor 13:11; Rom 15:33; 16:20; Phil 4:9) and "the Lord of peace" (2 Thes 3:16). Yet Paul, both Jew and Roman citizen, did not use the Greek idea of peace (and its negative notions, e.g. the absence of war, conflict, or avoiding contention) but the Hebrew understanding rooted in wholeness (*shalom*). For Paul, the gospel was the good news of wholeness rooted in the beginning of creation by the whole of God's thematic relational action and after creation with God's ongoing relational response of grace to the human condition apart from the whole (cf. Gen 2:18; 3:10). The gospel of wholeness unfolded after creation when *tamiym* reemerged with Noah (Gen 6:9) and was established with Abram in covenant relationship together (Gen 17:1-2). *Tamiym* can be rendered in negative terms as "blameless" or in positive terms as "complete" and "whole". *Tamiym* is inseparable from *shalom* and by their nature they must be integrated, yet not in the incomplete sense of being irenic and without blame. *Tamiym* is certainly by necessity contrary to the sin of reductionism in all its forms but only because of its condition of *shalom* and therefore to be and live whole (cf. Dt 18:9-13). The 'wholeness' of *shalom* constitutes God's relational response and its relational outcome, and 'to be and live whole' of *tamiym* constitutes the reciprocal relational response to and experience of God's relational action. This wholeness and being whole emerge only from the relational response and outcome of the definitive blessing that God initiated from the beginning and ongoingly enacts: "...make his face shine on you and *relationally respond* in grace to you...and (*siym*) *bring change and establish the new relationship necessary together for wholeness*" (Num 6:24-26; cf. Ps 119:1).

The relational dynamic to bring change and establish whole relationship together was vulnerably embodied by Jesus, the Word unfolding, to intimately disclose (*phaneroo*, not merely *apokalypto*) the whole of God to completely fulfill God's thematic relational response from 'the starting point of relationship'. This is light unfolding in the Word: in the beginning, being the whole of God (Col 1:19; 2:9); relationally fulfilling "the light of the whole gospel" from the beginning and vulnerably embodying the whole of "the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor 4:4-6); who has "turned his face to you" to live whole in the world and make whole the human condition (Jn 14:27; 16:33; Col 1:20; 2:10; 3:15; Eph 2:14; 6:15)—just as the gospel of wholeness was definitively enacted from the beginning (Num 6:26).

This is the whole gospel composed by the Word in the qualitative significance of relational language. And the gospel of wholeness, unfolded with the Word by its cosmological nature in the beginning and by its relational nature from the beginning, emerges whole only in this relational language; nothing less and no substitute can be definitive of the relational message that the whole of God communicated with the Word. Referential language, and its reliance on quantitative words to transmit information, is incapable of communicating the relational language of the Word and is deficient in accounting for the Word's relational work. Furthermore, referential language is rendered impotent for the qualitative-relational significance necessarily involved in the whole of

God's definitive blessing to bring change and establish the new relationship together of wholeness; perhaps these referential words serve a benedictory function but without relational significance. As discussed earlier, referential language is fragmentary and disembodies the Word into parts (e.g. teachings, doctrine), which it attempts to aggregate into some unity or whole (e.g. in a systematic or biblical theology). This fragmentation and disembodiment are further evident in textual criticism (historical, form, literary), which embeds us in the secondary without understanding the primary (as defined by God). For George Steiner, this secondary critical reflection is the interpretive crisis that results in the loss of God's presence—a condition he identifies as 'a Secondary City'.<sup>22</sup> More critically, the use of referential language in the quest for certainty (e.g. in foundationalism and philosophical theology), which presumably would more accurately describe and represent the Word (e.g. in propositionalism and criticism), cannot be more than self-referencing, inconsistent and incomplete; that is, this is the consequence once it disembodies the Word and hence disengages from the Word's relational context and process vulnerably disclosing the whole of God.

A qualifying note is necessary for the further distinction between referential language and relational language. The depth of relational language also includes propositions in the communication of vulnerable self-disclosure. Such propositions, however, are only for the qualitative significance of relationship together, not for mere quantitative knowledge and information. Therefore, in contrast to their use with referential language, these propositions must not by their nature in communication be reduced from this primary relational context and process, fragmented from the communication in relationship, and disembodied from the communicator, the Word. The primacy of relational language that qualifies the presence of propositions in communication clearly is heard in Jesus' "I am" statements (e.g. Jn 6:35; 8:12; 10:7,11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1), which Paul heard, received and responded to only in relational terms (Acts 9:5).

Essentially, it can be said that referential language was not "designed" for the further development of qualitative communication in relationship but in reality went in the opposite direction which takes us away from qualitative relational connection. Historically, the referential language of prose evolved after poetry, and early poetry was sung, the qualitative significance of which was basic to communication in relationship and not the mere transmission of information.<sup>23</sup> This speaks further to the significance that many portions of the canonical Word are poetry; communication is the key, not transmitting information, which in the Bible singing and music also constitute in the innermost (e.g. Judg 5:3; Ps 27:7; 30:12; 108:1; Eph 5:19; Col 3:16). This raises the issue of the effectiveness of prose in theological discourse. Perhaps contrary to Steiner's own use of prosaic language, he states the following conviction:

It is, I believe, poetry, art and music which relate us most directly to that in being which is not ours. Science is no less animate in its making of models and images.

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<sup>22</sup> George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

<sup>23</sup> See Oliver Sacks for a discussion on perfect pitch, tonal communication and protolanguage, *Musophilia: Tales of Music and the Brian* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008); see also Edward Foley, *From Age to Age: How Christians Have Celebrated the Eucharist* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1991), 9.

But these are not, finally, disinterested. They aim at mastery, at ownership. It is counter-creation and counter-love, as these are embodied in the aesthetic and in our reception of formed meaning, which put us in sane touch with that which transcends, with matters ‘undreamt of’ in our materiality. ...All good art and literature begin in immanence. But they do not stop there. Which is to say, very plainly, that it is the enterprise and privilege of the aesthetic to quicken into lit presence the continuum between temporality and eternity, between matter and spirit, between man and ‘the other’.<sup>24</sup>

While Steiner rightly identifies poetry and music as a qualitative link to the other beyond our being, he only appears to make discourse about this being without the relational connection constituted by communication. McGilchrist further identifies this difference in the qualitative use of words with music and poetry only *for* communication, which he locates in the function of the right brain hemisphere. This qualitative function of the right hemisphere, and its related view of the world, is in contrast to the quantitative reduction of words to the referential language of prose by the left hemisphere for its function not of communication in relationship but to merely make discourse about something.<sup>25</sup> This critical difference between discourse about the Word or from the Word of God to transmit information, and the qualitative communication by the Word in relationship is not the gap of Lessing’s ‘ugly broad ditch’ but rather the relational distance Jesus made definitive in Luke 10:21 for the presence or absence of the communicative God in relationship.

The message of the Word illuminated in and from the beginning is directly relational and qualitatively whole, clearly nothing less and no substitutes. Therefore, Jesus, the Word unfolded giving light and imparting whole understanding, is the beginning (*arche*) of creation (Rev 3:14) and the author (*archegos*) of life (Acts 3:15), of salvation (Heb 2:10) and of faith (Heb 12:2)—all of which Paul made conclusive as “the word of Christ,” that is, as communication in relationship, not as a set of propositions in a belief system (Rom 10:17; Col 3:16). The *pleroma* of God is the only whole and source of wholeness in the innermost (Col 1:19-20; 2:9-10), which Paul made the ongoing imperative to define and determine (*brabeuo*) our ontology and function from inner out, both as persons and persons together collectively (Col 3:15). This wholeness that Paul made the defining determinant for our life and practice is not a static condition but the relational dynamic composed by the communicative “word of Christ” (Col 3:16). This is the relational context and process of the Word in which Paul prays for the church for its deeper relational involvement and experience with the *pleroma* of God (Eph 3:16-19). His prayer echoes the relational significance of Jesus’ crucial prayer for his family’s relationships together to be whole—“one...”, not fragmented, separated, or broken, but only whole in likeness of the whole of God (Jn 17:20-26). Any human shaping or construction of these primary areas above constituted by the Word are only the ontological simulation and epistemological illusion of reductionism and can never be whole, God’s whole from inner out.

This gospel of wholeness is the integral relational response to the human condition that the embodied Word fulfilled and that the word of God completed by Paul

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<sup>24</sup> Steiner, *Real Presences*, 226-27.

<sup>25</sup> McGilchrist, *The Master and his Emissary*, 105.

with the Spirit (Col 1:25) distinguished for the relational outcome of wholeness ‘already’ in relational progression to the relational conclusion ‘not yet’. The integrating relational dynamic of God’s words unfolding from the beginning is the whole outworking of God’s definitive blessing (Num 6:24-26) to make whole the human condition and to fulfill in whole the inherent human relational need, as initially responded to at creation (Gen 2:18). This is the relational dynamic of the whole of God *in* Jesus, whose vulnerable presence and relational involvement extended *into* Paul for the embodying of the theology and hermeneutic of the whole gospel.

In the process unfolding in this study—a further and deeper extension of my separate studies of Jesus and Paul (noted earlier)—hopefully Jesus and Paul clearly speak for themselves without the influence of reductionism. Both of them necessitate nothing less and no substitutes, not out of duty or obligation but by their nature to be whole. Along with the question of Goethe’s Faust at the beginning, this raises questions which need to be addressed. Questions such as the following: Who is this Jesus, not only historically and epistemologically but most important relationally, which Paul also raised on the Damascus road?; What is the identity of God and God’s nature unfolded with the Word—theism, monotheism, trinitarianism?; What is the ontology and function of human being and persons in the image of God?; What does it mean to be whole (including the cosmos and all things in the universe), God’s whole on God’s terms?; What then is the gospel and its relational outcome?; and thus What is reductionism? These, and related questions (including those asked by God) and issues, are integral to this study. And, as begun already, they will be addressed, if not fully answered and responded to, without concern for maintaining any existing discipline boundaries between theology and biblical studies and even between OT and NT in order to not become fragmentary in the relational process to the whole.

As the ancient poet communicated in song to the God from outside the universe, present and involved: “Let your face shine upon your *children*” (Ps 31:16). In God’s blessing enacted, let the Word unfolding communicate, and may we listen.



## Chapter 2

## The Face

**Pay attention to what you hear;  
the measure you give will be the measure you get.**

Mark 4:24

**Did God really say *that*?**

Genesis 3:1 (NIV)

The challenge at the end of the previous chapter to ‘let the Word communicate and listen’ continues throughout this study. Yet, letting Jesus and Paul speak for themselves, much less listen to them, is not a simple choice to make—particularly if McGilchrist is correct that the left brain hemisphere does indeed exert dominance in our modern context (noted in chap. 1) and, more importantly, if the human shaping of relationships prevails.

For many engaged in scholarship, the integration of Jesus and Paul is possible with only various parts of them, and a synthesis is out of the question or beyond human reasoning. When some persons talk about Jesus and Paul in the same sentence, they are able to voice a consistent harmony without any dissonance, that is, as far as harmony goes. For others, while Jesus and Paul provide an agreeable flavor in their mouths, the taste is more bittersweet for them, and as a result what comes out of their mouths is unclear or ambiguous, perhaps inconsistent. Still others have difficulty keeping Jesus and Paul in harmony, consequently voicing dissonant speech, with even others unable to relate Jesus and Paul in compatible discourse congruent with their confession of faith.<sup>1</sup> In this cacophony of voices, will we be able to listen to Jesus and Paul, and can we let their own persons speak for themselves? This requires an openness by listeners, even, certainly, to listen to matters we may not want to hear or that even conflict with us. This is the challenge of this study, which I engage with the Spirit in the relational epistemic process—in that relational context which was embodied by Jesus and extended by Paul.

### **The Challenge *of* and *for* Face**

To meet this challenge our “ears” have to have priority over our “mouths.” As the Father made imperative, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him” (Mk 9:7); and as Jesus made imperative for his followers: “Then pay attention to how you listen” (Lk 8:18), and “Pay attention to what you hear; the measure you give will be the measure you get” (Mk 4:24). In other words, it is imperative to listen before we speak, giving priority to the sounds from Subject-Other, which is a necessary relational dynamic in all communication; unfortunately, but not unexpectedly, this dynamic has been reworked in the human condition. Quietly, for example, ‘method’ in scholarship imposes concepts on

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<sup>1</sup> In a short overview, David Wenham looks at the various questions and issues that scholars and others have raised about Paul and Jesus. *Did St Paul Get Jesus Right? The Gospel According to Paul* (Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2010).

what we seek to know, giving priority to its own perception (view of Other), thus it essentially speaks before it listens.

Furthermore, in this epistemic process our “eyes” are even a higher priority than our “ears” and must antecede both our “mouths and “ears” as the determinant for their function; this was the lesson Job deeply experienced (Job 42:3-5). This has less to do with the function of sight and critically involves how and what we see. When Jesus defines “the measure” (*metron, metreo*) used above, he identifies his followers’ perceptual-interpretive framework and lens, which determines what we will pay attention to and ignore and, therefore, what we see, hear and listen to. That is, to listen carefully and to understand what Jesus says, we not only need to understand the horizon of where Jesus is coming from, but we also need to account in this process for the horizon of where we are coming from—and the defining and determining influence our own context may exert as it converges with Jesus’ context.<sup>2</sup> Without knowing our own horizon and its influence on the framework and lens we use, we cannot listen to Jesus and Paul to speak for themselves on their own terms. ‘Method’, as noted above, signifies a generalizing bias of rationalizing from a scientific paradigm rooted in the Enlightenment, which reduces reality by narrowing down the epistemic field for better explanation. This modernist framework “speaks” before it listens, thereby defining the terms which determine the outcomes.

As these two horizons converge, the primary determinant of how the words communicated are to be understood for the listener/reader must always come from the context of the speaker. Certainly, some secondary influence still remains from the listener’s side. Yet, in the relational epistemic process the hermeneutical dynamic involves successive interactions between listener and speaker, reader and text, in the reflexive process of a ‘hermeneutical cone’<sup>3</sup> for further and deeper understanding. Throughout the process, however, the speaker’s context emerges as the primary determinant without negotiation with the listener’s side. And Jesus’ context cannot be limited to historical human contextualization but needs to include “in the beginning” and his relational context from outside the universe. His horizon is both nonnegotiable to human terms and irreducible to human shaping and construction.

In his imperative for his followers, Jesus makes it clearly definitive: our perceptual-interpretive framework and lens will define our reality and determine how we function in our life (“the measure you give”); on this basis alone, we should not expect to experience anything more or less (“the measure you get”), notably in relationship together. Implied further in his words, Jesus defined the outcome of a qualitative perceptual-interpretive framework and the consequence of a quantitative perceptual-interpretive framework, both of which are directly correlated to the epistemic process: “For to those who have a *qualitative framework and lens*, more will be given; from those who have nothing, *that is, no qualitative framework and lens*, even what they have from a

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<sup>2</sup> See a discussion on two horizons by Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 42-46.

<sup>3</sup> This composite term is taken from what more accurately defines the process not as a circle but as a ‘hermeneutical spiral’, which James D.G. Dunn describes as a ‘three-dimensional cone’. “Criteria for a Wise Reading of a Biblical Text” in David F. Ford and Graham Stanton, eds., *Reading Texts, Seeking Wisdom* (London: SCM Press, 2003), 51.



*quantitative framework* will be taken away or rendered insignificant” (Mk 4:25). Yet, the measure we use has more than epistemological consequences.

A quantitative framework shapes our theological anthropology to define the human person from outer in, based notably on what the person does and/or has. On the basis of this self-definition, this is how that person defines others, which then determines how relationships are engaged, both with God and others. The consequence of this human-shaping dynamic is far-reaching to define the human condition and determine the human problem. This quantitative framework and lens, for example, creates a process of measurement in social context with others in comparison and competition with them for one’s self-determination (see Mt 6:1-8, 16-18) and self-justification (see Mt 7:1-5). Self-determination is never an individual action (or an individual group action) done in isolation from others (or other groups). Self-determination is a social phenomenon requiring a process of comparison to others to establish the standards of measuring success or failure in self-determination. Invariably, these comparative (and competitive) differences lead to “better” or “less” social position (historically, even ontological nature, as seen in racism), consequently the operation of stratified relationships together (formalized in systems of inequality). When relationships become separated, partitioned or fragmented, there is a basis of justification needed either to access a “better” position or to embed/maintain others in a “less” position. The pursuit of this basis is the effort for self-justification (by individual or group). That is to say, the effort for self-determination inevitably becomes the function in social context for self-justification; and the results of this effort invariably come at the expense of others, even unknowingly or inadvertently. Jesus challenged these dynamics of reductionism, its counter-relational work and the functional workings of the sin of reductionism countering the whole of God’s desires—the human condition. Paul builds on Jesus’ words (1 Cor 4:6-7; 2 Cor 10:12) and extends them in the dynamics of the ecclesiology to be whole, which counters this reductionism (e.g. Eph 2:14-22; Gal 3:26-29). Therefore, our theological anthropology is critical for the theological process we engage and epistemic process we are involved in; our “eyes” by necessity antecede our “ears” in order to meet the challenge of our “mouth” to speak before it listens. And these issues are definitive for our ‘face’, the challenge *of* and *for* face that resolves one half of the relational equation needed to meet the challenge for the relational outcome of connection with the whole of God. What is the other half that is integral to our challenge for this relational outcome?

Theological interpretation correctly focuses on Scripture as communication, which helps put a face on those words in Scripture to hear as distinguished words from the mouth of God (Dt 8:3; Isa 40:5; 55:11; Mt 4:4). Yet it is insufficient to stop at communication because this communication is always in relationship—the relational function which should never be assumed, taken for granted or ignored. Relational messages (discussed in chap. 1), for example, are critical to understand since they provide deeper meaning to the content of the words communicated. This deeper meaning helps us interpret God’s relational intention for the words communicated, which is necessary to establish their full context for whole understanding. God’s communication always declares God’s relational nature, and this is enacted only in God’s relational context and process. Relationship, therefore, is not merely supplemental or supportive to the communication but primary for the communication. And what ‘face’ is put on the words of God determines what priority the relationship has. In terms of what ‘face’, it is critical

to distinguish between anthropomorphisms in language *about* God (which result in allegorical interpretation) and the relational language *of* God. What appears as anthropomorphism in ‘the face of God’ is the relational language of God’s relational nature, who created human persons with ‘face’ in God’s likeness only for relationship together (intrinsic to Gen 2:18,25).

The Face in and from the beginning makes definitive both the distinguished relational context and relational process of God’s whole ontology and function. The Face is inseparable from God’s relational context and process, in which the Face functions integrally to establish the primacy of relationship. Without the functional reality of the Face, any relational context of God is ambiguous and thus any relational process with God is elusive. What makes God’s blessing definitive from the beginning is the Face (*paneh*, signifying God’s whole presence) “turning and shining on you” in this distinguished relational context and relational process (Num 6:24-26). The lack or absence of this functional reality renders this blessing merely to the transmission of information without the relational significance either from God or to those receiving the blessing (e.g. just a perfunctory benediction).

Furthermore, what ‘face’ is put on the words of God determines whether we are listening to referential language transmitting information merely *about* God or to relational language for us to deeply *know* God. The former, for example, only hears (sees) the Word as Object to be observed with measured engagement, that is, from a relational distance, perhaps with a certain ‘method’. The latter is the relational outcome of listening to the Word as Subject with immeasurable relational involvement ‘Face to face’ in the relational epistemic process. Face to face is the distinguished involvement required to listen to the words from God’s mouth within God’s relational context and process. This involvement was distinguished with Moses, with whom “I speak face to face” (idiomatic use of *peh*, lit. “mouth to mouth,” Num 12:8; Ex 33:11). This was also the deeper relational outcome of Job’s epistemic humility in the relational epistemic process when he listened to God communicate in relationship (Job 42:4).

Both Job and Moses were important antecedents for Paul’s Damascus road experience and subsequent transformation, providing his roots in the whole of God’s thematic relational response. Most significantly, this is the Face who confronted Paul on that road for his epistemological clarification and hermeneutical correction, and the Face to whom Paul responded in the relational epistemic process (“Who are you, Lord?” Acts 9:5)—without his reductionist framework and lens—in order to listen to Jesus for the Face-to-face relational connection needed to be made whole. This is the Face that Paul, the learned Pharisee, certainly had information *about* from God’s definitive blessing (Num 6:24-26), but whom his own face apparently had long avoided in Face-to-face relationship to deeply know; his experience signified his own challenge *of* and *for* face. Even though Paul’s information *about* God from the *Shema* was correct in his monotheism, the Face challenged his monotheism, clarified it and deepened it beyond Paul’s reason and imagination. This did not change Paul from monotheism but changed his perceptual lens and interpretive framework to be qualitatively and relationally whole. This is the nature of the Face and ‘the challenge *for* face’ in his relational work; and this is the relational outcome of vulnerable involvement together Face to face. The Face turned to Paul and shined on him on the Damascus road to bring him the change needed for new relationship together Face to face with the whole of God and God’s whole. On

this relational basis of Face to face, not on the basis of mere information (even if correct), the whole gospel for Paul embodied nothing less and no substitutes (Gal 1:11-12). Anything less and any substitutes for Paul was in reality “no gospel at all” (Gal 1:7, NIV).

Therefore, the Face is the other half completing the relational equation and is critical to the words of God from the beginning, notably in God’s definitive blessing. The Face makes this blessing definitive and composes it in communicative action for relationship together, not in referential language for information. Importantly, the Face is irreducible for the whole of God embodied by the Word unfolding now in the incarnation, yet necessarily even before the cross for the complete Christology. The Face is not only irreducible for embodiment but also embodiment is nonnegotiable for the Face. That is, not only is the Face’s embodied ontology irreducible to human shaping and construction, the Face’s embodied function is nonnegotiable to human terms, most notable in relationship. What ‘face’ is put on the Word is the critical challenge *of* face, which defines and determines what unfolds with the Word. Moreover, when the Face is allowed to embody the Word to speak for himself without human shaping or terms, the Face presents the critical challenge *for* face, our face in Face-to-face relationship.

This issue and its relational dynamic were demonstrated by two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-32). Their trip on the third day after Jesus’ death was an exercise in disembodiment, which objectified the cross as event and thereby alienated these disciples’ connection or relatedness to the person of the cross, the Face—including disembodiment of his words as if without the Face. This was a hermeneutic impasse to the Face, creating the critical challenges both *of* face and *for* face. Of course, as the hermeneutical key, the Face’s appearance to the two on the road restored their connection, yet not metaphysically but to his embodied presence irreducible to their shaping and with his relational involvement nonnegotiable to their terms. What they experienced was relational and whole, not metaphysical: “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us...?” Jesus did not use referential language to transmit information about himself to them; he talked (*laleo*) to them not focused on content but rather in relational language to communicate his relational messages for them to take into their whole person, not merely process in their mind. Their deep communion together was the relational outcome only from the Face’s integral embodied presence and relational involvement, which the disciples learned as the functional reality of nothing less and no substitutes.

This is the Face challenging our face in this study for Face-to-face involvement together in the relational epistemic process. The contrast, and even conflict, of this relational epistemic process Face to face with a conventional epistemic process is evidenced clearly by Jesus’ declaration for receiving God’s communication (Lk 10:21, discussed in chap. 1). In his declaration essentially of God’s relational nature, Jesus categorically distinguished the deeper epistemology of the relational epistemic process that goes beyond mere information *about* Jesus and God to deeply *knowing* Jesus and God from involvement in relationship together—the relational outcome Jesus’ prayer later made conclusive (Jn 17:26). This is the deeper level that the early disciples had yet to engage with Jesus (Jn 14:4-9), and that constitutes participation in the eternal life with the whole of God (Jn 17:3). It is critical, notably for scholarship, to distinguish these (basically competing) epistemic processes and to understand what process we are

engaging. Our interpretive framework and lens will determine whether we will indeed listen to Jesus and Paul, and if we will let their whole persons speak for themselves, and then be involved with them in relationship together to know their whole persons and the wholeness they embodied, both individually and together, as God's whole on God's terms.

This raises the issue of God's self-disclosures in Scripture and how we view revelation. My short answer: If your view from inside the universe is definitive, speak; otherwise, listen. At the risk of oversimplification, this obviously points to only two views available to us, both of which are contingent on the availability of each view.

1. The view from God is both 'from above' (top-down from outside the universe) and 'inner out'. This is the view communicated in the whole of God's thematic relational action from top-down that the Face embodied from inner out (Jn 1:18; 3:13; cf. 3:31). 'Inner out' signifies the qualitative whole ontology and function of God, and on this basis inner out is the critical view for whole understanding (meaning for the innermost, not reduced to fragmentary explanation) and wisdom (understanding the whole in function, not the sum of its parts). God's view extends further and deeper than a quantitative view of the universe and all in it; therefore, how God sees the human person, life and practice is always from inner out and is focused primarily on the qualitative function of the heart (Ps 7:9; Mk 7:14-23; Lk 16:15; Rev 2:23).
2. The view from humans can be only 'from below' (bottom-up from inside the universe) and, if not introspective, is limited primarily to 'outer in'. 'Outer in' signifies the lack or absence of wholeness and thus becomes a reductionist view of quantitative parts, the fragments of which are aggregated in a conceived sum for some type of explanation. This reductionist view defines the human person from outer in within primarily quantitative terms, which is consequential for the fragmentation of both the person and persons together in relationships. This is characteristic of and inherent to reductionism and its counter-relational work, which constitute the human condition that the view 'from below' is unable to wholly understand and to fully resolve.

The limits of the knowledge, understanding and wisdom available to the human view is a contingency that cannot be avoided and must no longer be minimized, that is, if the concern is for the human condition and resolving the human problem. This contingency leaves us faced with the view from God—a challenge that Jesus also presented to Nicodemus (Jn 3:10-15). If openly faced, this further raises the challenge *of and for* face, which must be met conjointly with the contingency of availability for the necessary convergence of Face to face. When the Face connects relationally with human face, the relational dynamic is engaged for God's view from above and the Face embodied from inner out to unfold Face to face. Yet, this view's own contingency is its availability from God's self-disclosure from outside the universe. If such a reality does not exist outside the universe, then obviously this view is not available. If God exists, are there valid revelations definitive of God making his view available to human persons? My short answer: Yes, indeed. This contingency of availability is met with Scripture and most importantly *in* the embodied face of God who has turned and shined on us. This

contingency, however, is a reciprocating contingency; and it is insufficient merely to affirm the Word of God to meet this contingency. Without also the depth of relational involvement with the Word unfolded in the relational epistemic process, the availability of the whole of God's vulnerable presence and relational involvement is not the functional reality that can be known—even though its information may be in one's quantitative grasp. This is available only in reciprocal relationship Face to face, as Jesus made conclusive (Lk 10:21).

Apart from the primacy of Face-to-face relationship, Scripture and the self-disclosures of the Word are susceptible to human terms and its relative shaping and construction; then the view from God is misperceived and misrepresented by the view from below—that is, *re*-presentation of God's presentation. A *re*-presentation may even appear authentic in form when dressed in certain theological terms and doctrine (e.g. the authority of the Bible or biblical inerrancy). When Scripture and the Word are not engaged in the relational epistemic process, they invariably are narrowed down to and by referential language for the purpose of transmitting information about God's view, with the assumption of its general availability in its special form—even despite the embodied Word's definitive declaration (Lk 10:21). This is contrary to the communication of God's view only in qualitative relationship; and apart from the distinguished relational context and process of God's communicative action, all *re*-presentations of God's view are rendered without relational significance both for theology and practice. Without having relational significance, theology and practice, and its gospel, become fragmentary for the whole of God and God's whole. In other words, *re*-presentations in any form misrepresent God, the Word and the gospel.

Both Jesus and Paul confirm all of God's self-disclosure in Scripture unequivocally, the integral integrity of which Jesus only fulfills (Mt 5:17-18) and Paul extends to fullness (Col 1:25, cf. 1 Cor 4:6). When Jesus was confronted for unorthodox practice (healing on the Sabbath), he appealed to the Father's thematic relational work revealed from the beginning of which he was the qualitative-relational embodiment from inner out (Jn 5:16-23). His accusers based their critique on knowing the quantitative words of Scripture from outer in, which was about referential language transmitting information *about* God. This information was vested in the quantitative words of the text and not in the communicative words of God in relationship. "You have never heard *the Father's* voice...and you do not have his word abiding in you...*even though* you search the scriptures...but I know that you do not have the love of God in you *from inner out*" (Jn 5:37-42). Detached from the primacy of relationship and reduced to and by referential language, the words of Scripture become subject to the terms of human shaping and construction—which persons impose on Scripture for self-determination/justification in their quest for certainty in identity (e.g. strict adherence to the Sabbath represented an identity-marker for the above Jews). What unfolds in this interaction is vital to understand for our working-view of God's self-disclosures in Scripture, not our theologically-correct view: (1) The relational dynamics 'from above' in contrast and conflict with the reductionist dynamics 'from below', by which persons are defined and determined, relationships are established and function together—either from inner out or outer in (cf. Mk 7:1-23); and (2) the relational outcome of the former and the relational consequence of the latter, just as Jesus declared: "the measure you *use* will be the measure you get" (Mk 4:24). Paul further challenged the human shaping and construction

of Scripture and the measure used notably in church practice, and this practice always fragmented the relationships necessary to be whole, just as reductionism and its counter-relational work can be expected to perform (1 Cor 4:6-7; 2 Cor 10:12,18).

This is the challenge *of* and *for* face that Jesus embodied in wholeness and Paul further embodied integrally. As the subtitle of this study indicates, ‘embodying’ is integral for both Jesus and Paul, and their synthesis. A further discussion of embodying is necessary at this point, which will unfold throughout this study for our further and deeper understanding.

## **The Embodied Face**

It is necessary to further understand how the Face is irreducible to human shaping in order for the embodied whole of God to emerge in whole ontology; and to apprehend how embodying is nonnegotiable to human terms for this Face to function whole. Whole ontology and function are indispensable for the embodied Face (cf. Col 2:9-10), who constitutes the theological, hermeneutical and functional keys to all that unfolds (Jn 1:14,18; 14:6; cf. 2 Cor 4:6). Paul further embodied this whole theology (e.g. Col 1:19; 2:9) and the hermeneutic necessary to be whole (e.g. 1 Cor 14:33; Eph 2:14; Col 3:15), which he made definitive also for the Athenians (Acts 17:23).

‘Embodying of the theology and hermeneutic of the whole gospel’ means to go from distant, or more abstract, to functional reality. This necessarily involves the strategic, tactical and functional shifts unfolding with the Word (discussed in chap. 6), which take us from quantitative-referential beliefs or concepts of God to the qualitative-relational experience of the whole of God—just as Jesus initiated the strategic shift with the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:21-26). The process of embodying is neither a conceptually distant reality nor an abstraction of reality, as the Samaritan woman witnessed (Jn 4:28-30). Relational embodying composes the theology of God’s presence further than the quantitative Object to be observed to the depths of this qualitative Subject present vulnerably for reciprocal involvement in relationship together.

This embodied reality is not the mere notion of it (however personal) from incarnational terms of human shaping and construction but the whole reality from outside the universe to be known and experienced as Subject, therefore who is embodied reality both qualitative and relational, irreducibly qualitative and nonnegotiablely relational. That is to say, this functionally qualitative and relational reality cannot be reduced just to quantitative terms (as Object) or this fragments, separates and disembodies its essential wholeness (as Subject)—the wholeness in which this whole reality is necessarily known and by which he is experienced. Anything less and any substitute of this whole reality reworks the strategic shift back to an abstraction of aggregate parts, aspects and fragments—the teachings, example, principles separated and thereby disembodied from Jesus’ whole person—which can never be whole. Importantly, the consequence is indicated in a conceptually distant reality of God (even with a personal theology) that needs to be understood always as a relational consequence. And the awareness of this relational distance may not be apparent from our epistemological illusion (e.g. in an incomplete Christology that is overly christocentric) and ontological simulation (e.g. with faith from a truncated soteriology) in this reductionism. This abstraction or reductionism

is the consequence always prevailing when only part of the message of the Word unfolding is listened to, emphasized or proclaimed.

This gets us back to the heart of the issue of how we talk about God and the language we use, and specifically what we can say in relation to God based either on the information we have *about* God or on the deeper knowledge *of* God. The depths of the issue exposing the level of our knowledge certainly involve our perceptual-interpretive framework, and this engages an epistemic level in either the quantitative-referential words of mere discourse or the qualitative-relational words of communication in relationship. At its depths, though less definitive, we also should consider what McGilchrist suggests as influenced by the function of our brain's hemispheres and their competing views of reality.<sup>4</sup> Within this context, a question of interest is raised: What if, as in Steiner's Secondary City,<sup>5</sup> all talk *about* God was prohibited? Who speaks then?

Job, of course, stopped talking about God and deferred in epistemic humility to listen to God in the relational epistemic process (Job 42:3-5). With the unfolding of the Word from God, Jesus embodied the view 'from above' in the strategic shift and made functional the view from 'inner out' in his tactical and functional shifts. The embodied Face thus challenged the views 'from below', exposing the perceptions from 'bottom up' and confronting both interpretation of God's words and subsequent function only from 'outer in'—always challenging prevailing theological assumptions of both God and the human person (e.g. Mk 7:1-23). In Paul's confrontation by the embodied Face, he was epistemologically clarified from his own illusion and hermeneutically corrected in his own ontological simulation, therefore integrally transformed 'from above' and from 'inner out'. The relational outcome for Paul—unfolding in this study with the Word unfolded—was the redemptive change from fragmentary faith outer in to wholeness inner out, to which Paul witnessed for the Face (Acts 26:16; 2 Cor 4:6) in order to complete the Word from God and its gospel (Col 1:25-27; Eph 3:2-6). This relational outcome only emerged from Paul's relational response to engage the embodied Face in the relational epistemic process Face to face ("Who are you?") and then to listen.

And just as Job experienced, whatever his ears had previously heard *about* God was rendered silent by the whole understanding *of* God he received from inner out (Job 42:5). When we experience as Job did, our outer-in information *about* God is rendered silent in order to have relational connection with the whole of God embodied and thus unfolded from the beginning. The Word was embodied in the quantitative (in the universe) yet embodied from inner out for relationship; therefore, his embodying was whole and not fragmented, just as the Word created all persons in the universe in his image for whole relationship together (as Paul made theologically definitive, Col 1:15; 2 Cor 4:4; Col 3:10). In this relational dynamic, the Word embodied Face to clarify any existing ambiguity to the face of God and to resolve any elusiveness of connection with the whole of God, Face to face (Jn 12:45; 14:9; 2 Cor 3:18; 4:6). In the relational dynamic of the embodied Face emerged the whole ontology and function of God 'from above' and from 'inner out', nothing less and no substitutes, only for the relational outcome of the relationships together to be whole, Face to face—just as Jesus' formative prayer for his family composes (Jn 17), and Paul's prayer further embodied (Eph 3:14-19).

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<sup>4</sup> McGilchrist, *The Master and his Emissary*.

<sup>5</sup> Steiner, *Real Presences*.

Moreover, it is critical for our whole understanding to be unequivocal about the following: Embodiment emerged with the incarnation but was enacted in its relational dynamic even before the creation of the universe (as Paul clarified theologically, Eph 1:3-5). The whole of God’s thematic relational response of grace from the beginning is *the* relational context and process that by necessity integrally contextualizes the incarnation together with those in human history. Therefore, the embodied Face is inseparable and indistinguishable from the face of God from outside the universe, and from the Face engaged in creation in its beginning (Jn 1:1-3). Furthermore, the embodied Face is inseparable and indistinguishable from the Face who turned and shined on us in definitive blessing from the beginning to “bring the change needed to establish new relationship together in wholeness” (Num 6:24-26). God’s thematic relational response of grace can certainly be called a metanarrative. This can understandably raise suspicion. Yet, those who object to metanarratives are correct only insofar as they discount any ideological construction and functional shaping which impose a template ‘from below’ on the universe and all in it. In this regard, there is a place for a hermeneutic of suspicion to retrieve the words unfolding from outside the universe<sup>6</sup>; and the deconstruction of human shaping and construction today are both necessary and urgent. Deconstruction, however, is insignificant and serves no purpose if that is all replaced by other human shaping and construction. This is our predicament if we are limited only to views ‘from below’ inside the universe. Most important, if those objecting to metanarratives also discount the metanarrative of the relational dynamic from outside the universe, the relational consequence is the absence of the whole’s presence and involvement and thereby the loss of ‘what holds together the world in its innermost’—making any notion of the whole ambiguous and experience of wholeness elusive. If hubris does not make secondary the concern for the human condition, we need to speak less and listen more to the words from outside the universe unfolding from the beginning.

The whole of both the embodied Face and the gospel can only be seen, heard and understood in their relational beginning in God’s integral relational dynamic—the relational dynamic defining and determining nothing less and no substitutes—unfolding in the whole of God’s thematic relational response of grace to the human condition. Besides the hermeneutical issues identifying the whole of God and God’s communicative action in self-disclosure, this dynamic identifies the relational problem many persons throughout Scripture evidenced in maintaining relational barriers/distance in their relations with God other than Face to face (as critiqued in Isa 29:13), notably with the embodied Face vulnerably unfolded before their faces—that is, of those from his hometown (Mk 6:1-6), of his disciples (Jn 14:9), and of religious leaders (Jn 5:16-40).

Before the relational outcome for Job experiencing God in relationship Face to face, there was Moses in open interaction with God (Ex 33:11ff). Moses engaged the relational epistemic process with God’s disclosures in Face-to-face relationship (Num 12:6-8). Paul defined Moses’ experience as temporary, not fragmentary but transitory (2 Cor 3:7,13); and the relational difficulty of not having direct relational connection with God is signified by ‘the veil’, which Paul used to indicate counter-relational work (2 Cor 3:13-18). The relational connection without the veil was completed and made whole when the Face emerged wholly embodied in the relational work for the permanence of

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<sup>6</sup> For a discussion on the hermeneutics of suspicion and retrieval, see Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 344-78.



intimate relationship together Face to face (Jn 17:3,26). What Job learned qualitatively and experienced relationally (Job 42:5), along with Moses, were the integral aspects of (1) the definitive nature of God's self-disclosure and (2) the constitutive relational context and process of God's communicative action. The unfolding of the Word from God was always a relational dynamic, not a mere dialectic, that cannot be reduced from its relational context and process and still be definitive. That reduction involves renegotiating the Word's relational process to be shaped or constructed by human terms. On God's terms, the Word can speak for his own Self only in God's relational context and process. And the embodied Face speaks for himself secondarily as the object-Other in confirmation of the primary that more significantly communicates as Subject to be received in wholeness (neither fragmented nor disembodied) and to be responded to and experienced in whole relationship together Face to face. What Moses and Job were introduced to was now complete and made whole in new relationship together. This is *what* and *how* Jesus embodied as the whole of God's Face; and as the relational outcome of Paul's ongoing relational experience with the Face initiated on the Damascus road, this is *Who*, *what* and *how* Paul further embodied with the Spirit (Eph 1:17-18; Col 1:25).

When we relationally engage as Job engaged and relationally respond as Paul responded, as both in their epistemic humility, we come before the functional reality facing us: The unfolding of God's words gives the light of the whole and imparts whole understanding *only* when the Word embodies the hermeneutic necessary for the relational language used to communicate the relational messages and relational work of the whole of God. This hermeneutical dynamic unfolds as follows: The Word embodies conjointly and integrally the whole of Subject-God's vulnerable presence and relational involvement to deeply know God; and he further embodies the perceptual-interpretive framework (*phronema*) and lens (*phroneo*) for this whole ontology and function of God in relationship Face to face; the relational outcome for those in relationship together is having this framework and lens to exercise with the whole of God in order to be and live whole (as Paul made conclusive, Rom 8:5-6). Therefore, only when the embodied Word unfolded is allowed to speak for himself is the light from the Face of the whole of God the functional reality shining to bring the change needed to establish the new relationship together of God's whole—fulfilling the blessing of God's face from the beginning (Num 6:24-26). This is the Face made conclusive by Jesus in the incarnation—the Face to whom Paul gave theological clarity for “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God” (2 Cor 4:4-6), and the Face to whom Paul witnessed to complete the Word from God and its gospel in order to make whole the human condition (Col 1:20,25-28).

This reality and meaning of the whole gospel are at the heart of what Paul said of Jesus and are critical for his ongoing conjoint fight for this gospel and against any reductionism of it. Just as Jesus embodied the whole of God's vulnerable presence and relational involvement for the theological, hermeneutical and functional keys to whole ontology and function, Paul, also when allowed to speak for himself, extends this embodying to be whole, to live God's whole only on God's terms, and to make whole the human condition in the world (as apostle to the whole of humanity). Nothing less and no substitutes define and determine both Jesus and Paul, together in wholeness.

This study follows the unfolding of the whole Word in and from the beginning—the unfolding of which Paul was responsible to further complete and make whole (*pleroo*, Col 1:25), yet not by his own shaping and construction as suggested by some Pauline

scholars. And this study unfolds with the relational dynamic enacted in the beginning by the Word; and from this beginning the Face ongoingly enacted up to and conclusively through the embodying of Jesus, including his post-ascension interactions, which then enacted definitively *into* Paul in Face-to-face relational progression. Jesus *into* Paul is not a conceptual reality understood only on the metaphysical level. In contrast to such a distant reality or abstraction, Jesus *into* Paul signifies the relational dynamic of their relationship together, in which the whole of God was vulnerably present and intimately involved with Paul—whose relational outcome Paul defined in relational language with the shorthand term ‘in Christ’. Understanding this relational dynamic is the critical antecedent to any synthesis of Jesus and Paul; and the lack or absence of this understanding disengages the continuity of the whole of God’s thematic relational response of grace to the human condition, thereby reinforcing the theory of Paul’s shaping of Christ and construction of Christianity.

From the beginning God’s words unfolded in the whole of God’s thematic communicative acts of self-disclosure. The relational dynamic composing God’s thematic relational response of grace was defined and determined solely by ‘nothing less and no substitutes’ of the whole of God. Where the whole of God is not vulnerably present and relationally involved, then the whole is elusive to those from below and wholeness in the innermost is lost—which dismayed the ancient poet (Ps 30:7). The Word as clearly unfolded, however, conclusively embodied the Face of the whole ontology and function of God’s vulnerable presence and relational involvement (Jn 1:10-14,18).

The relational dynamic embodying the Face with nothing less and no substitutes is at the heart of what Paul made definitive theologically for the whole gospel: (1) God’s self-disclosure in relationship, (2) Jesus’ whole ontology and function in the qualitative significance of relational work, and (3) Christ’s relational work of atonement on the cross to complete the enactment of God’s thematic relational response (Col 1:19-23). As the Word of and from God, the Face embodied the whole of God unequivocally in the distinguished relational context and process of God’s terms from above (1). Jesus’ whole person always constituted his function in, with and by his wholeness, from inner out, thereby openly and vulnerably in, with and by his heart; and his whole person was always engaged and solely involved in relational work, that is, wholly engaged and vulnerably involved for accessible intimate relationship together Face to face (2). The relational progression of this relational dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes was ultimately enacted by his vulnerable presence and relational involvement embodied on the cross for atonement rather than a substitute body (Lev 16:1-19), therefore fulfilling God’s definitive blessing to bring (*siym*) redemptive change for new relationship together in wholeness—without the relational barrier/distance signified by ‘the veil’ (3). The embodied Face—by the cosmological, relational and whole nature of his communicative action—completed the whole of God’s thematic relational response of grace to the human condition, which unfolded from the beginning exclusively in God’s relational context and process.

God’s relational dynamic is vital to understand as the integral theme for what unfolds in God’s words for us to jointly listen to and respond. Who emerged was not only the embodied Face but clearly the distinguished Face.

## The Distinguished Face

Consider the pre-Damascus road Paul. Here was a Jew of religious conviction, impassioned to eliminate the embodied shape of his religious roots and the embodied reshaping of his religious convictions; he was dedicated to the demise of this embodiment—both the Face and faces following—threatening his religion by redefining the terms. Consider the post-Damascus road Paul. Here was a Jew of deeper conviction of faith, impassioned to eliminate the human shaping of the Face emerging from his religious roots and the human terms reducing the new depths of his faith and the whole gospel. What brought this change in Paul? The distinguished Face, who not only turned and shined on Paul but who was vulnerably present and relationally involved directly in Paul's life, Face to face.

The challenge of Face goes unmet by merely embodying the Face. Certainly, the incarnation is essential theology; and in spite of how 'critical' (historical, form, literary) the embodied Word has become in biblical studies, no human shape or construct distinguishes the Face unless the Face distinguishes his own Self. This goes further than the details of *what* the embodied Face disclosed of himself to more deeply account for *how* the Face was present and involved in the human context by the nature of *what* the embodied Face was. What unfolds from the Word and emerges clearly is the distinguished Face.

If indeed the Word, who speaks for himself, is from outside the universe, then the Face, whom we tend to talk *about*, is not just another embodied face in the human context. That is, the Face is neither another in common life and practice whose presence is praiseworthy and above reproach, nor another within the context of what is ordinary who is involved with others in extraordinary ways. While such presence and involvement in the human context rightly gives Jesus a special face in comparison to the other faces in the population, it is still another embodied face among the many in the same category of 'common' and of the same kind of 'ordinary'. Any distinction in this category and of this kind can be special only in a comparative process *within* that category and kind; but the value-judgment 'special' does not distinguish it *from* that category and kind (cf. Isa 40:18).

This becomes problematic for what we talk about for Jesus. For example, Jesus' ethical practice is certainly special and would be beneficial to emulate. Yet, ethics is not what distinguishes the whole of Jesus, even though it is an important distinction commonly used for Jesus. There is an essential (critical if you wish) difference between a special Face and the distinguished Face. Both can be combined with the embodied Face. A special Face, however, is attached to Jesus by a narrowing-down process from a conventional view inside the universe that attempts to better explain Jesus, notably from outer in by what he does (hence ethics). Even with good intentions, a special Face is incompatible with the embodied Face from outside the universe—though complimentary in christological discourse *about* the Face on narrowed-down fragmentary terms, still unable to speak *of* the Face in whole terms. The distinguished Face emerges only from God's relational dynamic in congruence with the whole ontology and function in the embodied Face of Jesus. Therefore, the distinguished Face can only be distinguished when he distinguishes his Self in the constituting relational context and process of God's

relational dynamic, just as the embodied Face emerged. What emerges that is distinguished beyond a mere distinction?

God's relational dynamic has unfolded from the beginning in communicative action, which is conjointly qualitative from inner out, yet not mystical, and always in relationship, never isolated or disengaged. This nature of God's relational dynamic is evident in the embodied Face to fulfill God's thematic relational response of grace. What becomes further evident of God's relational dynamic unfolding is witnessed in *how* the Face distinguishes his Self and *what* he distinguishes, both of which are not distinguished by or in a special Face.

A term used in the OT can present similar issues discussed for a special Face. This term is "wonderful" (*pala*, v., *pele*, n., *pil'iy*, adj.). 'Wonderful' (*pele*) is the name identifying Jesus in prophecy (Isa 9:6). The name 'Wonderful' could be attached to Jesus with the distinction similar to a special Face, or 'wonderful' could distinguish the Face of Jesus from any and all other faces. How the prophet used the term was later indicated in his description of the Lord of hosts: "he is wonderful [*pala*] in counsel" (Isa 28:29); *pala* also denoted to separate and distinguish, and is the root word for *pele* and *pil'iy*. The clear indicator of the term identifying the name came when Manoah asked for the name of the angel of the Lord and received this response: "Why do you ask my name? It is too wonderful" (*pil'iy*, incomprehensible, Judg 13:18). 'Wonderful' goes beyond a special distinction within the same category and kind, to distinguish a category and kind of its own that is too wonderful and incomprehensible for prevailing conventional terms of the common and ordinary, and is accordingly separated from all else.

Moreover, in common or ordinary terms 'wonderful' is a value-attachment in the eye of the beholder to describe something; thus this view is actually less focused on the thing described since the value comes from the beholder's attachment. 'Distinguished', however, defines the thing itself more than describes it and establishes its uniqueness set apart from all else, perhaps even in all the universe. This defined the name Manoah asked for; its uniqueness set it apart from all he could understand or comprehend. Such uniqueness set apart from all else is also inseparable from who is holy and what is sanctified. Perhaps 'distinguished' can be considered a synonym for 'holy' (cf. Isa 41:14,20; 43:3, 14-15; Lk 4:34; Jn 6:69). Together in function, we begin to understand the Face: whom Hagar named "You are *El-roi*" (Gen 16:13), that is, "You are the God who sees me" (NIV), and also said, "Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?"; of whom Jacob requested the name, and who blessed Jacob there in the place he called "*Peniel*, saying, 'For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved'" (Gen 32:29-30); the Face who is set apart and distinguished from any and all other faces, whose definitive blessing "shall put my name on *those in whole relationship together Face to face*" (Num 6:27); whose relational dynamic unfolds conclusively in the face of Jesus whom the prophet named 'distinguished'.

Also important in the meaning of that which is separate, the process to be 'distinguished' implies that only the distinguished name can distinguish himself and cannot come from a value-attachment of a beholder. This was the issue others had with what is 'wonderful'. When Sarah heard of her pending pregnancy from God, she used biological "science" to narrow-down her knowledge for a conventional explanation from inside the universe. On this basis, she also spoke for the God from outside the universe, thereby making the face of God *un-distinguished*. Offended, God responded: "Is anything

too ‘distinguished’ [*pala*] for the Lord?’ (Gen 18:10-14). Job implied acknowledgment of the distinguished God (Job 21:22) yet he attempted to speak for what is distinguished (*pala*) from his view inside the universe, and consequently he also reduced the face of God to obscurity in the *un*-distinguished (Job 42:3).

Sarah and Job contradicted what the ancient poet understood, the poet who did not attempt to grasp the distinguished ‘from above’ on the basis of what can only be indistinguishable ‘from below’: “Such knowledge is too wonderful [*pil’iy*] for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it” (Ps 139:6). Yet, the underlying issue in these examples is less epistemological and is rooted in the primacy of relationship. It is critical to understand that the distinguished Face does not and cannot distinguish himself in isolation or disengaged from relationship. If he did, he would no longer distinguish *what* the whole of God is and *how* God is. Relationship is always primary for God, whether in the beginning for the God outside the universe or from the beginning for the God now also inside the universe. Inside the universe, the face of God becomes distinguished for those ‘from below’ when he emerges from behind what is signified by ‘the veil’—a metaphor for the relational barrier/distance preventing significant relational connection (e.g. Sarah) and deeper relational involvement (e.g. Job). The Face is not distinguished as long as a veil exists in the relationship. Neither God’s face behind the veil nor our face in front of the veil allows for the relational connection necessary to be involved Face to face. The relational dynamic of the Face converging with our face in Face-to-face relationship is disengaged when relational distance exists—either the relational distance of God’s face or our face. This relational dynamic was evident when Moses made relational connection with God Face to face without the veil, after which he had to cover his radiant face with the veil to meet the people who could only observe from their relational distance (Ex 33:9-11; 34:33-35). This relational dynamic was made conclusive by Paul for the relational consequence of the veil’s presence and the relational outcome from the distinguished Face removing the veil (2 Cor 3:13-18; cf. Mk 15:37-38).

Vulnerable involvement in relationship without the veil was the unfolding relational dynamic of *how* the face of God was distinguished. The vulnerable presence and relational involvement of the distinguished Face integrally distinguished his own Face and composed the relational connection necessary Face to face for relationship together in wholeness—contrary to, and in conflict with, fragmented, separated or broken relationship with the veil.

The unfolding relational dynamic distinguishing the face of God became more definitive in relationship when the ancient poet requested from God: “Wondrously show [*pala*] your steadfast love” (Ps 17:7) or “Show the wonder of your great love” (NIV). The latter is easily rendered to comparative terms for a special distinction in the same category or kind of all love. Yet, the poet’s request implies for the relational dynamic of God to distinguish his own love, not merely to show a special love defined within the limits of all love in the universe. For the distinguished Face, there is still an element of mystery no matter how distinguished the Face is; and we can allow for and may be able to live with mystery for God. For love, however, we appear to need certainty and would not want any mystery about God’s love; and thus we try to explain God’s love in referential terms comparative to love inside the universe. Distinguished love cannot be constrained to these limited terms and, by its nature, will also still have an element of mystery no matter how distinguished by the distinguished Face; yet, this also accounts for

distinguished love to be open-ended, that is, to be deeply experienced without limits or end, as only God can constitute. Nothing less and no substitute of this love is what the ancient poet requested from God. And any attempt to “fully” explain God’s love can no longer distinguish love from the God from outside the universe. Both the distinguished Face and distinguished love are contingent on God’s self-disclosure. Though God’s self-disclosure is complete in terms of being whole (*pleroma*, Col 1:19), we can never assume that the disclosure of the Face and love distinguished before us is complete in terms of the totality of God. Mystery remains by necessity for the distinguished Face and love, yet without the gap from anything less or any substitute of their being whole.

Furthermore, distinguished love is not about the wonders of what God is capable of *doing*—another reductionism of God defined by what God does, which invariably engages a comparative process in human terms with distinctions of more or less, special or so-so. The reality of ‘all love’ is its conventional definition about *what to do*, in which quantity exceeds quality and by which sacrifice achieves its highest rank (e.g. the sacrificial love of *agape*). Distinguished love certainly involves action; this action of love, however, is relational action that only defines *how to be involved in relationship*. In contrast to love defined by ‘what to do’—that may benefit a need of another without being involved with their person—distinguished love engages the depth of relational involvement with the other person(s) with nothing less and no substitute of one’s whole person, and on this basis vulnerably sharing one’s self, not merely giving one’s deeds or resources. The depth of relational involvement unique to distinguished love to set this love apart from all love can be and is fulfilled only by the face of God. This is evidenced in the covenant and *Torah*. The covenant was no mere framework for religious identity that the *Torah* served for its identity markers—although they easily become just that when perceived in referential language. The face of God turned to bring change and establish a new relationship together in wholeness, as promised, that is, the covenant relationship distinguished by love in the covenant of distinguished love (Dt 7:6-9). And the *Torah* is God’s terms (*dabar*, Dt 29:1,9) for reciprocal relationship together Face to face—the *whole* terms distinguished by distinguished love (Dt 7:10-13), which Jesus made definitive in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:17-48).

The distinguished Face directly distinguished love in relational response to the ancient poet in a functional reality (not a conceptual reality) beyond what he asked or could have imagined; therefore, he sings out in reciprocal response: “Blessed be the Lord for he has distinguished his steadfast love to me” (Ps 31:21). And the poet could say confidently: “Truly the eye (*ayin*) of the Lord is on those who...hope in his steadfast love” (Ps 33:18). Yet if the face of God only watched from relational distance, the Face would be ambiguous most of the time and relational connection with the Face would often be elusive, which describes the history of Israel’s relationship with God. The term ‘*ayin*’ also denotes presence, the use of which distinguishes relational terms from mere referential terms; and the eye involves the Face whose presence distinguished love. Therefore, the poet was confident that the Face does not merely watch from a relational distance but indeed is vulnerably present and relationally involved to ongoingly distinguish love (cf. Ps 34:15-16; 1 Pet 3:12).

This goes far beyond a special distinction of wonderful love from a wonderful person, even if that love is perceived to be from God. When the distinguished Face distinguished love, he integrally distinguished *how* the face of God is vulnerably present

and relationally involved with other persons in the human context, and also *what* is the qualitative ontology and relational nature of the whole of God constituting the Face's relational response. No human terms and categories can define or determine the *how* and *what* of the distinguished Face.

This relational dynamic unfolds conclusively when distinguished love is enacted by the distinguished Face wholly embodied (Jn 3:16; Rom 5:8; Eph 2:4-7). Yet, the cross, as commonly perceived, was not what distinguished love; this perception of love involves comparative terms as sacrifice or service. The special distinction of sacrificial love is the basis for the cross usually lacking the distinguished Face, whose own relational communication while on the cross tends to be buried in referential language to transmit information without relational significance (cf. sermons on 'the seven last words'). Paul does not highlight God's love in comparative human terms because God demonstrates the whole of his own love in the innermost (*synistemi*, Rom 5:8; cf. Col 1:17), and this goes beyond any measurement from within the universe (*hyperballo*, Eph 2:7). An incomplete Christology as revolved around the cross lacks the distinguished Face prior to the cross, whose ongoing vulnerable presence and relational involvement distinguished love conclusively. This Face emerges throughout this study to demonstrate the depth of his presence and involvement.

One demonstration is critical to distinguish at this point since the distinction attached to Jesus' footwashing measures it only by comparative terms, thereby reducing its relational significance definitive for whole ontology and function (Jn 13:1-17). Even so, a comparison with Abraham's relational response and involvement (Gen 18:1-10) and Jesus' will be helpful for our understanding, since both contexts involved footwashing and table fellowship. Abraham became aware of the theophany unfolding before him and responded to the Lord and two others by providing water for them to wash their feet and food (a feast) for them to eat. This was a pivotal table fellowship together, from which God's thematic relational response of grace to the human condition would unfold, yet Abraham only "stood by them under the tree." Certainly, Abraham was a most gracious host who served but his primary involvement was focused on the situation (and its details) and only secondarily on these persons, consequently his presence and involvement were relationally distant. With his priorities of importance reversed and his preoccupation on secondary matters, in this key moment Abraham had yet to learn how to "walk before me and be *whole*" (*tamiym*), as God earlier made definitive to him for the primacy of relationship and not as a mere code of behavior ("blameless," as *tamiym* is commonly rendered, Gen 17:1).

The presence and involvement of being whole in relationship was distinguished by Jesus at the definitive table fellowship just prior to the cross. The distinguished Face unfolded in God's relational dynamic of 'nothing less and no substitutes'. At this table fellowship Jesus would go beyond being a most gracious host providing water for the others' feet; he himself would wash them because 'no substitute' (like a servant or others washing their own feet) could fulfill his relational action. Yet, Jesus was not focused on the activity traditionally connected to the situation of table fellowship. Jesus' whole person would also go beyond just serving by doing something for them as menial as footwashing because 'nothing less' could fulfill his relational action. What then was Jesus' relational action that no substitute and nothing less could fulfill? The opening narrative to this definitive table fellowship identifies the ongoing relational progression

of Jesus' distinguished love: *eis telos*, movement to the end, motion into completion, signifying either Jesus' act of love up to the end of this time period or Jesus' relational action of distinguished love progressing into completion (Jn 13:1). The latter is the only adequate interpretation for the distinguished Face, who distinguished love by *how* his whole person was vulnerably present and relationally involved with others at this integral table fellowship (beyond the traditional Communion) based on only *what* his whole ontology and function defined and determined in the primacy of relationship, not on what others, tradition or culture defined and determined. Therefore, the distinguished Face did not just serve others by washing their feet and sacrificing himself on the cross.

In contrast to Abraham's primary response of serving in the situation at the pivotal table fellowship, Jesus' relational response in this definitive table fellowship was not about serving but progressively sharing his whole person (not deeds or resources) vulnerably with others for the depth of relational involvement together—that which distinguished love in the primacy of relationship. This distinguished love, relationally progressing into completion by the distinguished Face, is the functional key Jesus embodied for the relationships together (signified by table fellowship) necessary to be whole as God's family—initiated at this pivotal table fellowship and fulfilled at this definitive table fellowship. The whole process illuminates the distinguished love that the distinguished Face brings to the communion table for the fellowship around it to be definitive of and distinguished as God's family. And *how* and *what* the distinguished Face shared with nothing less and no substitute, the Face seeks from others around the table in relationship Face to face (Jn 13:8; 17:2-3; cf. Jn 4:23). On the basis of this relational dynamic, Peter resisted the Face vulnerably distinguished before him in this defining interaction, and he also distanced his own face to be vulnerably involved in the nonnegotiable relationship Face to face (cf. Jn 21:15,21-22). Yet, the distinguished Face pursues our face and challenges us *for* face in order for the relational outcome together of Face to face (cf. Rev 3:20).

This relational outcome was the focus of the ancient poet, who communicated the relational dynamic involved when his familiar words are heard correctly in relational language, not the words of referential language: "Let the words of my face ['mouth', *peh*] communicating the relational involvement ['meditation'] of my whole person from inner out ['heart'] be a delight to your Face [*paneh*], in relationship together distinguished Face to face [idiom of *peh*]" (Ps 19:14). When the ancient poet kept relational distance with the Face and was silent about it by putting a mask on his own face, he felt the relational tension lacking Face to face (Ps 32:3-5). Finally, he took action, "I will confess" (*yadah*). The term *yadah* can be observed in the limits of referential language to do something (confess) to transmit information (sin), or it can be fully seen in relational language to compose the engagement in the relational communication needed for involvement in relationship together Face to face. *Yadah* distinguishes only the relational language of ongoing communication to deepen the involvement in Face-to-face relationship. In this moment for the ancient poet, the *yadah* necessary was to confess; *yadah* also denotes to speak out, to praise, to sing, to give thanks, which are all necessary at different moments for the communication needed to deepen the relationship Face to face. Therefore, *yadah*, together in all its relational actions, is the relational language that integrally composes the primacy of relationship together with the Face and distinguishes the ongoing involvement in the worship of the whole of God.



As Peter demonstrates later in this study, he had difficulty engaging the Face on the distinguished terms of God's relational response of grace rather than his own terms (cf. Mt 16:21-23)—a common difficulty for many of us. Much of this difficulty involves how well we listen and pay attention to what we hear from the distinguished Face, whose thematic relational response was initiated (grace) from outside the universe. Yet, grace is one of those common Christian terms which has lost much of its relational significance in referential language, and that must be recovered in relational language. Grace emerges in God's relational dynamic with nothing less and no substitutes for the face of God in thematic relational response to the human condition from the beginning, though most notably in the incarnation (cf. 2 Cor 6:1-2). The face of God not only sent light to shine on us but came *in person* as the Light (Jn 1:4; 3:19; 12:46); and the Face was vulnerably present and relationally involved, distinguished "full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:14). Grace and truth are not mere static attributes of Jesus' innermost substance, nor are they mere resources he can give as a gift, the gift of grace. The OT often renders the terms "grace and truth" in combination as "steadfast love and faithfulness" (cf. Ps 25:10; 40:10; Prov 16:6), which always involves covenant relationship. In these terms defined from relational language and not referential language, grace is interchangeable with steadfast love and always defined in the dynamic of relationship. Therefore, grace is not a mere gift to claim as our possession but the definitive relational response initiated by God to distinguish the whole ontology and function of the face of God, who is vulnerably present and relationally involved just for whole relationship together. Grace is inseparable from relationship in God's relational dynamic and on this basis is integral both for the whole of God's thematic relational response to the human condition and for the relational outcome of whole relationship together (cf. Isa 42:5-6).

If the face of God did not initiate this relational dynamic—relational action defined by the term grace in relational language—distinguished relationship from outside the universe is nonexistent and its relational outcome is a false hope inside the universe. However, when the distinguished Face became embodied "full of grace and truth," the common referential words "full of grace" is more accurately rendered "wholly involved in distinguished love" (*pleres*, wholly occupied with)—that is, that which the Face's presence and involvement communicate in relational language. The functional reality of God's relational response called grace is distinguished solely by the whole of God's vulnerable presence and relational involvement with persons in the human condition for the integral purpose not merely to redeem (deliver, save) them *from* their condition (i.e. for a truncated soteriology) but only for the relationships together necessary to be whole, God's whole family on God's relational terms (the full soteriology, Jn 1:10-13). Only when grace is restored to its proper relational language can grace be distinguished and clearly emerge as distinguished love in relationship. And, while in a very limited sense this can be considered unconditional love totally initiated by God, unconditional love is still perceived in comparative terms in the same category of all love which also includes conditional love. Unconditional love is certainly special in this sense, but that is inadequate to distinguish love and thus grace.

Distinguished love clearly makes evident and conclusive the primacy of relationship, which the distinguished Face, embodied in human context, was "wholly involved in" to distinguish what is primary to God, rendering all else secondary. Anything less of love (e.g. defined as sacrifice or serving others) makes the behavioral

deed of doing something for others what is primary. This conventional view of love engages a referential dynamic: the transmission of something to others; what is transmitted is primary and how it is transmitted is secondary. This dynamic is not focused on communication in relationship. It implies a dynamic that is more quantitative and consequently is focused on the outer in, both of the one giving and the other receiving. Such a dynamic diminishes both of the persons involved and minimalizes what transpires between them; and this can also describe the love in many marriages, families and churches. Most important, this dynamic of love is functionally disengaged from God's relational response of grace (not necessarily theologically separated) since it is contingent primarily on *what* one *does* from outer in, not on *what* the person *is* from inner out. The former requires one's own resources; the latter necessitates God's own relational involvement.

In contrast, distinguished love involves the relational dynamic that is irreducible from the primacy of relationship and is nonnegotiable to any terms other than those making the relationship primary. This relational dynamic is more qualitative, which includes overt action without reducing it to outer in but rather focuses primarily from inner out on the whole person(s) involved. The relational dynamic of distinguished love further involves opening one's whole person vulnerably to another whole person (whatever their need or desire) in the primacy of relationship (even if meeting for the first time)—in contrast to the mere transmission of something to someone, which in conventional love is often reduced to an exchange process of quid pro quo (cf. Jesus' critique of different love, Mt 5:43-48).

The distinguished Face distinguished love entirely in the *what* and *how* of the whole of God, thereby always distinguished in the primacy of relationship. As long as the distinguished of Face and of love remain vague or ambiguous in the human context, they can prevail *un-*distinguished; and as a result we can continue to substitute our terms that reduce the primacy of relationship in order to circumvent the involvement necessary Face to face. This points to the issue of the unknowability of God that classical philosophical theology creates (intentionally or unintentionally) by constructing terms for the attributes of God with negative theology (defining God by what God is not). Vagueness and ambiguity further relate directly to our seemingly ceaseless interest and participation in electronic communication for relationships, which provides us substitutes for connecting with each other face to face.<sup>7</sup> These issues also define Paul's critical presence and function in his synthesis with Jesus: his integral fight ongoingly both *for* the wholeness distinguished in the gospel and *against* any and all reductionism of *who* and *what* is whole.

Paul further distinguished the Face theologically as 'from above' and 'inner out' (2 Cor 4:4-6), who initially engaged (grace) Paul on the Damascus road and deeply involved Paul in relationship together Face to face (more grace). Paul first experienced relationally what he later learned theologically (ongoing grace) of the following functional reality: The distinguished Face embodied from inner out necessitates the reciprocal relational response of face from inner out that is compatible for the relational outcome of Face to face; compatibility is the convergence of God's relational response of

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<sup>7</sup> For a discussion on how we are changed by this process, see MIT professor Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

grace determining the distinguished Face's vulnerable presence and relational involvement, with God's relational response of grace determining ongoingly the face's vulnerable presence and relational involvement with the veil removed. Accordingly, this qualitative-relational dynamic cannot be engaged on the basis of human terms from outer in, which Paul implies for various persons identified by "the rest were hardened" (*poroo*, make insensitive, Rom 11:7), "their minds were hardened" (2 Cor 3:14), "the futility of their minds" and "hardness of heart" (Eph 4:17-18), and which Jesus made definitive earlier by "the wise and the intelligent" (Lk 10:21). All of the above human terms include an epistemic process but, more importantly, lack involvement in the relational epistemic process—which makes the Face ambiguous and relational connection elusive.

Jesus, for Paul, was the distinguished Face who distinguished love in the primacy of relationship (Rom 5:8; Eph 2:4-5). Paul did not focus on the referential words of Jesus' teaching—mostly absent in his corpus—but rather focused on the relational language of Jesus' relational work (creative and communicative relational action) for the theology and hermeneutic of the whole (*pleroma*) of Jesus and the whole gospel. Integrally, this is what Paul embodied in his own face and distinguished with Jesus Face to face. And it is *the distinguished* for which Paul prayed to be the church family's relational reality and experiential truth (Eph 3:16-19), echoing Jesus' formative family prayer (Jn 17:26). To be distinguished (Face) and to distinguish (love, as well as face) can involve nothing less and no substitutes.

## Turn from the Face

As long as the face of God has not made a distinguished turn to shine on our face, we do not have to deal with the distinguished Face (cf. negative theology). As long as the face of God can be limited to an embodied Face, without qualitative-relational significance from inner out, we do not have the distinguished Face to engage Face to face (cf. philosophical theology, dogmatic theology). Regardless of how the face of God is perceived, there are always relational implications for either relational outcomes or relational consequences. This is what Paul illuminates, the clarity of which unfolds in this study.

The issue involving the face of God is of immeasurable significance for the embodied Face we listen to and what we hear. If what is heard from the Face is not distinguished beyond the words of referential language transmitting information *about* God, then the embodied Face is no longer distinguished in the primacy of relationship with communication in relational language. By implication, this deconstructs the relational context and process of *how* the Face was embodied and *what* of God the Face embodied, which then redefines *who* was embodied and thereby reconstitutes the type of relationship available with the Face. Perhaps what may be reconstructed is a Face of distinction in a distinction of relationship that may rank at the top of any comparative scale, yet be neither the distinguished Face nor distinguished relationship Face to face. In other words, the measure of both the Face and the relationship cannot be distinguished from human shaping and construction. This is the paradigmatic consequence because "the measure we use" determines as *un-distinguished* the Face we listen to and as

indistinguishable what we hear, just as the process was defined unequivocally by Jesus (Mk 4:24).

The critical implication of the primacy of relationship that emerges within the distinguished Face is the reality that the primacy is not of just any type of relationship but the primacy of distinguished relationship unfolded by the distinguished Face. This critical relational implication necessitates that the distinguished relationship together is defined only by God's terms and cannot emerge from human terms, despite how referentially certain its theological shape or doctrinal construction.

If in any way we diminish the relational context of God's self-disclosure and/or minimize the relational process of God's communicative action, then the covenant and *torah* become 'disembodied', 'de-relationshiped' or *un*-distinguished from the whole of God's formative intention for both the covenant and *torah* just for whole relationship together (cf. 2 Cor 3:14; Mt 5:17-18; Acts 13:14-16). That is, they become fragmented from God's intentions for the covenant relationship of love and God's whole terms for this distinguished relationship (Dt 7:6-13; 39:16), thus become rendered to human shaping (cf. Dt 4:2). Moreover, God's self-disclosure from outside the universe in the incarnation within the human context, and his extension on the Damascus road, are also diminished or minimized to mere event (e.g. the Christ event), situation and circumstance (e.g. Christophany), situated in their surrounding contexts. This reduction disengages from their integral relational dynamic composing the experiential reality and relational significance of God's self-disclosure in thematic communicative action—in other words, disengaging from the relational dynamic that has been enacted by the whole of God even before creation and has unfolded since creation in God's vulnerable presence and relational involvement.

The issue then involving the face of God also involves the following: Either God's face has turned relationally to us, or our face is turning relationally away from God's, which includes keeping relational distance. The related question raised is whether we have received this turn from the distinguished Face or if we actually in relational function are turning from our own face that is distinguished by the whole of God's creative and relational action. This raises related issues involving three of our most essential views:

1. How we define the human person and determine relationships (our theological anthropology).
2. How we define the person of Jesus (our Christology).
3. How we determine the relationship that connects Jesus' person and human persons (our gospel).

How we define the person and determine relationships are interrelated issues at the heart of what unfolds both in human life and in the Face from outside the universe embodied in human context for the gospel. Theological anthropology, for example, is integral for *imago Dei* (image of God) that the face of Jesus distinguished conclusively (2 Cor 4:4,6), and that emerges from our face when distinguished by God's creative-relational action (2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10; cf. Ps 139:14). Therefore, what unfolds further determines either the definitive identity formation of God's family, or the making of an identity problem, even crisis. These are issues and questions by necessity addressed in this study because they were necessarily addressed by persons in Scripture, both human and divine.

Along with the counter-challenge question at the top of this chapter that is ongoingly raised ‘from below’, the face of God asks his own questions. These are questions which expose or reveal, depending on how they are asked. God’s questions are relational questions which either expose reduced ontology and function and challenge the underlying interpretive framework (the worldview from inside the universe), or they reveal the whole of God and the necessary interpretive framework (the worldview from outside the universe) to be whole with God, live whole in the human context and make whole the human condition.

The face of God exposes and reveals by asking these questions:

1. “*Where are you?*” (Gen 3:9) Emphasis is added because this is not a referential question seeking information about their location. This question exposes how those persons have redefined their person from the inner-out whole person in the image of God to the outer-in reduced self of human shaping and construction; and how these redefined individuals attempt to determine relationship with God on their reductionist terms, at a relational distance—“because I was naked, *redefined from outer in*, and I hid myself *relationally*” (v.10). The relational consequence is fragmented, separated or broken relationships: the human condition and problem.
  
2. “*What are you doing here?*” (1 Kgs 19:9,13) Emphasis added on the same basis as above. The question exposes Elijah’s theological anthropology in doing what he was—a position that was contrary both to the whole ontology of *who* and *what* he was and to the whole function of *how* he needed to be to live and make whole in his human context, not relative to his situation and circumstances. When one’s theological anthropology does not determine whole ontology and function from inner out, then these become defined and determined by terms from outer in, as from the surrounding context.
  
3. “*Who is this that speaks for me by words without knowledge?*” (Job 38:2) As discussed earlier about Job, this question is less an epistemic issue than a relational issue that exposes Job’s lack of direct relational involvement Face to face in the relational epistemic process and its relational consequence; thus Job’s use of referential words for information only about God which he used as a substitute incorrectly for knowledge of God. The question also reveals the necessary epistemic process to know relationally who, what and how God is, and the necessary interpretive framework to engage God in this relational epistemic process.
  
4. “*Why are you talking about that? ...still not perceive or understand [syniemi, put the pieces together for whole understanding]? ...hearts relationally distant? ...eyes and fail to see other than outer in? ...ears, and fail to hear relational language and messages? ...not remember my whole person involved in relational work? Do you not yet syniemi?*” (Mk 8:17-21). The dynamic involved here is in contrast to his interaction with the Samaritan woman. Jesus exposes their interpretive lens determining what they pay attention to and the primary matters they ignore, thereby reducing their epistemic process to a hermeneutical impasse unable to *syniemi*, that is, to integrate Jesus’ relational work, relational language and words for whole understanding. What Jesus exposes then is

critical for how the person (human and divine) is defined and how relationship together is determined. His following questions further expose reductionism.

5. “Do *you* also wish to *have relational distance*?” (Jn 6:67) This question was relational language focused on their whole person that the disciples answered with only referential language, which exposed their limited basis for how they defined Jesus (by having “the words of eternal life”) and determined their relationship (by “believe and know” in referential terms, not relational terms, vv.68-69). In spite of their commitment to follow Jesus, the implication of their reduced ontology and function resulted in the following relational consequence of major significance that should concern all engaged not only in intensive discipleship but also in biblical studies and the theological task.

6. “Don’t you *know me*, even after I have been *vulnerably present and relationally involved with you* such a long time?” (Jn 14:9, NIV) Jesus exposes the insufficiency of conventional epistemology focused on referential terms from outer in, and he reveals the necessity of the deeper epistemology in relational terms from inner out. “How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?” The Father is distinguished only in the qualitative interpretive framework of the whole of God’s relational context and process. Any disciple or scholar must by nature have both compatibility with this relational context and congruence in this relational process in order to *know* the whole of God in relationship Face to face. Any other epistemic context and process is referential merely for the transmission of information, of which these disciples had a large quantity about Jesus without knowing him. The primary issue here is relationship, and epistemology is only second to it since the deeper epistemology can emerge just from the depth of relationship engaged.

7. “Do *you love me* more than *any and all love*?” (Jn 21:15-17) Jesus was not asking for love in comparative terms that exceeds all others. The distinguished Face distinguished love in relationship together only on God’s relational terms, which the Face communicated with his vulnerable presence and relational involvement both while on the cross (i.e. by his relational words, not referential words) and during his footwashing. In both moments Peter’s own face made a turn from the Face and maintained his relational distance—relationally turned from the Face equally as much in his denials at the cross as in his refusal to let Jesus wash his feet, in spite of his earlier referential confessions and declarations of faith (e.g. Jn 6:68-69; Mt 16:16; Mk 14:29,31). Now the distinguished Face challenged Peter’s interpretive framework and theological assumptions both of his own anthropology and of Jesus himself, which signified Peter’s attempt to determine their relationship together on Peter’s terms, not God’s. This is the whole relational context and process of Jesus’ question. And Jesus reveals by his relational language: The reciprocal nature of God’s terms for relationship is the ongoing depth of relational involvement constituted by distinguished love; nothing less and no substitutes distinguished the reciprocal relational involvement in whole relationship Face to face—made definitive from the beginning in the covenant of love, with the summary commandments of love and ultimately by the distinguished Face embodied in human context.

8. “Why do *you* persecute *me*?” (Acts 9:4) Jesus’ relational question exposes *where* and *what* Paul was as a person at that point in his faith, thereby exposing his theological assumptions of anthropology and of God. And Jesus reveals directly to Paul *who* the whole of God is, *what* God’s whole ontology is, and *how* God’s whole function is by the relational messages implied in his question that identified his own person as relationally being directly persecuted. This exposure and revelation converged for the relational outcome unfolded in Paul’s whole person solely because of the qualitative significance of God’s revelation in relational language, not referential language. In referential terms, the question could easily have been ignored, dismissed, or even refuted by the counter-question, “Did God really say that?” Instead, in relational terms Paul received hermeneutic correction for *syniemi* and thus epistemological clarification of the whole, God’s whole family on God’s relational terms.

In the above questions, Adam, Elijah, Job and Paul experienced the depth of God’s presence and involvement, which integrally exposes reduced ontology and function and reveals their wholeness. Along with this, Peter and the other disciples experienced the depth of reciprocal relational accountability and the qualitative interpretive framework which God’s presence and involvement necessitate in relationship together. This relational dynamic and outcome make evident the relational purpose of the whole of God’s creative and communicative action from the beginning in three key definitive issues for all practice inside the universe:

1. The significance of the person God presents in self-disclosure to others—distinguished and whole from inner out, nothing less and no substitutes, thereby the vulnerable presentation of the whole person.
2. The integrity and quality of God’s communication to those others—in whole relational language, not fragmentary referential language, therefore whose word can be counted on to be true to his whole person (what is referred to as righteous).
3. The depth level of relationship God engages in the relational process of self-disclosure and communication with those others—vulnerably present with his whole person to be relationally involved in intimate relationship together Face to face.

These three key definitive issues for God are also key issues for all human practice in the created order and notably of faith, whose importance will further unfold in this study.

God asks these questions, even of us today, because the face of God has been distinguished in his presentation, communication and level of relational engagement. God wants us to pay attention to the turn from this distinguished Face for the new relationship together in wholeness—neither to miss the turn from the Face nor to turn from the Face. This raises questions for God which also need to be asked and addressed openly, open even in one’s presuppositions or with a hermeneutic of suspicion yet not with the predisposition of the counter-challenge question. These questions involve the identity of the distinguished Face embodied in the human context.

While the embodied face of Jesus was distinctly Jewish, and his predominant surrounding context was Jewish Galilee and Judea, the person Jesus presented (who and what) and how he interacted at the various levels of social discourse were a function not

of the dominant Jewish identity. That is to say, Jesus functioned in a qualitatively different way than prevailing Judaism, yet he was fully compatible with OT faith and congruent with the relational teaching of Scripture—to be distinguished from the referential terms commonly used for Scripture. Jesus was uniquely both part of and distinguished from the religious mainstream. As a result, his identity clearly distinguished his significance from the prevailing majority, including from the broader context pervaded with Greco-Roman influence. It is insufficient, therefore, to define the whole of Jesus' identity from human contextualization.

This is what the Samaritan woman discovered in a critical interaction with Jesus that disclosed the strategic shift of the thematic relational response by the face of God. The person Jesus presented to her was more than countercultural when he asked her for a drink. Despite the prevailing constraints at this level of social discourse, the whole of Jesus' identity emerges and is clearly distinguished because neither Jesus kept the expected relational distance nor the woman avoided this unique and significant opportunity to engage him further and deeper—that is, much further and deeper than she or his disciples could have expected. In response to his request, she responded: “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” (Jn 4:9-26). This person engages Jesus in an epistemic process with a referential question that defines two key issues: (1) her self-definition of being *less* than Jesus based on a theological anthropology of structural outer-in distinctions in a comparative system of inequality; and (2) she defined Jesus merely on the basis of human contextualization, shaped by the interpretive lens of her theological anthropology. The face of God, however, is disclosing the strategic shift of God's thematic relational response in this critical interaction, in which she is given direct access to the Face to engage in the relational epistemic process. She responds without caution: “*Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob who saw God face to face?*” Emphasis added to understand the relational dynamic unfolding. Without letting her theological assumptions determine the answers, she openly engages the Face in the relational epistemic process with both an epistemological question and an ontological question. The relational outcome was the hermeneutic correction of her theological anthropology and the epistemological clarification of her theology of the face of God, which deepened the theology of Face to face from Jacob's experience because of the whole of God's strategic shift in the distinguished Face embodied—from a place (“called *Peniel*,” and “this mountain...Jerusalem,” v.20) to the person (“I am he,” v.26).

While this is the expected relational outcome for those who engage Jesus for his full identity, there is also an expected relational consequence for those who engage Jesus in a limited identity. To define Jesus on the limited basis of human contextualization—which could include church tradition—becomes problematic for his followers own identity. This can perhaps even precipitate an identity crisis since Jesus' identity will be definitive for *who* his followers are or become. The clarity and depth of Jesus' identity then become a christological contingency that defines his followers' identity and determines their discipleship. This, of course, makes the significance of their life and practice (even in the academy) contingent on their working Christology, whether or not it involves the distinguished Face for involvement in relationship together Face to face, and whether or not it may lead to an identity problem.



An identity problem begins to emerge when the identity (or relational truth, not referential truth) of Jesus is incomplete of the whole person he distinguished—for example, focused only on his referential teachings or examples disengaged from his whole person in relationship. A fragmented or refracted face of Jesus has neither the clarity nor the depth necessary to be whole to avoid an identity problem. This process is demonstrated by Jesus' early disciples. After multiple occasions of witnessing Jesus healing various diseases and cast out demons, his disciples had a dramatic experience of Jesus disarming a storm on the Sea of Galilee (Mk 4:35-41). Their collective response was "Who is this?" Their question is to be compared and contrasted to Jesus' query of them later about his identity (Mt 16:15). Both queried the identity of Jesus. Yet, Jesus focused on a relational epistemic process for a deeper epistemology (cf. Mt 16:17) in contrast to an apparent conventional epistemic process the disciples utilized. Their actions suggest an imbalanced dependence on reason. Rather than pursue this question with Jesus and God's self-disclosure, the disciples pondered it among themselves. This was a consistent pattern by them, which cannot be adequately explained by sociocultural practice or by the tradition of rabbinic students because *how* Jesus was with them radically altered both of those constraints. Yet, in numerous situations they failed to understand what Jesus meant or what was happening to him, and each time they refrained from engaging him in the relational epistemic process (see Mk 8:14-16, Jn 4:27,32-33, Mk 9:32, Lk 18:34, Jn 12:16, cf. Lk 24:12). Each of these interactions was an opportunity for the disciples to deeply understand the identity of who Jesus is, but they failed to pursue further their initial query: "Who is this?"

Though certainly unexpected to happen to Jesus' original disciples—a more reasonable expectation for the Samaritan woman—the relational consequence is predictable as Jesus' questions above exposed. And even though Jesus distinguished his Face to them in relational terms for the deeper epistemology, they only heard referential language transmitting information *about* him in a conventional epistemology to signify their incomplete Christology. In spite of the ongoing turn from the Face vulnerably extended in relational involvement with them, it can be said that in actual relational function their faces turned from the Face to avoid the relational involvement together Face to face, even if unintentional (cf. Peter at his footwashing). This is the relational consequence of an incomplete Christology, which may be well-defined in referential terms but lacks the clarity and depth of wholeness to be qualitatively-rationally significant, either for Jesus or his gospel.

This was not the process, experience and outcome for Paul from the Damascus road. When the Face turned and distinguished his person to Paul, Paul asked openly, even with his presupposition of Jewish monotheism, "*Who are you?*" (Acts 9:5). Paul was not asking for a mere explanation of the charge against him implied in Jesus' question (v.4). He wanted the clarity and depth of the identity of the distinguished Face confronting his face in the relational significance beyond what was common to Paul, even to his Jewish mysticism. The question Paul asked openly in relational terms was wholly and ongoingly responded to by the vulnerable presence and relational involvement of the distinguished Face to compose Paul's complete Christology (cf. Acts 26:16; Eph 3:4-5; 2 Cor 4:6; Col

2:2-3). This was the full identity of the whole of Jesus, whose distinguished Face transformed Paul's identity in the necessary whole ontology and function (cf. Col 2:9-10; 2 Cor 3:18); and on this basis, Paul further embodied the theology and hermeneutic for the whole gospel—nothing less of Jesus and no substitute for his gospel.

Christology is at the heart of the face of God who turned and shined, therefore at the heart of all theology and of the identity of those receiving the turn from the distinguished Face. Any reduction of Christology by a fragmentation or refraction of the whole face of Jesus creates an identity problem. Accordingly, the response to such questions as “Who is this?” “Are you greater than?” and “Who are you?” needs to have complete theological determination. Such a determination requires the interpretive framework compatible for the relational epistemic process to *syniemi* the complete Christology definitive of the qualitative and relational significance distinguished by the face of Jesus and his gospel. This necessitates having the theological anthropology that at its heart integrally involves the complete Christology. The questions God asks and those asked of God converge in the integral relational dynamic to expose and reveal what is needed to define the depth of our theology (i.e. our Christology) as well as to determine the depth of our relational response (i.e. our theological anthropology) to the turn from the Face with our face in nothing less and no substitute of relationship together Face to face. Therefore, these questions are critical to address and should not be diminished or minimalized—or ignored at the risk of unintentionally making a turn from the Face.

The above questions, and variations of them, are important to listen to, to pay attention to what is heard, to answer and also to ask, even for us today. Their relevance for us is to help bring to light our own theological assumptions, most notably of theological anthropology and Christology; and then to examine these assumptions to disclose any need for their further clarity and depth—perhaps, just as for the Samaritan woman and Paul, for epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction.

Such questions from God, or variations, as “Where are you?” and “What are you doing here?” ask us to define *who* and *what* we are, based on our theological anthropology. To ask “Who is this?” is a theological question from us, and “Who are you?” is more of a relational question; “Are you greater than?” involves both. Yet, these questions, or variations, from us involve our working Christology and our assumptions about the gospel; and they need to be pursued in the relational epistemic process with the compatible interpretive framework for the further clarity and depth necessary to distinguish wholeness in our theology and practice. This wholeness is necessary: for our theology to confidently answer Jesus' question in relational language, “Do you also wish to have relational distance from the distinguished Face?”; and for our relational response to be vulnerably present and relationally involved in wholly answering the Face's question Face to face, “Do you love me in distinguished relational terms, not comparative referential terms?”

Either the turn *from* the Face or a *turn* from the Face is the challenge facing us to meet. As the Samaritan woman experienced with the Face's disclosure in the relational epistemic process of the whole of God' strategic shift—and had her theological anthropology corrected and theology of the Face clarified and deepened—she would have sung with the poet, ‘the Face’:

You are not in 'place'  
You are the face,  
less Object to observe  
O, Subject to receive—  
    openly present, relationship involved.  
Your face turned to us  
and shines on us,  
bringing change for the *new*  
relationship in wholeness together  
    with the Face—Face to face.

“Did God really distinguish his Face?”



## Chapter 3 Presenting and *Re*-presenting the Person – Part 1

**I have revealed you to those...have made you known to them.**

John 17:6, 26 (NIV)

When Paul directly asked Jesus “Who are you?” (Acts 9:5), he received a relational response beyond referential information about Jesus to have the relational epistemic connection to know Jesus. When Jesus unequivocally declared to the Father “I have made your name known” and “made your name known to them” (Jn 17:6,26), he was not referring to the transmission of information about the name but summarized his relational communication of the whole person to know only in relationship. As discussed in the previous chapter, the name is indistinguishable from the person in relational language; yet in referential language the person is not always distinguished in the name. Jesus presented only the person, and Paul’s experience of the whole person presented by Jesus defined his Christology.

The person presented can become confusing, however, and this presentation needs to be understood as a composite process influenced by two factors shaping the person presented: (1) the person’s surrounding context and (2) how that person desires to be seen by others in those contexts.<sup>1</sup> Tension is likely between these two influences on the shape of any person presented until that person establishes an identity compatible to, if not congruent with, the surrounding context. The person Jesus presented certainly was neither immune to these influences nor untouched by that tension between them. Yet, how much these two sources of influence shaped the person Jesus presented remains for many a christological problem.

This further challenges us in the ongoing issue of our interpretive framework and the epistemic process we engage, which Jesus already made imperative for seeing, understanding and responding to his whole person (Mk 4:24; Lk 10:21). The reality is that the ‘measure’ we use will determine the Jesus we get. Our ‘measure’, therefore, signifies our theological anthropology that actually antecedes our Christology and underlies the epistemic process of *who* and *what* we learn about or of the person presented, as evidenced by the following: learning either quantitative information about a person from outer in and what he does in situations, or learning qualitative understanding of the person from inner out and how he is involved in relationships; either his referential words and teachings or his relational communication and messages, as a result learning about a less personal and fragmentary person or learning of the personal and whole person. This is the extent of the person defined from the working theological anthropology we use. For the person presented by Jesus, the measure used is clearly definitive that results in either the further and deeper relational outcome (“still more will be given”) or the relational consequence of reductionism (“be taken away”).

If our view of Jesus is to be complete, and thus whole, we need to look to John’s Gospel for primary significance of christological study—which is problematic for a

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<sup>1</sup> For a classic social psychological study to help understand the second influence on this process, see Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959).

historical-critical approach. The Gospel of John provides us with God's view from outside the universe. More than a narrative account of aspects of Jesus' earthly life, John gives us the cosmological view that extends beyond the universe. It is from outside the universe that the Word emerges (not originates) and arrived in human context (Jn 1:1-4, 10). Though quantitatively embodied, the Word was not received relationally because the whole Word functioned qualitatively from inner out, that is, further and deeper than a quantitative interpretive lens (focused outer in) pays attention to, or if it can, it simply ignores. John's Gospel helps us understand that the incarnation of Jesus' person is both an epistemological issue and a hermeneutic issue.

The epistemic process of knowing the person presented is defined by either an outer-in framework primarily in quantitative referential terms, or by an inner-out framework primarily in qualitative relational terms. Interpretation of the life of Jesus is determined by each of these frameworks, and that framework forms our interpretive lens for the extent and depth of Jesus' person it pays attention to or ignores. The consequence or outcome that unfolds is directly correlated to the perceptual-interpretive framework defining the epistemic process engaged and determining the hermeneutic employed. The quantitative framework with its outer-in lens is fragmentary and can only aggregate a view of Jesus from parts or aspects of his person; consequently this christological view is incomplete and lacks the whole person. The qualitative framework with its inner-out lens goes further and deeper in a relational epistemic process of *syniemi* (cf. Mk 8:17) for the whole knowledge and understanding of the person Jesus presented (*synesis*, cf. Col 2:2-4) to receive and connect in relationship together with the whole of God. This includes the three relational messages which deepen the qualitative presence and relational involvement of Jesus' person and deepen our relational response in reciprocal relationship.

Therefore, the epistemological and hermeneutic issues are critical for the Jesus we pay attention to both in and from the beginning, as the evangelist made definitive at the outset. For example, a historical-critical *re-view* of Jesus is only embodied in human contextualization, consequently restricting any account 'in the beginning' particularly from outside the universe. Whereas a foundationalism *under-view* attempts to give account in the beginning and beyond, it also labors under the limitations of similar modernist assumptions; as a result its accounts lack the qualitative and relational significance to be whole. Both approaches result in incomplete and/or distorted Christologies. The inadequacy of such a result then challenges our methodological assumptions in order to let Jesus' person speak for himself; and it further challenges our theological assumptions of what we can know of the person Jesus himself presented, and thereby understand who, what and how God is.

Moreover, if we have moved beyond the obstructive theological assumptions at the heart of 'the unknowability of God' from philosophical theology, then the question becomes 'how knowable is God?' The significance of the answer mainly emerges or submerges with the person Jesus presented. And how his person is to be defined is further correlated to the three key definitive issues for all practice (i.e. in the created order, and notably of faith) discussed in the last chapter:

1. the significance of the person Jesus presented to others
2. the integrity and quality of his communication to those persons
3. the depth level of relationship his person engaged with those persons

What defines the person Jesus presented emerges primarily with these three definitive issues, which integrally unfolds from this chapter and throughout this study.

## Presenting and *Re-presenting*

Since Jesus' self-disclosures are only for relationship (signified by *phaneroo*, Jn 17:6), shared in the whole of God's relational context and process initiated from outside the universe, God's self-disclosures must by their nature be received in that relational context and process. This reciprocal relational dynamic necessary for the relational epistemic process then excludes (if not prevents) our speculations and formulations 'from below' (i.e. from "the wise and the intelligent," Lk 10:21) which signify our terms for the epistemic process, not the involvement of 'vulnerable children' who listen before they speak. Engagement in God's relational context and process involves the reciprocal response that is compatible to openly receive and accordingly be accountable relationally for all of God's self-disclosures in relationship. This compatible response is not the observations of Jesus' person from "the wise and the intelligent," who use an outer-in interpretive framework in a measured (distant or detached) relational connection with the person observed. That type of engagement results in fragmentary information to form the basis for those speculations and formulations *re-presenting* Jesus' person.

The compatible response to God's self-disclosure receives the whole person Jesus presents from inner out, in the same openness of one's own whole person (in child-like significance noted above). Receiving Jesus' person with the openness of the whole person is to be relationally responsible to vulnerably engage Jesus in all his self-disclosures and to fully connect them together in order to understand the whole of who, what and how God is. This understanding from the relational epistemic process is defined by the term *syniemi* denoting putting together the various disclosures by Jesus into its whole, like putting together pieces of a puzzle for a view of the whole picture. We need *syniemi* to understand the whole person Jesus presents in the various pieces of his life and practice, that process which his early disciples failed to engage for deeper understanding (discussed in the previous chap., Mk 8:17). Yet, *syniemi* is a function of the whole person, not merely the mind and the use of reason. The heart's importance to signify the involvement of the whole person is defined by Jesus as fundamental for *syniemi*—"hearts hardened...fail to see...fail to hear" (Mk 8:17-18); and the failure of heart function in those who lacked *syniemi* describes those to whom Jesus spoke in parables (Mt 13:15).

A related term *synesis* denotes the ability to understand concepts and see the relationships between them for the understanding of the whole, whole understanding. Paul's clear purpose for the church was defined for us to have the necessary understanding of the whole (*synesis*, Col 2:2-3; cf. 1:9) in order that we would specifically know (*epignosis*, not just have information about, cf. Eph 1:17) the full significance of the various pieces of the mystery of God disclosed in the distinguished face and person of Jesus the Christ. *Synesis* is inseparable from the relational dynamic of *syniemi* and is thus only a relational outcome, not the result merely from the ability to reason (cf. Col 2:4; Eph 1:18). Paul claimed to have this *synesis* (Eph 3:4) but only as the unequivocal outcome of openly engaging the relational epistemic process from Jesus with the Spirit, which was initiated but not completed on the Damascus road (Gal 1:12; Eph

3:3,5). Yet, not all *synesis* activity is meaningful. During Paul's fight against reductionism in the church and for the whole significance of the person of Jesus ("Has Christ been divided?" 1 Cor 1:13), he reminds us that some *synesis* is fruitless—notably the perception, discernment and comprehension of the rationalists (1 Cor 1:19-21). This suggests that *synesis* from a reductionist interpretive framework, determined 'from below' solely by the effort of human rationality, results in mere epistemological illusions of the whole. While such fragmentary observations and theories may have limited usefulness in particulate matters (e.g. in science), they are insufficient for understanding the whole in the innermost, God's whole and the whole of God in the person Jesus presented. The resulting consequence for Jesus is *re*-presenting his person, as demonstrated at the church in Corinth and down through church history.

*Synesis* is necessary for understanding the whole of Jesus' person as he presented but it is not always sufficient for presenting that person, depending on the 'measure' we use. As defined by Paul's relational purpose for the church, for those who vulnerably seek to know and understand God—as Subject presented, not merely an Object—*synesis* is necessary by the nature of (not out of obligation) relationship together. Hence, *synesis* is the reciprocal relational responsibility for which all Jesus' followers are accountable, and must not by its relational nature be undertaken apart from the relationship. The level of understanding requires engaging the relational epistemic process, which the early disciples above failed to do, notably along with "the wise and the intelligent," even in the academy today. Therefore, *synesis*, *syniemi*, or any other interpretive response, must be engaged in ongoing relational interaction with God for the relational outcome to be of significance for knowing and understanding the whole of God. In relational function for the relational epistemic process, this means the reading, exegesis, interpretation and involvement with Scripture (namely as the communicative Word unfolding) always necessitates being engaged (nonnegotiable) with the Holy Spirit, who mediates the interaction in the relationship—just as Jesus and Paul both made unequivocal (Jn 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-15; 1 Cor 2:10-12). Jesus' followers' relational responsibility defines the reciprocal relational work ongoingly engaged together with the Spirit, and accordingly the Spirit's own relational presence and function are certainly not to be forgotten, diminished or minimized in this relational process, not to mention be given lip-service. Such distinguished involvement also means that the Spirit needs to be pursued as the ultimate determiner for knowing and understanding God Face to face, which includes transforming our relational response to the new relationship together in wholeness promised by the face of God, and now fulfilled by the distinguished Face in the whole person Jesus presented. This is who and what Paul himself experienced from inner out in relationship and therefore further made definitive in the innermost (2 Cor 3:17-18; 4:6).

This understandably raises the issues of subjectivism (and the projections assumed by faith) overtaking reason in the epistemic process, and of reader-response 'in front of' the narrative of the unfolding Word ongoingly dominating the hermeneutic process, and how these matters can be accounted for to allow the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction needed to distinguish the presenting of Jesus' whole person from a substitute *re*-presenting his person. Philosophical theology raises the further question of the use of 'person' to define God in the doctrine of simplicity, since person is associated with assumptions of the human person that essentially re-present



God as not being simple.<sup>2</sup> Similar assumptions can also be used to re-present Jesus' person in our image, which makes evident how our theological anthropology antecedes our Christology and underlies the epistemic process of the Jesus we get.

At the heart of the issues of the person presented is the integral reality of 'presence': that is, the person present beyond the referential terms of the embodied Object—who can only be observed within the limits of those terms—to have the presence of Subject in relational terms, who is vulnerably involved to be experienced within the context of relationship, and therefore who is inseparable from the distinguished Face engaged in relationship Face to face (cf. *paneh*, presence, face, Ex 33:14). How the person Jesus presented is defined and how Jesus' person's presence is defined are both directly correlated to the three key definitive issues noted earlier, whose definition then also emerges with these related questions:

1. Is there the significance of presence in the person presented?
2. Is there the integrity and quality of presence in the person communicating?
3. Is there the depth of presence in the person relationally involved?

The integral reality of presence does not emerge from the Object, who is neither vulnerably present nor relationally involved but embodied simply to be observed and the object of any faith, theological and biblical study. In critical contrast, it is the Subject's vulnerable closeness and relational involvement that ongoingly defines this integral reality; and the reality of his presence only has significance in relationship, which then necessitates reciprocity compatible with his presence—as opposed to mere belief in the Object. This may require reworking our theological anthropology of defining the person from outer in to inner out and of restoring the primacy of relationship. Moreover, the Subject-person's presence opens to others an integral reality beyond what may appear probable, seem logical or exceed the limits of convention. This is problematic for narrowed-down thinking in a conventional mindset (e.g. from tradition, a quest for certainty, or even just habit), consequently the depth of his presence is often reacted to by attempts to reduce it to the probable, the logical, and to renegotiate it to familiar (and more comfortable) referential terms,<sup>3</sup> or reacted to simply by avoiding his presence—all of which refocuses the primary attention to secondary things about his person at the loss of his real presence. Openness to his presence requires a compatible interpretive framework and lens which are conjointly qualitative and relational.

On this basis then, 'presence' is least observed by those at a relational distance from the person observed and is most experienced by those relationally involved with the person presented. This is the reality that Jesus made definitive in Luke 10:21, which we need to take seriously for the epistemic process if we truly want to know and understand God. The relational connection of those involved with his presence emerges in this process: when it is necessarily made from one's whole person without the absence of mind or loss of reason, and made in the hermeneutical cone with the epistemic humility affirming the primary determination by the Word to communicate whole knowledge and understanding—while openly engaged with any of one's fragmentary information for the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction necessary to be whole in one's

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<sup>2</sup> See Brian Davies, "Simplicity," in Charles Taliaferro and Chad Meister, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 44-45.

<sup>3</sup> In life in general, McGilchrist locates this activity in the dominance of the left brain hemisphere. *The Master and his Emissary*, 140.

knowledge and understanding. In ongoing reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit in this relational epistemic process, the above process adequately minimizes the human shaping and construction of the person Jesus presents and, most importantly, consistently allows for the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction needed for any re-presenting of Jesus' person.

This relational epistemic process with the Spirit was evident in Paul's witness for the wholeness in the gospel (1 Cor 2:12-13; Gal 1:11-12) and in his theology (2 Cor 3:17-18; Eph 2:14,22), both of which he did not fragment or reduce by comparative referential terms and human shaping (cf. 2 Cor 10:12) but, with epistemic humility, submitted to the primary determination by the Word (cf. 1 Cor 4:6-7). The relational outcome of presenting the whole of Jesus' person and his presence is the whole understanding (*synesis*) and specific relational knowledge (*epignosis*) of the whole of God; and this was Paul's relational purpose for the church in wholeness (Col 2:2-3).

## The Emerging Person

Apparently even as a boy at twelve Jesus demonstrated the *synesis* of God's whole, that amazed those present in his reciprocal Q&A interaction with the teachers in the temple (Lk 2:41-52). Revisiting Jesus as a boy at the temple, we get our initial view of his person and what shaped the person Jesus presented even at that young age. Just prior to entering adulthood (beginning at thirteen in Jewish culture), this boy of twelve emerged in an improbable manner as a person distinguished from his sociocultural, religious, kinship group, household and parental contexts. This is not to say that Jesus' identity formation was independent of those influences but to establish that his person was not defined by them. Jesus' primary identity emerges at this point.

When Jesus' parents finally realized that he was missing from their caravan returning home from Jerusalem, they went back to find him at the temple. This boy was AWOL (absent without leave/permission), and his parents clearly let him know what was custom and legitimately expected of him (v.48). Yet, while respecting them and affirming his involvement in their surrounding context (v.51), Jesus simply asked them the questions (likely as an extension of God's questions and a precursor to his questions, discussed in the previous chap.): "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (v.49). Hearing "must be in my Father's house" probably was shocking to them—especially for Joseph in a normative patriarchal family. Thus it would be reasonable that "they did not understand..." (*syniemi*, v.50)—after all, at this stage they had insufficient pieces to put together to understand the person Jesus presented (cf. Jn 2:1-5, to be discussed shortly). And apparently Jesus was patiently accommodating of them since he did not press the issue, at least at this stage (cf. v.51 and later in Jn 2:6-8).

While Mary and Joseph could not yet learn and understand the person Jesus presented, we have the opportunity to engage the relational epistemic process with the Spirit to begin the process of *syniemi* for the *synesis* of the whole of Jesus' person and thereby the whole of God. When Jesus said "I must be in my Father's house," he was neither identifying being in a certain place (like church today) nor merely defining certain things for him to do (as serving has become). These activities easily become reductionist

substitutes that do not distinguish the significance of Jesus' action (cf. Mt 21:12-16). This interaction reveals that even before adulthood Jesus distinguished the person he presented in human contexts and clearly declared in relational terms (not referential terms) the identity of who and what he is. How so?

"I must be in my Father's house" reveals the significance of the person presented and disclosed in part how Jesus defined himself. By declaring "I must" (*dei*, necessary by the nature of things) we can understand the necessity of his action because of the nature of who and what he is. *Dei* is to be distinguished from *opheilo* which merely denotes a debt of obligation or acting under compulsion. *Opheilo* may have prescribed for Jesus his identity shaped by his surrounding context but *dei* identified his whole person based on who and what he is. Thus the nature of who and what he is by necessity defined for Jesus how to be distinguished from primary determination by human contexts. With his declaration "I must be" (*eimi*, to be, verb of existence and a copula connecting subject and predicate) we have a clear sense of this emerging person—a person who must be his whole person regardless of other contextualizing influences and pressures constraining him. And if the use of *eimi* as a verb of existence also has the sense of *ginomai* (to be, begin to be, enter into a state of being), this provides us with the ontology of the person Jesus presented and the personhood he practiced—his whole ontology and function.

Furthermore, "to be" (*eimi* as a copula) also connects Jesus' person to the primary context which did define him: "be in my Father's house." The temple (or church today) is not a mere place but represents where God dwells intimately for relationship together (2 Sam 7:5-7; Jn 14:23; 1 Cor 3:16; Eph 2:21-22; cf. Mk 11:17). In this disclosure Jesus addresses two critical issues about the presentation of his person: (1) *how* that person is defined, and also (2) *what* defines that person. *How* his whole person was defined was not primarily by human contextualization (though secondary influence remained) but by a further and deeper context: "be *in*" identifies the whole of God's relational context of family. It is *in* this distinguished context that the main significance of the person presented is found—making secondary the influence of all human contexts. And *what* defined the person Jesus presented from this context was not about what he did (or the role he served) but rather who he was by being in relationship with his Father: "to be in my Father is *who* I am and by that nature *how* I must be," to paraphrase Jesus.

In spite of all the things Jesus did—by which we usually define him—it was this relationship that defined him (cf. Jn 5:19-21; 8:28; 10:38b; 14:20a; 17:21). As Jesus presented as early as twelve, "*who* his person is" was not Joseph and Mary's son but the Son of his Father together in the whole of God (the Trinity); and "*what* his person is" was neither defined by human contexts nor by what he did in those contexts. To be defined primarily by human contexts and what one does in those contexts would be the result of reductionism; and re-defining Jesus' person on these terms makes evident a theological anthropology of human shaping and construction which antecedes Christology to represent Jesus' person. Yet, even before adulthood, in the midst of tension with reductionist influence, the whole of Jesus' person emerged.

This whole person also emerged on the Damascus road as the person Jesus presented to Paul, whose presence must by the nature of his person be understood further and deeper than a Christophany. Though Jesus' parents did not understand the whole person presented vulnerably before them, Paul was accountable to *syniemi*, as we are. By presenting his whole person and presence to others, Jesus' communication and level of

relational engagement with them challenged their theological assumptions, notably their theological anthropology defining their ontology and function and the related critical issues of *how* they are being defined and *what* is defining them. Theological anthropology and Christology begin their integral convergence with Jesus' person and presence emerging to make definitive theological anthropology, rather than theological anthropology re-presenting Jesus and re-defining Christology. The latter is from reductionism, that which ongoingly challenged the person Jesus presented to submerge his presence—a process that we need to understand clearly before continuing.

## Reductionism Presented Explicitly

At the heart of Paul's confrontation by Jesus' person on the Damascus road was 'the presence of the whole', Jesus' presence. In the presence of the whole that Jesus' person presents, two critical dynamics are put into motion: one dynamic is the exposure of any and all which are less than whole and thereby are in contrast and/or conflict with the whole; the other dynamic is the emergence of that which seeks to diminish, minimalize, fragment, separate or otherwise break down the whole, and consequently which is unequivocally opposed to the whole. What is exposed and what emerges in the presence of the whole is reductionism. Paul's confrontation by the presence of the whole exposed the reductionism that defined who and what his person had been, and that determined how his faith had become. This dynamic (discussed further in the next chap.) was critical not only to expose Paul's reductionism but necessary to make him whole. Paul's transformation from reductionism to wholeness is at the heart of what became his signature fight both for the wholeness in the gospel (and the presence of the whole) and against reductionism.

Paul understood from his own experience with the presence of the whole that any and all forms of reductionism are always positioned against wholeness, the whole, God's whole, the whole of Jesus—implied in "why do you persecute me?" That is the function of reductionism, the fact of which has no significance without the presence of the whole. This presence is *who* and *what* Paul further extended in the relational dynamic signifying Jesus *into* Paul. It was a given-reality for the whole of Jesus and Paul that reductionism emerged in their presence and had to be exposed.

Reductionism challenges the ontology of the whole person (divine and human), seeking to redefine the person based on secondary aspects (parts) from quantitative outer-in functions such as what the person does and has—without the qualitative significance of the heart signifying the whole person from inner out. This fragments both the ontology of *who* and *what* the person is and *how* the person functions, with the consequence of reduced ontology and function. This reduced contrast from wholeness was demonstrated in the primordial garden: "were both naked and were not ashamed"—inner out (Gen 2:25), and "were naked and *covered* themselves"—outer in (3:7). This reduced person then turns to substitutes for ontological simulation of the whole person (e.g. with "fig leaves...loin cloths") and thereby interacts with others without the depth of vulnerable presence and relational involvement necessary for relationships together to be whole (e.g. "I hid myself," "*she* gave me fruit from the tree," 3:10-12). The loss of wholeness for both person and persons in the primacy of relationship are consequential of reductionism.

In reductionism, the underlying theological assumptions of the person and of their relationships re-defined in this process are based on incomplete or false understanding (“Did God really say that?”), which essentially are lies serving as epistemological illusions (“You will not *be reduced*...you will be *greater* like God,” “was good for *development*...to make one wise,” 3:4-6)—all of which further serves the underlying goal of self-determination. The origin of such lies, and thus of reductionism, is understood conclusively in three pivotal interactions with ‘the presence of the whole’ following his baptism. Their review is important to understand the whole of the person Jesus presents and his presence unfolding.

While in the desert fasting for forty days, Jesus, “full of the Holy Spirit...led by the Spirit” (Lk 4:1, signifying the whole of God’s relational context and process), is hungry (Mt 4:2) and encounters Satan. In these three interrelated interactions (temptations, tests), the importance of heart function from inner out for the whole person and its significance in relationship with the whole of God definitively emerge in what are basic relational tests. Matthew’s Gospel (4:1-11) has a different order than Luke’s (4:1-13) but we will examine Luke’s order for its progression in this relational process.

### **First Relational Test:**

In the first test (Lk 4:3), Satan’s reductionist approach is apparent in what he tries to get Jesus to focus on: “stone to bread.” His test may appear to be about food and the circumstance of Jesus’ hunger, or even a test of Jesus’ deity (“if you are the Son of God...”) to prove what Satan certainly already knew. These initial words (“if you are”), however, challenged not the factual truth of Jesus’ whole person, the reality of which Satan is incapable to diminish. Rather Satan’s words seek to diminish the functional integrity of the presence of this whole person by trying specifically to confuse the basis on which Jesus defines his person. Satan ingeniously uses this moment, influenced by Jesus’ circumstances (hungry), to get at something deeper and more consequential: to re-define his person based on reductionist terms through the means of self-determination. More implicitly then, Satan is trying to get Jesus to see his own person in a reductionist way based on what he does (stone to bread) and has (resources, power), which Jesus exposes by responding: “*a person [anthropos, man or woman, which implies all of us] does not live by bread alone*” (4:4).

Since the tendency is to look at Jesus’ response referentially (“It is written”) apart from its relational context, the usual interpretation of his words is to prioritize the spiritual aspect of life over the physical (material), thus inadvertently substituting dualism for the whole person—as if Jesus spoke from a Greek philosophical framework. That would be too simplistic and inadequate to meet the challenge of Satan’s test. Jesus was neither reducing the whole of life nor the person into different aspects (parts) with the spiritual at the top of the priority list. By his use of reductionism, however, that is exactly how Satan was trying to get Jesus to see his person and function accordingly—which included the reduction of turning stone to bread as a quantitative miracle without the qualitative significance of the person it points to (the purpose of miraculous signs). Satan was trying to reduce the whole of Jesus’ person to only a part of himself because he knew the relational consequence this would have.

Satan cultivates this reductionism with the influential lie, which prevails today as the human norm of self-determination: *The need and importance to see ourselves and*

*therefore to define the person by what we do and have, as well as to define our life and practice by situations and circumstances.* This perceptual-interpretive framework narrows down the epistemic field and gives priority only to the parts (or aspects) of the person and relationships, consequently re-defining theological anthropology, whose parts then in the function of faith make up ontological simulation and epistemological illusion. The consequence of this process becomes a life and practice with reductionist substitutes focused on secondary matter, not the primacy of the whole person and the relationships necessary to be whole. The prevalence of secondary matter and its preoccupation are clear indicators of the prevailing influence of reductionism. This is increasingly evident as Jesus' presence of the whole unfolds.

As Paul learned dramatically and painfully, when we define our person according to this lie, we also define others (notably including Jesus) in the same re-defined theological anthropology. That is the Jesus we *get*. When our epistemic field is narrowed down to fragmentary aspects of Jesus, the only result is an incomplete Christology with a refracted view of Jesus. Furthermore, the truth (communicated words, not propositions) of God is nullified by this lie of self-determination because in our life and practice we function as if God also sees us and defines us in relationship on our terms shaped and constructed 'from below'. As our whole person gets reduced, our life and practice gets reduced to secondary things, situations and circumstances, which is what Jesus experienced from many persons. When our attention is on secondary things, situations and circumstances, Satan essentially shifts our focus from inner out to outer in and away from the primacy of relationships. Then we function in all of our relationships (notably with God and the person Jesus presented) based on these secondary criteria instead of the importance of the whole person and the primacy of vulnerably involved relationships. Jesus refused to participate in this common process of self-determination, so Satan was unable to get Jesus to make this shift.

Paul appeared to make this reductionist shift back to the outer in when he defended his ministry (2 Cor 10-12). Yet here he merely indulged the Corinthians to expose the prevalence of reductionism in the church (10:7,12; 11:13-15). Later, Paul made conclusive the results of a narrowed-down epistemic field delimited by self-determination and its consequence on the epistemic process to know the person Jesus vulnerably presented (Phil 3:4-10). Paul engaged in neither ontological simulation nor epistemological illusion.

This makes explicit the two major goals of Satan, masked by a conventional goal of self-determination (seen initially in the primordial garden), which he failed to accomplish in his first test of Jesus:

1. To reduce the whole of the person, specifically by a quantitative (outer-in) focus on what we do and have, thus functionally separating or distancing us from the qualitative (inner-out) importance of the heart signifying the whole person—the person created in the qualitative image of the whole of God.
2. To separate or distance us from functioning in the relationships necessary to be whole, specifically by our function with a diminished, distant or detached heart, thus without our whole person, in order to diminish (or prevent) vulnerable involvement and deeper relationship with God—the reduction of relationship created in likeness of the relational ontology of the whole of God.

Satan initiated reductionism for an ontology and function based on lies—for example, false assumptions of theological anthropology, inadequate methodologies of the epistemic process with a narrowed epistemic field, incomplete practices without qualitative and relational significance—which he generates (as the author of lies, Jn 8:44) for this twofold purpose. In Satan’s challenge of God’s whole, he uses the process of reductionism therefore to effectively formulate two influential competing substitutes for whole ontology and function to accomplish his goals: one, an *ontological simulation* of the whole of God without the qualitative significance of the heart, and, two, an *epistemological illusion* of the truth of God without really knowing the whole of God in relationship Face to face. Consequently, Satan is ongoingly involved both in the work of reductionism as well as in its *counter-relational work*.

Satan’s challenge to whole ontology and function is ongoing and persistent. Yet, we will not fully understand the influence of his presence without qualitative awareness of and relational focus on ‘the presence of the whole’. That is to say, understanding the presence and workings of reductionism develops in direct correlation to understanding the presence and relational work of the whole.

Jesus connects us to the whole with his presence—for which there is no substitute—by the latter half of his response to Satan’s first challenge: “...but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (recorded only in Mt 4:4). Rather than focus on secondary things, situations and circumstances to define a person’s life and limit that person, Jesus’ presence illuminates the need to *focus relationally* by sharing these relational (not referential) words from Deuteronomy 8:3. The original OT words were given “to make you understand” (*yada*, to understand personally, to know intimately) in the Israelites’ hearts (8:2,5) that reductionist life focuses on secondary things, situations and circumstances (fragmentary parts like food in the desert), whereas, in contrast, wholeness in life involves the relational meaning of “by every word....” These words cannot be reduced to mere referential truths, propositions or beliefs, nor limited to the “spiritual” realm; that is, these words cannot be disembodied by referential terms. Consequently, those who adhere to God’s Word also “cannot live by words alone.” By his response Jesus did not echo referential words to suggest the unimportance of food. He illuminated their deeper relational significance beyond merely God’s provision of food to God’s relational response with his own presence. These words are “every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” (8:3). “Mouth” (*peh*, also used as an idiom signifying direct communication with Moses “face to face,” Num 12:8) signifies direct relational communication from God—a communicative act which necessarily engages the relational context involving the relational process for vulnerable connection. In the same relational dynamic, the embodied Word vulnerably discloses (*phaneroo*, not *apokalypto*) his whole person for his followers to experience his presence in the whole of relationship together Face to face. Jesus’ presence of the whole constitutes the primacy of relationship with the whole of God’s vulnerable presence and relational involvement in God’s distinguished relational context and process. Nothing less and no substitutes of this is either sufficient to be or can be whole.

Thus the person Jesus presents to Satan in this relational test is unequivocally making evident in his distinguished ontology and function ‘the presence of the whole’. And as Jesus clearly defines by these relational words, only the whole of God determines by God’s relational terms ‘from above’ the whole person from inner out and the primacy

of relationships necessary to be whole. Self-determination is a false hope, no matter how good “the fruit” looks or “bread” smells.

### **Second Relational Test:**

As this encounter continues, the reductionist occupation and its relational consequence emerge in the second relational test (Lk 4:5-7). As an interrelated extension of the first test, Satan further offers status, authority/power, privilege and possessions to Jesus to use as a means to better define his person based on the quantitative-secondary criteria of reductionism (used in the first test). Modern scenarios of this offer would involve areas of education, vocation, economic security or even the “possession” of certain relationships. Yet the pursuit of these reductionist substitutes comes with a cost that intentionally or unintentionally compromises the integrity of who and what the person is, and thus how that whole person functions in life and practice. This cost includes the relational consequence of less direct qualitative involvement, and as a result diminished depth of relational connection intimately with God Face to face. This compromise and relational consequence were overtly presented to Jesus by Satan in order for us to fully understand the reductionism intrinsic to “if you will worship me” (4:7).

What is overtly presented to Jesus, however, is rarely presented as explicitly to us. In “worship *me*,” ‘me’ can be rendered by any and all reductionist substitutes which essentially serve as idols to define us or determine how we function. If this compromise and relational consequence underlying this pursuit of reductionist substitutes are more obscure for us today, it reflects how Satan tweaks some truths with another major lie: *To have any of these resources will make me a better person, or at least enable me to accomplish more—even with the intention, for example, to better serve God and others.* While there is some truth that such resources can be helpful toward this purpose, in this process of reductionism we see the genius of Satan to blur the distinction between truth and lie. These resources become the legitimated means for confused efforts in self-determination; even though the object in this process may be about God and others, the primary subject remains about *me*. His influence is not accounted for when we give priority to defining the person by secondary aspects of what one does and has over the whole person—and consequently we do not distinguish between the importance of the qualitative inner out and the secondary significance of the quantitative outer in, both in our person and our relationships.

In this second relational test, Jesus counters Satan’s challenge with “Worship the Lord your God and serve him only” (4:8). We tend to hear his words merely as a rule of faith, which we either perceive with only quantitative significance from outer in (e.g. in the activity of what we do) or often take for granted with their familiarity in referential terms (e.g. as an obvious expectation or given obligation). Certainly we would worship God over Satan and serving Satan is not an option, that is, as long as these choices are always straightforward in our situations and circumstances, as it was for Jesus in this second test. We need to understand the relational significance of Jesus’ second response when he declared “worship” and “serve” using relational language, not referential. Because the presence of Jesus’ person is again connecting us to the whole, he opens our focus relationally on the context and ongoing process these relational terms provide. “Worship” and “serve” are not about ‘doing those things’ before and for God; if they were, “worshipping any resources” which will help me better ‘do those things’ would not



be a problem. The acts of worship and serving, however, are relational actions, whose qualitative-relational significance is distinguished by ‘being involved in relationship’ deeply in vulnerable response to God. Jesus’ response in referential terms may signify a mere rule of faith to many, but in relational terms it constitutes the relational imperative necessary for whole relationship together. Jesus is defining as well as exercising the relational work necessary to be whole in order to negate Satan’s counter-relational work that reduces both the whole person from the heart and the primacy of vulnerable relationship necessary to be with the whole of God Face to face, with nothing less and no substitutes.

Moreover, Satan’s influence does not necessarily displace all the forms of worshipping and serving God, it only substitutes their practice with ontological simulation and epistemological illusion (cf. Mt 15:8-9; 2 Cor 11:13-15). Reductionism has no need to contend with these practices if they have no qualitative and relational significance. When the qualitative whole of God—namely, the heart of God and God’s intimately relational nature presented in Jesus’ person and presence—becomes secondary in defining our ontology and determining our function, we shift from inner out to the outer-in of reductionist substitutes for the whole. While this shift may not be apparent in our activity level related to God—but could even increase the activity—reductionist practices invariably further create a subtle shift in the relationship by displacing the functional centrality of God (not in doctrine or as the object of worship and servicing) with the relationship now functionally focused on us, that is, where the parts have priority over the whole. This becomes increasingly an inadvertent process of practicing relationship with God on our terms, which by implication is shaped and constructed ‘from below’, therefore re-defining our theological anthropology and re-presenting Jesus’ person without the presence of the whole. Reducing relationship with God to our terms is a reductionist coup, which is the major issue that emerges in Jesus’ third relational test.

### **Third Relational Test:**

These three interrelated tests in Luke’s order reveal a progression in Satan’s counter-relational work and the comprehensive impact of reductionism. Since, at this stage, Satan has been unable to reduce Jesus’ person by distancing him from his heart or to divert him from intimate relationship with the Father, he now seeks to disrupt directly how that relationship functions, though in quite the opposite way one might expect (Lk 4:9-12).

The dramatics of this scene at the highest point of the Jerusalem temple should not detract from the important relational work going on here. Satan quotes from the Scriptures, yet not in the convention of reductionist proof-texting (4:10,11). He uses this quote (from Ps 91) to challenge Jesus to claim a promise from the Father—a proposal suggested often in the conventional practice of faith. His challenge, however, is not about building trust and taking God at his word. We have to focus deeply on relationship with God and what Satan is trying to do to the relationship.

Jesus counters Satan with the response: “do not put the Lord your God to the test” (*ekpeirazo*, test to the limits, see how far it can go, 4:12). How does this work? Sometimes the dynamics in relationships get complicated or confusing—as in confused efforts in self-determination—and Satan uses reductionism to compound the relational process. God certainly wants to fulfill his promises to us; yet, we must go deeper than the

typical perception of this process which puts it in the referential limits of a proposition signifying reductionism. Limiting a promise from God to a proposition imposes a shift on the relationship that distances it from the whole of God—and the functional centrality of God. That is, we always need the whole (and the relational context of God’s view ‘from above’ beyond oneself) to keep in focus that God fulfills his promises only *on God’s terms* (in the relational process for the whole picture of God’s thematic relational response). If Jesus tried to evoke his Father’s promise in the manner Satan suggested, then he would be determining the relationship on his own terms (with the focus shifted to him and the limits he imposes). This is the real nature of this subtle relational test Jesus refused to do and the ongoing underlying temptation Satan presents to all of us: to test the limits of God and how much we can determine or even control (directly or indirectly) the relationship on our terms, even unintentionally, consequently reducing God’s thematic relational response down to the limit of our situations and circumstances. The false assumption here, of course, is the crucial lie, which functionally (not theologically) pervades our life and practice: *That the relationship is negotiable and that God accepts terms for it other than his own.*

These relational tests continue for Jesus in one form or another as the person he vulnerably discloses is now further presented to others. Yet the presence of this person Jesus presents is always whole and only for relationship, that is, on his terms. Many, including his own disciples, will attempt to renegotiate his whole terms for relationship, only to experience the relational consequence of anything less and any substitute. Because of his irreducible presence and nonnegotiable terms, reductionism and its subtle influence and substitutes will also persist to challenge Jesus, even to follow him in would-be disciples and in the early disciples themselves. Nevertheless, ‘the presence of the whole’ always exposes Satan’s counter-relational work intrinsic to reductionism; and Jesus’ whole ontology and function will clearly distinguish for our ontology and function the relational progression to partake of and participate in the whole of God. This complete (*pleroma* for Paul) Christology illuminates the whole of God’s relational context and process, which Jesus makes definitive for God’s self-disclosure and imperative for relationship together, as his person and presence extends out with nothing less and no substitutes.

## **The Person in Human Contexts**

One of the primary issues many persons (past and present) have with the person Jesus presented is placing him in the correct context, that is, his full relational context. If, in any way, we diminish the relational context of God’s self-disclosure, this reduction reverberates throughout the whole of God’s thematic relational response (e.g. in the covenant and *torah*) to then shape the person in the incarnation—and by extension presented to Paul. Jesus (and Paul) and his (their) gospel emerge or submerge relative to the extent of the incarnation, and what he embodied for the completeness of Christology and fullness of soteriology.

The presentation of Jesus’ whole ontology and function established this deeper context of his whole person and presence—the specific relational context beyond any

human context in which Jesus seeks to involve his followers, determine his disciples and make their ontology and function whole. The person Jesus presented from this deeper relational context is made vulnerable in human contexts as his whole person is relationally extended to others to “Follow me.” After Philip received his call from Jesus, he told Nathanael of the messiah, Jesus of Nazareth (Jn 1:43-51). Nathanael spoke honestly of his skepticism, displaying his bias of a prevailing stereotype disparaging Nazareth: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Nathanael asked a logical question based on the common knowledge of Jesus’ human context. While Nathanael had this bias, he remained open to the epistemic challenge from Philip to “Come and see.” By openly engaging the relational epistemic process even with his bias against Jesus, Jesus did not rebuke him but instead affirmed Nathanael’s relational involvement (“in whom there is no deceit”) by further presenting his own relational involvement with Nathanael (“I saw you...before Philip called you”). The person and presence Jesus presented to Nathanael connected him to the deeper relational context that was necessary and sufficient for Nathanael to know who and what Jesus was (“You are...”). The depth of relational connection in Jesus’ relational context is vital to understand the deep response Nathanael and the others made to Jesus.

In contrast to the person and presence of Jesus whom Nathanael heard, we turn to those who followed Jesus because of what they saw about him: what he did in feeding the five thousand (Jn 6:1-66). Both these followers and Nathanael believed the person Jesus presented was the king of Israel (vv.14-15). Yet, the former saw his person only in human contexts from outer in, which Jesus exposed by his direct communication with them (vv.26-27) and the depth of his relational involvement with them (vv.53-58). Since they defined his person from outer in by human contextualization, the person and presence Jesus presented to them (“Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood”) was no longer acceptable (v.60) or justified following (v.66). The underlying issue, however, is the challenge that Jesus’ person and presence presents in his call to “Follow *me*,” that is, his whole ontology and function, not just what he does and the title he has. The vulnerable presence and relational involvement of his whole person composes ‘the call to be whole’. And the call to be whole in human contexts by necessity involves the call to be redefined, transformed and made whole in the depth of his relational context.

This gets to the heart of theological anthropology and the person God created in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God. The human context is intrinsically shaped and constructed by the human condition, which has reduced both the human person from ‘inner out’ to ‘outer in’ (signified in Gen 2:25; 3:7) and the human relationship from its primacy to fragmentary substitutes (signified in Gen 2:18; 3:10,12). The good news for the human condition in all its contexts is the presence of the whole ontology and function in the person Jesus presented. The whole person, with his presence, calls persons shaped and constructed by the human condition to “Follow *me*” to be redefined back to ‘inner out’, transformed from their reductionism and made whole in the primacy of relationships together—the qualitative image and relational likeness of whom is constituted in the distinguished face of the person Jesus presented in human contexts. This is the face of the gospel whom Paul illuminated and made definitive theologically (2 Cor 4:4,6; Eph 4:24). Yet, this is good news only for those who follow the whole person and presence Jesus presented in the depth of his relational context and process (cf. Jn 6:60,66; 1 Cor 1:22-23; 2 Cor 3:14-18).

In the whole gospel, the relational process of the whole of God's relational context is distinguished by the person and presence of Jesus in human contexts. This raises again the issue of our theological anthropology anteceding our Christology to define Jesus in fragmentary terms, or the complete Christology defining our theological anthropology in wholeness. If his person and presence are not clearly distinguished in and thus *from* human contexts, then his person becomes more acceptable to followers like those above and can be justified to follow by those *of* human contexts. If Jesus is vulnerably distinguished both in and from human contexts, Nathanael has both the basis to define Jesus' person beyond Nazareth and the necessary call for his own person to be redefined, transformed and made whole *from* human contexts. For both Jesus' person and his followers' to be distinguished in human contexts is the ongoing challenge relationally for whole ontology and function, since reductionism is ongoingly challenging referentially in human contexts to be defined and determined by those contexts—the ongoing issue between 'nothing less and no substitutes' and 'anything less and any substitute'.

Jesus at twelve clearly distinguished his person to Joseph and Mary as well as his presence to Jewish leaders at the temple. After his interaction in the temple, Jesus does not reappear in the Gospel narratives until well into adulthood at around age thirty. This may suggest that he was isolated prior to that; perhaps this is true in terms of certain roles and functions he performed in his public ministry. Yet we do have indication that during this period he continued to extend his involvement in relationships, both with God and with others (e.g. Lk 2:52). One thing for certain is the embodied life of this person was not in a vacuum, isolated from human contexts. The person Jesus presented always functioned vulnerably in human contexts, in direct human interaction, in public (in contrast to sheltered in private). His whole ontology and function demonstrate the nature and extent of his presence and involvement, which are often not clearly distinguished by others in those contexts.

As we go back to Jesus' baptism, this may raise more curious thought about his need to "sanctify myself" (Jn 17:19). Why were these necessary for Jesus? Yet his baptism was not the same baptism that John the Baptist called for (Mt 3:1-2, Lk 3:3), since he had not sinned and did not need to repent. By what was necessarily his relational action, Jesus fully identifies in public with those who have repented and are prepared to receive the kingdom of God—not by ritual observance but by relational connection. Accordingly, his baptism makes evident to them that the person he presents is whole, complete and can be counted on to be who, what and how he is—that is, what is insufficiently rendered in referential terms but is "fulfilled" (complete, make whole, *pleroo*) in relational terms as "the whole (*pasan*) righteousness" (Mt 3:15), that Paul made definitive of Jesus' whole ontology and function for the church (Eph 1:23).

Jesus therefore presents to them publicly in his baptism the kingdom of God (cf. Mt 12:28)—in more relational terms, the whole of God's family, as the Trinity converges openly in function in this distinguished interaction of the full presence of God (Mt 3:16-17). In the full significance of his baptism, Jesus discloses the trinitarian relational context of family and the trinitarian relational process of family love ("my Son whom I love"), as well as demonstrates the redemptive nature of the relational progression necessary for his followers to the whole of God. Moreover, "I sanctify myself" in human contexts only for this purpose "so that they also may be sanctified" in their ontology and

function to be whole and thus also be distinguished in human contexts—the only purpose and outcome which compose the relational significance of his words.

Building on the previous discussion of a key experience early in his public ministry, Jesus and his disciples, along with his mother (apparently Joseph had died since he is no longer mentioned), were at a wedding in Cana (Jn 2:2-11). Mary's interaction with Jesus about the wine suggests uncertainty about how much *syniemi* (of the person Jesus presented) she had gained since the boyhood episode in the temple. While Mary was collecting the “pieces” of Jesus' person (e.g. Lk 2:19,51), how well she was putting them together is unclear (cf. Mk 3:21,31-34). Whatever her understanding of his person at this stage, it is difficult to suggest she was requesting a miracle from the person she was aware of, even though she did imply Jesus would resolve the problem (Jn 2:5).

Jesus' response demonstrates the involvement of his person, revealing how his whole person (who, what and how he is) functioned in human contexts, in human interaction, in public. This disclosure is made less on the basis of what Jesus did (a miracle) and more in how his presence was. Focusing on the miracle tends to define Jesus by what he did, and this reductionist definition would be insufficient to understand his whole person.

In this human context, Jesus is involved in three areas: (1) relationship with Mary, (2) the sociocultural situation, and (3) relationship with his Father. These areas of involvement are not to be separated because they converge in an interaction process on how Jesus functions in this context. Knowing how these three areas interact is crucial for understanding how the person Jesus presented functioned in his ‘regular’ life.

Jesus' response to Mary is no longer filial when he addresses Mary simply as “woman” (*gyne*, general term for woman, married or not). This redefines the nature of Jesus' involvement with Mary from the human context to God's relational context of family. Even though Jesus' response is no longer filial, it is nevertheless distinguished as familial; and this distinguished the relational context that defined his person. As witnessed also in the boyhood episode, this interaction reflects the tension between the contexts defining Mary and Jesus respectively. This tension is heard in his question “why do you involve me?” (Jn 2:4, NIV), which is rendered more clearly “what concern is that to you and to me?” Assuming Mary was still defined primarily by the human context, she gave priority to this gathering and acted in obligation to communal responsibility in support of the wedding hosts. We can say that Mary merely acted in who and what she is defined by that context. And this significance was not lost to Jesus in “what concern is that to you.” He clearly wanted Mary to know, however, what his priorities were and what and who defined him: “my time has not yet come”—his Father determines that (Jn 8:28,29; 14:31). Consequently, “what concern is that to me” cannot be defined by “what concern is that to you.” As most of his interactions reveal—which would include involving Jesus in what we ask for in many of our prayers—the person Jesus presented is continuously being challenged to redefine himself by other terms. In response, Jesus continues to address the two critical issues about the presentation of his person: *how* his person is defined and *what* defines his person.

Yet, Jesus never removed himself from the human context (not to mean every situation), nor avoided the tension this created. This was not only the nature of his whole ontology and function but signified his particular purpose for his followers also to be whole in ontology and function in those contexts. Thus he was involved in his

relationship with Mary and neither distanced his person from the sociocultural context represented in the wedding situation nor dismissed the cultural means used to define persons (in this situation, the honor of the wedding hosts who would have incurred shame without the wine). Contrary to an assimilation process, however, the significance of Jesus' involvement is directly a relational outcome of the nature of who, what and how he is—his whole person which is never defined by what he does (miracles) nor by what he had (e.g. the means to do miracles). Jesus then could respond to Mary and accommodate the sociocultural situation as long as his person was not reduced and his function not diminished or minimized.

This helps us know how the above three areas of his involvement interacted, which is crucial for our understanding of how the person Jesus functioned in wholeness: while Jesus responded to (1) his relationship with Mary and lived vulnerably in (2) the sociocultural situation, neither (1) nor (2) defined for him (3) his relationship with his Father. Rather as his relational response of distinguished love (Jn 14:31), (3) always defined Jesus' person and determined for him how to function in relationships like (1) and contexts like (2). This tells us the person Jesus presented not only involved who, what and how he is but also *whose* he is. Theologically, this is the ontology of the whole person. Functionally, this is the wholeness of personhood engaged in ongoing relational involvement in the trinitarian relational context of family and relational process of family love. To function apart from this is to shift into reductionism of the person, which Jesus would not allow to happen to the person he presented, despite all the influences and pressures he faced to shape him in the reduced terms of anything less and any substitutes.

How does his miracle fit this sociocultural situation? Did Jesus merely misuse his power in a rather insignificant situation with no apparent purpose? Or did Jesus diminish his purpose by this miracle? Taken out of context, either explanation can be made. Yet, given our discussion of the person Jesus presented, how is this miracle in this situation (about wine at a prolonged wedding reception—commonly up to seven days—perhaps in overindulgent celebration since they ran out of wine) significant for who, what and how Jesus is?

In terms of the wine this really had nothing to do with the person Jesus presented; essentially, the situation was about “old wine” while Jesus constituted “new wine” (cf. Lk 5:37-39). The miracle itself also had nothing to do with the whole of Jesus' person, that is, defining his person by what he did. Biblical miracles are not an end in themselves, used as a reductionist substitute for self-definition, though that is a prevailing perception and practice, even in Jesus' time (cf. Jn 2:23-25) as discussed above. Miracles are “miraculous signs” (*semeion*) with a qualitative end and relational purpose, which lead to something out of and beyond themselves; that is, they are indicators, ‘fingermarks’ of God. As a result, a miracle is not valuable so much for itself as for the person it reflects, just as Jesus described and practiced (Jn 10:38).

Since this Gospel narrative is the first recorded miraculous sign of Jesus (Jn 2:11), this happened early in his public ministry and in the disciples' involvement with him. Jesus used this situation to take the opportunity to build further and deeper relationship with his disciples. Given that Jesus did not define his person by what he did, the miracle was neither to draw attention to himself nor for the benefit of the general public (cf. Jn 2:9)—as if *apokalypto* were his purpose. This *semeion* was a disclosure of his whole person presented to the disciples for relationship together—as *phaneroo* indicates in “He

thus revealed his glory” (v.11, NIV). While it may be clear how disclosing “his glory” could have helped the disciples theologically, what is the functional significance of “his glory” which would take them further and deeper into relationship together?

Earlier John’s Gospel summarized the relational nature of the incarnation and how “We have seen his glory” (Jn 1:14). They “saw” (*theaomai*, a contemplative process that carefully examines Jesus to perceive him correctly) not merely because they were good observers but because the person Jesus presented vulnerably disclosed “his glory” for relationship (cf. *theoreo* in Jn 12:45). Yet how did engaging this relational epistemic process take them beyond the outer-in aspects of Jesus and merely referential information about God?

The answer to the above questions involves the “glory” that is “seen.” If “his glory” is merely perceived in referential terms as the abstract attribute of the transcendent God, we may claim some theological significance in knowing something about God but no functional significance to take us further and deeper in relationship to truly know and experience God. Yet, *glory* is one of those words in our Christian vocabulary (faith and grace are others) whose significance gets lost in familiarity. The word for glory in Hebrew (*kabod*) comes from the word “to be heavy,” for example, with wealth or worthiness. A person’s glory certainly then is shaped and seen on the basis of the perceptual-interpretive framework used for how a person is defined and what defines that person. The glory Jesus distinguished brings us further than an abstract attribute of the transcendent God and takes us deeper than a person defined by what he does and has. In the OT, *kabod* is used poetically to refer to the whole person (Ps 16:9; 57:8; 108:1).

The main idea of ‘the glory of God’ denotes the revelation of God’s being, nature and presence to us, that is, the whole of who, what and how God is. Paul made definitive that this disclosure was not in referential terms but relational terms from inner out (“who has shone in our hearts”) distinguished “in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). In the incarnation the vulnerable disclosures of Jesus’ whole person and presence engaged us with God’s glory—that is, God’s being, nature, and presence with us: the who (being), the what (nature) and the how (presence) of God. Who, what and how Jesus *is* vulnerably disclose who, what and how God *is*—that is to say, *phaneroo* God’s glory only for relationship, not for systematic theology or doctrinal certainty. Therefore, the who, what and how in the distinguished face of Jesus is the hermeneutical key to the ontology of the glory of God, through whom we can know and understand who, what and how God is. And when the glory seen is the distinguished Face, the person Jesus presents in whole ontology and function discloses the functional involvement of God’s being, nature and presence with us as Subject in relationship, not merely an Object to be observed. Briefly the person Jesus presented openly disclosed the following in relational terms:

- God’s being (*who*) as the qualitative heart of God from inner out—not a mere part of God or some expression or conception of God but the very heart of God’s being—and nothing less, constituted in Jesus’ whole function with the primary importance of the heart signifying his whole person, with no substitutes.
- God’s nature (*what*) as intimately relational, signified by the primacy of Jesus’ ongoing intimate relationship with the Father and the extension of this primacy of relationship by intimate relational involvement with others.

- God’s presence (*how*) as vulnerably involved, made evident by Jesus’ vulnerable presence in disclosing his person to others and his openness to be negatively affected by them, including by his disciples.

Just as the distinguished Face’s whole ontology and function disclosed the glory of God, the whole of God’s being, nature and presence function for relationship together Face to face. Anything less and any substitutes are neither the distinguished face of Jesus nor the glory of God.

That which is God’s glory is “his glory.” Who, what and how God is is who, what and how Jesus is (Jn 10:38b; 12:45; 14:9). Yet it is critical to distinguish that this disclosure (*phaneroo*) is not about the mere exhibit (*apokalypto*) by Jesus of the ontology of God; and any Christology that is embedded only in this for foundational purpose is insufficient and incomplete. The person Jesus presents is the vulnerable embodiment of the functional whole of God’s presence in relationship. Disclosing the whole of God in relationship is *the incarnation principle* of ‘nothing less and no substitutes’; a complete Christology must also be ‘nothing less and no substitutes’. This is who, what and how Jesus is and “his glory” disclosed in relational terms to his disciples for further and deeper relationship. Because Jesus vulnerably extended (the *how*) his whole person with heart from inner out (the *who*)—‘nothing less and no substitutes’—to them for intimate relationship (the *what*), the narrative of the wedding concludes with “his disciples *trusted* in him” (Jn 2:11). That is, “his disciples could respond back and open themselves to him in further trust and deeper involvement”—not based on what Jesus did (a miracle) but based on his whole person and presence vulnerably presented to them. This was the further and deeper relationship together that Jesus opened to them in the relational epistemic process for the relational progression to the whole of God.

It is vital to fully understand from this interaction in this human context at the wedding in Cana, that the presentation of “his glory” was contingent on the incarnation principle of ‘nothing less and no substitutes’. In other words, the person and presence Jesus presented—whether with Mary, in the sociocultural situation, or with the Father—was the function only of his whole person because Jesus maintained in whole ontology and function the integrity of who, what and how he is—ongoingly without reduction or redefinition. ‘Nothing less and no substitutes’ functionally involves both of the following:

1. Engaging the human context without losing the primary identity of *who* you are and *whose* you are.
2. Participating, involving, partaking in situations and relationships without losing your priorities of *what* you are and therefore by nature *how* you are called to be.

As Jesus experienced, the pressure to be redefined by reductionist influences is ongoing. Consequently, Jesus was vulnerably responsive to someone for relationship only on his terms, though he was vulnerably involved with anyone. Later in Jerusalem, many persons believed in him because of the miracles he was doing. Despite their response to him, “Jesus would not entrust himself to them” (Jn 2:23-25). Their response was not to his whole person (“his glory”) and for relationship on his terms. For Jesus to respond back to them would have necessitated redefining himself by their reductionist terms,



which would not have involved relationship further and deeper with the whole of God. Jesus never compromised who, what and how he is for the sake of gaining followers (as discussed above, Jn 6:25-66). These were not the kind of followers he came to call, since his vulnerable presence and relational involvement constitutes the call to be whole, which then necessitates the call to be redefined, transformed and made whole in the depth of his relational context—while in human contexts.

Moreover, by necessity Jesus' whole ontology and function address the issue of being able to distinguish a person's source of validation, confirmation and affirmation. What is our primary source of these and as a result where do we functionally entrust the ontology of our person and the personhood we practice: the human context or God's context? Jesus' unwillingness to respond back to the desires of these so-called followers is a vital distinguishing indicator of leadership in contrast to those who build a following on reductionist terms, albeit with good intentions. This further helps us distinguish in our life and contexts the difference between what I call '*discipleshipisms*' (the reductionist substitutes signifying our terms) and what is the clearly distinguished discipleship of Jesus' call to "Follow *me*" in whole relationship together.

Jesus' whole ontology and function constituting his call to the first disciples to "Follow me" implies this whole call, which the relational messages in the quality of his communication help us understand in the absence of further narrative content of their call. These relational messages combine with the content of his call to form the integrity of his communication necessary to fully constitute his words. For example, consider the likely relational messages implied to Nathanael (Jn 1:50-51): (1) "I am who you say I am, but I am much more to confess in your faith, and more importantly to experience in relationship," and (2) "I appreciate your honesty and your willingness to engage me further," therefore (3) "Don't stop here, Nathanael, but let's go deeper in relationship together in order to understand the whole of my person—and along with the others, to experience in relational progression together the whole of God." And further indicated, the relational messages implied in his call to Peter and Andrew that "I will make you fish for people" (Mt 4:19; Mk 1:17)—a call which by its nature must be neither subordinated nor preceded by what they do in mission, service or related roles: (1) "I am not defined by my role or by what I do, so *don't* reduce my person to Messiah, Teacher, Savior, nor to my miracles, my behavioral examples, or even to merely my teachings," and (2) "I don't define you by your service, sacrifice, role or anything you do or have. I call you because *you* are important to me—your person, not what you can do for me or give me," therefore (3) "With the heart of my whole person I am vulnerable and accountable to you for relationship together Face to face, and I want you to be vulnerable and accountable to me with your whole heart for this relationship." This is not to suggest that the early disciples understood the full significance of Jesus relational messages. This does indicate that their rapid reception and deep response to his call signifies being stirred or touched deeply by the quality (in relational terms, not referential content) of Jesus' communication. His presence was significant enough to open them to the need or desire to make this radical change in their lives: Simon and Andrew "left their nets and followed him" (Mt 4:20), also James and John "left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him" (Mk 1:20), and after the catch of fish, the four together "pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him" (Lk 5:11).

The experience when “they caught so many fish” (Lk 5:4-11) unnerved Simon in coming face to Face with Jesus, not so much by the quantitative difference (in what he did) of the person Jesus presented (which would be expected of God) but more so by the presence of the qualitative difference (the significance of who and what he was) of this person (vv.8-9). While at first this person’s presence was difficult to receive, Jesus’ relational messages had to have touched them from inner out to evoke their vulnerable response (vv.10-11). It seems highly unlikely that the mere content of his message—“Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people”—could have assured them to be vulnerable with this person presented, much less evoked their radical response.

This call to be redefined, transformed and made whole is even more dramatic in Jesus’ call to Levi (Mt 9:9-13, Mk 2:13-17, Lk 5:27-32). Levi was a lower-level tax (toll) collector employed by a chief tax collector (like Zacchaeus in Lk 19:2) who was contracted by the Roman government in a system of collecting fees on the goods and services passing through. The system commonly lent itself to abuse and often employed unethical workers without loyalties who engaged in a loose, ritually unclean lifestyle. To what extent this describes Levi is unknown; nevertheless tax collectors were identified as the “enemy” by some segments of the Jewish community and were despised by practicing religious people, not to mention considered socially lower class.<sup>4</sup> With this background, Jesus finds Levi at his toll booth and, without any further narrative information, extends his call to “Follow me.”

How do we understand both Jesus’ behavior and Levi’s response? Jesus’ rebuttal to the Pharisees moments later, about compassion and who needs a doctor (Mt 9:12-13), gives us a partial answer. But this tends to focus only on what Jesus did, and his example and words here often are interpreted in referential terms apart from his person. Yet the whole person Jesus presented is more dramatically made evident in this interaction than in his earlier calls involving foreknowledge and the catch of fish. While Jesus never played to the audience (or crowd in this context, Mk 2:13), his person presented is a resounding statement in relational terms for all (including us) to embrace. This relational message reverberated of his whole person and presence: “who, what and how I am is not defined by the human context, and therefore is neither determined nor controlled by any human terms or situation.”

Jesus’ whole ontology and function necessarily always addressed the issue of *how* the person presented is defined and *what* defines that person. And the person presented must be congruent with the nature of who, what and how the person is from inner out. For this congruence to be the significance of the person presented (the first definitive issue for all practice) integrally involves the other two key issues of practice: (2) the integrity and quality of the person’s communication, and (3) the depth of relationship the person engages.

The significance of the person Jesus presented, the qualitative integrity of his communication and the depth of relationship he engages all emerge dramatically, clearly and integrally in his call to Levi. Given the background of this surrounding context, Jesus crosses social, cultural and religious boundaries to connect with Levi. It should be understood also that Levi crosses these boundaries (barriers for him) as well by receiving

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<sup>4</sup> For more background on tax collection and collectors, see Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 82-83, 387-88.

and responding to Jesus. What do they see in each other that warrants such a call and such a response?

The person Jesus presented functioned with a perceptual-interpretive framework congruent with who, what and how his person is, thus determining what he would see, pay attention to and ignore. With this lens, Jesus never pays attention to the Levi defined by the surrounding context. That is, Jesus sees Levi deeper than from the outer in of a reductionist quantitative framework which has reduced Levi to a lower stratum of this human context. Therefore he sees a person from the inside out experiencing reductionism who needs to be redefined back to 'inner out', transformed from his reductionism and made whole in the primacy of relationship together. The person Jesus presented pays attention only to this Levi, the person. And the significance of Jesus' person and his distinguished presence are not overlooked by Levi, who is used to being treated with contempt. He well knows that for this Rabbi (and miracle worker at that) to engage him is radical, counter-cultural, and simply contrary to life as he has known. Yet, Jesus was not really making a sociocultural, political or philosophical statement. He vulnerably makes a relational statement of his whole person only for relationship together: "Follow me."

Along with the significance of Jesus' person engaging him, what can Levi understand of the quality of his communication? The content of Jesus' message, linked also to his action to engage Levi while in this surrounding context, is qualified further by his implied relational messages, indicated as follows: (1) "I am not defined by reductionism nor is my action determined by it; who, what and how I am is whole in the relationships necessary to be whole, for which I make my person vulnerable to you," and (2) "In spite of how others see you and you may feel about yourself, nevertheless I see you in your whole person, from inner out with sin and all, and you are still important to me and I want *you*; here is your opportunity to be redefined, transformed and made whole," so that (3) "we can have intimate relationship together and you can experience belonging in the relationships necessary to be whole as a full member of the family of God." The significance of Jesus' person discloses the quality of his communication, the content of which is qualified by these relational messages. And the third relational message defines the depth of relationship Jesus vulnerably engages Face to face with Levi, which Jesus practices in the distinguished love of relational involvement with Levi over table fellowship with his friends ("tax collectors and sinners," Mk 2:15) after Levi's response to the call to be whole—a key involvement constituting the primacy of relationships necessary to be whole.

Aside from the conviction of the Spirit in the call to all these early disciples, what does Levi see in Jesus to warrant a radical response for such a drastic identity change? For Jesus' person to be vulnerable to him and openly exposing his own person to social sanction and ridicule certainly must have spoken deeply to Levi. And to hear this person say (with both content and relational aspects of his communication) that he wants '*me*, my whole person', for relationship together Face to face undoubtedly disarmed Levi and touched him at his core—the significance of his own heart, most likely guarded from others in the surrounding context. The presence of the person Jesus presented was too distinguished and therefore significant, qualitatively different and relationally intimate for Levi to dismiss or resist. And how does he ignore the person Face to face?

Yet, for Levi to cross those social, cultural and religious barriers, he would openly have to let go of his *old* life and reject reductionism—its perceptual-interpretive

framework and its substitutes for the whole of persons and relationships, both prevailing in the surrounding context which defined him and determined his life all these years. This is a risk Levi is able to take because he is entrusting his person to relationship with the vulnerable presence and relational involvement of this person he can count on to be truly *who* and *what* he is, nothing less and no substitutes. He can count on Jesus' whole person in this relationship because he personally sees *how* Jesus is in practice—the significance of his whole person presented, the qualitative difference of his communication in relational terms, the intimate depth of relationship he engages—is congruent with who and what he is from inner out, thereby confirming for Levi that Jesus' whole person is for Face-to-face relationship. This is what Levi must have seen (not merely *blepo*, to see, but more like *horaō*, to recognize the significance of, encounter the true nature of, to experience) in Jesus to support making such a drastic change.

Levi's story is about the gospel, the whole gospel. This gospel, however, is not a fragmented gospel with an incomplete Christology and a truncated soteriology; nor is it a substitute gospel from human shaping and construction. An incomplete Christology is disembodied from the whole person Jesus presented throughout the incarnation and is without his presence, consequently its Jesus is essentially dysfunctional for the vulnerable involvement necessary for whole relationship together. Accordingly then, a truncated soteriology is disengaged from the relational process with Jesus' whole person and no longer in relational progression with him in the primacy of whole relationship together that he saves *to*. As a result its salvation is not functionally contextualized in the whole of God's relational context of family, notwithstanding doctrine; and its salvation lacks the ongoing relational significance of being whole and living whole in human contexts within the relationships together of God's family, all of which Jesus' whole person vulnerably presented and prayed for its intimate relational outcome (Jn 17). The whole gospel, which Paul defined as the gospel of wholeness ("peace," Eph 6:15), emerges only within the whole ontology and function presented in Jesus' person and presence. This is the distinguished Face who engaged Levi Face to face in the only gospel he experienced.

It is problematic for anyone to suggest that Levi would have made a radical change for a fragmented or substitute gospel. Not only does the whole gospel emerge conclusively within Jesus' whole ontology and function but, equally important, the human condition is illuminated conclusively by his whole person and presence (Jn 12:46; Lk 12:1-2). Nothing less and no substitutes defined the Jesus whom Levi experienced Face to face, and determined the gospel that he claimed in whole relationship together for his human condition.

Likewise, for the other disciples, their radical response to Jesus' call is difficult to explain (not to diminish the Spirit's work) without some understanding of Jesus' relational messages qualifying "Follow me" (which certainly would involve the Spirit's work). Without this understanding of Jesus' communication, we are left to consider that the disciples just somewhat blindly or irrationally changed the course of their life to follow Jesus. Without suggesting they understood well his relational messages, and knowing they had ongoing difficulty understanding his whole relational context and process while following him after the call, nevertheless in their call they still relationally received the *person*, not a referential proposition about the person; and they still responded to this person for relationship together, not to follow a teaching, a model or a missional goal. They had the embodied and distinguished Face of the whole of God

before them—nothing less and no substitutes—because God’s self-disclosure and the presence of God were relationally communicated and integrally enacted in the whole person Jesus presented. This was the person who was vulnerably present with them, relationally pursued and extended his whole person to them, and was intimately involved with them for the primacy of whole relationship together.

The disciples’ response to this person was not irrational and at the same time was not the result of mere rationality—perhaps to the discomfort of Lessing and his ‘ditch’. No amount of socio-historical, philosophical or even theological inquiry can account for the *presence* of God in the person Jesus presented. That is, God’s self-disclosure and the presence of God in the person of Jesus are communicative acts not for mere exhibition but for relationship (cf. Jn 1:11,12,18; 17:26). As communicative acts, God’s disclosures and presence cannot be understood merely by observation (scientific, critical or casual). They are understood only as they are received in the distinguished relational context and process in which God is disclosed by the person Jesus presented in his vulnerable presence and relational involvement—in other words, as the relational outcome of Face to face.

## **The Integral Person, not the Central Figure**

The face of God has clearly turned to us and shines on us to bring redemptive change and establish the new relationship together in wholeness, as God promised from the beginning (Num 6:27). If the Face embodied by the person Jesus presented is viewed and interpreted by referential terms, then the face of God is refracted and Christology is incomplete. Both are often distorted by becoming overly christocentric in lieu of the whole equally of Jesus’ person and of his relationship with the Father and the Spirit, inseparably together as the whole of God. In relational terms, however, the presence of the Face is distinguished by the presentation of Jesus as the integral person—not the central figure to the whole of God’s face, to the whole of God’s thematic relational action in the beginning and thematic relational response to the human condition from the beginning, and to the relational outcome of the relational progression to the whole of God.

Christocentricity in referential terms overly focuses on Jesus and revolves around him, which is what Satan tried to get Jesus to do in his last relational test. Certainly then this is re-presenting the person Jesus himself presented: a re-presenting with a person from the lens of a theological anthropology that has redefined the person by the outer in without the primacy of whole relationship together, consequently (1) shifting primary (not necessarily in quantity) focus to the individual person, (2) making the individual central (not necessarily overtly), and (3) providing the basis for individualism—even operational in a collective-oriented human context by the genius of reductionist assumptions, as exposed in Satan’s tests of Jesus. This is a *misre*-presentation of the whole of Jesus.

Contrary to, and even in conflict with, becoming the central figure in the whole of God and God’s thematic relational response to the human condition, the presence of the person Jesus presented is integral to understanding the whole’s ontology and function and is the key to experiencing the whole. To distinguish the integral person from the central

figure is critical for the synthesis of Jesus and Paul; but, more important, it is critical for us to know and understand the whole of God in the new relationship together in wholeness, as the face of God promised. How so?

When the Word became flesh, the glory of the Father's only Son was made vulnerable to us in the presentation of his divine-human person (in Jn's cosmological view, 1:14). His disclosures in relational terms as Subject both divine and human are for relationship, yet involve different aspects of the dynamics of relationship. On the one hand, this integral person communicated directly to us in the distinguished Face, and thereby the whole of God is disclosed vulnerably with the glory in his Face "who is the image of God" (2 Cor 4:4,6)—the integral image relationally disclosing who, what and how God is, all for the purpose of relationship together. While the humanity of Jesus is certainly involved in this relational action from God, there is another aspect of this relational dynamic of the integral image necessary to understand to complete the whole function of his divine-human person, and thereby the purpose for Jesus' sanctifying himself (Jn 17:19).

Since God's self-disclosures are only for relationship, what God communicates and discloses is never for unilateral relationship and to be merely received by us as information. For this specific relational process to be fully engaged and for its relational dynamic to be complete, there must (*dei* by its nature, not from obligation or compulsion) be compatible response back from us. On the other hand, then, the humanity of Jesus' integral person also enacts as the image of God this response back to God in order to both fulfill this compatible reciprocal response to replace our past failure, as well as help us understand who, what and how we now need to be in the same image created for the human person. Jesus' fulfillment was imperative so that we can complete the relational dynamic necessary for ongoing whole relationship together.<sup>5</sup> In other words, the humanity of Jesus' person also functions in the qualitative image and relational likeness of God to become that necessary response back to God to complete the primacy of relationship ("sanctify myself") in order that we can respond back to God in the very qualitative image and relational likeness God created for the human person ("so that they also may be sanctified in the truth *of who, what and how they are*"). In these relational terms, 'sanctify' (*hagiazō*, to set apart for God) can be understood as being distinguished as God's whole in the human context.

The integral image presenting the distinguished image is irreplaceable for the theological anthropology necessary to define human persons in wholeness and to determine their whole ontology and function. Yet, merely following Jesus' example/model is insufficient to distinguish this image and to engage the relational response back to God, because the Father wants us to be congruent with the relational response distinguished by "the image of his Son" (Rom 8:29), "who is the image of God" (2 Cor 4:4). The Father does not divide in referential terms the divine-human person Jesus presented. *Imago Dei* is conclusive in the integral person Jesus presented as the whole of God's ontology and function, and also definitive in Jesus' whole person for the human person's ontology and function. As Paul clarified theologically (2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10,15; Eph 4:24), complete Christology defines our theological anthropology in wholeness, rather than the reverse wherein the person Jesus presents is not the image of

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<sup>5</sup> For a similar examination of this relationship but from a conceptual perspective of dialogic process, see Alistair McFadyen *The Call to Personhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 45-47.

God but shaped in the image of our terms. The latter image is neither compatible with the image of God for Jesus' person nor congruent with the image of God in which human persons are created. The integral person Jesus presents clarifies the image of God and makes it conclusive for persons' whole ontology and function, both divine and human. And how the Son vulnerably responded to and relationally involved himself with the Father in the Trinity is also the response the Father expects us to be congruent to in relationship together "in order that he might be the *integral person* within *my* large family" (Rom 8:29). Therefore, the Father's relational imperative to us: "Listen to my Son's *relational language, not to referential words*" (Mt 17:5).

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

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

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

Throughout the whole of God's self-disclosures, we need to understand how the presence and person of Jesus is seen and related to, and how he himself is involved in relationships both with God and others in the human context. This will help piece together (*syniemi*) the *who* and *what* of the whole of God, which will then engage by *what* and *how* the whole of God does relationships. Without this whole understanding (*synesis*) we are left with only a limited view narrowed down to fragmentary terms, which we may attempt to aggregate in a seeming coherence (e.g. a systematic or biblical theology) lacking wholeness—rendering that coherence insignificant. While Paul apparently did not directly see how others saw and related to Jesus, he directly experienced how Jesus involved himself in their relationship for his *synesis* (Acts 26:16; Gal 1:12; Eph 3:2-4). As the epistemological, hermeneutical and functional keys, Jesus'

self-disclosures open up and take us to the Father (Jn 1:18; 14:6; 17:6), and accordingly to the whole of God, the Trinity. This is not static referential information but dynamic relational communication functional to “dwell with” us for relationship with the Trinity (Jn 14:23; Rom 8:15), and to “dwell in” us as God’s family together (Jn 17:21-23,26; Eph 2:22). Jesus engages us in this distinguished trinitarian relational context and process which intimately involves us in this relational progression to the whole of God—a relational progression that involves us further and deeper into relational communion with the Trinity. To stop in this relational progression to focus mainly on Jesus is to become non-biblically christocentric by reshaping the Word on human terms, therefore not “dwelling with and in” the Trinity.

The biblical interpretations for this study then necessarily must be theological in relational terms, not referential terms. This could be problematic if one’s interpretation is skewed by an interpretive framework, for example, from a theological anthropology one brings to the Word, particularly to the Word embodied to antecede Christology. While no one is without theological presuppositions, how we use them is crucial. We can be chastened in this engagement with the following perspective:

Theology emerges from the intimate reflection on the outcome of receiving and responding to God’s communicative action (cf. *theaomai*, Jn 1:14), not from measured consideration of mere information in referential terms. On this basis, theology needs to be understood beyond the task of formulating doctrines (even systematically) informing us about God to its deeper significance of making definitive the coherence (*synesis*) of God’s self-disclosures vulnerably communicated to us as the Word from God only for the primacy of relationship together with this twofold relational outcome. First, in order that we can vulnerably know the triune God Face to face and intimately experience the communion of life together in the ongoing involvement of transformed relationships as the whole of God’s family. Second, so that we together relationally embody the interdependent relationships necessary to be God’s whole in likeness of the Trinity, and thereby relationally witness to the experiential truth and whole of the gospel for the human condition to be made whole—God’s relational whole only on God’s qualitative relational terms, with nothing less and no substitutes.

This is the relational outcome for which Jesus asked the Father in his formative family prayer (Jn 17), and this is the only outcome of theological engagement that has significance to God—no matter how wise and learned the theological discourse.

The significance of theology for the person Jesus presented cannot be measured in referential terms but only relational terms. The measure of theology in relational terms must by its nature be functional for relationship in order both to have the significance of the whole of God presented and to be of significance to those wanting to know and understand God in their relationship. The inseparable integration of theology and function is a given for the theology which emerges whole from Paul—that some may question if it ever emerged. Part of their difficulty is the separation of theology and function, which Paul never does because his theology was first his function in relational involvement with



the whole of God. Paul's theology emerges only on this basis, without being fragmented from function; therefore it emerges whole.

Basing this integrated theological and functional whole in the person and presence of Jesus' self-disclosures is both a necessary and sufficient theological process to constitute the complete Christology (without fragmentation) functional for the whole of our ontology and function with God in his distinguished relational context and with others in the human context. This Christology does not function simply to inform our life and practice but to transform our ontology and function to "the image of his Son" as family together (Rom 8:29). Therefore, the vulnerable ontology and function of the integral person Jesus presented are the necessary keys for the change to the new relationship together in wholeness from the face of God, and keys to the synthesis of his person into Paul. Moreover, this Christology (without being overly christocentric) becomes the conclusive theological-functional pivot to the whole, while vitally integrated with a relationally functional pneumatology, from which emerges conclusively: a full soteriology (including not only saved *from* but more so saved *to*), an ecclesiology of the whole (without reductionist substitutes), a missiology predicated on the whole gospel (thereby deepening missions), an eschatology of relational conclusion of this relational outcome's relational progression to the whole of God (not events about the Kingdom), and the integral aspects of each of these in coherent relational terms. All the above theological dynamics converge to serve as integral functions of the whole of God's thematic relational response to the human condition, which integrates our discussion, therefore providing the necessary theological coherence for our whole ontology and function with, in and for the whole of God.

Theology, then, and all interpretations of Scripture related to it need to converge and to be integrally functional. For theology and its interpretations to function integrally and not be fragmented, there must be primacy given to relationship both to engage the trinitarian relational context of family and to involve the trinitarian relational process of family love. This distinguished relational context and process constituted God's thematic relational response of grace to the human condition, within which the person Jesus presented was embodied vulnerably with the presence of his whole ontology and function, full of grace and truth (covenant love and faithfulness) in the relational involvement of the gospel of wholeness. Anything less and any substitutes *misre*-present the whole of both Jesus and the gospel. This whole theology will be evident in what Paul further embodied for the wholeness distinguished by Jesus in the gospel that only his presence presented.

This is the door Jesus opens to the whole of God through which Paul and those following (person and persons together as the church) must enter together with the Spirit in order to be Jesus' distinguished followers in relational progression as the new creation family (in relational terms, not referential) in the theological trajectory and relational path of the whole of God's thematic relational action. This is where Paul enters.



## Chapter 4

## Presenting the Person – Part 2

**Boast in this, that they understand and know *me*.**

Jeremiah 9:24 (cf. 1 Cor 1:31)

**Listen to my Son!**

Matthew 17:5

In the previous chapter we looked at a sample of the persons in various human contexts to whom Jesus presented his person and distinguished his presence. The post-resurrection presentation of this integral person certainly involved more drama and constituted incomparable significance, yet the face of the person presented was not any more distinguished than before. For example, this was Peter's experience (post, Jn 21:3-12, and before, Lk 5:4-8) and his ongoing challenge with the distinguished Face presented to him for relationship Face to face (post, Jn 21:19,22, and before, Mt 4:19). And this was what two other disciples fortunately learned from table fellowship with the distinguished Face in their secondary sojourn in the wrong direction on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:25-27, 30-32).

The integral person and distinguished presence of Jesus continues to be further presented in post-ascension. His first notable post-ascension presentation happens on another road in the human context, which is best signified as less secondary and more the major conflict between wholeness and reductionism; many though consider this merely as a major event defined in secondary terms. This is the road where the integral person of Jesus confronts the reduced and thus fragmented person of Paul.

The road to Emmaus and the Damascus road are parallel roads which Jesus intersected signifying the relational dynamic of God's grace to compose wholeness in relationship together. These roads necessarily must converge in the study of Jesus and Paul to illuminate the relational progression to God's whole, and relationship together in wholeness as God's family, or else the journey on the road to Emmaus will remain a wandering in the wrong direction and the journey on the Damascus road will still be fragmented. Jesus' vulnerable presence and relational involvement continue in post-resurrection and post-ascension to be the epistemological, hermeneutical and functional keys to the convergence of these roads (and others like them in human contexts) and for the response necessary for their sojourners in the reciprocal relationship together to be whole, God's relational whole only on God's qualitative relational terms.

### Presenting the Person to Paul

Paul's reputation as an exterminator of those who belonged to the Way preceded him even before he got to Damascus—and so the disciple Ananias was understandably incredulous about him (Acts 9:1-2, 13-14; 26:9-11). That was Paul's purpose for going to Damascus, that is, until he encountered the theological and functional pivot for his life.

Given his purpose, it was not surprising that Paul was confronted about his actions. What was unexpected, however, was *whom* and *what* Paul encountered and *how* he was confronted.

When the Face that shone on Paul said to his face “why do you persecute *me*?” the Face was distinguished in deeper significance than a Christophany. The integral person and distinguished presence of Jesus further emerges on the Damascus road in the significance of his presentation as an extension of the incarnation. Yet, this is not limited to the embodied Face distinguished further in post-ascension but is integrally the distinguished Face both from the beginning who antedates Paul’s religious roots and in the beginning who antecedes the created image intrinsic to and thus innermost of Paul’s person.

Assuming his good intentions, Paul’s actions to the Way were a reaction to a basic, perhaps major, threat to his faith and its tradition in which Paul had invested his entire life (Gal 1:13-14; Acts 26:4-5,9). His reaction, however, was focused on and “against the name of Jesus of Nazareth.” Likely predisposed by the negative stereotype commonly attributed to Nazareth (cf. Nathanael), Paul’s interpretive lens looked at the name of Jesus in referential terms, and consequently reduced Jesus’ name only to human contextualization without the significance of his person. This was problematic for Paul in two critical ways directly associated with his faith-tradition: (1) to ignore the name of the Christ from his own Scripture (Isa 9:6), and (2) to not pay attention to the significance of the person who constitutes the name. Though in many human contexts, a name is commonly just an identity marker, for Jews the name *is* the person, notably for God who disclosed his name to Moses as the distinguished “I AM” (*Yhwh*, Ex 3:13-15; 6:2-3; cf. Isa 42:8). Yet, even *Yhwh*, the LORD, easily is diminished of the whole significance of his *person* when used in referential language.

Paul’s interpretive lens of Jesus’ name was likely further shaped by some (not all) of his cohort Pharisees, who challenged the validity of Jesus’ identity (Jn 8:13). They received this response from Jesus: “Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, *I am*” (Jn 8:58). Their reaction (v.59), as is Paul’s, was understandable because the name they heard correctly in relational language is significant unequivocally of the whole person of God and is distinguished unmistakably as their God, “the LORD alone” (Dt 6:4). The ‘I am’ statement they heard from Jesus is the ‘I am’ relational communication Paul hears from the distinguished Face to his face.

The relational dynamics converging and unfolding in this interaction are insufficient to understand as a mere Christophanic event or as merely a traditional call and even conversion of Paul. Consider what integrally converges with Jesus and Paul in the following: epistemologically, “who are you-I am Jesus”; ontologically, “me-I am”; relationally, “you persecute me-whom you are persecuting.” These are critical relational dynamics to understand for the whole of Jesus presented and for the whole of Paul both entering and emerging from the Damascus road. The whole of Paul entering the Damascus road was not a whole but reduced person, thus signifying the underlying convergence of wholeness and reductionism. What happens in this convergence is an even more dramatic extension of Jesus’ person presented to Levi (discussed in the previous chap.). The circumstances are different but the relational dynamic is the same: the distinguished Face who engaged them Face to face with the good news to be redefined back to ‘inner out’, transformed from their reductionism, and made whole in

the primacy of relationship together. How does this unfold for Paul as it did earlier for Levi?

**Epistemologically:**

When Paul directly asked “Who are you?” he not only knowingly engaged an epistemic process but unknowingly was connected to the relational epistemic process. How the incarnation was extended to Paul on the Damascus road is important to understand in this process.

The incarnation and the Damascus road converge, within the improbability of the whole of God’s self-disclosure, in both a quantitative-linear progression and a qualitative-reflexive process. In its quantitative-linear progression, the Damascus road is an extension of the incarnation. But it does not, and cannot, end there, or else this aspect of the incarnation becomes merely a historical event, that is, no more than what the main incarnation evokes for many observers: history as a public and accessible event on generally accepted standards of historiography—what one German word refers to for ‘history’, *Historie*. Paul encountered more than his personal observation of the incarnation. What converged on the Damascus road was more than a historical event but the full qualitative-relational significance embodied by Jesus—similar to the interpretation or significance attributed to historical facts, referred to by a second German word for ‘history’, *Geschichte*. The significance of God’s story *is not* the history. That is, God’s story takes place in history and accordingly has historical indicators, but God’s story is not in the details of that history. God’s story involves the whole of God’s relational context and process, in which God’s actions are always relational (e.g. self-disclosure, creation, redemption, salvation) and always for relationship together. This relational process unfolds in the OT into the NT—not the reverse, as interpreted by some biblical theologies. Most certainly, the embodied Word from God did not signify discontinuity with the Hebrew Scripture but rather constituted the continuity of God’s communicative action in relational response to the human condition. Jesus, the embodied Word, was not incompatible with the faith of Abraham and the covenant relationship but in fact compatibly constituted their fulfillment—which he further embodies and fulfills and therefore constitutes *into* Paul to extend with the Spirit for its completion. To merely use historical indicators for God’s story is incomplete, consequently never sufficient for the whole of God’s story.

Yet what Paul experienced neither should be limited to *Historie* nor can it be separated from it and reduced merely to *Geschichte*; to do so would allow Paul to emerge with his own shaping of Jesus and his personal construction of Christianity. In a vital way this interaction paralleled the interaction Jesus had with another Pharisee, Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews (Jn 3:1-15). Jesus made it imperative for Nicodemus, a strict practicing Jew and a teacher of Israel, to be born from above, born anew. This is where epistemological clarification and hermeneutical correction are needed, both for Nicodemus as well as for us today. Jesus was not pointing to a new belief system requiring Nicodemus’ conversion. Nicodemus could not grasp the meaning of Jesus’ words because his quantitative lens (*phroneo*) focused on the person from outer in (“How can anyone be born after...?”), and because his reductionist interpretive framework (*phronema*) was unable to piece together (*synesis*) his own Scripture (e.g. “The Lord your God will circumcise your heart,” Dt 30:6). This evidenced that Nicodemus was too

influenced by reductionism to understand—“How can these things be?”—even after Jesus said, “Do not be astonished...”, which implied that a teacher of God’s Word would comprehend God’s whole if not fragmented by reductionism. Now the embodied Word from God (whom Nicodemus initially came to engage) made conclusive the epistemological clarification and hermeneutical correction essential for Nicodemus, Paul, Jews or Gentiles, for all persons: *be made whole from above or continue in reductionism*.

What converged for Paul on the Damascus road was not only the historical reality of the risen-embodied Jesus but also the whole of Jesus’ ontology and function: Jesus’ vulnerable presence and intimate relational involvement with the whole of Paul (dedicated Jew, persecutor of the Way as well as Jesus’ person, and a person created in the image of God as well as a reduced person). Wholeness interposed on reductionism.

### **Ontologically:**

The vulnerable presence and relational involvement of Jesus’ whole ontology and function likely raised deep conflict for Paul when he heard “I am.” On the one hand, there were the theological assumptions of his cohort Pharisees evidenced above. On the other, the presence of the Face disclosing the name “I am” to Moses could no longer be distinguished from the Face communicating to Paul Face to face. As a result, Paul paid attention to the ontology of “I am” and was engaged further and deeper epistemologically. This necessarily involved a retrospective journey for him in order to compose the whole of Paul who emerged from the Damascus road.

Prior to the Damascus road, Paul’s primary identity was well established in the collective aspect of his retrospective journey with roots even deeper than Moses, going back to Abraham. Paul was a definitive Jew, “a Hebrew of Hebrews” (Phil 3:5). Though these roots were instrumental in paying attention to “I am,” Paul needed to go even deeper than this primary identity in order to locate his person. His retrospective journey went further back by necessity to creation, to the origin of the human person defining the roots for his whole person. This is the shared aspect of his journey which Paul shared in common with all human persons—his basic identity. This shared-journey of his person’s basic identity is critical to examine to understand his person. Since Paul’s person was subsequently shaped, defined and determined by his primary identity as a Jew, this deeper introspective was necessary in order to fully understand *what* was indeed foremost about his person and innermost for his person; and, as a relational epistemic outcome, he would be able to experience *who* was indeed primary of his person. This process required going deeper than his collective identity as a Jew to involve the roots of his *ontological identity*—the identity integrating both *what* as well as *who* Paul was, and as a result determining *how* his whole person functioned to be.

As a student of the Jewish Scripture, Paul had access to Scripture and was aware of its content. It is likely then that Paul was familiar with the thoughtful—and no doubt discussion-provoking—question: “What are human beings [*enos*, persons] that you are mindful of [*zakar*, think, reflect upon] them, mortals [*ben adam*, offspring of persons] that you care for them [*paqad*, positive action of involvement by a superior]?” (Ps 8:4), which Psalm 144:3 echoes (also in Heb 2:6) with the variation “...that you know [*yada*] the person” and “think of them with esteem [*hasab*]?” In his cynicism or despair, Job initially had raised the same question from an opposite approach: “What are human persons that you make such a big deal [*gadal*] of them, that you even focus your heart

[*leb*] on them and are involved [*paqad*] with them every day...all the time?" (Job 7:17-18, my paraphrase).

On the surface, this question may appear to be about humans but it is actually about God. Yet, though the question was raised in the above contexts with the primary focus pointing to what, who and how God is, it also points secondarily to what the human person is. Pointing to the whole and holy God, the answer rightly defines Yhwh as deeply involved with the human person for the purpose of relationship together, not merely to exercise sovereignty and authority over his creation; and this was Job's eventual relational conclusion in spite of his debilitating situation and circumstance (Job 42:1-6). What, who and how Yhwh *is* wholly constitutes this relational involvement with the human person. At the same time, it also helps to know what the human person *is* to further understand the whole of God's relational involvement. What each *is* is intrinsically interrelated. Even though the human person does not constitute God's relational involvement, the latter constitutes the former wholly in the qualitative image of God for relationship together to be whole in likeness of the whole of God—apart from whom is the human condition. Therefore, what each *is* is irreducible, and the reduction of either has implications for reducing the other—reducing functionally if not also theologically. Moreover, any such reductionism always includes relational consequences between them due to the counter-relational nature of how reductionism works.

The compelling nature of this question took Paul (as well as takes his readers) back to the origin of his person in order to understand the meaning of the person in full created significance—as well as to understand how subsequently his own person had been reduced from that full significance. By rewinding his shared-journey to the beginning, Paul would recall from the creation narratives that the origin of his person was indeed definitive in his Scripture: *the person created in the qualitative image of God—the whole of God increasingly known as the triune God and later as the Trinity—and thus the person composed with a whole ontology from inner out signified by the qualitative function of the heart; therefore this whole person was created with other whole persons in God's design and purpose for the primacy of relationships together, in order to be whole in likeness of the relational ontology of the triune God* (Gen 1:27-28; 2:18,25). This is the theological anthropology made definitive for Paul that by its nature became the functional key for his whole person, and that for his readers becomes a hermeneutical key for understanding the depth of Paul (cf. 2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10; Eph 4:24).

This shared-journey of Paul's person is in part the reason why it is inadequate to attempt to understand Paul only from human contexts such as Judaism (which in itself was diverse, even for Pharisees) and the Greco-Roman world, or even in the early church. There is a deeper context defining and determining Paul only by which Paul's whole person can be understood—beyond information about a fragmentary Paul narrowed down to referential terms.

This retrospective journey that refocused Paul on the origin of his person would have been difficult for Paul the Jew to face because it gets to the heart of the matter, both theologically and functionally. On the basis of this reality from his own Scripture, he had to examine his life and practice (both collectively and individually) and openly face the difficult reality of his person subsequently shaped, defined and determined by the reductionism in his collective-journey as well as personal-journey. He had invested his whole life to this perceptual-interpretive framework and in this quantitative system of

religious practice from outer in, and now he had to account for what he specifically profited from this investment (cf. Phil 3:7-8). The vulnerable presence and relational involvement of the whole of God's ontology and function exposed his reduced ontology and function.

The ontology of the human person from outer in is always a reduction of the person God created. This reduced person is essentially, at best, an ontological simulation and epistemological illusion of the whole person; moreover, any attempt to construct the whole from outer in is analogous to the human effort to construct the whole from bottom-up demonstrated by the tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-4). This is not the person God seeks for relationship together. And any such reduction of the person must be understood as the sin of reductionism, not simply positioned against God's whole but countering the whole of God's relational involvement—for example by diminishing God's involvement only to situations and circumstances, and by minimalizing God's presence only to a particular place or time, as evidenced in much of Israel's history and his collective-journey. This would emerge as the defining issue underlying Paul's life and practice.

The heart signifies the unmistakable function of what God seeks: the whole person, nothing less and no substitutes. When God made conclusive to Abraham the terms for covenant relationship together, the LORD appeared to him directly and said clearly in order to constitute Abraham's relational response: "Walk before me, and be blameless" (Gen 17:1). That is, "be involved with me in relationship together by being blameless" (*tamiym*, cf. Gen 6:9). The tendency is to render "blameless" as moral purity and/or ethical perfection, notably in Judaism by observance of the law (cf. 2 Sam 22:23-24). With this lens, even Paul perceived his righteousness as "blameless" (Phil 3:6). Rather *tamiym* denotes to be complete, whole, and is not about mere moral and ethical purity. Beyond this limited perception, *tamiym* involves the ontology of being whole, namely the whole person from inner out involved in the primacy of relationship together.

For Paul, this retrospective journey was not about going back merely to his birthright as a descendent of Abraham but more importantly about reclaiming his "creation-right" as the person in full created significance. And what *tamiym* signified in Paul's Damascus road experience was indeed the needed epistemological clarification and hermeneutical correction from his shared-journey—a journey also shared by all his readers. Any perception of his own blamelessness was an epistemological illusion since his practice only signified an ontological simulation from reductionism, that is, a person functioning only from outer in without accounting for the integrity of his heart (cf. his later theology, Rom 2:28-29). As Paul faced the reductionism in his life and practice, this turned him back to the pivotal juncture of his journey, confronted by Jesus on the Damascus road. From this axis he was now to be introduced to "a new song" emerging from having addressed the thoughtful question earlier (Ps 144:3,9). That is to say unmistakably, as Paul turned around from his reductionist life and practice he would be redefined, transformed and reconciled to God's whole only on God's terms, which would constitute the wholeness in his person, practice, thought and theology. This definitive blessing of the face of God is the whole of and from God, who and which previously had eluded Paul—and have continued to elude many of his readers.



### **Relationally:**

Along with *tamiym*'s epistemological clarification and hermeneutical correction from Paul's shared-journey in retrospect, he experienced personally and directly Jesus' whole person from inner out made functionally accessible by Jesus vulnerably sharing his heart with Paul. There was a relational dynamic of vulnerability that Paul could not ignore, perhaps reject but not ignore. This went beyond the religious framework of his collective-journey and involved a deeper level than just a belief system. It is on this level that Jesus' earlier words become indispensable for both Paul and his readers: "Pay attention to what you hear; the *interpretive lens* you use will be the *Jesus* you get" (Mk 4:24).

On the Damascus road, the significance of Jesus' dramatic presentation is less distinguished by sight over sound, and the person Paul vulnerably encountered is better understood as an experience of sound over sight (cf. Acts 9:7). That is, we have to go deeper than a quantitative lens focused on a referential level of transmitting information and get to the qualitative depth of communication in relational language and the relational involvement taking place. A quantitative lens and interpretive framework narrows down the epistemic field to referential terms from outer in, consequently diminishes the whole persons involved (both Jesus and Paul) to fragmentary aspects and minimalizes the relational significance, and therefore primacy, of their qualitative involvement. This becomes the narrowed focus and preoccupation with secondary matters. The qualitative and relational significance of the Damascus road emerge from what is heard more than seen, notably from the mouth of the Face and also with Paul's words "who are you" having this significance.

When Paul heard Jesus' words "whom you are persecuting," this opened Paul to the sounds of wholeness—undetectable as referential language—and relational communication from the whole of God. This was not an opening to mysticism but involved the relational dynamic in which wholeness interposed on reductionism. This process retrospectively indeed reengaged Paul epistemologically to the significance of *tamiym* and its epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction. Further engagement for Paul was necessary relationally for *tamiym*'s deeper significance.

The focus on purity, however, was problematic and insufficient for Paul's further engagement. In Israel's history purity often was measured functionally by a code shaped by human contextualization, and accordingly focused more on what persons were responsible to do rather than on the primary function of being involved in relationship together (cf. 1 Sam 15:22; Jer 7:22-23; Hos 6:6; Mic 6:6-8). When such practice was in effect, this demonstrated a redefinition of human ontology from inner out to outer in, thereby reducing persons to the measured indicators of what they did and had. Moreover, in this reductionist process Israel became more about land and nation-state rather than about a people and covenant relationship together, more about religious culture (e.g. ethnocentrism with quantitative identity markers) and politics (e.g. nationalism) than about relational life and practice (both collective and individual) in the image and likeness of God and having theological significance as God's relational whole on God's relational terms. In other words, Israel's history became the frequent narrative of God's people diminishing the covenant relationship and getting embedded, even enslaved, in the surrounding human context (cf. Jer 3:10; 12:2; Eze 33:31). This also applied to the

tradition of Pharisees during Paul's time (see Jesus' penetrating analysis, Mt 15:1-20, cf. the Qumran Essenes' critique<sup>1</sup>).

These reductions all fragmented the integrated functional and relational significance of *tamiym* which God made conclusive to constitute Abraham in covenant relationship together. To be "blameless" by its nature must be fully integrated with *what* and *who* God seeks to be involved with. Therefore, "blameless" is both inseparable from the qualitative function of the heart and irreducible of the ontology of the whole person from inner out. As a Pharisee who rigorously observed the law, Paul had considered his righteousness to be "blameless" (Phil 3:6). Yet Jesus previously had exposed the reductionist practices of Pharisees of Paul's day and their underlying ontology of the person from outer in without the significance of the heart (Mt 15:1-20, cf. 5:20). The critical assessment of one's faith must account for the ontology of the whole person. That is to say, to be blameless is nothing less and no substitutes for being whole as created in the image and likeness of the whole of God. For Abraham, this was the integrated functional and relational significance of his involvement with God signifying his faith, and therefore constituting the necessary relationship together of the covenant on God's qualitative relational terms.

The incarnation was the fulfillment of the whole of God's communicative action in relational response to the human condition. The extension of the person Jesus vulnerably presented on the Damascus road was the triune God's communicative action in relational response to Paul's condition. Jesus vulnerably expressed his "I am" statement to Paul only as relational communication (albeit confrontational) from God—as were his "I am" statements during the incarnation. Hence Jesus' "I am" statement must by its nature be understood as relational language. The embodied Word from God, both in the incarnation and on the Damascus road, communicates only in relational language, not in propositional terms using referential language.

The primary purpose of Jesus' language is always for relational significance, either in positive relational outcomes or negative relational consequences. This was the impact of Jesus' "I am" on Paul. When he heard "I am Jesus," Paul must have thought he was being held accountable and judgment was about to come down on him. Yet the significance of Jesus' relational language was not for a relational consequence but for a relational outcome beyond what Paul could have imagined (cf. 1 Tim 1:13-17).

In referential language, the focus is just on the transmission of information about something or someone. The underlying interpretive framework and lens provide information from an epistemic process which has narrowed down the epistemic field in order to have more certain explanation of the information transmitted.<sup>2</sup> This implies a view and its information from outer in for this certainty. This referential level is not deep enough to detect the sounds of wholeness. In relational language, however, the focus is on the communication of the persons involved in relationship, the terms of which go beyond information and cannot be narrowed down to referential terms even for the sake of certainty. Relational language and terms imply a view from inner out whose communication is both quantitative (content aspect) and qualitative (relational aspect). In this sense, relational language is open-ended rather than narrowed-down, thus the

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<sup>1</sup> See 4QNah 1:2,7; 2:2-3; 3:3,8.

<sup>2</sup> This is McGilchrist's essential description of the brain's activity in the left hemisphere. *The Master and his Emissary*.

communication is neither complete merely in quantitative terms nor understood merely by its content aspect.

Relational language is simply communication which includes two interrelated levels of meaning: (1) the content aspect of the words themselves, and (2) the relationship aspect which can be expressed verbally or nonverbally, directly or indirectly, usually implied by the words yet a distinct part of the communication. Since relational messages are always attached to the content of messages and help us understand its significance or any deeper meaning the content may have or its message includes, it is consequential not to pay attention to them—as Jesus made conclusive (Mk 4:24). If just the content of messages is considered, the significance of the communication may not be fully understood—notably the relational significance conveying the further and deeper meaning of the communication, as on the Damascus road. The three relational messages—what the person says (1) about oneself, (2) about the other person(s), and (3) about their relationship (all discussed earlier)—integrally qualify the content aspect of the words and the meaning that is being communicated. Therefore, understanding these relational messages from someone can mean the basis for truly knowing that person and also for understanding how to respond back to the person. Not understanding these messages is often the basis for misunderstanding that person and for insufficient, incompatible or inappropriate responses back.

Before the content of Jesus' other words to Paul can be considered, his "I am" communication must be understood. "I am Jesus" goes beyond just acknowledging his identity to Paul. *Who* he is cannot be separated or reduced from *what* and *how* he is. That is to say, Jesus' whole person was made vulnerable to be relationally involved in this interaction, and he directly shared that message about himself with Paul. This was the relational message about himself (message 1 above) that qualified the content of his words.

"I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." Technically, Paul could argue that he never persecuted Jesus personally and directly. Jesus, however, communicated that he received Paul's action "personally and directly." His words alone indicated that and did not mean "symbolically and indirectly." Yet his relational message conveys the further and deeper meaning of his communication. This "I am" statement was qualified by the relational message in which Jesus communicated something ontological and relational about himself and his followers. They are God's whole in the irreducible interdependent relationships together necessary to be in likeness of the relational ontology of the whole of God. *What* Jesus is ontologically as one of the trinitarian persons constitutes *how* Jesus is relationally involved with the whole of God's people, just as Jesus defined in his prayer to the Father (Jn 17:23,26). To persecute any person in God's whole is to persecute the whole, thereby to persecute Jesus personally and directly (cf. Jn 15:18-23). This is the who, what and how of Jesus' whole person "whom you are persecuting." This integrated functional and relational significance of Jesus' communication points ahead to the development of Paul's ecclesiology with the metaphor of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12).

There are further relational messages to understand. While Jesus was certainly not releasing Paul of responsibility for his actions, his confrontation of Paul was not as a heretic to be condemned—though Paul belonged to a sect of Judaism (*hairesis*, Acts 26:5). An isolated message Paul attributed to Jesus, "It hurts you to kick against the goads" (Acts 26:14, cf. Ecc 12:11-12), points to how Jesus defined Paul's actions as self-

defeating, destroying the very significance which can fulfill his faith (cf. his teacher Gamaliel's conditional statement, Acts 5:39). This opens up the further relational message in Jesus' "I am" statement of how he saw Paul's whole person (message 2 above), not just as a person reduced to what he did—even conspicuously against Jesus. Accordingly, this relational message communicates how deeply Jesus felt about Paul as a person, which included how his own person was affected relationally by Paul. Moreover, included in his communication, the additional relational message of what Jesus wanted for their relationship and how much he valued it was also implied (message 3 above). In other words, this relational confrontation by the embodied Word from God was truly the relational response of grace by the whole of God who pursued Paul's whole person for the only purpose of relationship together. This relational outcome indeed was the relational significance of Jesus' communication with Paul and the deep impact his "I am" statement had on Paul—which later became the basis for Paul's Christology.

The embodied Word from God communicated the relational messages composing the integrated relational and functional significance of the gospel, both in this presentation of his person as in the incarnation. What Paul would experience from Jesus was indeed an extension of the relational messages in the incarnation of the Word (cf. a Pauline description, 1 Tim 1:15-16). Yet only the whole of the embodied Word vulnerably communicated from the whole of God for the primacy of relationship together composes the full significance of the gospel. A propositional-didactic Word in referential terms by its nature cannot communicate the relational messages essential to establish the gospel in its integrated relational and functional significance; it only establishes a doctrine of the gospel for propositional truth and certainty of faith, not for the experiential truth of ongoing relationship together. Paul did not encounter that Word, though many of his readers perceive him through that lens. Just as in the incarnation, Jesus' whole person came to Paul to be personally and directly involved only on a relational basis with relational language, not in propositional terms for a didactic task to transmit information.

The Word from God whom Paul encountered vulnerably communicated "I am" with the full significance of relational messages to establish the qualitative basis required for Paul relationally both to truly know his triune God and to wholly understand how to respond back for the ongoing involvement in new covenant relationship together. And this same Word is whom Paul's readers need to encounter also, because the same epistemological clarification and hermeneutical correction Paul experienced indeed are keys to what Paul wrote in his letters.

Returning to the words Paul heard from the distinguished Face, "It hurts you to kick against the goads" (Acts 26:14), Jesus' use of relational language also refocused Paul on the relational process of God's communicative action, the words of which cannot be altered (subtracted from or added to) by human shaping and construction in referential terms (cf. Mt 5:17-20; Dt 4:2). Paul was hurting his own person by engaging in this reductionist process, which his Scripture also had warned him against: "The sayings of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings that are given by one shepherd. Of anything beyond these, my child, beware. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh" (Eccl 12:11-12; cf. Jn 5:39). Paul later clearly stopped going up against the goads and relationally responded to the whole of God's words communicated in relationship (cf. 1 Cor 4:6). Paul's readers,

notably in the academy, are still challenged today by these same words in relational language.

When the Father gave the imperative “Listen to him,” he was focused on the necessity of listening to the conclusive messages communicating the whole of God’s thematic relational action, which the integral person presented by Jesus fulfilled vulnerably through their distinguished relational context and process in the human context. Nothing less and no substitutes of the distinguished Face turned and shined, that is, the whole person and presence of Jesus in irreducible and nonnegotiable relational terms. This is the relational dynamic that further unfolded post-ascension.

And what emerges from the Damascus road is only the relational outcome from the whole of God’s relational dynamic distinguished in the relational context and process of God’s qualitative relational terms. This is the relational dynamic that was extended into Paul and unfolded by him—as Jesus promised to his followers (Jn 14:12)—to *pleroo* (complete, make whole) the words from God (Col 1:25) and to make definitive the *pleroma* of Christ (the whole body of Christ, the church, Eph 1:23). In what is characteristic of sight and sound, we can say that Paul was *into* the ‘sound’ of Jesus—that is, the sound of relational language—and less focused on the ‘sight’ of Jesus. Therefore, Paul became less limited by referential language than the early disciples appeared to be (notably Peter) and more open to understand the qualitative depth of the relational significance of the embodied Word, whose relational context and process are not “seen” but clearly heard (Mt 17:5) when carefully listened to (Lk 8:18; Mk 4:24). Paul’s response to and involvement with Jesus were on this qualitative-relational level and thus relationally involved with the whole of God—whose grace Paul was a prime recipient of (cf. 1 Tim 1:15)—in God’s thematic relational response of grace to the human condition. Therefore, in this relational epistemic process with the Spirit, Paul’s epistemology shifted from the referential words of Scripture shaped and constructed ‘from below’ to the Word relationally extended ‘from above’. And his life, practice and theology emerging can only be understood as the relational outcome of his vulnerable involvement with the whole of God in this distinguished relational context and process.

In terms of the integrity and quality of Jesus’ communication (the second definitive issue for all practice discussed previously), Paul was *into* the sound of Jesus’ relational language; and this connected Paul to the depth of Jesus’ relational involvement (the third definitive issue). This provided the epistemological, hermeneutic and functional keys for Paul, which opened the door for the relational dynamic of the whole of Jesus *into* Paul, therefore defining and determining the person Paul presented.

## **The Person Paul Presented**

The integral person and distinguished presence Jesus presented to Paul challenged not only Paul’s theological anthropology but his theological assumptions about God. Even though his assumptions about God were based correctly on the Shema (Dt 6:4), his monotheism was incomplete, not whole. The presence of the whole of God in Face-to-face relationship with Paul changed that for him to compose inseparably the complete Christology and whole monotheism. Yet, it is important for Paul’s readers to understand

that Paul's whole theology was first a functional reality in his life, that is, the relational outcome from ongoingly having his ontology and function defined and determined in wholeness by the distinguished Face in relationship together.

Paul did not emerge from the Damascus road as a fully developed apostle with a complete ready-made theology. As Paul's journey continues beyond the Damascus road, it is critical that the further reading, interpretation and understanding of Paul (namely in his letters) deeply concern the growth and development of *who* and *what* emerged from the Damascus road. What unfolds in Paul's journey is without the following distinctions: What unfolds is not religious though it includes religion; is not spirituality though it bears spiritual development; is not apostolic though it involves the apostle(s); is not missiological though it involves mission; is not ecclesiastical though it involves the church; is not about ethics though it involves ethics; and is not about doctrine though it involves theology.

Paul was vulnerably engaged by the whole of God and as a result he vulnerably engaged God for ongoing involvement in the relational progression of God's whole relational context and process—the relational dynamic of God's thematic action from the beginning. Therefore, Paul's journey must not be reduced to these other referential aspects which appear to prominently occupy Paul's life and practice. Likewise, his whole person must not be reduced to the prominent roles and related functions he fulfilled in these aspects. Paul's readers, in other words, cannot redefine the whole of Paul by a quantitative framework with a referential lens diminishing him to fragmentary aspects, however important, and expect to understand his life, practice, thought and theology. Paul's journey develops only on the basis and with the significance of what emerged in his person from the Damascus road.

The relational process and outcome of Paul's ongoing vulnerable involvement with the whole of God in Face-to-face relationship was summarized by Paul frequently in his shorthand relational language 'in Christ' (e.g. 1 Cor 1:30). Based both on his relational engagement to wholeness by the person and presence Jesus presented and on his ongoing involvement in the relational epistemic process with the whole of God for whole understanding (*synesis*), Paul had no illusions about his person and emphasized epistemic humility: "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord" (1 Cor 1:31). Paul learned the hard lesson that to define one's person based on, for example, what role one performs or what resources one has is a reductionist theological anthropology diminishing the wholeness of God and thus relationship together (1 Cor 1:28-29). This was Paul's urgent theme to the church at Corinth (1 Cor 1:12-13; 3:4; 4:6; 2 Cor 10:12,17). And the basic issue raised for Paul's readers (past and present) revolves around the question: Is our God a referential God in fragmentary terms (1 Cor 1:13a) or the relational God in wholeness (1 Cor 14:33a)? This basic issue was critical for Paul in the Jesus he presented and in the monotheism he maintained. The whole of Jesus could not be understood in fragmentary terms and the whole of God could be known only as the God of wholeness, not as a God of fragmentation.

Paul's warning of exceeding "what is written" and his repeated emphasis on boasting from Jeremiah 9:24 are significant for distinguishing the whole of Paul and the whole in this thought and theology. What the LORD declared in the context of these relational words first exposes boasting (*halal*) from a fragmentary theological anthropology that defines the human person from outer in (Jer 9:23,25-26), which Paul

took to heart to redefine his own person and faith (Phil 3:4-8; Rom 2:28-29). Accordingly, the focus of such boasting also reduced God to referential terms, for example, narrowing down God's deliverance merely to situations (i.e. saved *from*) and the law to a mere code of behavior—including worship behavior of praise, glorifying, rejoicing and celebrating (*halal*, cf. hallelujah) before God without the function of the heart (cf. Isa 29:13). The primary focus of the LORD in relational language, however, is on God's whole ontology and function: the whole of God's vulnerable presence and relational involvement Face to face in human contexts, engaged in the relational work ('*asah*) of distinguished love (*hesed*), who can be counted on to be *who* and *what* God is (*sedaqah*) and *how* God is (*mispah*, 9:24). Based on these relational terms of the whole of God's relational dynamic—not reduced to God's attributes in referential terms—boasting and worshipping are constituted whole (cf. *tamiym*) and signify wholeness (cf. *shalom*) conclusively by the following condition: “that they understand (*sakal*, cf. *synesis*) and know (*yada*, cf. *epignosis*) me, that I am.” Jesus extended this relational condition deeper into the whole of God's relational context and process (Jn 17:3), which also exposed reductionist approaches to the words from God only in referential terms (Jn 5:39; Lk 11:52). Paul turned from the latter and only the former is the key distinguishing his person, even as a Jew. This was the ongoing relational outcome for the whole of Paul from inner out—and hence the nature and significance of his boast only in relational terms (cf. 2 Cor 11:7-10)—that determined the whole ontology and function of the person he presented both for himself and for Jesus.

If Paul's readers are to go beyond merely having information about Paul and his Jesus, then they need to engage them further than human contextualization and locate them in the deeper context that defined their whole person and determined how they function in wholeness. This necessitates, on the one hand, a compatible theological anthropology that pays attention to the whole person from inner out in the primacy of relationship. Anything less will be incompatible for the relational outcome of whole understanding (*synesis*) of the person from inner out. Any substitutes will be incompatible for involvement in the relational epistemic process with the Spirit to specifically know (*epignosis*) the whole person, not merely information about the person. To emphasize, this does not shift Paul's readers from rationalism to existentialism but rather gets beyond these frameworks in order to engage openly in the qualitative and relational significance of God's self-disclosures in the persons of Jesus and Paul. And *synesis* of the person from inner out and *epignosis* the whole person are requisite for the synthesis of their persons.

What emerged from the Damascus road for both Paul and his Jesus essentially does not exceed what converged there. Yet how Jesus and Paul are perceived shapes what converged, and in this manner determines what emerged. If who converged were just historical subjects, then who emerged are limited to their historical contexts. If who converged were referential objects to be observed in the text, what emerges never exceeds those referential terms. It is more than problematic for Paul's readers to be limited to human contextualization and constrained by referential terms, because neither of these positions can adequately define who and what converged and consequently are insufficient to determine who and what emerged.

The Jesus in post-ascension on the Damascus road is inseparable from the Jesus in the incarnation in human contexts, therefore is irreducible from his whole person in and

from the beginning. The Paul converging on the Damascus road is inseparable from his roots, and therefore is irreducible from the person created in the image of God, constituted by the whole of who converged with Paul. Yet Paul entered the Damascus road as a reduced person whose function and faith were fragmentary. Congruent with the whole person Jesus presented to others in human contexts, his whole person and Paul's reduced person were *who* converged; accordingly, it is critical also to understand that wholeness and reductionism are *what* converged, just as evidenced in the incarnation. The convergence of who and what in human contexts resulted in either relational consequences (diminished, distant or broken relationship) with Jesus, or in the relational outcome of whole relationship together. Paul certainly did not experience a relational consequence with Jesus. The relational outcome that emerged, however, can only be determined by the depth of relational involvement of who and what converged. In other words, who and what emerged with Paul did not exceed who and what converged.

A complete christological account of the Jesus who converged with Paul is not gained from referential observation of the narrative and critical interpretation of the text. If the embodied Word was indeed communicative action relationally extended from above, we need to step away from our primary position 'in front of the text', and move out from any likely security pursued 'behind the text', and then to be vulnerably involved 'in the text' in order to engage compatibly the Word in the relational epistemic process. As the epistemological, hermeneutical and functional keys, the person and presence Jesus presented opens the door to the whole of God in relational terms just to understand and know God in whole relationship together, not for referential information about God. In this convergence, Paul's epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction turned him away from his primary position 'in front of' what was written and from the referential words shaped from below in order to receive the Word relationally extended from above. The relational outcome that emerged from Paul did not exceed who converged and what Paul listened to: "Where are you?" "What are you doing here?" "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" "Listen, and I will speak" "Listen to my Son." "Pay attention to how you listen," and "pay attention to what you hear; the measure you use will be the Jesus you get."

For Paul, the Jesus who converged with him defined the measure Paul used for both the Jesus he got and his Jesus who emerged. The relational dynamic of the incarnation for Paul was signified in his relational language with the phrase "the word of Christ" (Rom 10:17), which is commonly rendered merely to referential terms. The whole of Jesus' person and presence constituted "the word of Christ" for Paul and why he made ongoing relational involvement with the Word essential for the church as God's family in wholeness (Col 3:15-16). Paul was not writing about the referential word about Christ embedded in propositional teachings, but only the relational word of Jesus' whole person and presence who vulnerably embodied God's communicative action in relational response to the human condition: "So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ" (Rom 10:17). This is who converged with and constituted the whole of Paul and the wholeness emerging from the Damascus road and unfolding with Paul, as evidenced in his definitive ontology and function for the new creation family of God (Col 3:10-17). Jesus' person, presence and relational involvement are the whole word of Christ in relational terms on whom Paul focused in his corpus, rather than the referential content of Jesus' words and teachings. This I affirm speaks to



why Paul's corpus lacks those quantitative aspects; his corpus is instead complete with the qualitative depth of Jesus' person and presence—the whole of whom Paul could boast of understanding and knowing (as in Jer 9:24; 1 Cor 1:31), yet only because of whole relationship together.

In Paul's corpus Jesus was not a mere referential figure in his thought and theology. Paul never constructed a theology on a referential Jesus, based on and/or supported by various references to Jesus' sayings and teachings—somewhat like an academic study today. Jesus conclusively defined and determined whole ontology and function. Namely, the person and presence of Jesus constituted the whole of God, the *pleroma* (fullness, complete, whole) of God for Paul (Col 1:19; 2:9) and his whole person and presence, along with the Spirit, constituted the whole of Paul to *pleroo* (to complete, make whole) the communicative word of God (Col 1:25). For Paul, nothing less and no substitutes would be the whole who converged with him and the wholeness necessary to emerge to constitute Paul, his Jesus, his gospel and the communicative word of God's thematic relational response to the human condition. And if Paul's readers will listen to the sound of his relational language and not merely depend on their sight of referential words, there will be further and deeper understanding of the relational dynamic synthesizing Jesus *into* Paul and of his wholeness which emerged.

In relational terms of wholeness, who emerged from the Damascus road also was not a converted Jew but a transformed Jew. This differentiation is vital to distinguish the whole of Paul who relationally functioned conjointly in human contexts and God's context, with the latter his primary determinant. When we put together the various segments of God's thematic relational action and Paul's journey to the Damascus road, their integration is the relational outcome of his person redefined from outer in back to inner out, transformed from his reductionism, and made whole in the primacy of relationship together as God's new covenant family—all congruent with Judaism's faith as enacted with *tamiym*, and consequently incompatible with any reductionism of its practitioners and practices. In Paul's relational response to the whole of Jesus, he neither simply converted to a new religion (as assumed by traditional Pauline studies) nor changed ("converted") to another variation of Judaism (as assumed by a new Paul perspective). While not a conversion, the relational significance of Paul's response did redefine his collective identity from 'majority Israel' to 'minority Israel', as he later theologially clarified (Rom 2:28-29; 11:1-32). Moreover, on the basis of *tamiym*'s epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction, as well as the Face's definitive blessing of *shalom*, it is incorrect to say that Paul was only called and commissioned on the Damascus road to fulfill the mission to all nations. By no means could Paul serve as light to the nations without *tamiym*; nor could he work for *shalom* while engaging in reductionism. It is simply inadequate to explain and misleading to suggest Paul's Damascus road experience as a shift in beliefs, understanding or mission. A conversion or call is insufficient understanding of these relational dynamics and is inadequate to define the whole person emerging from the Damascus road. Even more so, such interpretation becomes a distortion when shaped by a reductionist interpretive lens focused outer in.

In the relational dynamic unfolding on the Damascus road, what was happening in Paul's response was qualitative not quantitative. Paul was not converted from the outer in, he was transformed from inner out (cf. 2 Cor 3:18). This was a vital distinction

between the quantitative change from outer in of *syschematizo/metaschematizo* and the qualitative change from inner out of *metamorphoo*, which Paul later made imperative for redemptive change (Rom 12:2). Paul's previous life and practice clearly signified outward conformity (*syschematizo*), and he turned around to go beyond mere outer-in change (*metaschematizo*) to experience only the qualitative change from inner out (*metamorphoo*) of his whole person. In other words, Damascus road was not about Paul's conversion; it was the experiential truth (not a doctrine) of Paul's reconciliation of his whole person with the whole of God to be made whole from above (as Nicodemus was challenged earlier), thereby only God's whole on God's qualitative relational terms. And *tamiym* had become both Paul's epistemological clarification and hermeneutical correction as well as what also newly defined his person (whole ontology) and determined his practice (whole function), therefore the definitive blessing of *shalom* for new relationship together in wholeness.

If whole understanding (*synesis*) of who emerged eludes us, then certainly the person Paul further presented will be incomplete, distorted or contextualized just by human shaping to his readers. This includes both the Jesus he presents as well as his own person presented to others. And this has further implications for what emerged, rendering his corpus merely to referential terms which narrows down his thought and theology to fragmentary aspects lacking coherence, and thus without wholeness. This is not who and what emerged.

On the basis of Paul's response to what he heard (as noted above), Paul was able to further respond to Jesus. That is, the relational significance of Paul's response composed the functional significance of Paul's further response to the communication of Jesus' other words on the Damascus road: his obedience, in relational response to the whole of Jesus' call and relational message to be vulnerably involved together with him in further relational response to the human condition of reductionism apart from God's whole (Acts 9:6; 22:10; 26:15-18). Obedience to God must by its nature be a function of relational involvement; otherwise obedience becomes rendered to some reductionist function defining what a person does, for example, merely out of duty or obligation without any deeper relational significance in response to God (cf. Gal 5:3). That type of obedience could not signify the change Paul was experiencing. What emerged from Paul's obedience was only the outworking of his relational response to and ongoing relational involvement with the whole of God—namely to the whole of Jesus' person and presence and notably with the Spirit.

Moreover, it is important to understand in the development of who and what emerged, that Paul was not only vulnerably engaged by God's relational context on the Damascus road of human contextualization but he also reciprocally engaged God's distinguished relational context by his own ongoing vulnerable involvement in God's whole relational process. The primacy of his relational involvement with the whole of God necessarily was made functional even from within his human contexts by what can be defined as *the process of reciprocating contextualization*:

The ongoing relational involvement with God in the trinitarian relational context solely on God's terms for reciprocal relationship together; in this relational context of ongoing reciprocal interaction, engagement in human contexts is defined on this

basis and thereby primarily determined by God in order to be God's whole, live whole together, and thus to make whole in the world.

Jesus made this process evident ongoingly in the person he presented in human contexts (e.g. at the wedding in Cana, discussed in the previous chap.). And in a notable human context, Paul shared how his own condition and circumstance were used by God specifically to help him deal with the lure of reductionism to keep from crossing that line (2 Cor 12:7-10). Briefly, this involved "a thorn in my flesh" that served to nurture his development of wholeness in God's relational context and process and to help him avoid functioning in reductionism by defining his person from outer in by what he had—a condition defining him as *less*. By the process of reciprocating contextualization Paul was chastened for any engagement in ontological simulation from reductionism. The Lord's response helped Paul's person and their relationship not to be reduced by human terms and shaping, consequently not to be distant or fragmented as outer-in function signifies. That would be the relational consequence of reductionism's counter-relational work based on reducing human persons to outer-in definition by what they have and do, which diminishes relationships accordingly.

Without the primacy of God's relational context for reciprocal contextualization, we are left with only the influence and shaping from human contextualization, which in itself has been influenced and shaped by reductionism. It is an insurmountable challenge to recognize the source of this influence and shaping unless we have God's whole (from top-down self-disclosure) for orientation in the process of reciprocating contextualization. Reductionism essentially reverses this process from the bottom-up by giving primacy to human contextualization both to define and determine human ontology from outer in and relationships accordingly, as well as to construct knowledge of God in order to effectively counter God's whole. This was demonstrated in the three relational tests of Jesus, as discussed in the previous chapter.

This process of reciprocating contextualization functionally determined Paul's person, practice, thought and theology. Therefore 'the historical Paul' seen within human contextualization in the canonical texts is also 'the relational Paul' in God's relational context and process composing God's revealed Word, which further made definitive God's whole to him to additionally compose the significance of 'the theological Paul'. The historical Paul, relational Paul and theological Paul converge and emerge in the text of God's Word by reciprocating contextualization to define and determine the whole of Paul's person and witness (who emerged), and the whole in his thought and theology (what emerged). And the historical, relational and theological Paul must be integrally accounted for by Paul's readers in order to boast with him of understanding and knowing the whole of God, with nothing less and no substitutes.



## Chapter 5                    **The Primacy of Relationship (Part 1)** **and** **the Human Condition**

**You are *occupied* and distracted by many things;  
there is need of only one thing.**

Luke 10:41-42

We need to deepen the question at the beginning of this study from Goethe's Faust—what holds the world together in its innermost?—to address the more specific question: What holds the person(s) together in her/his/their innermost? The response to this question makes this the pivotal chapter of this study, in which our whole understanding of the breadth of the human condition needs to clearly emerge.

Attempts by modern science to answer this more specific question have shifted notably to neuroscience along evolutionary terms. And the insights gained from neuroscientists' hypotheses and findings should not be ignored or dismissed. If anything, they likely challenge our theological anthropology and perhaps chasten, or even put to shame, our practice of faith. While their work does not provide hermeneutic correction for us, it does offer important secondary epistemological clarification about the human person that is helpful to further understand what is primary.

Two interrelated functions appearing to be integral to the human brain are remarkably qualitative (i.e. in terms of feelings) and social (about relationships). In his explanation of how consciousness (a mind with a self) develops, neuroscientist Antonio Damasio promotes the following:

Feelings are often ignored in accounts of consciousness. Can there be consciousness without feelings? No. ...I hypothesized that feeling states are generated largely by brain-stem neural systems as a result of their particular design and position vis-à-vis the body.

Why should perceptual maps, which are neural and physical events, feel like anything at all? To attempt a layered answer, begin by focusing on the feeling state that I regard as simultaneous foundation of mind and self, namely, the primordial feelings that describe the state of the organism's interior. ...Feeling states first arise from the operation of a few brain-stem nuclei that are highly interconnected among themselves and that are the recipients of highly complex, integrated signals transmitted from the organism's interior. In the process of using body signals to regulate life, the activity of the nuclei transforms those body signals. ...In brief, in the complex interconnectivity of these brain-stem nuclei, one would find the beginning of an explanation for why feelings—in this case, primordial feelings—feel like something.

Another layer of the answer as to why perceptual maps of the body should feel like anything calls for evolutionary reasoning. If perceptual maps of the body are to be effective in leading an organism toward avoidance of pain and seeking of pleasure,

they should not only feel like something, they actually *ought* to feel like something. ...A related aspect of the answer points to the functional divide between pleasure and pain states, which are correlated, respectively, with optimal and smooth life-managing operations, in the case of pleasure, and impeded, problem-ridden life-managing operations, in the case of pain.

The neural design that enables qualia provides the brain with *felt* perceptions, a sense of pure experience. After a protagonist is added to the process, the experience is claimed by its newly minted owner, the self.<sup>1</sup>

In conjoint function with the qualitative, there is the relational that emerges for neuroscience to explain what it means to be human. Consider the social function of the brain in neuroscientist John Cacioppo's research on loneliness:

To understand the full capacity of humans, one needs to appreciate not only the memory and computational power of the brain but its capacity for representing, understanding, and connecting with other individuals. That is, one needs to recognize that we have evolved a powerful, meaning-making *social* brain.

Our research suggests that “not lonely”—there is no better, more specific term for it—is also, like “not thirsty” or “not in pain,” very much part of the normal state. Health and well-being for a member of our species requires, among other things, being satisfied and secure in our bonds with other people, a condition of “not being lonely” that, for want of a better word, we call social connection.

It should not be surprising, then, that the sensory experience of social connection, deeply woven into who we are, helps regulate our physiological and emotional equilibrium. The social environment affects the neural and hormonal signals that govern our behavior, and our behavior, in turn, creates changes in the social environment that affect our neural and hormonal processes.

Because early humans were more likely to survive when they stuck together, evolution reinforced the preference for strong human bonds by selecting genes that support pleasure in company and produce feelings of unease when involuntarily alone. Moreover...evolution fashioned us not only to feel good when connected but to feel secure. The vitally important corollary is that evolution shaped us not only to feel bad in isolation, but to feel insecure, as in physically threatened.

Our brains and bodies are designed to function in aggregates, not in isolation. That is the essence of an obligatorily gregarious species. The attempt to function in denial of our need for others, whether that need is great or small in any given individual, violates our design specifications. ...Social connection is a fundamental part of the human operating (and organizing) system itself.

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<sup>1</sup> Antonio Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010), 242, 56, 259, 262.

Social neuroscience shows us not only that there is no magical boundary between mind and body, but that the boundaries we have always assumed to exist between ourselves and others are not nearly as fixed as we once imagined.

A great deal of what it means to be human, perhaps a great deal more than philosophy, religion, or even science realized until very recently, is to be social.<sup>2</sup>

The integration of mind and body by neuroscience, of course, is still from an outer-in framework; consequently its notion of the qualitative is determined by the limits of the quantitative. This is certainly insufficient to answer what holds together human persons in their innermost. Hans Küng is correct to critique the limits of neuroscience.<sup>3</sup> Yet these qualitative and relational aspects observed by neuroscience help draw attention, if not point us, to what is primary in holding together persons in the innermost. At this stage in human life, we, whether in the theological academy or the church, need any helpful support or assistance available, even if only secondary. And if neuroscientists make these observations of the evolutionary development of the human person, what are we doing with the unfolding of God's words from the beginning? David Brooks, author of *The Social Animal*, a recent thought-provoking book about the human longing for contact and community, does not think we are doing much of any significance: "Philosophy and theology are telling us less than they used to. Scientists and researchers are leaping in where these disciplines atrophy—they're all drilling down into an explanation of what man is."<sup>4</sup>

We can and also need to be more specific: the qualitative and relational aspects necessary for whole ontology and function are neither sufficiently addressed nor deeply accounted for when addressed in theological and biblical studies. This suggests a status quo in theology and function above which we rarely rise, and thus from which we need to experience redemptive change (the old dying and the new rising). This also may raise a further question from some of those readers of such studies: On what basis then is the human condition defined and its resolution determined? This pivotal chapter addresses these questions and illuminates the whole of God's response to them, notably in the theology and hermeneutic embodied by Jesus and Paul.

## The Primacy of the Secondary

In human life and practice, the surrounding context (namely culture) commonly establishes the priorities of what is important. To the extent that our identity is shaped and our function is determined by these priorities, we can say that we are products of our context or times. In our period of human history in the global context, the priorities of this larger context are having a profound effect on the priorities of the local context—

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<sup>2</sup> John T. Cacioppo and William Patrick, *loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), x, 8, 11, 15, 127, 167, 201.

<sup>3</sup> Hans Küng, *The Beginning of All Things*, 179-91.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in an interview about his book, *Newsweek*, March 7, 2011, p.47. For an integrated account of these issues, see David Brooks, *The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement* (New York: Random House, 2011).

partially positive but mainly negative. The limited positive effect involves helping people to look beyond a provincial identity and function for connection in the global community—albeit an elusive connection, if not an illusory community. The negative impact has been the conflict or the reduction which global priorities have had on any qualitative and relational priorities in the local context, therefore increasingly shifting, embedding and enslaving persons in the secondary. And, as neuroscience would confirm, this development is taking its toll on the minds and bodies of those affected.

Interestingly, the globalizing dynamic could be a metaphor for Jesus' actions during the incarnation, although with deeper implications and effects for the qualitative and relational. As discussed in part previously, Jesus had significant connections throughout his earthly life. One of his most significant connections was with a family that included Martha, Mary and Lazarus. The dynamic that unfolds in this intimate family context has some parallel to what is happening today, not only in the global and local contexts but also in family contexts.

The current period of globalization in human history is neither unprecedented as commonly perceived (cf. humanity in the beginning) nor sufficient enough to expect significant change as some propose (cf. the tower of Babel). Jesus connected this local family to the definitive larger context and deeper change necessary for human identity and function to become involved in the qualitative-relational whole, and therefore in what is primary and not merely secondary.

Their first interaction takes place because “Martha welcomed *Jesus* into her home” with his disciples during his later Judean ministry (Lk 10:38-42). The term for “welcomed him” (*hypodechomai*) denotes a distinct act of caring for them by Martha, which she apparently initiated; also, identifying it as “her home” is unusual when there is a male in the family. Her hospitable and kind action was no doubt well received by this likely tired and hungry group, and could easily have been the basis for significant fellowship. But fellowship is a context in which the function of relationship is critical. Martha certainly cannot be faulted for what she did (hospitality and serving Jesus), yet she needs to be critiqued for *how* she did those deeds, and thus the nature of her discipleship. The critical implication of the definitive context to which Jesus connected this family involves not just any kind of relationship.

For persons like Martha, thinking relationally is always more difficult when the surrounding context defines persons in fixed roles and confines them to the performance of those roles. The non-fluid nature of their sociocultural context made individuality outside those roles an aberration; consequently the norm not only constrained the person but also limited (intentionally or inadvertently) the level of involvement in relationships. These barriers made the function of relationship critical for Martha since she was a product of her times.

The person Martha presented to Jesus was based on her role and what she did, which she seemed to perform well. By defining herself in this way, she focused quite naturally on her main priority of all the hospitable work (*diakonia*) to be done, that is, her service or ministry (*diakoneo*, Lk 10:40). This work, on the one hand, was culturally hers to do while, on the other hand, was an opportunity for her to serve Jesus. Yet, defining her person by what she did and the role she had also determined what she paid attention to and ignored (from her perceptual-interpretive framework) in others, and thus how she did relationships with them. More specifically, Martha stayed within the limits of her role



in relationship with Jesus, whom she related to based on his role, all as determined by her local context. In other words, Martha did not engage Jesus and connect with him in the quality of relationship made accessible to her from his larger context. This can be seen clearly in their second interaction when Lazarus died (Jn 11:1-40), to which we turn before continuing in their first interaction.

In this second interaction Martha quickly extends herself again to Jesus when her brother died (Jn 11:21); she appears not to lack in initiative. Her opening words to Jesus are exactly the same words (see Greek text) Mary would share with him in their encounter later: “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died” (v.21, Mary in v.32). Yet, while expressing her discouragement and seemingly holding Jesus accountable, in the same breath she qualifies her words with an indirect statement: “But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him” (v.22). Whether she was suggesting or requesting that Jesus do something, her indirectness was probably true to cultural form by not asking Jesus (Master, Teacher) for a favor directly. Furthermore, Martha stayed within the limits (functional barriers) of relationship between men/rabbi and women. Her indirectness evokes from Jesus a simple yet personal response of what will happen: “Your brother will rise again” (v.23), implying his relational involvement with them. Since Jesus had already taught about the future resurrection from the dead (Jn 5:28-29; 6:39-40), Martha must have learned that earlier by making reference to it here (v.24). These words by Martha are what a good student would be expected to say. On the surface of Jesus’ response, he then seems to take her on a short theological exercise, yet he is really trying to make deeper relational connection with her at the vulnerable level of her heart—“believes in me,” the intimate relational work of trust (vv.25-26). Martha responds with a clear confession of faith (v.27) but without the intimate relational connection with the whole person of her faith, who is kept at a relational distance as she goes back to call Mary. Later, even her confession is called into question, as she is tested relationally by reductionism: the fact of the situation vs. the person of her faith (vv.39-40).

The priorities of Martha’s local context limited her identity to provincial terms from outer in and consequently constrained her person from being able to function from inner out and to engage Jesus accordingly. How Martha was defined by her sociocultural context also determined the function of her person, which predisposed her to Jesus and biased how she did relationship with him. As a product of human contextualization, she shaped the relationship together with Jesus. With this cultural-perceptual framework, she paid attention to Jesus primarily in his role as Lord and Teacher but overlooked his whole person in this interaction; she concentrated on serving Jesus but ignored being relationally involved with him, as evidenced in the first interaction. Consequently, she neither exercises her whole person from inner out nor experiences her whole person with Jesus in the primary function of relationship imperative for his followers, which Jesus later made paradigmatic (Jn 12:26). As a substitute for what is primary, Martha occupies herself in what is secondary—not necessarily unimportant (as hospitality and serving Jesus evidence) yet clearly secondary to what is primary.

This was the critique that Jesus had for *how* Martha functioned: “You are *occupied* and distracted by many things; there is need of only one” (Lk 10:41-42). Jesus refocused Martha on what is primary and redefined for her what is necessary, irreducibly and nonnegotiable. This obviously created conflict with the priorities of her cultural-

perceptual framework. Jesus does not directly deny Martha her framework but shifts her to the deeper qualitative framework of his relational context from above to provide her with needed hermeneutic correction. Martha was embedded in the primacy of the secondary. Despite the work that needs to be done and the circumstances related to it, he basically tells Martha not to let that define her and determine their time together: “but only one thing is needed.” The term for “need” (*chreia*) means usage, act of using, employment, to signify that in which one is employed. Jesus is calling her to the primary priority (her vocation, as it were) in life: *to his whole person in relationship together*—not merely to occupy the same space as Jesus, nor merely to do what Jesus did (e.g. serve), but *to ongoing relational involvement with him in intimate relationship*. No greater priority can employ her life and practice, nor should any other priority determine how she functions. The primacy of relationship in whole relationship together is irreducible to any other human functions and nonnegotiable to any human terms.

The primacy of relationship is inseparable from discipleship as defined and determined by Jesus. This necessarily involves the call to be redefined from outer in to inner out, transformed from reductionism and made whole in relationship together. For Martha, who shaped relationship together as a hospitable servant of Jesus, this implied her need for redemptive change. Though she took a small step to connect initially with Jesus in their second interaction, she needed to be redeemed (set free) to be involved in the primacy of whole relationship together with Jesus as Mary was. Moreover, this included her relationship with Mary and seeing her person from inner out also. In their last time together at another dinner given in Jesus’ honor, Martha continued to stay in her traditional place among the women to serve, even though the dinner was not in her home (Mk 14:3; Jn 12:2). Whether she was still occupied by the secondary is not clear; but she did not complain about Mary not serving, who was involved further and deeper face to Face with Jesus in the primacy of relationship (Jn 12:3; Mk 14:6).

Mary was vulnerably involved in relational work (*ergon*), which should not be confused with occupation in “a good service” (Mk 14:6). In discipleship, when following Jesus is shaped by human terms, the line between the primacy of relationship and the primacy of the secondary becomes indistinguishable. In Jesus’ paradigm for serving, however, he is clearly definitive that the work of serving him (*diakoneo*) must by its nature emerge from and thereby be secondary to “follow me” (*akoloutheo*) in the primacy of face-to-Face relationship together (Jn 12:26). The subjunctive mood of *diakoneo* is contingent on the imperative of *akoloutheo*. *Diakoneo* is focused on the primacy of the work to be done (as in Martha’s *diakoneo*), which, however important the work may be (or perhaps perceived to be), is always secondary to the primary involvement of *akoloutheo* with the person in relationship (as in Mary’s *akoloutheo*). When Jesus unequivocally defined the “need for only one” priority, ongoing involvement in the relational work for the primacy of relationship became irreplaceable and nonnegotiable. All other work is secondary, and the (pre)occupation of anything less and any substitutes shifts the primacy to the secondary, even inadvertently and with good intentions as evident with Martha. These are the qualitative and relational aspects of the human person and function with which Jesus integrally impacts human contexts from his deeper relational context for the connection to the whole that holds together both the person and the world in their innermost.

The shift to the primacy of the secondary must further be understood in the underlying quest for certainty and/or the search for identity. This process engages a narrowing of the epistemic field to better grasp, explain and have certainty, for example, about what holds the person and world together in their innermost. Functionally, the process also necessitates reducing the qualitative-relational field of expectations from inner out (too demanding, vulnerable with uncertain results) to outer in for quantitative-referential terms that are easier to measure, perform and quantify the results of, for example, in the search for identity and finding one's place in human contexts (including church and academy). In other words, the shift to the primacy of the secondary and its preoccupation are not without specific purpose that motivates persons even in the theological task and the practice of faith. Yet whatever certainty and identity result in secondary terms can only be incomplete, ambiguous or shallow. Jesus further critiqued this secondary certainty without the primacy in relationship (Jn 5:39,42) and the substitute identity without the qualitative depth of relational involvement (Mt 5:13-16; cf. 15:8-9).

After Paul's own epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction, he further extended the ongoing fight against the primacy of the secondary and its counter-relational work in the church. This is evident notably in his Corinthians and Galatians letters. The shift from inner out to outer in, and the preoccupation with the secondary over the primacy of relationship together, can be summarized in Paul's relational words: "So let no one boast about *persons from outer in*...so that none of you will be puffed up in favor of one against another. For who sees anything different in you *from inner out*? ...But when they measure themselves *from outer in* by one another, and compare themselves *accordingly* with one another, they do not *understand the whole* [*syniemi*]" (1 Cor 3:21; 4:6-7; 2 Cor 10:12); "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for *the primary*; the only *primary* that counts is *the relational work of faith* working through *distinguished love*" (Gal 5:6).

The shift to the outer in and the secondary is always made at the expense of the qualitative and relational, as evident in Jesus' and Paul's critiques. Moreover, the qualitative and relational are interdependent and integral to the process to be whole, both for the person and persons together in relationship. The reduction or loss of either also results in the reduction or loss of the other. That is, they are inseparable. We cannot function in the qualitative from inner out apart from the involvement in the primacy of relationship; and we cannot be involved in the primacy of relationship without the function of the qualitative from inner out. The focus and occupation on the secondary are consequential for reducing, if not preventing, the primary by (1) the focus narrowed to referential terms of the quantitative having primacy over the qualitative and (2) the occupation reduced to functional terms of what essentially becomes counter-relational work. In addition, when the primacy is given to the secondary, there are certainly repercussions theologically and for the gospel, as further evidenced in the critiques of Jesus (e.g. Mk 7:5-8, 14-23) and of Paul (e.g. Gal 1:6; 3:1-5).

Of course, what Jesus and Paul embodied, the Face distinguished from the beginning, and continues to turn to us to bring the change from inner out necessary to constitute the new relationship together in wholeness. And the only alternative to God's whole in the primacy of relationship is reductionism and its counter-relational work with

its substitutes of the secondary and the human shaping of relationships—what otherwise needs to be understood as the human condition, that is, the human relational condition.

## The Human Condition

Either too much is assumed about the human condition or too little discussion takes place about it. And not enough is said when discussion does focus on the human condition. Yet, the human condition is not as complex as frequently considered, nor can it be oversimplified (narrowed) down to sin as sin is commonly perceived.

If the gospel involves the fulfillment of God's thematic relational response to the human condition, then in order to fully receive, wholly claim and completely proclaim the gospel, we need to understand the human condition. If we do not, or cannot, account for the human condition, what exactly is our good news and to what is it significant? Certainly, the human condition remains unchanged without the gospel; but the gospel is not good news without the human condition. God's response is relationally specific so it cannot be generalized. What then is God responding to in his thematic action? Just as the gospel antecedes the incarnation, the whole of God's relational response emerged from the beginning.

In the beginning God created the human person with an aspect of God to constitute the person from inner out (*nepes*, soul, spirit, mind, person, self, Gen 2:7). *Nepes* has a quantitative aspect in which God created all living creatures (Gen 1:30); there is a limited quality within this quantitative structure that neuroscientist Damasio identified in the evolutionary development of the organism's interior (as noted above). *Nepes*, however, also has a deeper qualitative aspect created only in human persons constituting the image of God. The combination of both aspects should not be confused with an artificial dualism of quantitative-qualitative, material-immaterial, as in classic dualism from a Greek philosophical framework. Rather the inner (core) and outer (peripheral) conjointly constitute the integral person's whole ontology and function from a Hebrew framework. Therefore, the person must not, by this created nature, be seen in fragmentary parts or the whole person is reduced, which is the inevitable consequence of an outer-in approach to define the person. Only the inner out distinguishes the whole person, while outer in is a fragmented person who is not whole, even with an aggregate of one's parts.

In Hebrew terminology of the OT, the *nepes* that God implanted of the whole of God into the human person is signified in ongoing function by the heart (*leb*). The function of the qualitative heart is critical for the whole person and holding together the person in the innermost. The biblical proverbs speak of the heart in the following terms: identified as "the wellspring" (starting point, *tasa'ot*) of the ongoing function of the human person (Prov 4:23); using the analogy to a mirror, the heart also functions as what gives definition to the person (Prov 27:19); and, when not reduced or fragmented ("at peace," i.e. wholeness), as giving life to "the body" (*basar*, referring to the outer aspect of the person, Prov 14:30, NIV), which describes the heart's integrating function for the whole person (inner and outer together). Without the function of the heart, the whole person from inner out created by God is reduced to function from outer in, distant or separated from the heart. This functional condition was ongoingly critiqued by God and

responded to for the inner-out change necessary to be whole (e.g. Gen 6:5-6; Dt 10:16; 30:6; 1 Sam 16:7; Isa 29:13; Jer 12:2; Eze 11:19; 18:31; 33:31; Joel 2:12-13).

The fragmentation of the person to outer in emerged from the beginning. In the primordial garden a critical dynamic took place that is insufficient to understand merely as the sin of disobedience. Along with being created as a whole person with a qualitative heart for integral function from inner out, the human person in the qualitative image of God was not created to be isolated, separated, alone from other persons, that is, to be apart from the whole of relationships together in likeness of the relational ontology of the whole of God—the condition of which God made conclusive “is not good, pleasant, beautiful, delightful, precious, correct, righteous” (all meanings of *tob*) for the person to be and function in (Gen 2:18). God responded at creation to create wholeness in human persons by the inseparable and integral function of the whole person from inner out in the qualitative image of God and of whole persons in the relationships together necessary to be whole in the relational likeness of God. Wholeness is the irreducible and nonnegotiable created ontology and function of both the qualitative and the relational. And anything less and any substitute for the human person and persons together are reductions of creation and contrary to God’s creative action, as well as in conflict with God’s relational response for the whole of persons. This condition is what unfolds in the primordial garden.

The critical dynamic underlying this condition for us to understand is less about what Satan does and involves what the persons do. In Eve’s perceptual field (with her brain engaged as well), the fruit she saw evoked feelings of delight and of desire for gaining knowledge and wisdom in referential terms (Gen 3:6). Whether she thought about the fruit prior to this is unknown, but she appeared to have been satisfied with God in relational terms. That is, God’s creative action from inner out was satisfying (“both naked and were not ashamed,” Gen 2:25) and God’s communicative action was not displeasing (“but God said,” 3:3). In relational terms, however, the feelings evoked by the fruit should also have evoked—what Cacioppo identified in the social brain—feelings of insecurity, perhaps even pain, about losing whole relationship together, both with God and Adam (“naked and not ashamed”). Why the feelings about the fruit had more influence than the feelings about the relationship is not just about the sin of disobedience but because Eve (in her perceptual-interpretive framework and lens) shifted in function from inner out to outer in, from the qualitative to the quantitative, from the relational to the referential, therefore from what is primary to secondary things (“good for food...a delight to the eyes...desired to make one wise”). What emerged is human effort for self-determination and the human shaping of relationships (“clothed and hidden”). What fully accounts for this shift and its resulting actions is the sin of reductionism: that which counters the whole in creation and conflicts with the whole of God.

The persons in the primordial garden redefined their theological anthropology and reduced their whole persons from inner out with the qualitative heart in the primacy of relationship in order to substitute an identity from outer in based on the secondary of what they have and do, and thereby reshape relationships. The consequence was the loss of wholeness in both the qualitative and the relational. In further understanding these critical dynamics, since their action to give priority to the secondary was made apart from the primacy of relationship, by implication the person (self) acted autonomously in the relationship based on one’s own terms. Of further significance then, having assumed an

identity apart from the primacy of relationship necessitated being involved in the effort of self-determination. If they had functioned inner out focused on the primary, they would have engaged the above situation by the primacy of relationship. This would have avoided the fragmentation of wholeness in relationship created by their self-autonomy and made unnecessary their attempt to construct an identity in the human context by self-determination, efforts which necessarily involve their shaping of relationships. Their loss of whole relationship together was evidenced in the relational consequence: “the eyes of both were *refocused to outer in* and they knew that they were naked and they *covered their person*...I was afraid because I was naked and I hid myself” (Gen 3:7,10). These dynamics were extended further with the overlap of self-determination into the need for self-justification: “The woman whom you gave to be with me [in the primacy of relationship], she gave me fruit...I ate” (3:12). For the person to be defined from outer in and determined by what they have and do, always necessitates a comparative process with human distinctions of ‘better’ or ‘less’.

All these dynamics converge to define the human condition and its engagement in the sin of reductionism. We need to broaden and deepen our understanding of sin to fully account for the human condition in our midst, notably efforts of self-determination and the human shaping of relationships. If we think that the human condition is about sin but understand sin only in terms of conventional moral-ethical failure (e.g. disobedience in the garden), then we do not account for the loss of the qualitative and the relational in everyday human life (even in the church and academy) that God clearly distinguished in created ontology and function of human persons—that qualitative image and relational likeness distinguishing the whole of God. The relational consequence “to be apart” unfolding from the primordial garden is the human condition of the loss of the primacy of whole relationship together and its prevailing relational distance, separation, brokenness, and thus loneliness—which even threatens the integrity of the human brain (per Cacioppo) as further evidence that this condition “is not good, pleasant, beautiful, delightful, precious, correct, righteous for persons to be apart from whole relationship together.” How we tend to do relationship and what prevails in our relationships today are reductions of the primacy God created for whole relationships in his likeness; and the human shaping of relationships composes the human relational condition, which then is reflected, reinforced or sustained by any and all human shaping.

Furthermore, the whole person from inner out signified by the qualitative function of the heart needs renewed focus for understanding the human condition and needs to be restored in our theology and practice. We cannot avoid addressing the human heart (our own to start) and the feelings associated with it because the whole of human identity is rooted in it—along with the consciousness of self noted by Damasio—and the depths of the human condition is tied to it. If neuroscience can talk about feelings as integral to the human function, why doesn’t the theological academy discuss feelings as at the core of the human person? I suggest that part of the answer relates to our theological anthropology having redefined the person without the primacy of the qualitative and relational; but the main reason involves the human condition, that is, our intentional, unintentional or inadvertent engagement in the reductionism composing the human condition—notably in the self-determination preoccupied in the secondary (“good for...a delight to...desired to”) and in the shaping of relationships (“unexposed and distant”). Consciousness as a person necessarily involves feelings—even for the whole of God (e.g.

Gen 6:6; Jn 11:33,35; Eph 4:30)—which Damasio defines as essential for the self but locates feelings only in brain function to integrate mind and body. We, however, can and need to go deeper to inner out for the qualitative function of the heart to distinguish the whole person. Jesus clearly declared that the heart is innermost of the person, who when not whole emerges in the fragmented function of reductionism (Mk 7:20-23).

Therefore, a turn from the heart in any context or function has an unavoidable consequence of the human condition. The qualitative loss signified in the human condition emerges when we become distant from our heart, constrained or detached from feelings, thereby insensitive or hardened—just as Jesus exposed (Mk 7:6; Jn 5:42) and Paul critiqued (Eph 4:17-19). This increasingly embeds human function in the outer in and reduces human ontology to ontological simulation. This is evidenced in the function of “hypocrites” (*hypokrites*, Mk 7:6). In referential terms, *hypokrites* and *hypokrisis* (hypocrisy, cf. Lk 12:1) are limited to pretension or falsehood, in acts to dissemble or deceive. In relational terms, the dynamic involves the person presented to others that is only from outer in and thus different from the whole person distinguished from inner out. Just as ancient Greek actors put on masks in a play, *hypokrites* engages in ontological simulation not necessarily with the intent to deceive but from what emerges by the nature of function from outer in. In other words, whatever the person presents to others, it is not whole and consequently cannot be counted on to be who and what the person is, which is not about the outer-in issue of deception but the inner-out issue of righteousness. This dynamic engages a pivotal issue involving the ontology of the person and its effect on relationships. The consequence of such function in relational terms is always a qualitative relational consequence which may not be apparent at the quantitative level from outer in. The outer-in simulation masking its qualitative relational consequence is exposed by Jesus notably in the relational act of worship: “This people honors me with their lips but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me” (Mk 7:6). Paul also later confronted Peter and exposed his outer-in simulation (*hypokrisis*) by the role-playing he engaged in focused on secondary matters, which even influenced Barnabas and others to function outer in (Gal 2:11-14).

The qualitative function of the heart is irreplaceable and inseparable from the primacy of whole relationship together. They are the irreducible and nonnegotiable outworking of the creation (both original and new), for whose wholeness they are integral—and therefore the keys for being whole which cannot be ignored or diminished. Anything less and any substitutes of the qualitative and the relational are reductions which signify the presence, influence and operation of the human condition. Any reductions or loss of the qualitative and relational renders the person and persons together in relationship to fragmentary terms of human shaping, the condition of which cannot be whole and consequently function in the “not good to be apart” from God’s whole—in spite of any aggregate determination made in referential terms. The reduction to human terms and shaping from outer in—signifying the human person assuming autonomy apart from the primacy of relationship—prevail in human life and pervade even in the church and the academy, notably in legitimated efforts of self-determination and self-justification (functionally, not theologically). The interrelated issues of self-autonomy, self-determination and self-justification are critical to understand in terms of the sin of reductionism if we are to pay attention to the human condition in our midst.

## **Its Issues of Self-Autonomy, Self-Determination and Self-Justification**

Jesus provides the whole understanding definitive of these issues in the Sermon on the Mount as he places in juxtaposition the following: reductionism with wholeness, the outer in with the inner out, the fragmentary of referential terms with the whole of relational terms, thereby exposing reduced human ontology and function in contrast and conflict with whole ontology and function (Mt 5-7). And what emerges conclusively from his major discourse—his communicative message in the relational words of relational language, not referential—is the primacy of whole relationship together constituted *in* the whole of God and *by* the Whole of God in creation, which is integrally distinguished from the workings “to be apart” of the human condition that emerges in contrast and conflict by human shaping of relationships.

The search for the identity of the human person implies the need to have an identity in both the qualitative and the relational, even though this may not be the actual identity pursued. Apart from the qualitative and relational, identity formation is an ongoing process of shaping who the person is in human contexts. The implication of such an ongoing search is that the valid need for identity becomes redefined to a narrowed-down need to have certainty about the identity of who the person is rather than struggle with a fluid or relative identity in human contexts. Without the qualitative and relational, the certainty of an identity in human contexts by necessity requires an outer-in comparative process based on defining the person by what they do and have in reduced referential terms. The reduction of the person and persons together are necessary to have any certainty in who one is in that human context. Otherwise a person has no quantified means to measure their standing compared to others and if there is any assurance of belonging in that human context.

The further implication in this search for *who* the person is involves the deeper issue: Without the qualitative and relational, the formation of identity does not, and cannot, constitute *what* the person is, and is thus unable to know, understand, practice and experience *what* holds together the person and persons in relationship in their innermost. Nevertheless, that does not keep persons from trying to construct an identity in human contexts in search of who they are. Their search assumes self-autonomy (individually or collectively), and self-determination defines the basis of their attempts. The ongoing dynamic is the outworking of the human condition, as unfolded from the persons in the primordial garden in their autonomous attempt to construct an identity from outer in (“sewed leaves together and made loincloths”) as a substitute for their whole person from inner out (“both naked and not ashamed”). Even when a perceived level of certainty in a limited identity had been achieved, the narrowed-down identity markers only engaged their persons in ontological simulations and epistemological illusions—in other words, that which still reflects the presence of and determination by the human condition with its sin of reductionism. This is who and what Jesus makes definitive while exposing such simulation and illusion for the person and persons together.

The determination of self, meaning in life and wholeness in the innermost has been ongoingly the most consequential human practice ever since the first human persons took up the challenge in the primordial garden. This effort becomes even more problematic when it is a theological practice functioning in a religious context supposedly in relation to God. As noted above, when Jesus critiqued the outer-in function of religious



practice, he directly challenged the assumptions and determining source of self, meaning and wholeness based on whose terms, God's or human persons' shaping of God's terms (e.g. Mk 7:5,8,13). More importantly, he directly confronted the issue of who determines, functionally and not necessarily theologically, the terms for relationship with God.

When a lawyer made the volitional decision "to justify himself" (*dikaioo*, Lk 10:29), this exercised the functional choice "to demonstrate to be righteous." Yet, merely to be defined as righteous is an issue of interpretation and meaning; to *be* righteous, on the other hand, cannot be self-determined or be measured by terms of human definition. This is critical to distinguish in order to understand the difference in actual function between God's terms and our terms for relationship together. Failure to distinguish this difference leaves us susceptible to the influence of reductionism and its counter-relational work; "the measure we use will be the measure we get." The subtlety of reductionism is evident both in the shift of prominence to the individual person and in the person's effort to fulfill the responsibility to demonstrate one's righteousness. The latter necessarily occurs in order to quantify some result, however secondary or virtual.

While Jesus said "blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Mt 5:6), he clearly taught his disciples that their righteousness must "exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees" (*perisseuo*, to go beyond, Mt 5:20)—that is, must go beyond the reductionists who function from outer in (as in *hypokrites* discussed above). This issue of righteousness was addressed in whole by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount—his major discourse (in relational terms, not referential) with his disciples and his summary teachings (in relational language, not referential) for all his followers, the primer for discipleship (Mt 5-7)—in order to constitute our life and practice beyond reductionism, that which signifies the human condition even in a religious context and its practice of faith.

The pivotal section in his major relational message is Jesus' declarative position on the Torah and the Prophets (Mt 5:17-20). Together with the Writings, they collectively constitute the communicative words of God in the OT, to which his coming (the embodying of the gospel) adhered and cohered. The Sermon on the Mount was framed in this larger context extended from the OT and, therefore, in the full context of God's thematic relational action. Jesus' purpose was not "to abolish" (*katalyo*, to dissolve, demolish, destroy) but "to fulfill" (*pleroo*, to complete) "until everything is accomplished" (*ginomai*, to be, comes into existence). Yet, what the incarnation adhered to and cohered with was not a list of demands of the law, nor a system of ethics and moral obligations. The law is God's terms for covenant relationship together. What Jesus focused on was not merely the oral and written word of God but those words from God—that is, the communication from the mouth of God. And God's communicative action is not merely informative in referential language but has distinguished authorial intention (as communicator/author) in relational language to which the incarnation adhered and cohered: namely, God's thematic relational action to respond to the human relational condition "to be apart" from the primacy of God's relational whole only on God's relational terms.

*Katalyo* is an intensive action of *lyo* (to dissolve, break, destroy), which I will render simply as "to reduce" to better understand the whole of Jesus' relational discourse. At issue here is the determination of righteousness and the reduction of God's communicated intention, which the embodying of God's communicative action in the

incarnation clarifies, constitutes and makes whole. Jesus never engaged in reducing (*katalyo*) God's communicative action, whether in the person he presented, by the quality of his own communicative action and with the level of his relational involvement. To the theological and functional contrary, by vulnerably embodying God's communicative action of grace, Jesus relationally both extended and fulfilled God's authorial intentions since creation. The whole of God's thematic communicative action is purely for relationship in the qualitatively distinguished relational context and process of the Trinity, as Jesus vulnerably disclosed. The implication of reducing (*lyo*) any one of these words from God (5:19) is "to dissolve" (cf. "to nullify" in Mk 7:13) communication from God by human reinterpretation in referential terms; the consequence, therefore, is to disembody God's Word down to a code of behavior, a tradition, doctrine, propositions, and so on, without the qualitative significance of the whole of God's relational intentions.<sup>5</sup> For this critical reason, Jesus closed this pivotal section of his relational discourse with the theological and functional necessity for the righteousness of his followers to go beyond reductionism and the righteousness shaped or constructed by those still essentially determined (even unintentionally and inadvertently) by the human condition (5:20).

When Jesus definitively said our righteousness needs to go beyond the scribes and Pharisees, it is important for us to think in contrary terms, not comparative terms. That is, we have to think in terms of the qualitative from inner out that is distinguished from what is common function outer in—the significance of being holy. Their righteousness was a product of reductionism based on the comparative measurement of the quantitative indicators of what they did in their behavioral code (e.g. wash their hands compared to Jesus' disciples' unclean hands). While most Christians likely do not formulate or perceive of righteousness as an explicit product of reductionism, nevertheless they have a tendency to associate righteousness with certain behavior which essentially amounts to outer-in function. The presence or absence of that behavior becomes the dependent variable in the determination to be righteous. Contrary to this is the righteousness of God in which Jesus' definitive relational message seeks to compose the righteousness of his followers.

Righteousness (Heb. *sedaqah*, Gk. *dikaiosyne*) is the innermost of what is just or of one who is just, righteous (Heb. *sadaq*, Gk. *dikaios*). *Saddiyq* (just, lawful, honest, right) signifies the innermost of what and who God is "in all his ways" or actions (Ps 145:17). *Sadaq* (to be right in a moral or forensic sense, be just, true) is essentially a legal term, which defines the laws of God (Ps 19:9). Yet, the laws of God cannot validly be separated from God's qualitative ways and relational actions—that is, disembodied from the righteous God who authored those laws—and still have the qualitative-relational significance of God's laws. Separated from its author in relational terms, though likely still identified in referential terms, the practice of the law becomes centered on what the individual does, not about the qualitative involvement (righteousness) with others in the primacy of relationship intended by God for its practice.

Being *dikaios* means to be congruent in actions to what and who one is in the innermost; yet, the actions are not in a vacuum and are only significant in relation to others. The Hebrew derivative of *sadaq*, *sedaqah* is a legal term used for relationships to

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<sup>5</sup> Anthony Thiselton comments on how author intentions tend to be overlooked by individualism in *The Promise of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 133-239.

stress that the parties involved should be faithful to the expectations of one another. To be *dikaios* has no theological meaning without being conjoined to this functional significance from the Hebrew. To diminish or ignore this functional involvement for the individual's (collective or not) practice to be righteous becomes an ontological simulation of reductionism; to ascribe theological meaning to the individual's practice without having this functional significance becomes an epistemological illusion of reductionism. This so-called righteousness is composed by the relative shaping of relationships that others cannot count on. Therefore, to be righteous always involves these actions which others can expect, and what can be counted on from the righteous to function in relationship, most notably with God.

“God is righteous” essentially means the whole of God is in complete congruity with what, who and how God is in relationship; and the experiential truth of God's covenant is the ultimate functional expression of his righteousness in relationship in the human context. While righteousness is innermost of the ontology of what, who and how God is, righteousness is not a mere static attribute or quality of God but always a dynamic relational function. It is readily apparent that God acts on his covenant according to the relational dynamic of the righteous (or just) God in his ongoing involvement with his people; that is, they can count on God to function in congruence with what, who and how he is (cf. Ps 89:33-37). By the nature of being righteous, this is the only way God acts in relationship—nothing less and no substitutes. Also by the nature of being righteous, this ongoing relational involvement is the only way God functions in human context—the transcendent and holy God vulnerably present, wholly accessible and directly involved Face to face in the primacy of relationship. This provides the functional understanding of righteousness which is definitive for our righteousness. As Jesus' summary relational message (teaching in relational language) will make evident, anything less or any substitutes are reductionism, the sin of reductionism signified in the human condition. In conflict with the human shaping of relationships, Jesus is pointing ahead to his functional key to define relationships by God's righteousness (Mt 6:33).

While the righteous God and his covenant are conjoined, God is not the covenant—that is, disembodied in a covenant framework whom we can shape in our anthropomorphic likeness. Yet, the covenant is God—that is, the embodied relational promise authored by the righteous God which we cannot redefine on our terms; at the same time, this covenant is only a partial expression of what, who and how God is in toto. Likewise, though the righteous God and his laws are inseparable, relationship with God cannot be reduced to mere relationship with the law, which would disembody the law functionally apart from its author's purpose for relationship together. Moreover, the law is not the covenant either; it is only the relational framework for the covenant defining God's desires and terms for the primacy of relationship together. The law communicates God's desires of how to be involved in the relationships for the covenant of love (cf. Dt 7:9). When we observe the law (or forms of it) in order to define us (as righteous) or to measure up (to God's expectations for righteousness), we functionally fall into the outer-function of legalism and thus make the law the covenant. This is reductionism, which effectively diminishes our ontology to fragmentary terms and constrains our function down to what we do; conversely, persons defined by what they do can inadvertently or by design use the law as a referential measure in the practice of their faith—consequently,

practice reduced to the referential letter of the law. This approach to the law also fails to understand the relational process at the heart of the law for the relational purpose of the covenant: intimate relationship together with the whole of God, the primacy of which is the relational outcome to understand and know God (cf. Jer 9:24; Jn 17:3).

Whenever we inadvertently reduce the whole of God and disembody God's thematic communicative action, all that remains are codes of behavior, standards of ethics, teachings of what to do, propositions of belief to sustain, examples to emulate, to which to conform for righteousness. These are quantitative substitutes in referential terms from reductionism in lieu of the qualitative difference of relational involvement with the whole of God, including displacing function in relational likeness of the Trinity. Though this may provide a measure of certainty for identity in narrowed-down terms, any results will be insufficient to be whole for the person and persons together. Jesus makes definitive the qualitative significance that involves the only process to get us beyond reductionism to the distinguished righteousness from inner out that functions in likeness to what, who and how God is in relationship.

Going beyond reductionism necessitates the shift in righteousness from merely displaying character traits (an issue of integrity) and practicing an ethic of right and wrong (an issue of being upright) to more deeply distinguish the qualitative involvement of what, who and how to be in the primacy of relationship—whole relationship both with God and with others. This is the significance of righteousness that is qualitatively and relationally distinguished from common function, and therefore is contrary to and goes beyond those who reduce righteousness, the law, the covenant, God and his communicative action to disembodied referential terms in outer-in function focused on the secondary.

Moreover, this righteousness of what, who and how we are in function is never realized by the individual person in isolation but only as an ongoing relational function both with God and with others in the human context. Thus this involves our identity as participants in a surrounding context while being defined and determined only by the deeper context in the primacy of relationship. This makes definitive the following: Righteousness is the process that makes functional our identity as Jesus' followers; and identity formation is integrated with the process to be righteous, the extent and depth of which is constituted by God from inner out in the primacy of whole relationship together. In the definitive message of Jesus' relational language, nothing less and no substitutes can be sufficient to exceed the righteousness of the reductionists, that is, to go beyond in contrary relational terms and not in comparative referential terms.

Human identity by its nature in the human condition lacks wholeness and therefore always functions in uncertainty; and its formation remains in ongoing variation in its elusive search. This underlying elusiveness and absence of wholeness should not be ignored or misperceived due to the presence of a prevailing collective identity with firm identity markers, that is, from outer-in function signifying ontological simulation. This also was Paul's epistemological illusion prior to the Damascus road for which he received *tamiym*'s epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction; as a result he clearly understood the basis for his former identity as reductionism, which unmistakably signified "loss" (*zemia*) and "to be apart" from God's whole (Phil 3:4-7).

In Jesus' relational language, our identity serves to define the innermost of who and what we are, and from this primary identity we can present that person to others with

the significance of our innermost, that is, when still defined in relational terms. Evidenced by the early disciples' struggles with their identity—vacillating between who they were in the human context and what they were as Jesus' followers—the formation of our primary identity is critical for following Jesus in relationship in order both to be qualitatively distinguished from prevailing function in the surrounding context and to clearly distinguish who, what and how we are with others in human contexts—just as distinguished by Jesus at the wedding in Cana (discussed in chap. 3).

Despite the identity conflicts and crises which seem to come with the territory of identity formation, Jesus targeted the two major issues making our identity problematic. These directly interrelate to the human condition and the search for identity in human contexts. The two major issues are often overlooked by a focus on familiar referential terms:

1. The first issue is *ambiguity* in not presenting ourselves in our distinguished identity as “light” (5:14-15). Identity becomes ambiguous when what we present of ourselves is different from what and who we are in our innermost, as in the dynamic of *hypokrisis*. Or this ambiguity occurs when what we present is a variable mixture of two or more competing identities, as Peter struggled with at his footwashing. Light may vary in its intensity but there is no ambiguity about its presence. Identity is problematic when it does not have this distinguished function from inner out and clarity in relational involvement with others in the surrounding context (v.16; cf. Peter, Gal 2:14).
2. The second issue is *shallowness* in our identity. This identity, for example, may have the correct appearance in our presentation but lacks the qualitative significance from inner out that distinguishes the innermost of who, what and how the person is—just like the salt without its substantive quality (v.13). This lack of depth is both an ontological issue and a functional issue. Salt is always salt; unlike dimming a light, salt cannot be reduced in its saline property and still be salt. Merely the correct appearance of an identity neither signifies the qualitative function nor constitutes the ontology of the person presented in the depth of wholeness; it never exceeds reductionism. Shallowness is guaranteed when we define ourselves by an outer-in approach as opposed to an inner-out process; subtle examples of this approach include defining ourselves merely by the roles we perform, the titles we have, even by the spiritual gifts we have and/or exercise.

In these metaphors of the light and the salt, Jesus was unequivocal about the identity of his followers: “You are...” (*eimi*, the verb of existence), and therefore all his followers are accountable *to be* (not merely to do) “the light of the world” and “the salt of the earth.” As a preservative in the ancient world, it is not clear what specific function the salt metaphor serves—perhaps as peace (cf. Mk 9:50). But as a seasoning (“its taste,” *moraine*, v.13, cf. Col 4:6), this metaphor better suggests simply the distinguished identity of Jesus' followers which cannot be reduced and still be “salt,”; and, as further distinguished, an identity which cannot be uninvolved with others and still have the qualitative effect of the vulnerable presence of Jesus and illuminate the significance of his relational involvement as “light” (cf. 2 Cor 4:6; Eph 5:8). In relational terms this is not an optional identity, and perhaps not an identity of choice, but it is unmistakably the

identity which comes with the primacy of whole relationship with Jesus and the qualitative function from inner out as his followers.

The clarity of the light and the depth of the salt are the relational outcome of this ongoing vulnerable relationship with the whole of God. Any identity formed while distant from this relationship (which happens even in church and academy) or in competition with the primacy of this relationship (which happens even in Christian subcultures) diminishes the primary identity of being the whole of God's very own (as "the light," cf. "children of light," Eph 5:8) as well as deteriorates its qualitative substance (as "the salt," cf. Col 4:6). Certainly, then, the qualitative presentation of the whole person to others is crucial to the identity of Jesus' followers. This makes evident the importance of Jesus interrelating identity with righteousness in conjoint function. While identity defined the innermost of who, what and how we are, righteousness is the functional process that wholly practices what, who and how we are without ambiguity or shallowness. Identity and righteousness are conjoined to present a whole person in congruence (ontologically and functionally) to what, who and how that person is in the innermost—not only in Christ but in the whole of God, the Trinity. Righteousness is necessary so that his followers can be counted on to be those whole persons—nothing less and no substitutes without imposing their own shaping of relationships. And what is often practiced as Christian identity may not be congruent with the identity of his followers.

Christian identity without righteousness is problematic, rendered by Jesus as insignificant and useless (5:13). Yet, "righteousness" without wholeness of identity is equally problematic, which Jesus further made a necessity in its practice "before others" to go beyond reductionism (6:1). Righteousness without whole identity emerges often as an issue unknowingly or inadvertently by how "the light" and "the salt" are interpreted. "You are the salt...the light" tend to be perceived merely as referential missional statements from Jesus of what to do, or as ethics in referential terms of doing the right thing. While this so-called commission has certainly challenged many Christians historically to serve in missions, it has promoted practices and an identity which do not go beyond reductionism. By taking Jesus' relational words out of the context of the qualitative whole of his major message in relational language, they fail to understand the significance of Jesus' call to his followers—the extent and depth of which Jesus summarized in this indispensable communication to his followers and increasingly made evident in his whole ontology and function in human context.

In contrary relational terms, Jesus' declarative statements about the clarity of the light and the depth of the salt are definitive for our identity. Yet, they are not a challenge about what to do in referential terms; such a challenge would not help us go beyond reductionism but further embed us in it. His conclusive statements of our identity are an ontological call about *what* and *who* to be. That is to say, the call assumes the human condition and the need to be redefined from inner out, transformed from reductionism, and made whole in the ontology of the person created in the qualitative image of the whole of God, therefore also as the call of *whose* we are. Conjointly, his definitive statements are a functional call about *how* to be, that is, called as whole persons to function together in the primacy of relationships necessary to be whole in relational likeness of the Trinity.

The ontology of the person is a key variable in understanding God's terms disclosed in this relational discourse. The lens through which we perceive the person, thereby define human identity and determine human function, is ongoingly challenged or influenced by reductionism. This then urgently addresses our perceptual-interpretive framework and holds us accountable for two basic issues: one, how we define our person, and as a result, two, how we do relationships. God's terms will have either more significance or less depending on our assumptions.

Jesus clearly defined the process of distinguished identity formation for his followers (Mt 5:3-12, to be discussed in chap. 8) and the identity issues of clarity and depth necessary to be qualitatively distinguished from the common's function of reductionism, and to relationally distinguish who, what and how we are with others in the surrounding context (5:13-16). This necessitates by its nature (*dei*, not *opheilo*) the ontology of the whole person created from inner out in the qualitative image of God and those persons together in the primacy of whole relationship created in likeness of the relational ontology of the Trinity. Moreover, this is the theological anthropology which coheres with the light and emerges from the Light—it does not antecede it. This constitutes the relational compatibility and congruence necessary to function as whose we are, that which is necessary to go beyond the human shaping of the reductionists (5:17-20). Thus, the remaining sections of Jesus' summary relational words (a primer for discipleship) for all his followers (5:21-7:27) make evident the function of this new identity conjoined with relational righteousness and the ontology of the whole.

In transition to the remaining sections, two common issues about the Sermon on the Mount need brief attention. If God's terms for the whole of relationship together were disclosed by Jesus essentially for the future life in his heavenly kingdom, then present life and practice are negotiable or reducible to our terms. On the other hand, if God's terms are only high ideals incapable for realistic life and practice, then these terms need to be renegotiated or reduced to terms shaped by our prevailing function in order to work in human contexts. Moreover, neither future-life interpretation allowing us to ignore his relational words nor high-ideals perception causing us to evade the Sermon on the Mount are correct or an acceptable perceptual-interpretive framework for Jesus' summary relational message. When the Father made it imperative to "Listen to my Son," he wants us to pay attention to every word communicated for the primacy of whole relationship together made clearly evident, vulnerably accessible and intimately functional 'already' with the embodied whole of the Word—whom Paul later defined theologically as the *pleroma* of God (Col 1:19) who constitutes the whole (*pleroma*) of his body, the church (Eph 1:23). Jesus' relational terms necessary for whole ontology and function in the present, therefore, are nonnegotiable and irreducible; and these contrary terms able to go beyond the reductionists can only be understood in the incarnation principle of embodying of the whole: nothing less and no substitutes. This is the whole that Paul embodied further theologically and hermeneutically for the wholeness of the gospel and the church (e.g. Gal 6:15; Eph 2:14-15).

Additionally, along with his relational context and process, Jesus' summary relational message (teaching in relational language) needs to be framed throughout his communicative discourse in the three major interrelated issues for all practice (discussed previously):

1. the significance of the person presented to others, including
2. the integrity and quality of this person's communication to those persons, and
3. the depth level of relationship this person engages with them.

As Jesus seeks to constitute his followers in relationships beyond reductionism to the whole of God, his contrary relational terms need to be understood as directly involving these interrelated issues—which directly also involves the above two basic issues of how we define ourselves and do relationships, and accordingly, of course, implies how we practice church. Unless these can be distinguished from what prevails in the surrounding context, the person's ontology and function do not exceed the reductionism of human contexts, which signifies the presence and influence of the human condition.

This brings us to the existing reality integrally challenged in Jesus' summary relational message. His relational words further cohere throughout with the progression and interaction of three critical concerns specific to the human condition: (1) self-autonomy, (2) self-determination, and (3) self-justification. It may seem incorrect to say that Jesus was definitively addressing something self-oriented in a non-individualistic setting. Yet, in this collective-oriented religio- and sociocultural context, self-autonomy was not the modern self-autonomy of individualism in the West but rather the self-autonomy of persons (individually or collectively) who determined function in relationships together and acted autonomously “to be apart” from the whole, that is, engaged in human shaping of relationships—for example, by the absence of significant involvement while in relationship together, or by merely keeping relational distance in those contexts (cf. Martha in relationship with Jesus). This pervasively happens in a collective context as well (even in churches in the East and global South), though due to ontological simulation and epistemological illusion it is less obvious than in the individualism of the modern West. The subtlety of self-autonomy (as an individual or a collective) involves the work of reductionism, which signifies its influence and its counter-relational work. With what Jesus placed in juxtaposition in his summary message, he disclosed the relational terms to be whole and thus ongoingly confronted human life and practice reducing the whole in each of these reductionist terms. In the process, he broadens and deepens our understanding of sin, and its functional implications and relational repercussions as evident in the human condition. Therefore, these three concerns evidence the general applicable character of the Sermon on the Mount in human contexts today and the need in particular for all his followers to respond to in the present to his summary relational message—or be found still within the righteousness-limits of the reductionists, yet to go beyond the narrowed-down ontology and function necessary to be whole and, therefore, yet to rise above the sin of reductionism in the human condition.

### **Self-Autonomy: Matthew 5:21-48**

In this section, Jesus began to define specific qualitative-relational terms for the function of the new identity formed by the integral process of the beatitudes (see discussion in chap. 8)—the distinguished identity redefining the person from inner out and transforming persons to be whole. Since he already disclosed his complete compatibility (*pleroo*, i.e. to make whole) with the Torah (5:17-18), his focus remained on the law of the covenant with the issue being either essentially reducing (*lyo*) these commandments (*entole*) or acting on (*poieo*) them in their whole (5:19). This issue



precipitated Jesus' definitive relational statement to his followers about the nature of their new identity (that of righteousness, what and who they are in the innermost) determining how they function, thus acting on the relational righteousness necessary to go beyond the reductionists (5:20). This necessarily involved the interrelated issues outlined above.

The commandments (*entole*) Jesus focused on, however, was not a specific list of demands, code of behavior, system of obligations or rules of ethics—all denoted in referential language by the term *entalma*, a synonym for commandment—which signify the referential letter of the law. While *entalma* points directly to its content and stresses what to do, *entole* stresses the authority of what is commanded, that is, its qualitative relational significance. In other words, with the relational language of *entole* Jesus focused on the law beyond merely as the charter for the covenant, but he went further to the whole of God's desires for covenant relationship together in love (cf. Ex 20:6, Dt 7:9) and deeper to God's necessary terms for relationship together to be whole in likeness of the Trinity (signified by his emphasis on the Father). Jesus' teaching engaged this communicative action, which cannot be understood without his relational language.

This is not to say that Jesus did away with the *entalma* of the law. Jewish ceremonial law, for example, served to maintain purity, and thus to have clear distinction as God's people, if only in referential terms. Righteous life and practice serves a similar purpose more deeply in relational terms to be qualitatively distinguished from the common's function and to be defined only by God as God's—that is, what and who they are as well as whose they are. Yet, Jewish practice (post-exilic Judaism in particular) of the law often fell into ethnocentrism and national protectionism—maintaining the law symbolized this. They essentially reduced God's terms for covenant relationship and making their collective self-determination an end in itself—that is, merely for themselves rather than as “the light to the nations” for the whole of God and the relationships necessary to be whole. This is how the practice of the law deteriorates when seen only as *entalma* in referential terms, and how it becomes embedded in the secondary over the primacy of relationship together.

When *entalma* is the dominant focus, the qualitative relational significance of the law is diminished by this misguided priority, creating an imbalanced emphasis on what to do that is focused on this behavior more than the persons receiving the supposedly-relational action. Consequently, the law's purpose for relationship together is made secondary, ignored or even forgotten—pointing to concerns about self-autonomy, self-determination and self-justification. When the law is reduced, the primacy of this relationship is lost and consequently also its top priority. The practice of the law then becomes a code of behavior to adhere to (i.e. to its referential letter), not about the terms for involvement in the covenant relationship together God desires. Moreover, this signifies that the person presented in this practice has been redefined by an outer-in human ontology based on what one does; and this reduction of the person to outer in raises the issue of the integrity and quality of one's communication, while at the same time reducing the level of relationship that person engaged, if at all.

Such reductions have relational consequences both with God and with others, the counter-relational implications of which Jesus contrasted with God's terms to be whole and to make whole in the primacy of relationship together. This is the ongoing tension/conflict between reductionism (and its counter-relational work) and God's whole (and the relationships necessary to be whole) that Jesus integrally addressed in his

summary relational teaching by clearly setting in juxtaposition the following six examples of the law (or its tradition) with God's desires. These six examples should not be seen separate from each other but seen together in order to avoid fragmenting Jesus' integral message.

When Jesus juxtaposed God's desires by declaring "But I say to you" (5:22,28,32,34,39,44), he clearly distinguished the whole meaning of the law and the prophets. The focus of *entalma* on the quantitative aspects of the law (the referential letter of the law) was a prevailing norm in his day. That practice, however, operated essentially as a system of constraints to prevent negative acts, without any responsibility for further action: "You shall not murder" (v.21), "You shall not commit adultery" (v.27). Based on the ontology of the person from outer in, which is defined primarily by what one does, this kind of system invariably focused on outward behavior as the main indicator of adherence to the law. No physical murder and adultery meant fulfilling those demands of the law, without consideration of the significance of that behavior. This opened the way for God's law to be reduced and its function to be shaped by self-autonomy, self-determination or even self-justification. To formulate practice based on the referential letter of the law is to reduce the integrity of human ontology in the divine image and to redefine the significance of human identity in its innermost to a substitute constructed merely by the quantitative aspects of what we do. Furthermore, this self-definition also determined how others are perceived and how relationships are done, foremost with God. The referential letter of the law is the human shaping of relationship with God on our terms.

For Jesus, this was an inadequate human ontology and an insufficient response to God's intent for the law. More specifically, God's relational action (creative and communicative) was contrary to both. In contrast, Jesus disclosed the qualitative-relational significance of the whole law (the relational spirit of the law) for which to be responsible, therefore deepening the involvement necessary just on God's terms. This must by its nature (*dei*, not *opheilo*) involve the conjoint function integrally of the following without fragmenting the terms or without selective observance:

1. the ontology of the whole person from inner out, thus the words (vv.22,37), thoughts and feelings (v.28) as well as the overt behavior constitute a person's actions; and
2. based on this ontology of the whole, other persons also need to be defined and thus engaged in the primacy of relationships together to make and to be whole (vv.23-25,32,34-36,39-42,44-48).

By embodying involvement deeper into the relational spirit of the law, Jesus essentially restores the person and their relationships to their created ontology of God's whole. Conjointly, the whole of the law restores the primacy of covenant relationship together and makes definitive its top priority in life and practice as the integral qualitative-relational function.

The whole law signifies nothing less than God's desires and no substitutes of God's terms for covenant relationship together. By its nature the law cannot be reduced either to merely avoiding the wrong behavior or to a code of merely the right thing to do, either to not making mistakes or to trying to be right—that is, reduced to mere ethics. Such action, even with good intentions, in contrast with relational terms becomes a form of legalistic function and its preoccupation is a measure of legalism, in spite of

legitimation in referential terms. Such practice of the law invariably becomes narrowed down, even selective, in order to determine adherence; yet Paul later made clear that adherence to the referential letter of the law is an all-or-nothing proposition (Gal 3:10; 5:3). In contrast and also in conflict, God's desires in the law are terms only for relationship together and how to be involved in its primacy; therefore, the law defines *the positive* relational action to live whole necessary to make relationships whole. Yet, even the specific relational prescriptions Jesus presented to these six examples should not be taken as an end-practice for ethics; they are only provisional steps in the relational process to wholeness. For example, merely clearing up something someone has against you is not the sum of reconciliation (5:23-24)—nor all that peace involves—yet is a provisional step to the irreducible end to be whole. When Christian ethics, including peacemaking, stops at provisional steps, its practice will not function to be whole and make whole but only serves as a reductionist substitute, an ontological simulation and an epistemological illusion—which then may end up only reflecting, reinforcing or sustaining the human shaping of relationships in the human condition.

Jesus clearly countered the underlying concern of the reductionists about doing the “right” thing by the referential letter (or avoiding doing the wrong thing), which did not serve to lead them to this positive relational action. While refraining from negative behavior certainly has some value, the absence of positive relational action is of greater importance to God—evidencing the deeper significance of God's design and purpose for those relational terms involving murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, an eye for an eye, and love for enemies. As the counterpart to any form of legalistic function, even moralism is not the righteousness God expects and Jesus composes in his followers. Moralists and legalists are misguided in thinking that such conformity is congruent with, and even compatible to, God's desires and who, what and how God is. Conversely, we should not be thinking in the limits of mere conformity to God's terms, which would tend to become merely about doing the right thing and trying to live up to those expectations—autonomous efforts signifying self-determination.

On the other hand, since the law signifies God's terms for relationship together, this certainly makes the practice of God's law the function only of our whole person from inner out, thus making practice vulnerable (vv.44,46-47), threatening (vv.39-42), if not even demanding (vv.29-30) for us in the primacy of relationship. Also, undoubtedly, the practice of the relational spirit of the law is most inconvenient to much of what prevails in modern social relations. Yet, the further responsibility of God's desires in the whole of the law is not given to burden or constrain human persons. It was disclosed only for relationships together to be whole; and the juxtaposition of these various relational terms having deeper responsibility signify the positive relational opportunities to grow in the distinguished identity of our whole person to make relationships together whole. The interrelated focus and conjoint function between the whole person from inner out and the primacy of whole relationships together always emerges in the whole of Jesus' relational words and action because they embody the essential relational ontology of who, what and how the triune God is in the innermost. In his summary teaching distinguished in relational language, Jesus is giving us understanding of the heart of God's desires for human persons and the integrating purpose for God's qualitative relational terms indispensable for his followers together. As we reflect on these six examples together juxtaposed in this section, they clearly disclose the loving purpose God has in the

primacy of relationship: Not just for any relationship but to be distinguished in the qualitative significance of relational belonging in the relationships together as the whole of God's family—"so that you may be children of your Father in heaven" (5:45).

Without the whole (relational spirit) of the law, we have no understanding of God's law in its innermost and consequently of God's thematic intent for the law in relational response to the human condition "to be apart" from God's whole. Without the whole of the law, Christian ethics has no integral basis to compose the qualitative integrity and relational significance necessary to be compelling for even the various shaping of Christian life and practice, much less for all shaping of human life and practice in the human condition. In his summary relational teaching, Jesus juxtaposes the relational spirit of the law to the law's interpretive framework to distinguish it from any application of the referential letter of the law. Yet, Jesus disclosed that this forensic interpretive framework is constituted further in the qualitative relational context and deeper by the intimate relational process of the whole of God. This signifies the relational language by which his teaching needs to be received in order to be understood, and constitutes how it must by its nature (*dei*) be responded to in order to be experienced.

The relational dynamic underlying the relational spirit of the law goes beyond merely a greater flexibility (than legalism) and application (than moralism) of God's law. Its whole function is to lead persons into involvement in the primacy of relationships with others—namely, to care for and to love persons not merely in their situations and circumstances but foremost in relationship together for wholeness. Jesus is taking us to a further and deeper level of relationships in the innermost, beyond our prevailing ways of doing relationships that have been shaped even by the church and academy. With the relational spirit of the law, he illuminated in the following relational terms: (1) what it means to love, (2) the intimate relational process of love, and (3) the integrity and dignity of the persons involved in this process. This necessitates the inner-out human ontology signified conjointly by the importance of the heart and the primacy of relationships in which hearts open and vulnerably engage others for relationship together. This practice is qualitatively distinguished from the referential letter of the law. The relational spirit of the law defines and determines the relational involvement necessary to be whole *in* the whole of God, *with* the whole of God and *for* the whole of God.

The function of this human ontology and its qualitative relational process, however, are ongoingly challenged by reductionism and its counter-relational work. Each of the six examples represents a situation or circumstance which can have the following effect: either to redefine our person and let those limits determine how we function in that relationship; or, instead, to be an opportunity to grow in being our whole person and function in that relationship to live whole and make whole. The former effect involves a contrary dynamic. For these situations and circumstances to redefine who and what we are, and to determine how we function, implies that we react from outer in to other persons in these contexts essentially out of a concern for self and our autonomy. We are reduced to merely *reactors* by pursuits in self-autonomy, hence ironically indicating an absence of freedom, rather than being free to function as *respondors* by the relational involvement of love for the sake of God's whole.

This self-autonomy emerges in the priority or dominance given progressively to what Jesus exposes: (1) self-interests, for example, signified in acting on anger or sexual desires (involving issues of how the person is defined and relationships are done); (2)

self-concerns, for example, signified by unwarranted divorce (overlapping in self-interest), or depending on oaths for validation (involving issues of the significance of the person presented, integrity of one's communication and level of relationship engaged); and (3) self-centeredness, for example, signified by seeking restitution/revenge (overlapping with self-concern), or keeping relational distance with those who contest you, are different than you, or are simply not in your social network (involving issues of how the person is defined and level of relationship engaged). The concern for self-autonomy certainly overlaps into self-determination and interacts with the major and basic issues outlined above. The underlying dynamic of this self-orienting process engages in counter-relational work, which Paul also identified for the church's wholeness (Gal 5:13-14).

Each of these six expressions of self-autonomy can find some justification, yet at the expense of reducing human ontology and reinforcing reductionism's counter-relational work "to be apart" from the whole of relationships together as a result of one's own shaping of relationships together. The persons involved are reduced to less than whole persons from inner out, and relationships shift to outer in to become fragmentary and self-oriented instead of whole relationships together—even in a collective context. This is the contrary dynamic Jesus confronted by juxtaposing the qualitative relational significance of the whole of God's terms necessary for relationships together to be whole, and to be made whole as needed. In the process, he deepens our understanding of sin by introducing us to the functional workings of the sin of reductionism. His summary relational teaching exposes the sin of countering (knowingly or inadvertently) God's desires, as well as God's created relational design and purpose, by reducing one's own person and then reducing other persons to reinforce the human relational condition "to be apart." By the juxtaposition of these practices of the law, Jesus conclusively expands our understanding of the human condition: Though the human condition in function clearly exists outside 'the rule of law', it also can and still does operate in the practice of the rule of law—which then includes and has critical application to 'the rule of faith'. This dynamic is exposed by Jesus as he opened our understanding further and deeper to the sin of reductionism and its counter-relational work. And by the nature of its reductionist function, this includes anything less and any substitutes of the qualitative whole and the primacy of relationship innermost both to the whole of God and human persons created in his qualitative image and relational likeness.

The relational terms Jesus made definitive in this discipleship primer restores this fragmentation to wholeness, therefore clearly functions for his followers as the definitive *call to be whole*. Even his apparent severe injunction in 5:29-30 serves this purpose. This is not a mere injunction to prevent sexual sin, consequently not about self-mutilation—which in effect would be reductionism. (Remember, Jesus used relational language in his teaching.) This action was about decisively not letting one part of our body or human make-up—not about "eliminating" its function—to redefine and determine our whole person (cf. 1 Sam 11:2, dishonor persons), and likewise not looking at other persons in only certain parts of their body or make-up as a consequence of fragmenting their person by defining them by what they have. His strong prescription paradoxically is about restoring such fragmentation to be whole and to engage others to live whole—involving the issue of the depth level of relationship engaged based on the issue of how the person is defined.

The only alternative to function in anything less or any substitute of our whole person and of others in the primacy of whole relationship together, is to function in nothing less and no substitute of who, what and how we are in our innermost with the new identity formed through the beatitudes in relational involvement with Jesus as his followers together. Following Jesus in his relational context and process involves us in the relational progression to his Father for the innermost belonging in relationship together as the whole of God's family, with the relational outcome of constituting us as his very own daughters and sons by the redemptive process of adoption (as discussed previously). The function of this distinguished relationship together in this new identity is only on the whole of God's terms Jesus made definitive in his summary teaching. Therefore, these relational terms for qualitative function are irreducible to any alternative or substitute from human terms—notably to human ontology and relationships together—and are nonnegotiable for the varied efforts of self-autonomy, self-determination and self-justification. Later, Paul will further our understanding of adoption and deepen the experience of relational belonging in the primacy of whole relationship together as God's church family, whose ontology and function illuminate the relationship needed for the human condition in its innermost.

To provide clarity and depth of function for this new identity on God's terms, Jesus concluded this section with the functional key (the first of three for the entire discourse) to which the six examples converge and to which the distinguished identity of his followers coheres.

**First Functional Key:** *“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (5:48).*

Jesus directed this to those who have been adopted by his Father into God's family. Moments earlier he said essentially “Love others (even those against you) to be the whole of your distinguished identity, that you may begin to function (*ginomai*, begin to be) as the sons and daughters of your Father in heaven” (5:44-45a). It was a recognized responsibility in the ancient Mediterranean world for adopted children to represent their new father and to extend his name. In contrast to mere obligatory terms, Jesus defined this responsibility in relational terms and qualified it essentially with this key: *“You are to be involved with others as your heavenly Father is involved with others, notably with you.”* This is the relational significance of *agape* in distinguished love, which Jesus embodied to fulfill God's thematic relational action to make us whole in relationship together. Now he calls his followers to embody this love in the primacy of relationships together to be the whole of God's family and to make whole for God's family—to embody, however, not merely as his followers but further and deeper as their Father's very own sons and daughters. The seventh beatitude (5:9) coheres with this key to give depth of meaning to the making of peace (wholeness).

Once again, Jesus' emphasis here is not on what to do but on how to be involved with others in the primacy of relationship. Yet, certainly, we cannot be involved with others to the extent in quantity or quality as God is involved. To function in comparative terms was not what Jesus stressed in this key. Quantity, like ethical or moral quantity, is not the goal of “be perfect.” The notion of perfect is often rendered in only referential terms which narrow the focus to aspects of what we do, which then is measured on the basis more likely of what we do *not* do. Moreover, to perceive ‘perfect’ from a lens influenced by classical theism—and its perfect God defined by negative theology (what

God is not)—reinforces the emphasis on what we do not do and, more importantly, is simply a reductionist view of God unable to distinguish the transcendent God’s ontology vulnerably present and involved. The consequence also is immeasurable for the ontology of human persons. To be whole (perfect), and wholeness, defines the vulnerably disclosed ontology and function of the triune God, which necessarily defines and determines human ontology and function created in the image and likeness of the whole of God. Without God’s whole ontology and function, the human person and persons together have no understanding of *what* constitutes them and holds them together in the innermost, consequently can only be rendered to reduced ontology and function. This critical difference in ontology and function emerges clearly from their juxtaposition in Jesus’ summary teaching in relational terms. Thus, in his first functional key Jesus’ relational language is focused on involvement with others by “how” (*hos*, as) God is involved only in terms of the primacy of relationship. This is not an unrealistic ideal since God created us “to be” (*eimi*, verb of existence) in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the Trinity, to which the identity as the light points. While “perfect” in referential terms can never be the outcome of what we do and how we do it, “perfect” (*teleios*, describing persons who have reached their purpose, *telos*, thus are full-grown, mature, i.e. whole) in relational terms can indeed “be” (*eimi*) the growing function (*ginomai* in v.45) of who, what and how we are in the innermost as the very daughters and sons of the whole of God’s family.

Therefore, **the first functional key** becomes the distinguished emergence of whole ontology and function: “*Live to be (eimi) whole and then make whole as your Father is whole in the Trinity and is vulnerably present and intimately involved to make us whole in relationship together as his family.*”

Jesus does not want his followers “to become” reduced to mere *reactors* to this or that situation or circumstance and to these or those persons; that would be counter-relational work. He calls us “to be” persons who live in the primacy of relationships to be whole and function to make relationships whole, hence free to be *respondors* in love to the human relational condition. His call and its function are ongoingly challenged to be redefined and determined by reductionism, notably with subtle self-autonomy apart from God’s terms. This first functional key begins to form the integral basis necessary for *the process of triangulation* (cf. navigation) in relational congruence with the triangulation Jesus used with his Father to engage the surrounding contexts and relationships with persons in those contexts without being redefined or determined by reductionism. Just as it was for Jesus, the main aspect of this triangulation process is ongoing intimate involvement in relationship together with our Father and the whole of God for the determination needed to be involved in the human context and relationally respond to the human condition as our heavenly Father functions.

The primacy of relational involvement with our Father is the guiding point of reference for the function of our primary identity in the surrounding contexts and in relationships with persons in those contexts, including in his kingdom-family. Furthermore, this involvement is the dynamic necessary for Jesus’ followers to embody *the reciprocating contextualization* to clearly both be whole and make whole without being co-opted by human contextualization. In the next section, Jesus takes this relational process even further and deeper.

### **Self-Determination: Matthew 6:1-34**

Besides our perceptual-interpretive framework and our operating human ontology of the person presented, other issues which interact with this part of his teaching are the convergence of how we define our person and do relationships, thus the integrity and quality of our communication and the level of relationship engaged. And the overriding issue throughout this section of his summary teaching is the concern for self-determination. What follows in this section is a progression from self-autonomy in the previous section (Mt 5:21-48) because self-determination is always in ongoing interaction with self-autonomy and coheres with that section's teaching.

In this discipleship primer, frequently preempted by assumptions about the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus constitutes his followers in the relational righteousness that by its nature functions beyond reductionism. Relational righteousness is the process to ensure that our identity as his followers functions unambiguously in ongoing life and practice both with God and others in human contexts. It is crucial for our identity to be in conjoint function with relational righteousness in order to present whole persons in congruence with the innermost of our whole identity, therefore as those who can be counted on to be those whole persons in relationships—whether with God or with others, in his kingdom-family or in the surrounding context, with nothing less and no substitutes. The identity of God's people without righteousness is problematic and righteousness without wholeness of identity is equally problematic (cf. 5:20), which Jesus makes evident in this section. This addresses deeply two of the major issues for all practice: the significance of the person we present to others and the integrity and quality of our communication.

Jesus began this section immediately focused on righteousness with the relational imperative to his followers essentially to “Pay attention to (*prosecho*) how your righteousness functions” (6:1). Righteousness is neither a static attribute nor a function in a vacuum, so Jesus is not pointing to mere introspection. As noted earlier, the significance of righteousness is not isolated to the individual but only as it affects relationships in some way. In what way it does directly depends on the person presented. All relationships are affected by the specific presentation each participant makes, thus the quality of any relationship is contingent on the accuracy of that presentation. This is where righteousness needs to have congruence with who and what a person is in the innermost, or else others cannot have confidence in what to expect or count on from that person. His followers' identity without righteousness is acutely problematic, rendered by Jesus earlier in his relational message as insignificant or useless (as salt, 5:13).

God's righteousness in relational terms is completely essential for our confidence in *how* the whole of God (not merely some part of God) will be in relationship together, which negative theology in referential terms is unable to provide. This makes evident that righteousness without wholeness of identity is also questionable, doubtful or even suspicious (as Paul exposed, 2 Cor 11:15), which in this section Jesus makes their integration imperative for his followers to go beyond reductionism. In other words, a partial or inaccurate presentation, or semblance of the person are insufficient to establish confidence and generate trust in relationships at a significant level. The whole of the person from inner out is needed, which is the integral function of relational righteousness. The incarnation made evident God's righteousness since Jesus presented the embodied whole of God's vulnerable presence and relational involvement with others in nothing



less and no substitutes—the significance, quality and depth of which can be known and understood only in whole relational terms, not fragmentary referential terms. How we present our person to others involves this issue of wholeness and the inseparable function of righteousness, thus what others can expect and count on from us—including what God expects (cf. Jn 4:23-24).

How we function in the whole of who and what we are emerges from the significance of the person we present. In this section of his summary relational teaching, Jesus continued to expose the workings of reductionism and disclosed the deeper process of relational righteousness, specifically in direct relationship with God. Paying attention to how our righteousness functions involves examining not only the person presented, but also further involves understanding our perceptual-interpretive framework and the human ontology by which we live and practice our faith.

To make definitive what God expects in relationship together, Jesus focused specifically on three important areas of religious practice and prevailing methods of enacting them: giving to the needy (6:2-4), prayer (6:5-15), and fasting (6:16-18). In each of these relational contexts, Jesus juxtaposed relationship with “your Father” (with the emphasis on *your* Father, not merely the Father, 6:1,4,6,8,14,15,18) with his conflict with prevailing methods signified by the term *hypokrites* (6:2,5,16). I prefer not to use its English rendering (hypocrite) because of its limited connotation and its associated stereotype incorrectly imposed on all of Judaism. Jesus broadens our understanding of this term and takes us deeper into the process behind it. This is crucial to understand since it not only involved a prevailing norm in his day, it also involves a prominent mindset and practice today. While sincerity is an issue of *hypokrites*, it is not the main issue. The primary issue involves the function of the whole person verses the enactment of a reduced version of the person in reduced life and practice (cf. the inner-out change of *metamorphoo* distinguished from the outer-in change of *metaschematizo*).

As noted previously, *hypokrites* involved playing a role or taking on an identity different than one’s whole self. Just like an actor, this presentation of a person was made to a crowd, an audience, observers, that is, before others with interest, or anyone who took notice. When Jesus focused on righteousness, he was specific about “paying attention that you do not live your righteousness before others *to be seen*” (6:1, emphasis added). The term for “to be seen” (*theaomai*) denotes to view attentively, deliberately observing an object to perceive its detail. In other words, this is a presentation intended to be observed and noticed by others. Moreover, *theaomai* (related to *theoreo*) involves more than merely seeing (as in *blepo*, to be discussed shortly); the observer regards the object with a sense of wonderment (maybe even imagination) in order to perceive it in detail. This implies that there is a certain effect, image, even illusion, that the “actor” seeks to establish about one’s presentation of self, which will result in a response “to be honored” by observers, and ultimately by God (6:2). The term *doxazo*, from *doxa* (glory), means to recognize, honor, praise. Whether performed overtly (as Jesus exposed) or enacted simply in performing a role of service (as commonly seen in Christian ministries), this dynamic points to the self-determination motivating the act. Intentionally or unknowingly, this is what they seek and, on this basis, this is all they will experience, as Jesus said unequivocally: “they have received their reward in full” (6:2,5,16) with “no reward from your Father” (6:1). When we factor in also how the person is defined, how relationships are done and the level of relationship engaged, what emerges from this

reduced ontology and function merely reflects, reinforces and sustains the human condition. This should raise questions about our faith-practice and the need to challenge our theological assumptions, even for the gospel.

This reduced practice was addressed further when Jesus exposed such efforts “to be seen” in prayer (6:5) and “to show” others their acts of fasting (v.16). The same term (*phaino*) is used for both, which denotes to appear, be conspicuous, become visible—that is, essentially to be recognized by others for one’s presentation of self (e.g. in eloquent or verbose prayers), and, of course, ultimately be recognized by God. Both of these acts were accentuated to elevate (v.7) or dramatize (v.16) the effects for greater attention, and accordingly greater recognition and honor. Whether elevated, dramatized or performed simply in religious duty, the effort for self-determination underlying these acts is clearly evident; and for some persons, this effort also overlaps into self-justification. This process unfolds even unknowingly for persons, yet there is always an intentional element present since we are responsible for our course of action.

While the term *phaino* comes from *phos* (light), there is no clarity of light in this reduced practice, even if punctuated with correct doctrine or accentuated with the right ethic and spiritual discipline. The identity of light in this presentation of the person is ambiguous at best, and mainly just reduced to outer simulation and inner illusion. In the absence of relational righteousness, there is no basis for wholeness of the person presented or of the integrity and quality of the person’s communication. This is how we need to understand *hypokrites* and perceive its operation today—not so much as a blatant lie or subversion of the truth but as the outer-in substitute (sometimes even enacted unknowingly) for the whole person from inner out, and thus for the relational function of one’s whole identity with others, notably with God. When the pursuit of recognition and affirmation is left to self-determination, it invariably becomes reduced to being seen by others and how others perceive what one does, consequently easily compromising the whole presentation of self ‘to be seen in a better light’ in narrowed-down comparative terms.

This is the purpose for Jesus making imperative the ongoing need to pay attention to how our righteousness functions. It has direct relational implications for determining the level of relationship we engage. In highlighting these three important areas of religious practice, his concern is foremost our relationship with our Father and the level of relationship we engage with him. The major implication of merely performing roles in Christian duty is the significance of the specific relational messages we communicate to God implied in such practice: first, about how we see ourselves—with an outer-in human ontology and the responsibility for fulfilling obligations by self-determination; next, about how we see God—that God is similar to us, and thus sees us as we see ourselves, holding us accountable to fulfill our obligations by self-determination; and then about our relationship together—it functions neither on the basis of God’s relational grace nor on the intimate relational involvement of *agape* (distinguished love), which would be on God’s relational terms, but rather it functions on the basis of obligation (*opheilo*) and fulfilling those expectations (from *entalma*, not *entole*), thereby the preoccupation with what we do, reducing the relationship to our terms. There are assumptions about God made in these relational messages for which we have no basis and therefore no right to make—assumptions which Jesus corrected both theologically and hermeneutically with the relational truth of the Father (discussed below).

These are pivotal relational messages implied in such practice constituted by self-determination. Their significance reflects a perceptual-interpretive framework focused on the secondary over the primacy of relationship, and an outer-in ontology of the person which reduce life and practice to quantitative (over qualitative) function embedded in reductionism and its counter-relational work. How self-determination emerges in this process that reduces life and practice to quantitative function in narrowed-down referential terms involves a two-fold dynamic: (1) it reduces function and practice to what a person can both control (overlapping with self-autonomy) and thereby manage to accomplish for success in determining one's self, identity and worth (in contrast, qualitative function necessitates more from the whole person); and yet (2), this cannot be determined in a spiritual vacuum or in social isolation, but by necessity of its quantitative approach in referential terms can only be determined in comparison (and competition) with others, consequently requiring the use of quantitative indicators to ascribe "better" or "less" to self-definition, identity and worth, and to establish higher and lower positions in stratified relationships (overlapping with self-justification, cf. 7:1-5, discussed in the next section). Paul also identified this dynamic in the epistemic process of acquiring knowledge and exposed the use of knowledge for self-determination (1 Cor 8:1-2). This reductionist focus becomes the preoccupation (even compulsion or obsession) in practice with the relational consequence implied in the above relational messages; and ethical and moral practice alone does not address this.

In contrast and conflict, Jesus disclosed the intimate relational messages from his Father, both in these three areas of religious practice and the rest of this section. He made eleven references to "your Father" (6:1,4,6,8,14,15,18,26,32), which are vital relational messages communicating how our Father feels toward us and defines the nature of our relationship with him. In conflict with self-determined pursuit of recognition and validation, Jesus embodied God's relational work of grace, and with the relational language in his teaching he communicated the holy and transcendent God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement. From the midst of this apparent litany of prescriptions and injunctions emerged his relational message clearly divulging the intimate involvement and response of our heavenly Father. Contrary to the reductionist effort to be seen, he fully disclosed that "your Father sees" (6:4,6,18). The term for "sees" (*blepo*) is the most basic of a word-group having to do with sight and observation; others include *horao*, *theoreo* and *theaomai* discussed earlier. *Blepo* simply denotes exercising one's capacity of sight, to look at with interest, to be distinctly aware of—suggesting an intentional or deliberate act (cf. 5:28, the implication of *blepo* as a relational act). The significance of his disclosure that your Father simply *blepo* is vital to what Jesus taught about these practices.

Jesus did not compartmentalize various acts (like giving to the needy) to different areas of function, thereby fragmenting the person ("...do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing," 6:3). Nor, in this, was he suggesting to be subconscious in practice ("so that your giving may be in secret," v.4); rather he was directly addressing the issue of practice becoming *self*-conscious, that is, self-oriented (for recognition) instead of giving self in relational involvement with the person(s) receiving. Jesus rendered such self-conscious practice unfulfilling and unnecessary. Likewise for praying (6:6-7) and fasting (6:17-18), Jesus was not suggesting these practices be inconspicuous, nor inward or detached. These are relational acts of involvement for relationship

together—namely, prayer as a means for greater intimacy with God, and fasting as a means of submission to God for deeper relationship. And Jesus targeted the qualitative function (from inner out with the heart) of the whole person in intimate relational involvement together with our Father, nothing less and no substitutes.

In his distinguished relational message Jesus disclosed the experiential truth for relationship together: our Father *blepo* us because he is relationally involved with us; and such giving of our whole person to others (in service) and to God (in prayer and fasting) is relationally compatible to his involvement and is relationally congruent with how he sees us from inner out, as well as how he both defines the primacy of our relationship together and functions in its innermost. Jesus used the term “secret” (*kryptos*) to describe this relational involvement together. In an apparent play on words, *kryptos* (6:4,6,18) is in juxtaposition to *hypokrites* (6:2,5,16). *Kryptos* means hidden and *hypokrites* functions essentially to hide the whole person. Yet, in function they are contrary and in conflict. *Kryptos* (“in secret”) signifies the qualitative relational function of the whole person (constituted by the heart) in intimate involvement in relationship together, which *hypokrites* avoids and/or precludes this deeper involvement by the outer-in function in the secondary referential terms of reductionism. Since the primacy of this relational involvement signifies the relational truth of *how* God functions in the innermost, our Father *blepo* intimately “what is done in secret,” that is, what has qualitative relational significance from the inner out of the person. Our Father neither needs to use wonderment or imagination (as in *theaomai*) to see *what* we are, nor does he need deep contemplation (as in *horaō*) to experience *who* and *how* we are, as we need to experience him beyond referential terms. Our Father simply *blepo* the whole of the person presented, therefore he intimately knows what, who and how we are in the innermost, including what we need (6:8).

In this distinguished relational process, then, he “will reward you” (*apodidomi*, recompense, give back, 6:4,6,18), which needs to be understood in his relational context and process and not by a reductionist perceptual-interpretive framework shaping the varied efforts of self. Reductionism engages a referential exchange process narrowed down to the quid pro quo of *misthos* (“reward” as wages, 6:2,5,16). With *apodidomi* Jesus is using only relational language to build relationship together. “Reward” involves our Father’s relational response to us—not with quantitative things, secondary matter, or on our terms—by giving his intimate Self further and deeper (including some things or matter, yet not on our terms) in Face-to-face relationship with distinguished love. In this intimate relational outcome and experience, we are clearly being recognized for *what* we are and affirmed for *who* we are as persons belonging to his own family in the primacy of whole relationship together.

Jesus wholly embodied and thus vulnerably disclosed our Father’s intimate relationship-specific involvement with us, which is the basis for his Father’s imperative to his followers “Listen to my Son.” This is the experiential truth of the irreducible presentation of their whole persons, with nothing less and no substitutes of what, who and how the whole of God is. In this pivotal teaching as the whole of God’s communicative action, Jesus called his followers to be whole in what, who and how we present of our person in reciprocal relationship together with him, our Father, the whole of God, in their qualitative and relational likeness.

As a relational means for, and an ongoing relational response of, the function of our whole identity in relational righteousness together, Jesus taught this summary prayer using only relational language to involve us further and deeper in the primacy of relationship together: *the Lord's Prayer*, a functional outline for relational communication humbly submitted directly to our holy (*hagiazō*) Father for Face-to-face relationship together as family (6:9) only on the whole of God's terms (v.10) in order to be made whole, to live whole and to make whole for God's family (vv.11-12), which necessitates neutralizing the influence ("temptation," *peirasmos*) of reductionism and being disengaged ("deliver," *rhyomai*) from its counter-relational work, authored and ongoingly promoted by Satan (v.13). These relational messages (about him, our relationship and our person), ongoingly communicated to our Father in humble response back to the vulnerable presence and intimate relational involvement of the whole of God, constitute the integrity and quality of our communication (involving the three major issues for our practice). This then signifies the engagement of our whole person at the level of intimate involvement in relationship together—in the relationships necessary to be whole.

Just as with the incarnation of Jesus, this relational process begins with embodying the person. The significance of any embodiment, or incarnation, is a function of the person presented in relational context.<sup>6</sup> The incarnation of Jesus had distinguished significance beyond anything embodied in human context because Jesus presented his whole person vulnerably in relationship and functionally embodied the whole of God, nothing less and no substitutes. This is the embodying that interposed on Paul on the Damascus road, and the embodying of Paul that emerged from the Damascus road in his practice, theology and gospel. Likewise, the embodiment of our person only has significance in this relational process when it is the function of our whole person presented for intimate involvement in relationship together. Anything less and any substitutes for the whole (of our person and of God) are a function shaped by reductionism, notably and subtly emerging from self-determination. Jesus continued in this section to directly address the issue of whom and what we will pursue.

Anything less and any substitutes for our whole person are incongruent with the person created in the innermost in the image of God (cf. 6:25b-28), and consequently incompatible for intimate relationship together with the whole of God. Jesus made this clearly evident in his remaining teaching. When influence of reductionism pervades our perceptual-interpretive framework and how we see things (6:23), this shifts the focus defining our priorities and determining our primary pursuits from relational terms to referential terms (6:19,24). Consistent with thought in the ancient Mediterranean world, the eyes and the heart are interrelated functions for the whole person, which Jesus made evident earlier (5:28, cf. Job 31:7, Ecc 11:9).<sup>7</sup> He now also interrelated their functions to the ongoing tension-conflict issue of reductionism of the whole. In function, Jesus said

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<sup>6</sup> Embodiment and "incarnational" are terms gaining wider usage in recent years—for example, incarnational discipleship, ethics, ministry, etc. Yet, these tend not to be understood as a function of the whole person presented in the relational context and process engaging intimate involvement in relationship together—namely in relational compatibility and congruence with the incarnation of Jesus embodying the whole of God for relationship together. Jesus was more than incarnational and embodied more than embodiment. In other words, mere use of a term does not make practice more functionally significant.

<sup>7</sup> See the discussion of social values in John J. Pilch and Bruce J. Malina, eds., *Biblical Social Values and Their Meaning: A Handbook* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publ., 1993), 63-67.

“For what defines you also determines where your heart (signifying the whole person) will be also” (6:21). In conjoint function, he illuminated that what the eyes focus on determines the function of our identity as the light, that is, the primary identity of our whole person (6:22-23). And he unequivocally delineated the complete incompatibility between reductionism and God’s whole, and exposed any illusion that we can pursue and function in both with a hybrid identity in human contexts (6:24).

The lens from reductionism focuses on quantitative secondary matter and outer-in function, thus pays attention to (or becomes preoccupied with) the quantitative referential aspects of life and practice—namely in what we do and have—while ignoring (or making secondary) the qualitative significance in the function of persons and relationships together. Jesus reconstitutes this reductionism by restoring the qualitative function of the heart to compose the whole person. Only the heart in qualitative function signifies the presence of the whole person—no matter how much quantitative practice accentuates the person presented. Conjointly, Jesus restored the primacy of relationship by integrally constituting whole persons in the relationship together necessary to be whole in likeness of God. These are the qualitative intimate relationships, which by their nature are the function of only the hearts of whole persons opening to each other and coming together. This is the intimacy in relational congruence with the whole of God and God’s vulnerable presence, and the intimacy necessary to be relationally compatible with God’s ongoing intimate involvement. This is the relational outcome and experience “in secret” divulged by Jesus, in which the whole of God seeks our vulnerable presence and intimate involvement.

Yet, self-determination continues its urgent call also. Situations and circumstances in life and practice always emerge seeking to define who we are and what our priorities are, and thereby to determine how we function. The ongoing issue is whether those matters (however large or small) need to be determined by our own efforts, which overtly or covertly constitute self-determination—however normative the practice, even in Christian contexts. Or, “therefore” (*dia*, on this account, for this reason) in Jesus’ relational words (6:25-32)—given our Father’s involvement with us and the nature of our relationship together—we can entrust our person ongoingly to our Father to define who we are and what our priorities are, and on this relational basis to determine how we function in whatever situations and circumstances because our Father is both intimately involved (both “sees” and “knows,” 6:32b) and lovingly responsive (6:26,30) with us in the primacy of reciprocal relationship together.

This relationally penetrating polemic leads to the second functional key illuminating the relational framework that provides clarity and depth for the intimate relational involvement of our whole identity in relational righteousness with our Father.

**Second Functional Key:** “*Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well*” (6:33, NIV). “Seek” (*zeteo*, actively pursue to experience) in Jesus’ relational language is not about obligatory striving (*opheilo*) to belong to God’s kingdom, which becomes self-determination overlapping into self-justification. Likewise, “seek” is not about striving for an attribute of righteousness, and thus to be righteous in likeness to his to justify and/or ensure receiving “all these things.” Nor is this about practicing mere ‘kingdom ethics’. In his relational language, the imperative of *zeteo*, by the nature (*dei*) of God’s terms, is the qualitative pursuit of the whole of God (“his righteousness”) for intimate

relationship together in his family (“kingdom”). The pursuit of this primacy of whole relationship together is nonnegotiable to human terms and shaping. This qualitative-relational pursuit by necessity (*dei*) involves the vulnerable presence and intimate involvement of the whole person, constituted by the heart from the inner out, nothing less and no substitutes—composing our relational righteousness in likeness of his righteousness. Such a distinguished pursuit, then, provides the clarity and depth for both who we are and whose we are in the primacy of relationship together as his very own daughters and sons. This intimate relational process of belonging to his family and participating in his life has the relational outcome of ongoingly experiencing the whole of God further and deeper (cf. “understands and knows me,” Jer 9:24), as well as receiving what belongs to our Father in his family—the qualitative relational significance of “all these things” necessary to be made whole, to live whole and to make whole.

The relational framework of this functional key also provides the relational process by which our Lord’s summary prayer needs to be submitted to our Father and from which it will be fulfilled in his reciprocal relational response. Moreover, this key relational process coheres with the interrelated process between the fourth and sixth beatitudes (5:6,8). The second functional key’s relational framework of pursuing our Father on his terms further forms—integrated with the first functional key of living how our Father loves us—the basis for *the process of triangulation* by making functional in our life and practice the primary aspect of this triangulation process: ongoing intimate involvement in relationship together with our Father and the whole of God as family. Guided from this intimate relational point of orientation in the larger and deeper context of God, we are defined in the surrounding context by the trinitarian relational context of family, and how we function in relationships and in all our situations and circumstances is determined by the trinitarian relational process of family love for relationships together to be whole. Without the relational framework within which to engage this triangulation process, the primary influence defining our identity and determining our function comes from human contextualization, thereby co-opting the primacy of reciprocating contextualization.

With the primary focus on this distinguished pursuit in our life and practice, it becomes unnecessary (not to mention insufficient) to self-determine the course of our life “into the future” (*eis*, motion determining action). Instead, ongoingly engage, without reductionism (implied by the daily presence of “enough trouble,” *kakia*, evil), the level of reciprocal involvement of intimate relationship together with the whole of God and the level of involvement with others in the primacy of relationships necessary to be whole and to make whole, just as Jesus projected (“worry about tomorrow” with the subjunctive mood) to close this section (6:34).

### **Self-Justification: Matthew 7:1-27**

As discussed in the previous section, self-determination is never an individual action (or an individual group action) done in isolation from others (or other groups). Self-determination is a social phenomenon requiring a process of comparison to others to establish referential standards (e.g. of status, privilege and power) for measuring so-called success or failure in the determination of self. Invariably, these comparative (and competitive) differences involve constructing human distinctions which are the basis for “better” or “less” social position (historically, even ontological nature, as seen in racism),

consequently the operation of stratified relationships together (formalized in systems of inequality). Such a social order, no matter how efficient or cohesive, still reflects the human condition in contrast with the primacy of whole relationship together. When relationships in any arrangement on any social level become separated, partitioned or fragmented, there is a basis of justification needed either to access a “better” position or to entrench/maintain others in a “less” position. The pursuit of this legitimating basis is the effort for self-justification (by individual or group). That is to say, the effort for self-determination inevitably becomes the function in social context for self-justification; and the results of this effort unavoidably come at the expense of others, even unknowingly or inadvertently. These varied efforts are inseparable from the human condition and inescapable from its reduced ontology and function.

Jesus continued to expose the underlying dynamics of reductionism, its counter-relational work and the functional workings of the sin of reductionism countering the whole of God’s desires. In his initial teaching in this section, the subtle shift of self-determination to self-justification emerged from an invalid application of “righteousness”—or an inadequate practice of ethics and morality—to effectively create distinctions (“with the measure you use”) of “better” and “less” for relational position in religious and social context (7:1-2). This so-called righteousness was not merely about “the holier the better” but about “holier than thou.” Judgment based on an outer-in human ontology evidenced their reductionism, with the relational consequence from counter-relational practice diminishing relationship together to be whole (7:3-4). This mere role performance of righteousness (even with good intentions, e.g. by church leaders) is characteristic of *hypokrites* and is a function of the sin of reductionism lacking the inner-out practice of the whole person constituted by the heart (7:5)—the necessary outworking of the sixth beatitude defining the whole identity of Jesus’ followers (5:8). In addition, to be whole is the outcome of God’s relational work of grace, not self-determination, thus humility precludes self-justification—for example, humility in ethical and moral practice, or in spiritual development, which would involve epistemic humility, as signified in the identity formation of the first three beatitudes (5:3-5).

The dynamics of reductionism in religious/Christian life and practice is embedded in ontological simulation and epistemological illusion of God’s whole. Yet, Jesus exposed the varied efforts of self-autonomy, self-determination and self-justification as insufficient (not to mention unnecessary) to be whole. Reductionism and the whole are incompatible. Moreover, they cannot be conjoined in any pluralistic or syncretistic way, and any attempt to do so will fragment the whole, consequently rendering the whole to human shaping and terms. It is the integrity and significance of this whole which Jesus pointed to in a vivid illustration of the issue of whom/what we will pursue (7:6). This verse is not merely an added injunction thrown into his discourse but needs to be directly integrated into this issue at hand. Given the whole identity of his family in the primacy of whole relationship together, to function in anything less is to pursue an alternative substitute of reductionism, even with good intentions. The dynamics Jesus described is consequential: The integrity (“sacred”) and significance (“pearls”) of your whole person and relationship together in their innermost are indiscriminately thrown (*ballo*) to reductionists, who treat with disdain (*katapateo*) anything whole, and even turn (*strepho*) on you to break down your wholeness and leave you fragmented (*rhegnymi*). This dynamic, for example, emerges in the modern search for human connections on the



Internet in social media like Facebook, Twitter and texting. While Jesus' words may appear as hyperbole, the dynamic is rightfully described because of the essential violence reductionism exerts on the whole—even though the influence reductionism exerts, notably in its counter-relational work, tends to be a very subtle process, even appearing in Christian roles (cf. 2 Cor 11:14-15) or as the Christian norm, for example, in ontological simulation and epistemological illusion of God's whole (as Paul also exposed, Eph 4:14-16).

The choice of whom/what we will pursue is really quite simple, as Jesus' summary relational teaching made definitive: God's whole or anything less and any substitute. Yet, the results penetrate deeply to the innermost, as Jesus clearly distinguished in this concluding section of his most major discourse with his followers.

The summary relational word embodied by Jesus to communicate the whole of God's desires is this nonnegotiable relational message: self-autonomy, self-determination and self-justification are insufficient and unnecessary, no matter how their practice is punctuated and accentuated; their varied efforts signify the human condition, therefore are contrary for whole relationship together. The summary experiential truth embodied by Jesus to fulfill the whole of God's thematic relational response to the human condition is this irreducible relational message: God does not define our person based on what we do and have, therefore the whole of God's vulnerable involvement and intimate response is solely based on the Trinity's relational work of grace for relationship together to be whole—the whole of God's family.

These nonnegotiable and irreducible relational messages are the whole of God's terms and the only way the Trinity does relationships. Since this precludes self-autonomy, makes self-determination unnecessary and renders self-justification insufficient, Jesus invited his followers to partake of God's relational work of grace (7:7-8). Yet, God's relational grace constitutes involvement in relationship only on God's terms, not to partake as a gift (or commodity) for self-determination (or indulgence) on our terms. In integral function, then, “ask...seek...knock” signify only our reciprocal relational work of involvement to be whole together in intimate relationship with our Father and his relational work of grace. His vulnerable involvement and intimate response can be counted on because of his relational righteousness (7:9-11), and participating in his life in this reciprocal relationship together necessitates by its nature (*dei*, not *opheilo*) our relational righteousness. On the indispensable basis of God's relational work of grace for this relational experience together in the primacy of whole relationship—the grace of our Father's intimate involvement and response of love—Jesus disclosed the third functional key, commonly known by its reductionist title in referential terms, the Golden Rule.

**Third Functional Key:** *“In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets”* (7:12).

This teaching tends to be reduced by interpreting it only in the limited context involving us with others. This clearly bases how we do relationships with others on the self-orientation formulated from two basic issues (which Jesus addressed throughout his summary teaching): (1) how we define our person, and thus, on this basis, (2) how we do relationships. If this self-orientation has been influenced by reductionism, then “in everything we do to others” will not go beyond and deeper than a reductionist practice of how we do relationships based on a reductionist self-definition. In other words, what we

desire others to act on (*thelo*) in relation to us will always be seen through this diminished or narrowed-down lens, which in turn will determine how we function with them. This use of self-orientation, even with the best of intentions as the Golden Rule, is insufficient basis for wholeness in our life and practice “in everything”—for example, even for Christian ethical decisions and practice to go beyond the outer in of referential terms. Moreover, the practice emerging from this approach is inadequate to be the sum and substance (*eimi*, what is) of the law and the prophets (i.e. God’s communicated Word), which Jesus vulnerably embodied in his teaching only for the primacy of relationship together to be whole.

The one alternative to this reduction is the whole. The third functional key cannot be limited to only the context involving us with others, which would then take it out of its whole context, as the Golden Rule does by its nature. Its whole context involves us further and deeper than this by the process of reciprocating contextualization. This functional key can only be understood in the relational context of “your Father” and wholly understood by his relational process in intimate relationship together, which is the relational context and process Jesus disclosed and made definitive in his summary relational teaching. That is to say, in our Father’s distinguished relational context and process we have engaged vulnerable relationship together Face to face and have been intimately involved to experience the whole of God’s relational response of mercy, grace and *agape* involvement to be made whole. In his relational context and process, we ongoingly experience being redefined as whole persons in the innermost, redeemed from reductionism and its sin, transformed necessarily in human ontology from the inner out and reconstituted in the function of relationships necessary to be whole in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God. From this experience we know without equivocation: (1) how we want to be seen (from the inner-out human ontology), (2) how we want to be treated by others (as whole persons, nothing less), and (3) what we want to experience in relationships (the intimacy together to be whole, no substitutes).

Therefore, on the basis of this relational experience together with our Father, Jesus calls those being made whole to live whole “in everything,” notably with others in the primacy of relationships in order to make whole. In other words, to **paraphrase his third function key**: *Use what you are intimately experiencing in your relationship with ‘your Father’ as the basis for defining and determining how to function with others, both in his kingdom-family and in the surrounding context—‘in everything’ live to be whole and make whole.*”

This points to the indispensable engagement in the triangulation process. The third functional key completes the basis for the process of triangulation by making definitive the relational experience of being made whole in relationship together with our Father. In integrated function with the second functional key (of pursuing our Father in relationship together as family on his terms), the third functional key uses what is being experienced in that intimate relationship to interact in integral function with the first functional key (of living how our Father loves us). In integrated function together, these three functional keys provide this intimate relational point of orientation in context with the whole of God, by which to be guided in order to be defined in any human context by the trinitarian relational context of family and to function in any relationship by the trinitarian relational process of family love. Triangulation with our Father takes us further than the right ethics and merely doing the right thing, and engages us deeper than acting

in life and practice as mere *reactors* to others in situations and circumstances. As Jesus embodied and calls us to embody in likeness, triangulation with our Father directs our whole person and engages us to be relationally involved with others in the same distinguished love by which he is involved with us in the primacy of relationship together necessary to be whole, God's relational whole.

Jesus embodied the whole of God's thematic action and relational work of grace in response to the human condition existing at various levels and in varied efforts apart from God's whole—in the relational dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes. Therefore, he functioned on God's relational terms signified in the law and the prophets for relationship together to be nothing less than whole—terms irreducible and nonnegotiable, embodying the whole of God's Word. Our embodying, in likeness without reduction, will function in our whole identity with relational righteousness to be also the qualitative and relational significance of the whole of God's word—to function both in the distinguished loving involvement to be whole and in the distinguished loving response to make whole. Our likeness, in contrast and conflict with the human shaping of relationships, will then also illuminate the whole relationship together necessary to fulfill the human relational condition.

Without ongoing relational function in these three functional keys (all relationally focused on our Father with reciprocating contextualization) and the triangulation process, Christian life and practice (distinct from Jesus' followers) is left with only alternatives to the whole. To pursue, settle for or be resigned to anything less and any substitutes for the whole is to engage in reductionism. Jesus made clearly evident in the juxtaposition of reductionism with the whole throughout his summary relational discourse and teaching that there is no other alternative in-between, which may trigger those assumptions about the Sermon on the Mount mentioned earlier. Consequently, in each moment, situation, circumstance and relationship encountered in our life and practice, we are faced with the decisions of what is going to define us and what will determine how we function, notably with others in relationships. And Jesus is unequivocal about our having only two alternatives (7:13-14): God's whole, which is irreducible and nonnegotiable, therefore imperative to only one function ("narrow gate and road"); or anything less and any substitutes, which is amenable to any variation away from the whole, consequently adaptable to various functions ("wide gate and road"). "Gate" is a metaphor for what defines and determines us, while "road" is a metaphor for the ongoing function in our practice emerging from that "gate." The wide one leads away (*apago*) from the whole to loss (*apoleia*, i.e. reduction) or ultimate ruin, while the narrow one brings before (*apago*, same word for opposite dynamic) the *zoe* of the whole of God and to the qualitative relational function of *zoe* in God's whole. The former is easier because of a reduced ontology and function, while the latter necessitates significantly more by the nature of whole ontology and function.

*Zoe* signifies the qualitative relational function of the whole of God and the Trinity's relational action in the trinitarian relational context of family by the trinitarian relational process of family love. *Zoe* involves the practice of this qualitative relational work made definitive in Jesus' teaching, which is contrary to prevailing practices and norms (as implied above) and in conflict with quantitative outer-in presentations of a reduced human ontology (7:15-20). Moreover, relational work in its innermost is not about doing something (like performing ministry, 7:22), nor even about beliefs,

associations or intentions referentially made to “Lord” (7:21). This qualitative relational work constitutes only the primacy of involvement in intimate relationship together to be whole, experienced first with the whole of God (“I don’t know you” to the reductionists, 7:23). This is the qualitative relational work of those being made whole in relationship together in God’s family, and therefore who are able to live whole as their Father’s very own daughters and sons—those “who do the will of my Father” (7:21b), whom Jesus also made clearly definitive in another context (12:48-50).

As Jesus vulnerably embodied and intimately disclosed the whole of God, he made definitive what composes the inner-out function of God’s whole. In his closing communicative action to all his followers (then and now), he integrated this whole function with accountability (7:24-27). We are accountable for all his relational words communicated to us in his summary discourse, which was not referential language merely to inform us but only God’s terms in relational language to make whole our relationship together and its relational significance to be and live whole with others in his kingdom-family and to live and make whole with others in the surrounding contexts. The qualitative and relational depth of how we live and practice emerges directly from the inner-out function of who and what we are in our whole identity (righteousness in the innermost), which involves whose we are. And what validates our innermost is all his relational words and our relational involvement with him on those relational terms (“the foundation on rock”). This accountability is relationship-specific, and thereby we are accountable not for the self-orientation of what we do but rather for our vulnerable involvement in intimate relationship together—that is, accountable for this qualitative relational work of who and what we are in the primacy of relationship together with the whole of God. To separate how we live and practice from the function of our whole identity renders how we live and practice to reductionism—namely defined by only what we do, which does not go beyond the righteousness of the reductionists (5:20).

As Jesus unfolded the truth for the primacy of whole relationship in his teaching, he clarified what is signified in the human condition: In reality, the function of self-autonomy is not free but only an ironic form of enslavement—namely because of the outer-in human ontology which defines it and determines its practice, most notably in the human shaping of relationships—which self-determination reinforces by being constrained to the limits of ontological simulation, and which self-justification then embeds even deeper in epistemological illusion. The events, situations, circumstances and relationships (“rain...wind,” 7:27) experienced in life and practice will expose their lack of qualitative substance to be whole, qualitative significance to live whole, and qualitative function to make whole. This is a reality check for those engaged in any form of reductionism (even inadvertently or naively), which extends our accountability with the clear need to ongoingly account for what defines us and what determines how we function—notably in what we specifically characterize as our Christian practice.

As the primer for discipleship, Jesus’ relational words to his followers clearly distinguish without variation that discipleship is following him in relational progression to his Father for relationship together as his very own to be whole as family (cf. Jn 12:44,49-50). This nonnegotiable involves discipleship distinguished in relational terms not referential, and irreducibly frames discipleship formation in only his Father’s relational context and process. While there are more than a few variations of discipleship and approaches to discipleship formation—not to mention varied efforts at discipleship—

his closing metaphor of building a house warns us that these may only appear to be genuine to define his disciples and merely claim to be valid to determine discipleship (7:26-27), yet be lacking the depth of basis to have relational significance to God (cf. Rev 2:2-4). Jesus was conclusive in his relational message that any genuineness and validity foundational (“built on rock”) for all his followers are relationally based on the inner-out functional practice of all his relational words (7:24-25; cf. Rev 3:1-3). All his words in relational language (not referential), communicating our Father’s terms for relationship together in its innermost primacy, are what his Father also made imperative for us to “Listen to my Son”—which Peter eventually understood (2 Pet 1:18-19). Therefore, all his relational words communicated to us from our Father are not optional, negotiable, nor can his followers who are distinguished from inner out be selective about which of his words to practice (cf. Lk 6:46). They cohere as the whole of God’s terms necessary for relationship to be whole, that holds persons together in the innermost—which Paul made functional for the church (Rom 10:17; Col 3:16; 1 Cor 4:6). The whole of Jesus’ communicative action defined the whole of Paul’s witness and determined the whole in his theology (Acts 26:16; Gal 1:11-12; Eph 3:2-3; 2 Cor 4:2).

Even as he shared his summary relational discourse, Jesus vulnerably embodied the whole of God and intimately involved himself in relationships with others to live whole and to make whole. Many also listening to his words, other than his disciples, recognized his qualitative difference (*exousia*, denoting his right and authority to be and make whole) and his qualitative function distinguished from the apparent reductionists prevailing in their context (7:28-29). Yet, what those persons did with his words they listened to with interest was an issue of accountability integrated with inner-out function (cf. Eze 33:30-32, a pervasive practice in ancient times as well as modern). His distinguished followers are called beyond reductionism to be the innermost whole relationally congruent to the whole of God, and therefore ongoingly accountable to vulnerably embody God’s whole and to be intimately involved with others in the primacy of relationship together—to be whole, to live whole and to make whole, nothing less and no substitutes. This is the only ontology and function that go beyond the reductionists and rise above the human condition. And if his followers are not adequately addressing the self-determination and shaping of relationships together, they are unable to sufficiently define the human condition and determine its wholeness, including the existing human condition within the church and in the academy.

If the view of sin in the human condition remains limited to the parameters of moral-ethical failure, then salvation of the human condition merely becomes saving *from* this sin. Defining sin, however, in its complete nature and function as reductionism, which Jesus did in the Sermon on the Mount, necessitates a complete soteriology for the response to the human condition to be significant in its innermost. In the nature of a significant saving dynamic, we cannot be saved just *from* sin if sin is reductionism. That is, reductionism, and its counter-relational work, by its design and purpose always has fragmenting repercussions on wholeness, the whole, God’s relational whole. Therefore, to be saved from this reductionism of the whole, and the human condition existing relationally apart from the whole, needs to involve, by its very nature, being restored to wholeness—what a complete soteriology saves *to*. Any saving from reductionism has no meaning and functional significance if wholeness and God’s relational whole are not

restored in the innermost; such salvation is in itself reductionism, no matter how normative theologically or sincere in practice. ‘Saved to’ constitutes the primacy of relationship together in wholeness, in the beginning of which God created human persons in the innermost likeness of the triune God, and from the beginning, for which the distinguished Face turned to us in the whole of God’s definitive blessing to bring the necessary change from inner out to restore.

## **The Primacy of the Qualitative and the Relational**

The whole of God’s thematic relational response of grace unfolded from the beginning. God’s vulnerable presence ongoingly has been distinguished by the qualitative from inner out—the innermost of God’s heart, beyond any kind of quality in the universe. Even from before the beginning, God’s involvement ongoingly has been distinguished by the relational in wholeness, and only for relationship together in wholeness. Therefore, God’s relational response of grace prevails not theologically in referential terms but only in the primacy of whole relationship together—defining human ontology and determining human function in his qualitative image and relational likeness.

If we do not have whole understanding (*synesis*, as did Jesus, Lk 2:47, and Paul, Eph 3:4; Col 2:2) of the primacy of relationship, we essentially do not understand the integral composition needed for theology to be whole and not fragmentary:

1. Who, what and how the whole of God is as the Trinity (to be discussed in chap. 11).
2. Who, what and how human persons are created in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God.
3. The depths of what and how the human condition is and the whole of God’s thematic relational response to it.

The whole gospel is contingent on this whole theology, which Jesus relationally embodied from inner out as the hermeneutic key for the gospel. Conversely for Paul, the embodying of his *pleroma* theology emerged from the whole of the gospel whom he experienced in the primacy of Face-to-face relationship.

What Jesus ongoingly embodied is often observed apart from his primary relational context and process. Then the focus shifts merely to what Jesus does or to his teachings, yet only as referential words and not in his relational language. When Jesus saw a widow at her only son’s funeral procession, his heart felt compassion for her (Lk 7:11-16). His feelings indicated the qualitative heart of his whole person, vulnerably present in the human context. This also illuminated the depth level of his ongoing relational involvement with those who were not whole and unable to function in wholeness, which Jesus made evident with Levi in the significance of Hosea 6:6. Without her son, this widow in the ancient Mediterranean world lacked value and would suffer social illness (*kakos*, as Jesus implied about Levi and Zacchaeus). Jesus responded to her by restoring her son—a further expression of God’s thematic relational response to the human condition.

In this seemingly limited moment, Jesus demonstrated more than his power over illness and death; and by this act beyond intervention, he demonstrated more than the limitations of a messianic role. The witnesses of this miracle were convinced that God

had come to fulfill the covenant and messianic promise (7:16-17). Yet, the relational significance of what Jesus distinguished with this widow appears to be lost in their covenant and messianic expectations shaped by human terms, rather than the meaning of the covenant in God's thematic relational response. This reflects the absence of whole theological understanding and, consequently, it demonstrates lacking what indeed signifies good news for the human condition. In other words, their working theology and gospel were fragmentary.

In the creation narrative, human ontology was never about one's self (or the individual) nor designed "to be apart" from the whole (Gen 2:18). The person was never created to function as if in social isolation, thus the individual has neither the functional freedom for self-determination nor the relational autonomy to determine meaning in life and practice and to constitute wholeness, that is, in mere self-referencing terms. The ontology of the person is only a function of relationship in likeness of the relational ontology of the triune God—in whose qualitative image the human person is created and apart from whom there is no determination of self, meaning and wholeness in the innermost. Since creation, God's thematic action throughout human history has been to respond to the human relational condition "to be apart." While widows and orphans were at risk in their situations and circumstances, it was their relational condition apart from God's whole to which Jesus responded as fulfillment of God's thematic relational response to restore whole relationship together.

Not understanding the depths of what and how the human condition is certainly then necessarily diminishes the whole of God's thematic relational response to it. This has significant implications critical for Christians who supposedly have been saved *from* the human condition but lack the theology and function necessary for what they are saved *to*—that is, to that which is the sole definitive replacement to the human condition: the primacy of relationship together in wholeness. This lack is certainly consequential for the experiential truth of the good news and the experiential reality of its outcome for the human relational condition.

Furthermore, as the distinguished Face vulnerably present and relationally involved, God ongoingly functions in and thereby is concerned for the primacy of the qualitative and relational of those in the primacy of relationship together. Whatever distracts, defines and determines persons away from this primacy are of a primary priority for God. Accordingly, the various issues (e.g. troubles, problems, sufferings, even persecutions) persons experience in situations and circumstances in human contexts—though always secondary to the primacy of relationship—are also primary concerns which God 'delivers, saves from', yet nonnegotiable for the primary purpose of the relationship God 'saves to' (cf. Ex 6:6-7; 14:13; Ps 34:19; 2 Tim 3:11). As deliverer and savior, God always functions in and is concerned for the primary. Therefore, the whole of God must not by nature be reduced to just Deliverer or Savior in truncated salvific action, or the qualitative and relational of God are rendered secondary, and our theology becomes fragmentary. This occurred in Israel's reductionism ("devoted things," *herem*, Josh 7:1,7-12); and Joshua, in irony of his name (meaning "the Lord saves"), needed this theological clarification and functional correction of the primary of what the LORD saves to.

Of subsequent significant consequence both theologically and functionally, the qualitative image and relational likeness in which God created the human person from

inner out is no longer the primary determinant for human ontology and function, and for what holds together the person and persons in relationship in the innermost. This was evidenced as Jesus' qualitative and relational correction of Martha clarified the wholeness necessary for his followers and their discipleship (Lk 10:41-42), and as Paul further clarified theologically and functionally for the church's wholeness (2 Cor 3:14-18; Col 3:9-10; Gal 6:15; 1 Cor 14:33; Col 3:15). In a critical lesson for Paul personally, he learned and developed in this whole theology, that further distinguished his deliverer and his own person, by a key relational experience about his 'thorn in the flesh', the relational outcome of which deepened him in the primacy of the qualitative and the relational (2 Cor 12:8-10). This outcome involved experiencing the depth of the whole of God's presence and involvement with him, thereby giving him this whole understanding: "weakness" as defined by the qualitative is primary over "strength" in quantitative terms, when determined by the primacy of whole relationship together.

The distinguished Face of the savior turned and shined on us from the beginning (Num 6:24-26) solely to 'bring change necessary to constitute the new relationship together in wholeness'—the relational outworking and fulfillment of *siym* and *shalom*. Anything less and any substitutes of the savior, deliverer, messiah are reductionism from human shaping and construction, the terms of which become quantitative over qualitative, referential over relational, and therefore secondary over primary, with a theology and gospel fragmented, not whole.

In a fragmentary context and process, not only is the whole of God elusive but the human person becomes increasingly a virtual simulation from outer in, while knowledge and awareness of the human condition are diminished and redefined by illusions in social discourse and relations—for example, evidenced currently in the social media on the Internet. These interrelated dynamics are critical because any reduction or loss of the qualitative and relational renders the human person and persons in relationship to unavoidable fragmentation. Regardless of human efforts, this condition in function cannot discover the whole (e.g. through science), become whole (e.g. in the search for identity), or be whole (e.g. in the quest for human connection). Accordingly by its nature, this condition functions only within the limits of a worldview (interpretive framework, *phronema*), the constraints of a mindset (perceptual lens, *phroneo*), and the unchangeableness of reduced human ontology, all of which compose the disconnected function apart from God's whole in the innermost. Yet, the human pursuit, search and quest for more (than existing in human experience) continue unabated. This is less about human curiosity and mainly about the human need that remains unfulfilled by the secondary, as even neuroscience is helping us to understand.<sup>8</sup> In terms of the innermost, however, there is a deeper explanation illuminating whole understanding that is needed.

Jesus challenged persons who were pursuing more to put their efforts into that which "endures for eternal life" (*meno*, dwells, Jn 6:27). Most human efforts would claim more modesty in their goal than something eternal, while many others would dismiss this pursuit as spiritualized daydreaming. In actual function, much of prevailing Christian practice fits into either of these categories, lacking both involvement in Jesus' challenge

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<sup>8</sup> In his research on loneliness, Cacioppo concludes: "Loneliness itself is not a disease; feeling lonely from time to time is like feeling hungry or thirsty from time to time. It is part of being human. The trick is to heed these signals in ways that bring long-term satisfaction." *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection*, 228.



and understanding of eternal life, even though the term itself occupies a prominent status in Christian vocabulary. Yet, this ‘more’ desired and needed is the singular purpose Jesus claimed “which the Son of Man will give you” who pursue more. What is the whole understanding of the more that Jesus illuminates in the innermost?

The writer of Ecclesiastes provides the antecedent necessary to answer this question, which emerged from his own honest reflections on life (Ecc 3:9-11). In the context of the human condition, he recounts God’s creative action: “He has made everything beautiful in its time” (NIV). Along with these well-recognized words, in the same breath he also includes that “He has set eternity in the *human* heart” (NIV). This part of his words is not a secondary supplement to his previous words but actually is more significant for function and needs our attention more than the better known part. The writer’s honest reflections get to the heart of human ontology and function and the underlying desire and need for more described above. How so?

Eternity (*‘olam*) is a concept that means forever, lasting, never ending, that is, eternal; yet this needs to be understood beyond the limits of quantitative terms and chronological time. God is eternal (“everlasting,” Gen 21:33; Jer 10:10), and he enacted a complete plan in the beginning in which everything is made beautiful according to it. Moreover, this eternal God transplanted an innermost part of himself into the human heart: the qualitative of eternity, or simply ‘eternity-substance’. Even with this eternity-substance of God in us, however, our efforts cannot discover, comprehend or even imagine the whole of “what God has done from the beginning to the end” (Ecc 3:11)—as Job learned, “too wonderful for me” (*pala*, too distinguished, Job 42:3). In the whole of God’s complete plan for creative action, all its parts (dynamics) are wonderfully put together and distinguished in the whole. Though humans cannot fully grasp God’s whole, we can experience and enjoy the beauty of its parts converging in the whole. We can because of the eternity-substance God implanted of himself in the human heart, that is, creating us with the qualitative innermost of the whole of God and in God’s whole, and as a result to be whole. Therefore, at the qualitative level of the human heart implanted with this eternity-substance, we can have whole understanding (*synesis*) of the whole constituting God and the whole in which the whole of God composed human persons. Accordingly, the eternity-substance of the human heart is affected in the innermost by anything less and any substitutes (e.g. the secondary), which signify the absence or loss of wholeness.

This understanding of wholeness and affect intrinsic to eternity-substance in the human heart can be a burden or a blessing. It is a common burden—that prevails in the human condition—when it just brings out dissatisfaction and frustration with our life (individually or collectively), as it did for the writer of Ecclesiastes. But the feelings from such honest reflections on our life can also become a blessing when they help us realize there is more in life to experience and enjoy, and thereby stir in us to pursue more, namely at the level Jesus challenged and not in secondary pursuits. This blessing goes beyond an awareness of something lacking; it is the deep desire and need emerging from the innermost of the human person who seeks ‘the more’ that is vital to eternity-substance—which can no longer be met by the secondary but only fulfilled by the primary.

Eternity-substance, when paid attention to, essentially provides epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction for that which is innermost to the whole of God

and therefore to the whole human person. It is from this antecedent that our understanding of eternal life needs to emerge. And how the dynamics involved in the pursuit for more stirred by eternity-substance converge with Jesus' challenge above is critical to our understanding. These dynamics unfold in a revealing interaction Jesus had with a person pursuing him for eternal life. Jesus' response to this person also implies an interaction with and extension of his summary relational message to his followers in the Sermon on the Mount, discussed earlier.

On this occasion Jesus encountered an interesting, rich young man who pursued him about eternal life (Mt 19:16-22). The effects of eternity-substance apparently stirred in his heart a great deal because he assertively imposed himself on Jesus (par. Mk 10:17)). Whether he had been feeling this for awhile or whether seeing Jesus' loving treatment of little children just prior (19:13-15)) triggered his feelings, he seized the opportunity to pursue more. Since by all social standards back then, or even today, this person was successful and young, what exactly was the more he was pursuing? While his query was about eternal life, this was not a typical evangelistic conversation about life after death. He wasn't merely seeking to prolong his life into eternity. So, if this wasn't about insurance for the future, why was a successful young man pursuing more? The word he used for "life" (*zoe*) involves the qualitative substance from inner out that is distinguished from another word for life (*bios*) simply involving the quantitative aspects from outer in. His pursuit of the lasting qualitative of *zoe* reflected the need and desire of his heart. This innermost feeling signified the eternity-substance from Ecclesiastes—not about chronological time and quantity but about depth and quality. Accordingly, this pursuit necessitates meeting Jesus' challenge to pursue the qualitative that “dwells for eternal life.”

However, since this person focused on what he must do, he lacked a whole understanding of the person from inner out. The quantitative of *bios* still prevailed over the qualitative of *zoe*. Even though he pursued the stirrings in his heart for more, he defined his own person from outer in based on what he did and had. Consequently, he also missed seeing Jesus' person, because when we define ourselves by what we do or have, we also define others by what they do or have. That's why he focused on what Jesus did (teach) and had (knowledge) also. Since he focused on secondary things from outer in instead of the whole person, how he did relationships also focused on merely doing something (“good deed to do”), not on relational connection between persons in relationship together—which is what Jesus focused on. These conflicting dynamics—between, on the one hand, his feelings from inner out and, on the other hand, his outer-in function with Jesus—demonstrate the ongoing tension between the qualitative and the quantitative, the primary and the secondary, that is, the whole and reductionism.

After trying to refocus him, Jesus raised the issue of God's terms for covenant relationship together: the commandments (19:17)). As Jesus exposed in the Sermon on the Mount, this successful young man perceived these actions in referential terms based on what he did from outer in (the referential letter of the law) rather than in relational terms based on the involvement of his whole person from inner out (the relational spirit of the law); therefore, he also failed to understand their importance for the primacy of relationships in God's design and purpose. But, then, this would be predictable from how he defined himself and did relationships. Nevertheless, he declared to Jesus that he faithfully practiced these behaviors since his youth (par. Mk 10:20). Despite his apparent

devotion, eternity-substance helped him realize that he lacked something in the innermost (“what do I still lack?” 19:20), so he pursued more.

Despite all that he was accomplishing and all he had, this serious, devoted, successful young man wanted *more* in his life. Jesus pursued his heart further and loved (*agape*, as distinguished previously) him (par. Mk 10:21). With the primary Jesus addressed his lack and focused his attention “to be perfect” (19:21) in relational terms, which he defined in the first functional key for his followers in relational likeness of the Father (Mt 5:48). Then, in relational language those familiar words came out of Jesus' mouth (19:21), which in referential language seem so exceptionally demanding as a requisite for discipleship that they are taken as an exception. These gentle, loving relational words were so burdensome to this serious, devoted religious man, as they likely seem to us, that he could not respond to Jesus' relational message and walked away depressed (19:22). Was Jesus too hard on him? Wasn't he, after all, serious and devoted?

His depressed state emerged from the conflicting dynamics unfolding in this interaction, consequently its state was twofold: (1) the deep disappointment in not experiencing the more he desired and needed, and (2) the frustration and sadness of the thought of losing his identity based on all he had. The issue for him was his perception of Jesus' words in referential terms, thus exposing the primacy he gave to the secondary. Despite the blessing of eternity-substance stirring his heart to pursue more in the innermost, the secondary emerged as the primary to render him only to eternity-substance's burden to bear. In contrary qualitative and relational terms, by the distinguished love of communicating those relational words to him, Jesus redefined his person from inner out (the primary) and wanted to redeem him from what he based himself on from outer in (the secondary); and by sharing these relational words, Jesus also unmistakably revealed what was primary to the whole of God, to God's life and thus to eternal life. The primary focus of his relational words is not on secondary efforts of what to do, like "go, sell everything ...," but on the primacy of relationship together in "*follow me*." Jesus tried to focus the young man's person on the whole of his distinguished person, not further embed the man in his occupation in the secondary. Jesus wanted this serious pursuer to be relationally involved with him in Face-to-face relationship, not indirectly engaged by just doing things, even if they were for God. The critical issue is *relational work* in the primacy of whole relationship together that Jesus lovingly presented to him for his primary involvement, just as he defined in his second functional key for his followers (Mt 6:33). This primacy in the qualitative and relational was *what* his person lacked and *how* he lacked; conflictingly, that's also *why* this successful young man wanted more in his life—that more of eternity-substance that can only be experienced in qualitative ontology with relational function. In the pursuit of more, eternity-substance converges with eternal life in the primacy of the qualitative and the relational to be fulfilled and made whole in the primacy of relationship together with the whole of God.

This is the what, who and how of eternal life Jesus illuminated in the concluding part (dynamic) of the whole of God's complete plan in thematic relational response to the human condition, which provides whole understanding of the *more* in eternal life and that leads to the conclusive outcome of his challenge above of pursuing him who “dwells *together* for eternal life.” With the relational words in relational language, Jesus communicated his primary relational message in his formative family prayer: “This is

eternal life, that they may know you *Father*, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (Jn 17:3). This cannot be reduced to referential words in referential language to transmit information about God (and to God in his prayer), because that would not be the level of knowing in the innermost signifying the eternity-substance constituted by the innermost of the life of the eternal God. The significance of the qualitative and the relational in the innermost are irreducible. Their significance for the human person in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God are deepened in the distinguished context composed by the ongoing qualitative presence and relational involvement of the whole of God: the distinguished qualitative and relational context of eternity and eternal life. The integrally vulnerable presence of Jesus’ whole person embodied the qualitative presence and relational involvement of the whole of God for relationship together (Jn 17:6), in which we can relationally participate face to Face in the qualitative life of God (17:21). The relational outcome of this intimate involvement is the eternal life Jesus intimately distinguished in his prayer: to “understand and know me” (as in Jer 9:24 but further and deeper) in the primacy of whole relationship together, “so that the love with which you *Father* have loved me may be in them, and I in them” (Jn 17:26).

The relational challenge Jesus made to direct our efforts in the primacy of dwelling together in eternal life is the necessary reciprocal relational work of vulnerable involvement compatible to the whole of God’s presence and involvement. This primary relational work is unmistakably distinguished from efforts of self-determination and the shaping of relationship together. As Martha apparently learned, we can be distracted and occupied by many secondary things, even with good intentions in efforts for God, but there is necessarily only one primary response (Lk 10:41-42). The rich young man turned away from this relational work to remain apart from the whole.<sup>9</sup> Paul turned to this reciprocal relational work to become whole, to live whole in God’s family and to make whole the human condition (cf. Phil 3:7-11; 2 Cor 5:17-19). They both learned, the former as a burden and the latter as a blessing, the irreducible and nonnegotiable reality:

Only the qualitative and relational from inner out, created in the innermost in the very likeness of the whole of God and with God’s distinguished qualitative being and relational nature, can have the compatibility and congruence necessary (1) to make relational connection with God from inner out, (2) to understand the innermost significance of the primacy of the qualitative and the relational in order to be whole, and therefore (3) to intimately know and understand the whole of God in the primacy of whole relationship together—that which holds together the person, persons in relationship, and the world in the innermost.

Anything less and any substitutes reflect, reinforce and sustain the human *relational* condition in its human shaping of relationships—even among his followers, within the church and in the academy. Without addressing the breadth of the human condition, any response to it lacks the depth of the gospel.

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<sup>9</sup> Cacioppo’s observations of the human person lead him to believe: “The degree of social connection...is both as simple and as difficult as being open and available to others.... The characteristic most common among those low in loneliness is a full availability to whatever genuine social interaction is appropriate to the moment” (*loneliness*, 229). Cacioppo, however, makes a false assumption that the human person is simply free to engage such a response that would satisfy the whole person, especially when motivated by the desire and need for more—an assumption that the rich young man’s lack of response disputes.

## Chapter 6                      The Gospel Embodied in Whole

**Lord, say to my innermost, ‘I am your salvation’.**

Psalm 35:3

Good news may be based on its composition. Good news for the human condition, however, can be based only on the depth of its significance to compose the fulfillment of the human condition.

The ancient poet made the above request of the LORD to utter. If the poet had been focused on his surrounding situations and circumstances, what he requested would have been a referential statement transmitting information merely about what God does—that is, deliver him from his negative situations and circumstances. Since his request was for the LORD to speak to his innermost (*nepes*, the qualitative of God distinguished in the human person), he wanted only relational words from God not referential. The relational response he wanted from God did not necessarily make his situations and circumstances unimportant but clearly secondary to the primacy of relationship together, therefore he was able to affirm God’s righteous involvement in their relationship in spite of his continued troubles (Ps 35:28).

This speaks to the significance of the whole gospel. What the ancient poet wants is the depth of God’s relational response from inner out, which a response just to his situations and circumstances would not satisfy. His feeling is the affect of eternity-substance in his heart (Ecc 3:11) pursuing God for more. Therefore, he impressed on God to communicate this relational message to his innermost, a message that would be insufficient as an “I am” statement in referential terms. Only the “I am” as relational words in relational language can communicate on the innermost level these vital relational messages which the poet wanted to receive: (1) who, what and how the whole of God is; (2) who and what God sees in our person and how he feels about us; and (3) what the relationship between us means to God and how the whole of God responds to us for our person and the relationship to be whole.

These relational messages integrally constitute the heart (innermost) of the whole gospel, the depth of which is necessary to respond to the breadth of the human condition. And the gospel unfolds from the beginning with nothing less and no substitutes; otherwise our gospel is not whole, not a gospel at all, as Paul declared (Gal 1:7). Our beliefs or notions about the gospel tend either to make major assumptions about it so as to render the good news merely to a headline composed with only a sidebar and obituary in the news, and consequently a gospel without full significance for the human condition. Or we take liberties with the gospel in autonomous efforts to shape the gospel for our (individual and collective) determination and justification so as to render the good news merely to another op-ed article in the newspaper, and, as a result, not really a gospel for the human condition. The former composition reduces the gospel and the latter

renegotiates it, both of which perceive the gospel in referential terms through a myopic lens—the prevailing interpretive framework and perceptual lens.

In referential words and language—as noted in the news above—the gospel becomes an announcement that transmits information about what God did and what people can do because of it. Such a gospel in referential terms has been reduced to quantitative information describing God’s outer-in function (what God saves *from*) in fragmentary parts, though the results for human persons have spiritual nuances and implications which have been negotiated on human terms. In such a so-called gospel, the ontology and function of both God and the human person have been reduced and fragmentized by being defined and determined on the basis of what they do, and thus what they have: a referential gospel. This, however, *misre*-presents the whole gospel that emerged from the beginning in relational response to the human condition, which Jesus embodied to fulfill, and which Paul embodied to complete. We therefore need to challenge any of our assumptions and shaping of the gospel which are anything less and any substitute.

In relational words and language, the gospel is a relational dynamic beyond the proclamation of a static proposition; and it is simply irreducible to referential terms or else the significance of its relational response is fragmented and its wholeness is lost. When this happens, the distinguished Face does not turn and shine to bring new relationship in wholeness but becomes an ambiguous or elusive Face needing human shaping. Moreover, then, the whole gospel is a relational dynamic solely on God’s relational terms, which are nonnegotiable to human terms, or else its relational response is no longer to make whole the human condition but becomes determined by the human-shaping influence of the human condition. From the beginning, the gospel is the distinguished Face’s relational outworking and fulfillment of *siym* and *shalom*, nothing less and no substitutes (Num 6:24-26)—as the ancient poet wanted from God.

How did the relational dynamic of the gospel unfold and become embodied in whole? This involves the ongoing convergence and integral interaction of the dynamics of the whole of God’s thematic relational response to the human condition.

## **The Shift of the Gospel**

In the highlight of Israel’s history (liberation from Egypt), Moses affirmed that the LORD “has become my salvation” (Ex 15:2). In a low point in his personal history, the ancient poet wanted the distinguished Face to turn to his innermost to experience the same affirmation. Both of them expressed their feelings in the most qualitative form (and the earliest) of human communication: song and poetry. Referential words in referential language (a later development in human communication) were inadequate to express the depth not only of their hearts but the qualitative-relational depth of God’s salvation. Moses’ song was a prelude to the communication in their relationship together in which God spoke directly to Moses, Face to face (Num 12:6-8). Their direct relational involvement together was a precursor of what God saves *to* conjointly with saves *from*. These early experiences capture the initial relational significance, if not always the qualitative significance, of the dynamics of God’s thematic relational response signifying the gospel. The dynamic that unfolds from these experiences, along with others like

Abraham's, has even further and deeper qualitative-relational significance which distinguishes the gospel unmistakably in wholeness (the *shalom* of God's definitive blessing) and thus inseparably from the whole, God's relational whole. As we fast-forward, the distinguished Face's relational outworking and fulfillment of *siym* and *shalom* intensify.

What the qualitative and relational significance of the gospel are was unclear until the incarnation. Yet, understanding both its qualitative significance and relational significance remained an issue throughout the incarnation and Paul's time, and remains an issue for us today. This lack of understanding remains until a compatible shift occurs integrally with the gospel.

After the aborted effort to pursue eternal life by the rich young man, the disciples were somewhat shocked at Jesus' account of the difficulty to enter the kingdom of God. Due to a lack of their own understanding, they raised the question: "Then who can be saved?" (Mt 19:25; Mk 10:26) Jesus' short answer must not be reduced to referential terms about what is possible for God and impossible for human persons; his answer must be understood in the context of the account he just gave in relational terms. Whether for the rich young man or any other persons defined by what they have and do, these persons are engaged unavoidably in varied efforts of self-determination. Until such persons shift from these reduced terms of what defines and determines them, they are incompatible with the gospel to be saved *to* more—no matter how sincere, devoted and successful they are in the religious context, as demonstrated by the successful young man. The shift of the gospel is clearly both bad news for those who have not shifted from their self-definition and determination, as well as the good news for those who make a compatible shift (e.g. Levi, Zacchaeus and the Samaritan woman, discussed previously).

The gospel unfolds in the incarnation with three major shifts: strategic, tactical and functional. As these shifts are enacted, the gospel Jesus embodied in whole is made conclusive for what God saves *to*.

### **Strategic Shift**

Moses' experience of God's direct involvement with him in Face-to-face relationship was a precursor to the strategic shift of the gospel. This strategic shift clearly emerged with the Samaritan woman (see previous discussion, Jn 4:4-26). In the shift from a place (like the mountain, tabernacle, or Jerusalem), and from situations and circumstances, the whole of God becomes vulnerably and relationally accessible for ongoing involvement in direct relationship Face to face. This makes the transcendent God accessible to all peoples and persons regardless of their human distinctions from outer in, on the one hand, which certainly opened up a unique opportunity for this woman, viewed as a person of despicable race-ethnicity, debased gender and likely denigrated character. On the other hand, however, this was unique access only for the relationship-specific involvement from inner out in the primacy together of God's family, for which this woman would have to shift from outer in to be compatible. This then makes the holy God accessible for relationship only to those who respond in the innermost of Jesus' relational context and process—in other words, relationship only on God's terms (cf. Jn 8:31-42). Was this good news or bad news for this woman?

In relational language, Jesus vulnerably engaged her to reveal that the *old* (prevailing religious tradition and way to see things) was going to be changed (Jn 4:21-

22), and that the *new* “is now here” (4:23-24). The strategic shift in the holy and transcendent God’s presence was embodied vulnerably with her in a highly improbable encounter—improbable both in God’s action and in human thinking. As Jesus disclosed the qualitative and relational significance of his whole person in his pivotal “I am” relational message to her (v.26), the whole of God’s ontology and function became vulnerably accessible for ongoing involvement in direct relationship Face to face. The same relational dynamic was also extended improbably to Paul on the Damascus road, which raised similar issues for Paul in his religious tradition, as for the woman in hers, but with further implications and consequences. This shift to the new relational context and process, however, necessitated (and still necessitates) terms significant for compatibility in order to distinguish relationship together from prevailing human terms, self-definition and determination. In the strategic shift of the gospel, there is no relational progression with the wholly accessible God without these ongoing relational terms: “in spirit and truth” (4:23-24).

These familiar terms cannot be limited to worship in traditional terms because Jesus takes worship beyond its traditional context (v.21). Worship is not location-specific but relationship-specific in its primacy. While the latter was always intended by God to constitute the worship signified in the tabernacle or temple, the location had become the primacy to constitute worship which only secondarily signified in relationship with God. The relational distance or lack of relational involvement with God emerges unmistakably in worship when perceived from inner out (cf. Mk 7:6-8). This practice engaged in relationship without the heart, the innermost of the person that Jesus made definitive in relational language by the term “spirit,” (cf. the poet’s *nepes*, Ps 35:3).

In the strategic shift of the gospel, throughout the incarnation the distinguished presence of Jesus’ whole person vulnerably disclosed the transcendent “God is spirit” (as in v.24)—that is, the innermost of the whole of who, what and how God is. The good news for the Samaritan woman was that Jesus wasn’t engaging her in a theological task to merely inform her for further doctrine about which she could be dogmatic. The strategic shift of the gospel’s relational dynamic reveals the innermost of the whole of God completely for the primacy of whole relationship together, even for a Samaritan woman with a history of failed marriages and cohabitation without matrimony. The innermost of God’s ontology and function necessitates by its nature (*dei*, v.24)—not the personal obligation or moral compulsion of *opheilo*—the innermost of human ontology and function for relationship together to be compatible. A reduced ontology and function defined and determined from outer in is incompatible for relationship with the whole ontology and function of God. In addition, the innermost of God’s ontology and function is the truth of who, what and how God is because God is relationally righteous and faithfully involved with nothing less and no substitutes of the whole of God, as vulnerably embodied by Jesus throughout the incarnation. The improbable unfolded before her in order to be with her. Therefore, along with the innermost of human ontology and function is the inseparable need for the truth of who, what and how the person is, that is, being vulnerably open and honest with one’s whole person—weaknesses, failures, sins and all, nothing less and no substitutes (demonstrated by this woman, 4:17)—in order for compatible relationship together to be reciprocal and whole. These are the indispensable relational terms to involve our whole person in the depth of face to Face.



“In spirit and truth” are the compatible qualitative relational terms which shift human persons to converge with the strategic shift of the gospel; and the gospel’s relational dynamic in distinguished relational progression redefines their persons from outer in to inner out, transforms them from reductionism, and makes them whole in the primacy of relationship together in God’s family. Our theological reflections on the ontology and function of both God and the human person deepen as we understand the pivotal significance of the Samaritan woman’s experience with the improbable. The need to account for the whole person, God’s and ours, is critical to the relational dynamic of the gospel and its relational outcome in the primacy of intimate relationships together Face to face necessary to hold together God’s family in the innermost.

The relational terms Jesus made definitive are neither optional nor idealized terms, and certainly cannot be understood as referential terms. Jesus’ relational terms embody the whole of God’s thematic relational response in the gospel and constitute the only terms by *what* and *how* God does relationships. Understanding the qualitative significance and relational significance of the gospel, however, does not stop with the strategic relational shift. Further shifts unfold in the relational dynamic of the gospel distinguished by the relational progression to deepen our understanding and to fulfill our experience for its relational outcome.

### **Tactical Shift**

The strategic shift opened direct access to Face-to-face relationship with the whole of God. The relational dynamic of the gospel also embodies the relational progression of relationship together to its complete relational outcome. This relational progression unfolds in the gospel with the tactical shift, the further and deeper shift of the gospel integrated with the strategic relational shift.

Any news about Messiah would be good news, especially for those who experience discrimination and dispossession. It is not clear whether the Samaritan woman, and those following her, believed in Jesus merely as the expected prophet (Jn 4:28-29, 39-42, cf. Deut 18:15-19), or also responded from their innermost to Jesus as the whole of God’s very self-disclosure for relationship together. While the former outcome was expected and probable, or at least hoped for, the latter would be an improbable expectation, a paradoxical wish at best. This suggests the difficulty not only of explaining the holy and transcendent God’s presence and involvement but also understanding the significance of God’s strategic relational shift—a difficulty compounded if approached from thinking in referential terms.

Psalms 8 reflects on the involvement of the transcendent God and Creator with the human person and raises the question (paraphrase of v.4): What is the human person that this God is involved, how can this be? This question provides a transition from the strategic shift of God’s thematic relational action to God’s tactical shift within the incarnation.

A partial theological answer to the question perhaps could be that the human person is not only God’s creation but created in God’s image as the epitome of God in all creation; thus in support of *imago Dei*, God maintains this involvement and caring (cf. God’s providence). Yet, as discussed previously, this is really the wrong question to be asking because it does not focus on the primary. Attempting to explain God’s action on the basis of *what* defines the human person is to conclude that human persons merit or

warrant God's action—which is essentially the underlying dynamic for identity maintenance in Judaism with its identity markers. Such an explanation cannot be justified as the basis for moving the transcendent God to action. The primary question then to ask focuses on the innermost of God: Who and what are *you* that this is how you are—present and involved?

While OT narrative and theology define no deistic God who is detached or distant, there is deeper understanding needed for the holy and transcendent God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement. Even the strength of covenant expectations of God's action prevailing in the intertestamental period (Second Temple Judaism) cannot adequately account for the relational significance of God's strategic relational shift. The only answer to this question that can be offered for the improbable is not a referential narrowed-down explanation (e.g. grace as a default explanation) but emerges from the qualitative-relational understanding of God's innermost: the relational nature of the heart of God's ontology and function vulnerably enacting the whole of God's relational response of grace.

As the whole of God's relational work of grace made a strategic shift with the incarnation, Jesus' relational work of grace makes a tactical shift for further engagement in the relational progression. With this shift Jesus makes evident the gospel further in the improbable.

The improbable is not only about the relational presence of the transcendent God but also about the vulnerable involvement of the holy God, who must by nature be separate and distinguished from what is *common* (cf. *qados* and *hol*, holy and common, respectively, Lev 10:10; 11:45). In the mystery of the holy God's direct relational involvement, Jesus' whole person demonstrated no relational separation from the common's context (from micro level to macro) in his ongoing vulnerable involvement. Yet Jesus' relational involvement illuminated the qualitative innermost distinguishing his relational work of grace from the common's function. What distinguished the holy God from pervasive common function underlies both the tactical shift for the relational progression as well as the functional significance of the gospel.

Jesus emerged in the midst of a religious context pervasive with messianic and covenant expectations, with the surrounding context prevailing in cultural, economic and political stratification. He also encountered the interacting effects of these contextual pressures in his public ministry, yet these effects neither defined nor determined what emerges in the tactical shift of the gospel. The presence of these and other contextual influences, pressures and related problems, however, have importance in the life of Jesus, and accordingly for his followers, and are valuable in our understanding of the gospel, for the following purpose: (1) they help define the pervasive common function from which Jesus' function was distinguished; and (2) they help identify the prevailing common function from which persons needed to be redeemed. This purpose is realized with the tactical shift. The relational dynamic enacted by Jesus in the tactical shift conjointly distinguished his relational involvement in progression with persons, and distinguished those persons in their relational response in relational progression.

We had our first exposure to Jesus' tactical shift when he called Levi to be redefined, transformed and made whole (see previous discussion, Mt 9:9-13). Reviewing Levi's story (discussed in chap. 3), it was nothing less than the embodying of the gospel—that is, the gospel which is contingent on no substitutes for a complete

Christology and a full soteriology. In calling Levi, Jesus demonstrated the new perceptual-interpretive framework distinguished from what prevailed in common function. As both Jesus' whole person and Levi's crossed social, cultural and religious boundaries, they connected in relationship together Face to face. In this highly unlikely relationship (given Levi's status), Jesus made evident his tactical shift for involvement in the relational progression. This was initially demonstrated by the significance of their table fellowship together. Levi was not only redeemed from the old but freed *to* relationship together in the *new*—that is, the primacy of whole relationship together in the relational progression involving friendship, intimacy and belonging to God's family. Jesus' tactical shift enacts the relational dynamic in the relational progression for persons like Levi to go from a disciple (and servant) of Jesus to his intimate friend (Jn 15:15), and then to be whole together as family (Jn 14:23; 17:21).

The relational progression is further distinguished with Zacchaeus. What unfolds from Levi to Zacchaeus is certainly more improbable in contextual terms. Yet the significance of this was the design of Jesus' tactical shift, which further illuminated his qualitative innermost distinguished from common function.

Reviewing Zacchaeus' story (Lk 19:1-10), he certainly was not lacking economically, though he lacked by any other measurement. Most importantly, he lacked the wholeness of belonging to the whole of God. This was the only issue Jesus paid attention to, demonstrating his perceptual-interpretive framework. By this qualitative lens, he didn't see a short rich sinner up in a tree but Zacchaeus' whole person needing to be redefined, transformed and made whole. Zacchaeus also becomes a metaphor for all such persons, whom Jesus must (*dei*) unavoidably pursue in their innermost by the nature of God's thematic relational action; this was how Jesus also pursued the rich young man in his innermost, without the same relational outcome as Zacchaeus. This metaphor for such persons, whom Jesus must "dwell *with*" (*meno*, 19:5) by intimate relational involvement together as family, also signifies the qualitative and relational significance necessary for the gospel. With the tactical shift of the gospel, the whole gospel's qualitative and relational significance are composed.

The reality of this new creation of God's family is revealed conclusively in the experiential truth of the relational progression, which God's thematic relational work of grace initiates, Jesus' relational work of grace constitutes and the Spirit's completes, also in reciprocal relationship with Paul. This new relational condition was neither a response warranted by Zacchaeus nor an experience he could construct by self-determination. While Zacchaeus declared (in the Greek present tense) that he was already making restitution and helping to restore equity for consequences of his old relational condition (19:8), this could also indicate an intention he assumed already as a foregone reality. Thus it would be an error to conclude that this was the basis for Jesus' responsive declaration: "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham" (v.9). This was not the result of what Zacchaeus did, however honorable an act or repentant Zacchaeus. This was only the relational outcome of Jesus' relational work of grace: "For [*gar*, because] the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost" (v.10). The tactical shift Jesus enacted as expressed in this verse determined the outcome in the previous verse.

What are we saved to and the primacy of relationship together with the whole of God necessary to make us whole only emerge in Jesus' tactical shift for distinguished

involvement in the relational progression. Levi and Zacchaeus had similar experiences of Jesus vulnerably pursuing them in their relational condition “to be apart” from the whole; and both directly experienced his intimate relational involvement for the purpose to be made whole. Yet each of these narratives emphasizes a different aspect of the relational progression; integrating their experiences with Jesus into one relational process provides us a full view of the relational progression.

Their relationship together went further than the friendship of table fellowship, and their relational involvement went deeper into the relational progression. Though Zacchaeus’ salvation was not “because” of ancestry with Abraham, there was essentially relational connection as “a son of Abraham,” as Jesus declared (Lk 19:9)—pointing to connection with Abraham’s wholeness in faith, as Paul’s will emerge. That is, “to the degree that” (*kathoti*) Zacchaeus’ whole person from inner out—the shift Zacchaeus also made to be compatible with Jesus—was intimately involved with Jesus on the basis of God’s relational response of grace, Jesus redeemed him from the outer in of the *old* (of the common’s function) and transformed him in the innermost to the *new* as a son belonging in the family of God represented by Abraham. Therefore in their intimate involvement together Face to face, Zacchaeus was constituted in Jesus’ very own relational context, the whole of God’s relational context of family. In other words, the Son’s Father would also become Zacchaeus’ Father and they would effectively be brothers, as Jesus indicated after the resurrection (Jn 20:17, cf. Mt 12:50). This was what Zacchaeus was saved to, and this was the relationship necessary by nature to make him whole in the innermost together in God’s whole—the relational progression to the whole of God, the Trinity qua family.

Both Zacchaeus and Levi received and responded to the three vital relational messages which the ancient poet asked to experience as his salvation. While the poet’s experience of what he was saved to was limited, he did receive these relational messages sufficiently to understand that God “delights in the *shalom* of his servant” (Ps 35:27). *Shalom* is the definitive relational outcome of *siym* (Num 6:26), the distinguished Face’s relational work to bring change for new relationship together in wholeness that Jesus fulfilled.

There is one further shift that consummates this relational progression distinguishing the gospel.

### **Functional Shift**

In God’s strategic and tactical shifts, the whole of God’s thematic relational action integrally converges within Jesus’ relational work of grace in the trinitarian relational context of family and by the trinitarian relational process of family love. This coherence of relational action is completely fulfilled by Jesus’ whole person with his vulnerable relational involvement in distinguished love—the love that is further distinguished by this process of family love, of which Zacchaeus and Levi were initial recipients. With the qualitative significance and relational function of family love, Jesus embodied in whole the gospel’s functional shift for the innermost involvement in the relational progression in order to bring it (and his followers) to relational consummation (not yet to full conclusion). What is this family love specific to the trinitarian relational process?

During their last table fellowship, Jesus intimately shared with his disciples-friends “I will not leave you orphaned” (Jn 14:18). While Jesus’ physical presence was soon to conclude, his intimate relational involvement with them would continue—namely through his relational replacement, the Spirit (14:16-17). This ongoing intimate relational involvement is clearly the dynamic function of the trinitarian relational process of family love, which directly involves all the trinitarian persons (Jn 14:16-18,23). Yet, the full qualitative significance (in relational terms not referential) of this dynamic of family love is not understood until we have whole understanding (*synesis*) of the relational significance of Jesus’ use of the term “orphan” and his related concern.

In their ancient social context orphans were powerless and had little or no recourse to provide for themselves, which was the reason God made specific provisions for them in the OT (Dt 14:29, Isa 1:17,23, cf. Jam 1:27). This might suggest that Jesus was simply assuring his disciples that they would be taken care of. This would address the contextual-situational condition of orphans but not likely the most important and primary issue: their relational condition. It is critical to understand that Jesus’ sole concern here is for the relational condition of all his followers, a concern that Jesus ongoingly pursued during the incarnation (e.g. Lk 10:41-42; Jn 14:9; 19:26-27), after the resurrection (e.g. Lk 24:25; Jn 21:15-22), and in post-ascension (e.g. Rev 2:4; 3:20). Moreover, to understand the qualitative and relational significance of the gospel is to have whole understanding of the gospel’s relational dynamic unfolding the depth of God’s relational response to the breadth of the relational condition of all humanity.

Orphans essentially lived relationally apart; that is, they were distant or separated from the relationships necessary to belong to the whole of family—further preventing them from being whole. Even orphans absorbed into their extended kinship network were not assured of the relational function of belonging in its qualitative relational significance. The relational condition “to be apart” from God’s whole and to not experience the relational function of belonging to the whole of God’s family would be intrinsic to orphans. This relational condition, which is also innermost to the human condition, defines the relational significance of Jesus’ concern for his disciples not to be *relational* orphans but to relationally belong. What addresses an orphan’s relational condition is the process of adoption. Without adoption, distinguished in the primacy of whole relationship together as family, this relational condition remains unresolved. Therefore, Jesus’ relational work of grace by the trinitarian relational process of family love enacted the process of adoption, together with the Spirit, to consummate the whole of God’s thematic relational response to the human relational condition (Jn 1:12-13, cf. Mt 12:48-50; Mk 10:29-30). Paul later provided the theological and functional clarity for God’s relational process of family love and its relational outcome of adoption into God’s family (Eph 1:4-5, 13-14; 5:1; Rom 8:15-16, Gal 4:4-7).

In referential terms, adoption either becomes doctrinal information about a salvific transaction God made, which we can have more-or-less certainty about. Or adoption could be merely a metaphor that may have spiritual value but no relational significance. Both views continue to lack understanding of the qualitative and relational significance of the gospel and further *misre*-present the gospel’s relational outcome in the innermost. The qualitative relational outcome from Jesus’ intimate involvement of family love constitutes his followers in relationship together with the whole of God as family, so that Jesus’ Father becomes their Father (Jn 14:23) and they become “siblings” (*adelphoi*,

Jn 20:17, cf. Is 63:16; Rom 8:29). If the functional significance of adoption is diminished by or minimalized to referential terms—or simply by reductionism and its counter-relational work—the relational consequence for our life and practice is to function in effect as ‘relational orphans’. In the absence of his physical presence, Jesus’ only concern was for his followers to experience the ongoing intimate relational involvement of the whole of God in the primacy of whole relationship together as family—which the functional shift of his relational work of grace made permanent by adoption. This relational action established them conclusively in the relational progression as family together, never to be “let go from the Trinity as orphans” (*aphiemi*, as Jesus said).

Functional and relational orphans suffer in the human relational condition “to be apart” from God’s relational whole, consequently they lack belonging in the innermost to be whole. While this is a pandemic relational condition, it can also become an undetected endemic functional condition among his followers and in church practice—even with strong association with Christ and extended identification with the church. It is an undetected condition when it is masked by the presence of ontological simulations and epistemological illusions from reductionist substitutes—for example, performing roles, fulfilling service, participation in church activities (most notably in the Eucharist) and membership (including baptism), yet without the qualitative function from inner out of the whole person and without the relational involvement together vulnerably in family love. When Christian life and practice is without this qualitative-relational significance, it lacks wholeness because it effectively functions in the relational condition of orphans, functional and relational orphans. This then suggests the likelihood that many churches today (particularly in the global North) function more like orphanages than family—that is, gatherings of members having organizational cohesion and a secondary identity belonging to an institution but without the primary relationship together distinguished only in the innermost of family. This exposes the need to be redeemed further from the influence of reductionism in the human relational condition, most notably signified by the human shaping of relationships together, which the relational function of family love directly and ongoingly addresses for relationship together as family in likeness of the Trinity.

In its most innermost function, the trinitarian relational process of family love can be described as the following communicative and creative action by the whole of God:

The Father sent out his Son, followed by the Spirit, to pursue those who suffered being apart from God’s relational whole, reaching out to them with the relational involvement of distinguished love, thereby making provision for their release from any constraints or for payments to redeem them from any enslavement; then in relational progression of this relational connection, taking these persons back home to the Father, not to be mere house guests or to become household servants, even to be just friends, but to be adopted by the Father and therefore permanently belong in his family as his very own daughters and sons.

This is the innermost depth of the Trinity’s family love, which vulnerably discloses both the relational significance of God’s relational work of grace and the qualitative significance clearly distinguishing Jesus’ relational involvement from common function, even as may prevail in church and academy.

By the relational nature of the Trinity, the trinitarian relational process of family love is a function always for relationship, the relationship of God's family. These are the relationships functionally necessary to be whole in the innermost that constitutes God's family. That is, distinguished family love is always constituting and maturing God's family; therefore, family love always pursues the whole person, acts to redeem persons from outer in and to transform from inner out, and addresses the involvement necessary in the primacy of relationships to be whole as family together in likeness of the Trinity. In only relational terms, family love functionally acts on and with the importance of the whole person to be vulnerably involved in the primacy of intimate relationships together of those belonging in God's family. When the trinitarian relational process of family love is applied to the church and becomes functional in church practice, any church functioning as an orphanage can be redeemed from counter-relational work to function whole as God's family together. Then its members will not only occupy a position within God's family but also engage from inner out and experience the relational function necessarily involved in belonging in the innermost of God's family that integrally holds them together.

In this functional shift enacted for the gospel, Jesus' relational function of family love vulnerably engaged his followers for the innermost involvement in the relational progression to the whole of God's family. This integrally involved the following relational dynamic: being redefined (and redeemed) from outer in to inner out and being transformed (and reconciled) from reductionism and its counter-relational work, in order to be made whole together in the innermost as family in likeness of the Trinity. Theologically, redemption and reconciliation are inseparable; and the integral function of redemptive reconciliation is the relational outcome of being saved to the whole of God's family with the veil removed to eliminate any relational separation or distance. The irreducible and nonnegotiable nature of this integral relational dynamic of family love must (*dei*) then by its nature be an experiential truth having qualitative-relational significance for this wholeness to be a reality of consummated belonging to God's family. This was further illuminated by Jesus when his family love exposed the ontological simulation and epistemological illusion of family, along with its counter-relational work—exposed by his relational action centered on a familiar theme composed with relational words in relational language, not referential: “you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (Jn 8:31-47).

Jesus made clearly unmistakable that the human relational condition “to be apart” from God's whole is pandemic (and enslaving to sin as reductionism, 8:34), thus critically endemic to those who labor in ontological simulations and epistemological illusions of God's family (8:35,39,42). What Jesus distinguished with his relational words in relational language was both in contrast and conflict with what prevailed in human contexts (8:43)—the influence of which permeates even gatherings of God's people. To be distinguished necessitates meeting the contingencies of Jesus' familiar words above. His familiar words are an integral relational message first contingent on his inseparable relational words connected to them: “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples.” In spite of this context, these familiar words are usually separated from their contingency on this integral structure of Jesus' relational message. The contingency of discipleship, however, is not met by merely following his disembodied words or teaching; it can only be fulfilled by following Jesus' whole person, which Jesus made

paradigmatic for discipleship (Jn 12:26) and the Father made relationally imperative (Mt 17:5). To “know the truth” is not a referential fragmentary truth but the whole of the embodied Truth in the primacy of relationship. Therefore, “make you free” further involves a contextual contingency communicated in Jesus’ complete relational message. In other words, there is no relational progression to belong in God’s family without redemption, and there is no redemption to be reconciled together as family without receiving and relationally responding to Jesus’ family love in his functional shift (Jn 8:35-36).

The relational progression does not and cannot stop at just being a disciple, or end with liberation as it did for many in Israel. The prevailing influences from the surrounding contexts—most notably present in the human relational condition shaping relationships together, yet existing even in gatherings of God’s people—either prevent further movement in the relational progression or diminish deeper involvement in its primacy of relationship. God’s salvific act of liberation is never an end in itself but an integral part of God’s creative action for new relationship together in wholeness—the distinguished Face’s relational work of *siym* and *shalom*. The embodied Truth in the trinitarian relational process of family love is the fulfillment of the whole of God’s thematic relational response, nothing less than the strategic shift of God’s relational work of grace. And God’s vulnerable presence and relational involvement distinguished within the Truth are solely for the primacy of this relational outcome. From the beginning, liberation (redemption, *peduyim*, *pedut*, *pedyom*, Ps 111:9) was initially enacted by God for the Israelites in contingency with the Abrahamic covenant’s primacy of relationship together (the relational outcome of *shakan*, “dwell,” Ex 29:46). To be redeemed was never merely to be set free but freed to be involved in the relational progression together. Moreover, redemption is conclusively relationship-specific to the whole of God’s family together on just God’s relational terms, which are the relational context and process the Truth embodied. Jesus’ relational words must be understood in the whole context of God’s thematic relational action as well as in their immediate context. By the strategic, tactical and functional shifts of God’s relational work of grace, Jesus fulfilled God’s relational response to the human condition, thereby also defining the contextual contingency of the familiar words of his relational message. Jesus’ relational language is unequivocal: the embodied Truth is the only relational means available for his followers to be liberated from their enslavements to reductionism (or freed from a counter-relational condition, Jn 8:33-34), for the innermost relational purpose and outcome, so that they can be adopted as the Father’s own daughters and sons and, therefore, be distinguished as intimately belonging to his family permanently (*meno*, 8:34-36; cf. *shakan* above).

Additionally in contrast, the immediate context of Jesus’ relational words further defines a reduced servant (*doulos*) as one who is not free to experience God as Father and participate (*meno*, dwell) in his family as his own child (as Paul clarified theologically and functionally, Rom 8:15-16; Gal 4:6-7). Any mere servant, or mere disciple stalled in the relational progression, must be redeemed first, then must be adopted to belong in its innermost relational significance. This integrated context makes clear the contextual contingency in Jesus’ relational message declaring adoption as irreplaceable. Anything less and any substitutes for God’s people are reduced in function to ontological simulations and epistemological illusions. Whatever forms these simulations and illusions



from reductionism may have in church practice today (including as an orphanage), these persons have no position of significance nor belong in the innermost with relational function in God's family as long as the adoption process is not complete. Without the relational reality of adoption, a church functions in a reductionist substitute, at most, and engages in counter-relational work, at least (the implications of 8:43-44 among God's people). And without experiencing redemptive reconciliation in the primacy of intimate relationship with the embodied Truth who "will make you free" (v.32), there is no other relational means for the outcome of adoption.

In the functional shift of Jesus' relational work of grace, his family love wholly constitutes his followers in their innermost—by the relational progression to the whole of God—in the relationships necessary to be whole together as the triune God's very own family. This is the only relational outcome that is congruent with God's thematic relational response to the human relational condition, that Jesus' whole person vulnerably fulfilled with his strategic, tactical and functional shifts in the trinitarian relational context of family and by the trinitarian relational process of family love. And anything less and any substitutes of Jesus' ontology and function render him in an incomplete Christology. This is the only qualitative and relational significance the whole gospel of Jesus the Christ has—nothing less and no substitutes. And without this qualitative-relational significance, the gospel is reduced to a truncated soteriology about only what we are saved *from* and to a fragmented soteriology without the whole (God's relational whole) that holds us together in our innermost.

Any salvation that does not also save *to*, and make whole in, the relational outcome of the relational progression—that Jesus enacted in the strategic, tactical and functional shifts of the gospel—simply misrepresents the gospel. Any gospel that does not consummate in the innermost belonging in God's family sadly misrepresents the whole of God's thematic relational response to the human condition. Such *misrepresentations* are crucial to understand and are necessary to challenge both in church and the academy. Belonging to God's family, for example, may not be congruent with belonging to a church. The church signifies God's family but a church may not compose God's family in the primacy of whole relationships together. Any church life and function that is not constituted in the primacy of whole relationships together critically misrepresents God's family, the new creation. The interrelated dynamic above is both inseparable and unavoidable, which Paul will clearly expose and make definitive as this study unfolds.

Many issues thought to be supplemental to the gospel—for example, righteousness, sanctification, discipleship, church structure and composition—are primary to what the gospel is. Many issues thought to be primary for the gospel—for example, doctrinal certainty and purity, referential acts both missional and social—are secondary to what the gospel is. That is to say, when the gospel is reduced to fragmentary terms without the whole, there is misinformed definition of *what* the gospel is and misguided determining of *how* the gospel is, even though *who* the gospel represents may be referentially correct. What is primary or secondary involves the underlying issue of the whole gospel distinguished from a referential fragmentary gospel.

The shift of the gospel is indeed both good news and bad news, either good news for wholeness or bad news for reductionism.

## Embodied in Whole

The gospel is indeed bad news for those who continue to be defined and determined by reductionism, even if they want more, as demonstrated by the rich young man. Of further critical importance to understand about the gospel, it is also bad news for any religious status quo. Jesus clearly illuminated this as he pursued the relational condition of his main disciples to constitute the gospel's embodiment in whole, including for the last things to come (eschatology). The gospel keeps unfolding in the midst of—yet in contrast and conflict with—their messianic hopes and expectations.

When Jesus' relational message identified the embodied Truth in his familiar but relational words (noted above), he anticipated fulfilling the complete relational response of God's communicative and creative action. This included the good news of the kingdom of God. During the week of passion and days distinguished by equalization leading to the cross, Jesus made intimate disclosures to his disciples in a relational message with words even more familiar to us which communicate his most integral "I am" message: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life..." (Jn 14:1-9). Jesus embodied the dynamic of the relational progression to the Father and thereby enacted the keys necessary for involvement to this relational outcome:

1. the functional key for *the relational way* from inner out;
2. the theological and epistemological keys for *the experiential truth* in the innermost;
3. the hermeneutic key for *the whole life* in qualitative and relational significance.

The implication of this integral message is clearly defined in relational terms by Jesus: To know Jesus, and thus the Father, is to experience what Jesus embodied as the relational way, the experiential truth and the whole life in the relational progression to life together in God's family (or kingdom). Good news—unless one's interpretive framework has difficulty understanding the way (v.5), one's perceptual lens is unable to recognize the Father (v.8), and one's relational condition can claim only a referential level of knowledge about Jesus (v.9). What Jesus embodied in whole eluded his main disciples, even after three intensive years together; and their relational condition could not continue in this status quo if the gospel was indeed to be the good news they were to claim and proclaim.

When Jesus responded to Thomas for a deeper epistemology by disclosing that he embodied Truth, his theological key opened further the relational way to the whole of God, yet not merely for the disciples to observe as embodied Object but, with his epistemological key, made God as Subject vulnerably present to be relationally involved in order to know the experiential Truth in the innermost. And his hermeneutic key further opened the whole life constituting the relational progression integrally to God's whole ontology and function and whole relationship together as family. The life Jesus vulnerably embodied is whole in ontology and function, in which qualitative *zoe* is primary and quantitative *bios* is secondary, as in the relational significance of eternal life. The primacy of the whole life holds together the person and persons in relationship in their innermost. Apart from the whole life Jesus embodied in the relational way as the experiential Truth, both persons and relationships become fragmented—notably preoccupied with the secondary, as demonstrated by the disciples here and Martha earlier. This is the integral relational message Jesus communicated only in relational language.

The relational dynamic that Jesus enacted in this critical interaction was initiated by his further intimate involvement with his disciples' troubled hearts, indicating their relational condition (Jn 14:1). In this vulnerable moment precipitating Thomas' question, he disclosed where he was going and that they knew the way, in spite of their apparent confused state of messianic hope. That is, they would know the relational way only if they knew the experiential Truth in the whole life, which they clearly demonstrated they did not deeply know in relational terms by the relational epistemic process (14:9).

In his startling claim to his disciples that they know the way to where he was going, and that they know the Father and have seen him (14:4,7), Jesus illuminated the critical distinction between an incomplete or fragmentary process of gaining knowledge and the whole epistemic process of knowing. This difference can be simply stated as between referential knowledge (information) and relational knowing.<sup>1</sup> In terms of the former, Thomas was correct in his epistemological logic to reply: "Lord, we have no knowledge, except some ambiguous information, of where you are going so how can we have knowledge of the way?" (14:5). Yet, Jesus was also correct in his epistemological premise for knowing him, and thereby knowing the Father and the way (14:7). In other words, based on his vulnerable disclosure to them and ongoing intimate involvement with them, Jesus correctly claimed "You know the relational process for relationship together with me that involves with the Father, to whom I'm returning to further be involved with together." Jesus makes clear that this knowing is the relational outcome from the relational epistemic process of relationship together—the relational way to the experiential Truth for the whole life that Jesus embodied. Despite the disciples' difficulty with being involved in this qualitative relational process with Jesus, they have been experientially exposed to it by him; and they were discovering the primacy of knowing him in relationship together over mere referential knowledge about him and its inadequacy to know the whole of God and God's relational whole as family. Thus the status quo of their relational condition would not remain, and could not remain for the good news they would claim and proclaim.

The most critical hermeneutical issue for understanding God's Word is how the embodied Word is perceived and approached. What Jesus embodied in whole and emerges from the gospel, and is synonymous with eternal life and eschatological hope, is the kingdom of God (or heaven, used by Mt to be indirect in reverence of God for Jewish readers). Integrally enacted in what Jesus embodied in whole is the kingdom of God (Lk 11:20). In his hermeneutical discourse defending his salvific work, Jesus exposed a false eschatological hope of those Jews incorrectly immersed in the Scriptures with a narrowed referential interpretive framework (Jn 5:39-42). Later, when some Pharisees questioned Jesus about the coming of the kingdom of God, his response addressed the same kind of interpretive framework and perceptual lens as those above: "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you" (Lk 17:20-21, NIV). The primary issue that Jesus addressed (or exposed) involved "careful observation" (*parateresis*, to watch closely). This kind of attentiveness characterized the rigorous practice of Pharisees observing their covenant code of behavior (as Paul testified of himself, Acts 26:5; Phil 3:6); more importantly, this revealed the lens of their perceptual-interpretive framework

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<sup>1</sup> As noted previously, McGilchrist identifies this distinction as associated with the brain's left hemisphere and right hemisphere, respectively. *The Master and his Emissary*, 94-96.

operating in their approach to the Scriptures and their eschatological hope. Just as he exposed the approach of those who search the Scriptures to have eternal life (Jn 5:39), Jesus exposed their careful observations made through a lens that only focused on the quantitative aspects of the kingdom. These approaches to Scripture and the kingdom involved a process analogous to the modern scientific method that emerged from the Enlightenment, all of which are shaped by the bias of “the wise and the intelligent” critiqued by Jesus (Lk 10:21).

This necessitates revisiting Jesus’ demonstrative joy with the Spirit in praising the Father for “your gracious will” (*eudokia*) of “disclosing the whole of God and God’s thematic relational action to little children,” not to “the wise and the intelligent” (Lk 10:21). Those who represent “little children” are persons vulnerably engaged in qualitative relational involvement with the whole of Jesus—neither distant relationally by engaging a disembodied Word, nor detached relationally by analytically observing the secondary details of the Word and God’s action, as “the wise and learned” were incorrectly immersed in the Scriptures. The whole of God’s self-disclosure that Jesus embodied in whole involves his relational context and process—which are critically distinguished from what pervades and prevails in human contexts—in which “little children” relationally respond compatibly for the qualitative connection from inner out necessary for the relational flow of communication, as Jesus made definitive (Lk 10:22). This has been a hermeneutical issue through Israel’s history in search of the eschatological hope to have eternal life (10:23-24); and it continues today as a hermeneutical impasse for the religious status quo, even in church and academy.

“The wise and intelligent” (in Lk 10:21) were directly associated with “your careful observation” (in Lk 17:20), and they need to be placed in juxtaposition. This clarifies both their reductionist interpretive framework imposed on the Scriptures (and God’s self-disclosure in the Word embodied in whole), and their reductionist perceptual lens confining the kingdom of God to quantitative parameters without the qualitative relational significance of the whole accessible to all “little children”—the persons Jesus made definitive as those who compose the kingdom (Mt 18:3; 19:14). This narrowed-down referential process was clearly summarized in John’s Gospel (emphasizing the big picture) with Jesus’ disarming words in his hermeneutical discourse of his salvific work: “You diligently study the Scriptures but you depend on your own perceptual interpretation to signify your eternal life, your membership in the kingdom” (Jn 5:39).

What these approaches involved is fragmenting the whole of God’s communicative Word into a referential Word, which included disembodied the whole Word vulnerably embodied and relationally involved from God. The relational consequence is not understanding the qualitative and relational significance of the Word embodied in whole, whose strategic, tactical and functional shifts disclose the relational way, the experiential Truth and the whole life. By fragmenting the whole of Jesus embodied into referential parts in order to narrow down the epistemic field for better observation, analysis and explanation, the religious status quo (even in church and academy) ignore or make secondary (1) the qualitative innermost of God’s whole ontology and function, (2) the human person’s ontology and function created in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God, and (3) the primacy of whole relationship together as family constituted by the whole of God’s thematic relational response to the human relational condition. And the consequence of anything

less and any substitutes is a referential gospel for eternal life, the kingdom or eschatological hope without the qualitative and relational significance to fulfill any relational condition in the innermost.

This is the issue of the gospel embodied in whole with which Jesus pursued the relational condition of his main disciples. As the experiential Truth by the relational way, Jesus only disclosed the Father to them for the whole life of relationship together as his family. In these vulnerable moments on the eve of the cross, Jesus intimately responded to their troubled hearts by providing them the basis to be able ongoingly to relationally trust God and him, to count on him in his absence (14:1); moreover, as Jesus made definitive earlier, “the kingdom of God is embodied whole within you from inner out” (Lk 17:21), and, as he makes conclusive now, your relational condition “will not leave you orphaned” (Jn 14:18) since the whole of God “makes our home with you” (Jn 14:23). Certainly, the disciples were highly concerned about what was going to happen to them as a group and their messianic hopes for Israel (Acts 1:6). The interaction that unfolds in these critical moments helps us understand the quantitative lens used by the disciples limiting their focus and the qualitative perceptual-interpretive framework necessary for clarity of the last things ahead. What unfolds is the essential difference between reductionism and wholeness, and what is necessary to distinguish the gospel Jesus embodied in whole.

The basis to trust him that Jesus provided for them began initially by disclosing a metaphor of his Father’s house (*oikia*, from *oikos*, a family dwelling) with many rooms (*mone*, a habitation, from *meno*), where Jesus is going to prepare a place (i.e. a relational belonging) for them in the not yet—that is simply an extension of *mone* in the already of God’s family and the kingdom embodied in whole (Jn 14:23). Then Jesus addresses any uncertainty about their future status by asserting definitively that “if I go and prepare a *relational belonging* for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also” (Jn 14:2-3; cf. in the already, Jn 12:26). *Where* Jesus is going is confusing in referential terms since the focus is on a place and its location. In relational terms, however, Jesus is not going to *where* but *who* and *what*, that is, the whole of *who* God is and the whole of *what* the Father and the Son (along with the Spirit) are in intimate relationship together as family. Jesus is going only to his *who* and *what* to compose the relational conclusion to the relational progression. The deep relational message, therefore, that his disciples needed to receive in their troubled hearts is vital for their relational condition: This Jesus in post-ascension is not only a person in the past tense but even more importantly is also actively involved in the present for the relational progression of the primacy of his family (kingdom). This was not to inform them about events to come but to continue building (using a cognate of *oikos*) their relationship together as family in relational likeness of the whole of God, of which the not yet will be the relational conclusion—not a mere dwelling place (Rev 21:22).

After disclosing this initial basis to trust him for the last things to come, he implied that this should not be such a mystery and relationally ambiguous to them because they know *the way* to where he’s going (14:4). What Thomas and Philip said in response to Jesus (14:5,8) exposed where the disciples were focused: knowledge of the place where Jesus was going and visual verification of the Father. This quantitative lens—which, on the one hand, is somewhat reasonable, while, on the other, overly depended on referential knowledge and observation, consequently obscuring the

qualitative—limited their perception of Jesus’ person and their interpretation of his qualitative relational significance, consequently fragmenting the whole he embodied. The whole of Jesus embodied the experiential Truth in the relational way to disclose the whole of God only for the whole life of relationship together distinguished in the Trinity qua family. Therefore, the experiential Truth vulnerably discloses the whole of God only in the relational way’s context and process, and the experiential Truth of the Word intimately communicated the whole life of God only with relational language. That is, what Jesus, the embodied Truth and Word, discloses—in the significance of his person presented, with the quality of his communication, and by the depth of relationship he engaged—must be understood as relational words and speech in his relational context and process, which are distinguished from human contextualization and its shaping. And as the experiential Truth, everything Jesus said about the last things to come is only relational language. Eschatology is the relational language of the experiential Truth embodied in whole, who becomes for eschatology both its qualitative agent in the innermost and its relational action from inner out; this is the perceptual-interpretive framework necessary for eschatological clarity. In other words, with Jesus’ agency of the last things, eschatology must be perceived, received and responded to by “listeners” (readers) in his relational language defining his relational context and process, God’s qualitative relational terms for his family.

Jesus’ relational purpose for his disclosures of eschatology as *truth* is not about mere referential information, and thereby merely for doctrinal certainty. His primary focus and concern with his relational language for eschatology is to communicate only this integral relational message: the relational progression to be God’s whole family embodied in relationship together both in the already and the not yet, and, conjointly, to live and make whole in the remaining days to this relational conclusion of the last things—the relational conclusion of which the experiential Truth is guarantor as its qualitative agent in the innermost and its relational action from inner out. Therefore, his metaphor about the Father’s house with many rooms is clearly not about a referential place (“we do not know where”); and his assertion that they have seen the Father is not about another embodied person (“show us the Father”). The relational dynamic from outside the universe that Jesus embodied in whole is reflexively extended as Jesus is returning back to the Father in their intimate dwelling whole together as family (cf. Jn 17:5), in which his innermost followers will also participate intimately dwelling whole together as family, both ‘already’ and ‘not yet’ so that the breadth of the human relational condition may know and believe the depth of the gospel embodied in whole—just as Jesus prayed to the Father in his formative family prayer (Jn. 17:21-23).

## **Extended Embodying of the Whole Gospel**

As one entrenched in a religious statue quo, Paul certainly did not perceive the gospel to be good news. His persecution of the Way left no doubt that for Paul the gospel was bad news needing to be eradicated. It is all the more significant that his confrontation by and subsequent experience with the relational way embodied by “I am” had the relational outcome of Paul’s whole person redefined from outer in to inner out, transformed from his reductionism and made whole in relationship together in the

innermost of God's family. The whole of Paul who emerged and the whole in Paul that unfolded extended the theological and hermeneutic embodying of the whole gospel. Therefore, Paul's function is critical for the relational progression of the gospel and is irreplaceable for the gospel's relational outcome of what we are saved *to* in the primacy of whole relationship together as God's family, the church—or the kingdom 'already', though Paul did not discuss the kingdom as Jesus did.

What was Paul's role and function to develop this new faith 'in Christ'? Did he serve to develop Christianity beyond its roots in Judaism and transform it from a Jewish messianic renewal movement into essentially a new religion that influenced the Greco-Roman world and beyond? Did Paul engage in effect in the reification (human authorship and enterprise seen as objectified fact) of Christianity and the church, thus promoting a belief system and institution of his own construction; or was he in fact responding in many of his letters to the reification of Christianity and the church by false or reductionist practices of many associated with the church, in order to clearly distinguish their human constructs from the whole of God's thematic relational action and creative involvement making whole from above? What indeed was the significance of Paul's gospel and how did his gospel differ from Jesus' gospel?

The gospel unfolded for Paul in its relational dynamic when Jesus' strategic, tactical and functional shifts converged in Paul from inner out starting with the Damascus road. Jesus communicated to Paul the relational messages which integrally composed the heart of the gospel: (1) who, what and how the whole of God is beyond Paul's monotheism; (2) who and what God saw in Paul and how he felt about Paul; and (3) what their relationship meant to God and how the whole of God responded to Paul for him and their relationship to be whole. This qualitative and relational significance of the gospel that Jesus embodied in whole to Paul was the gospel that emerged from Paul to make whole God's family. Based on this experiential truth, Paul's relational dynamic of the gospel was unequivocally compatible with the whole of Jesus in relational terms—though arguable in referential terms—and integrally congruent with the gospel Jesus embodied in whole. Moreover, this gospel emerged from Paul in whole because he would experience—along with *tamiym*'s epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction—the contingencies in the relational progression made definitive by Jesus (notably for the religious status quo like Paul, Jn 8:31-47) to distinguish Paul conclusively in the whole of God's family (cf. 2 Cor 3:12-18). The redemptive reconciliation of his own relational condition was the experiential truth constituting the integral basis for his gospel—the truth in relational terms embodied in whole by the experiential Truth for relationship together.

The development of Paul's thought emerged from the deeper epistemology from the relational epistemic process in relationship with the whole of God, which was the theological basis for the experiential truth of his gospel. His thought functionally overlapped with his gospel in integral interaction such that to understand his gospel necessitated more deeply understanding his thought; and conversely, to understand his thought involved further understanding his gospel. As Paul addressed in his letters various situations and conditions involving tension, distress, fragmented relationships and a lack of harmony in the church, he emphasized certain themes which were vital to his thought and gospel (noted previously). Paul began each of his letters with a simple address (with the likely exception of Ephesians whose title was apparently added later):

“grace and peace” (both letters to Timothy add “mercy”). Furthermore, he closed most of his letters with a greeting containing these terms. It would be an error to read this as a mere formulaic greeting. The significance of his address is critical to Paul’s thought and basic to his gospel, which his closing greeting pointed to or summarized.

Paul consistently combined “grace and peace,” which indicates they are inseparable. They are not joined as mere concepts but converge in function as interdependent relational action and outcome directly from God the Father and Christ—whom Paul identified as “the God of peace” and “the Lord of peace” (1Thes 5:23; 2 Thes 3:16; 2 Cor 13:11; Rom 15:33; 16:20; Phil 4:9). Paul began his letters with peace in conjoint function with grace and ended his letters with peace contingent on grace in order to illuminate the functional and relational significance of the gospel (2 Cor 13:11,14; Gal 6:16,18; Eph 6:23-24; 2 Thes 3:16,18); furthermore, this composition points to Paul’s theology of wholeness (to be discussed in chap. 7).

Grace was not some mere notion of favor or a spiritual gift (commodity) dispensed by God for human possession (or consumption). Grace only signified God’s relational response to the human condition on the basis of God’s terms, without contingency to human terms. The definitive relational outcome of God’s relational response of grace is the peace of God (cf. Phil 4:7), the peace of Christ (cf. Col 3:15), from the God of peace, the Lord of peace—whose distinguished Face turned and shined on Paul for *siym* and *shalom* (Num 6:24-26). This was the integrating theme of Paul’s thought throughout his letters, which pointed first to Paul’s own experiential truth of this peace with Jesus on the Damascus road. Though Paul had been in conflict with Christ and Christians (the Way), God’s relational response of grace extended peace to Paul; yet this peace was not a mere “olive branch” to address their disharmony. Jesus did not pursue Paul just for the absence of conflict from outer in. Such a conventional peace signified human construction (the ancient Greek notion of peace), which does not address the human relational condition in its innermost, as Jesus distinguished from his relational response of inner out (Jn 14:27). Jesus relationally responded in family love to reconcile Paul to his family to make Paul whole from inner out, which by its nature must be distinguished from his former relational condition determined by outer in. This relational outcome of wholeness is the qualitative depth of the peace of Christ (thus the peace of God) that Paul directly experienced from the Lord of peace (thus the God of peace). Therefore, this is the wholeness that composed *shalom* further and deeper than Israel and Judaism had experienced in the innermost of their relational condition.

Moreover, while Paul addressed the various situations lacking peace, Paul’s emphatic theme of peace went well beyond peace as the absence of conflict. In Paul’s thought, peace was rooted in the Hebrew understanding, which ‘in Christ’ had become the irreducible well-being constituted only by the wholeness of God and the relationships together necessary to be whole, God’s relational whole on God’s qualitative relational terms. In God’s definitive blessing, *shalom* is contingent on *siym* (to bring change for a new relationship), which is the relational work Jesus embodied in whole for relationship together in wholeness. This is further understood in Paul’s letters by another ongoing theme interrelated to “grace and peace”: “blameless and holy” or a variation (1Thes 3:13; 5:23; 1 Cor 1:8; Col 1:22; Eph 1:4; 5:27; Phil 2:15; 1 Tim 6:14). Responding to the church at Thessalonica’s eschatological concerns, Paul did not emphasize “blameless and holy” merely for the sake of purity when Christ returns. Paul builds on “blameless”



(*amemptos*) from the covenant relationship in the OT and God's relational terms to Abraham to be *tamiym* ("blameless," Gen 17:1-2). As discussed earlier, *tamiym* is clearly about persons being *whole* in relationship together with God, the holy God, and therefore composing relationship only on God's terms.

In Paul's thought, "holy and blameless" converged with "grace and peace" to signify being whole in relationship together (peace and blameless) only on the ongoing basis of God's relational response and terms for the relationship (grace and holy). Furthermore, Paul's own experience and thought made clear that this relational outcome is not about relationship together only in the future but necessarily 'already' in the present, just as Jesus relationally embodied in the incarnation and 'already' constituted for his followers—the experiential truth and whole of the gospel.

For Paul, his gospel was clearly the experiential truth of "the gospel of peace" from the Lord of peace (Eph 6:15). It is this wholeness 'in Christ' (both 'already' and 'not yet') which Paul unequivocally made nonnegotiable to human terms and irreducible to human shaping and construction in order to clearly distinguish: (1) the qualitative significance of the new creation (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15), just as Jesus made whole from above (Jn 3:3-7); and (2) the relational significance of new covenant relationship together in the ecclesiology of the whole (2 Cor 5:18; 13:11; Eph 2:14-15; Col 3:15; Rom 8:6), that is, in likeness of the relational ontology of the Trinity as Jesus prayed in his formative family prayer (Jn 17:20-26). Nothing less than and no substitutes for this peace integrated Paul's journey, practice, thought and theology. And nothing less than and no substitutes for the relational response of God's grace composed the basis and ongoing base for the whole of Paul. Therefore, for Paul, this relational outcome of wholeness (peace contingent on grace) is "the distinguishing purpose [*semeion*] in every letter of mine" (2 Thes 3:17), which Paul's readers need to understand qualitatively as critical to his thought and need to further understand relationally as basic to his gospel. This is the qualitative and relational significance integral to his gospel, that is, the whole gospel.

From his experience with Jesus on the Damascus road and his subsequent involvement in relationship together, Paul's gospel emerged directly from the gospel relationally embodied in whole by Jesus. As a result, Paul's thought is better understood as a qualitative extension of the incarnation, even though in quantitative terms he rarely quoted from Jesus' teaching. Paul's relational involvement with the whole of the embodied Word speaks directly to his limited reproduction of Jesus' words and teachings. Paul understood that the embodied Truth was only for relationship in the relational way of the new life, and that his witness was to the experiential Truth of Jesus' whole person—neither reduced to his teachings nor fragmented by his deeds but only for the whole life of relationship together as God's family. If Paul's readers listen to his words in relational language and not depend on our sight focused on referential words, we will understand Paul's Christology as not being incomplete, and thus overly christocentric, but as the Word embodying the whole of God to fulfill God's relational response to the human condition, foremost Paul's relational condition. Moreover, from his previous practice in Judaism and *tamiym*'s epistemological clarification and hermeneutical correction, Paul understood that anything less than and any substitutes for this gospel of peace are incompatible and in conflict with the truth of the whole gospel relationally embodied by Jesus. In other words, Paul clearly understood that reductionism

is always positioned against the wholeness 'in Christ', seeking to formulate alternatives ("a different gospel," Gal 1:6-9) by human terms, shaping and construction.

Human terms, shaping or construction occur when the gospel is contextualized within the primary influence of human contexts. Jesus takes his followers further and deeper than this, as he did Paul. Paul declared unequivocally that the origin of his gospel cannot be explained by human contextualization and the influence of surrounding contexts (Gal 1:11-12), which also includes by Paul's own shaping or construction. To the contrary, his gospel was contextualized only in Jesus' whole relational context and thereby can be understood only by Jesus' whole relational process, which for Paul was first his direct experience with Jesus to be transformed and made whole in the experiential truth of the whole gospel relationally embodied by Jesus. As a person vitally concerned about this whole gospel, Paul turned only to the gospel of peace he experienced directly from the Lord of peace to make definitive the theological basis for his gospel. Paul did not engage in reification, that is, essentially construct his own gospel and belief system to support an institutional order of his shaping, in which he lived as if this were the nature of God's truth and the reality of peace 'in Christ'.<sup>2</sup> He did, however, expose those who did.

Given the deeper context defining and determining the whole of Paul and the wholeness 'in Christ' integrating his thought throughout his corpus, there emerged two distinguishing actions in the depths of Paul's development. On the one hand, there was his compassionate, sensitive and loving relational involvement with God's family for the purpose of being God's whole and living whole on God's terms, thereby making unmistakable the qualitative and relational significance of the gospel. On the other hand, there was his passionate, rigorous and uncompromising response to anything less and any substitutes among those related to God's family for the purpose of exposing and confronting reductionism to make them whole, thereby making irreducible and nonnegotiable the experiential truth of the whole gospel. In these ongoing depths of action Paul made his own person vulnerable to any relational outcomes or consequences resulting from those he addressed. It would be inaccurate to perceive Paul's passion as a mere expression of his personality transferred from his previous passion to persecute the church (cf. Acts 26:11). His previous passion came from an outer-in ontology and his new passion emerged from the depths of an inner-out ontology made whole. This process of transformation to wholeness was the gospel of peace Paul felt so strongly about in his innermost. And the only alternative to this whole gospel was one reduced by human terms, shaping or construction. Such alternative for Paul, experientially, epistemologically and ontologically, had no basis and qualitative-relational significance beyond human design to be defined as a gospel (Gal 1:6-7).

What this delineates about Paul was his strength of position on the ongoing issue of the gospel. The issue is ongoing because reductionism is always positioned against the whole of the gospel, and the gospel of wholeness, always seeking to redefine it with something less or some substitute. The strength of Paul's position was clearly expressed in his polemic about the issue, which is always twofold: It is an inseparable fight *for* the truth of the whole gospel and *against* reductionism. In Paul's conjoint fight for the gospel and against reductionism, his primary effort was not for doctrinal certainty of the truth

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<sup>2</sup> For a helpful discussion of the dynamic of reification and its implications in human life, see David K. Naugle, *Worldview: the History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 177-20.

but for the whole ontology and function of both God and God's family. Paul's family relational responsibility (his *oikonomia*, Col 1:25) centered on the integral concern for the innermost relational condition of the church, and to make whole the church as God's family by making whole (*pleroo*) God's relational words on the basis of *pleroma* Christology, soteriology, pneumatology and ecclesiology—the *synesis* of the qualitative and relational significance of the whole gospel.

For Paul, the whole of God unmistakably distinguished to Whom Paul witnessed, by Whom Paul was whole, with Whom Paul lived whole, and for Whom Paul made whole as apostle to all of humanity. As the whole of Paul and in Paul emerges in reciprocal relationship together with the whole of God (including notably the Spirit, 1 Cor 2:10-13; Rom 9:1), the theological and hermeneutic embodying of the whole gospel is extended in the relational dynamic of Jesus *into* Paul—fully compatible and wholly congruent with Jesus in the innermost. The gospel was irreducibly and nonnegotiable embodied in whole, and anything less and any substitutes are no gospel according to the whole ontology and function of both Jesus and Paul.



## Chapter 7      The Black Swan of Whole Theology

### Has Christ been divided?

1 Corinthians 1:13

Until the discovery of Australia, people held the conviction that all swans had to be white. Then the first black swan was sighted. Nassim Nicholas Taleb uses this development to illustrate the severe limitation to our learning from observations or experience and the fragility of our knowledge based on predictability. Taleb addresses this prevailing condition which continues due to our dependence on the probability of expectations, with excessive focus on what we know in narrowed-down terms at the expense of learning more (or the whole) from the improbable signified by the black swan.<sup>1</sup> This limitation also reflects the left brain hemisphere's increasing dominance of the modern mind, according to McGilchrist.<sup>2</sup> The improbability of a black swan then is intrusive to the explainable and predictable, and its intrusion makes us vulnerable unless handled accordingly, that is, narrowed down to explainable and predictable terms. All of this is the dynamic outworking of primacy given to the secondary at the expense of the primacy of the qualitative and the relational—the dynamic which reflects, reinforces and sustains the human condition underlying it.

The truth is that the Jesus embodied in whole is a black swan. And how we approach the Word will determine how probable or improbable the results of our learning will be. Alan Torrance challenges the interpretive framework of modern biblical scholarship with the question “Can the truth be learned?” This question is framed within a broader question “To what extent, and on what grounds, does the New Testament shape and prescribe Christian theology?” which Torrance and Markus Bockmuehl, among other leading biblical and systematic theologians, address.<sup>3</sup> The significant part of Torrance's answer to his question correctly involves the creative presence of the Spirit in order to have the eyes to discern God's presence (the significance of the Other distinguished from oneself) in otherwise improbable ways—that is, beyond what we can explain or predict. Hence, without the Spirit, theological hermeneutics never goes beyond the probability of our immanent self-understandings, only to remain within the limits of the familiarity of what we know. Yet, what Torrance also needs to understand is that the Spirit's creative presence neither involves unilateral action, nor can merely be acknowledged in referential terms. The presence of the Spirit's whole person is neither reduced to a mystery nor fragmented to an impersonal force but is openly engaged as whole Subject (as Jesus' relational replacement, Jn 14:16) in only the function of ongoing reciprocal relational involvement in the relational epistemic process. Any lack of the Spirit's person and reciprocal relationship together render the hermeneutic task to an individualistic (or group) approach shaping a private language of god-talk. In my opinion then, the corollary

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<sup>1</sup> Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable* (New York: Random House, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> McGilchrist, *The Master and his Emissary*, 163-64.

<sup>3</sup> Markus Bockmuehl and Alan J. Torrance, eds., *Scripture's Doctrine and Theology's Bible: How the New Testament Shapes Christian Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 3, 143-63.

question, even antecedent to the question Torrance, Bockmuehl and others thankfully address, that also needs to be honestly addressed critically involves this deeper concern: To what extent does Christian theology reflect and is thus shaped by Scripture in the innermost of the primary, not the secondary, and, therefore, can truly be definitive of *theology* and not *egology*?

Distinguished from human limits and shaping, Paul clearly made definitive the irreplaceable qualitative and relational involvement of the Spirit's person necessary to take us beyond the limits of the probable to the improbable of the whole of God's vulnerable presence and relational involvement (1 Cor 2:9-13). Theological interpretation requires both an openness (vulnerability) and expectation of the improbable (e.g. John the Baptist, Jn 1:27-34). Moreover, it demands a paradigm shift away from the secondary to relationally engage the Word's vulnerable disclosures in the primacy of the qualitative and relational (cf. Nathanael, Jn 1:45-50). This indispensable hermeneutic process is necessarily irreducible and nonnegotiable to get beyond the hermeneutic impasse of the probable and secondary to open the hermeneutic flow to the improbable and the primary, so that the black swan of the Word embodied in whole can be known and understood. In other words, the shift to this relational epistemic process with the Spirit is the only means available, so that we can learn the improbable whole life of the experiential Truth in the relational way from Jesus' relational replacement, the Spirit of truth (Jn 15:26; 16:13-15). Only the Spirit illuminates the hermeneutic of the whole Word's improbable theological trajectory and intrusive relational path. Whole theology is the relational outcome from the relational dynamic of this theological interpretation.

## **Encountering the Improbable**

What we claim to know in a narrowed epistemic field can only be self-determined understanding, which is unable to go beyond being merely self-referencing. This self-referencing is what physicist Stephen Hawking honestly acknowledged (noted in the introduction) in giving up his search for what holds together the world in its innermost, though he is still preoccupied with substitutes from the secondary. Yet, such epistemic humility is problematic when not acknowledged from inner out. This is the problem that emerged when the strategic shift of the whole of God from outside the universe (Jn 1:1-5) improbably embodied God's vulnerable presence and relational involvement "in the world...yet the world did not know him" (Jn 1:10). Moreover, "he came *embodied in whole* to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him" (1:11). This relational barrier and hermeneutic impasse can be defined as the limits of the probable unable and unwilling to perceive, receive and, therefore, know and understand the improbable embodied in whole—the whole which holds together the world and all in it in the innermost.

The improbable embodied in whole in the midst of the probable involves more than having emerged from outside the universe. The presence of the improbable includes having come to those created in his qualitative image and relational likeness, in whose human condition the qualitative is less probable and the relational is more improbable. The improbable, conjointly from outside the universe and embodied in whole in relational response to this human condition, presented problems in the human context

which composed essentially “the narrow gate and road” necessary to engage the whole life (*zoe*, Mt 7:14).

The improbable unfolds clearly in the Gospel of John for the evangelist’s purpose to identify the whole of Jesus with the Jews and the nation of Israel (1:11), yet to also distinguish him from them for the whole of God’s strategic, tactical and functional shifts in relational progression to the eschatological relational conclusion. The next disclosure of the improbable embodied in whole happened with John the Baptist and then with Nathanael. John the Baptist, however, was expecting the improbable so had no problem recognizing and receiving him (Jn 1:26-36), while Nathanael did not anticipate anything improbable (“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”); yet he shifted from his secondary focus to openly respond to the improbable when relationally disclosed to him (1:45-50).

Part of the difficulty persons had with the improbable embodied in whole was engaging Jesus in his relational language. This is evident in the next two major interactions presented in John’s Gospel. The first occurred when Jesus deconstructed the Temple of Jerusalem and reconstituted it on his relational terms (Jn 2:13-22). The temple was central to Jewish religious life in all its variations; more importantly, the temple was the heart of their faith, where God’s presence dwelled to signify ongoing involvement (2 Chr 5:14; 7:15-16, cf. Ex 40:34). Jesus observed their faith-practice by involvement in the temple, but he neither accepted that aspect of their religious life reducing their practice to a purification code nor tolerated the inequitable system this code generated for its adherence. In relational consequence, he drove out those who exploited the less resourceful for profit and who created barriers to access “my Father’s house” (*oikos*, dwelling, notably of family, v.16). That is, the temple was no mere center of religious activity (cf. church today) but only the context where his Father dwelled for communion together for all peoples (cf. Mk 11:17). While Judaism certainly had knowledge of this in its covenant teaching, its practice had increasingly become narrowed down to referential terms lacking qualitative relational significance, thus practice reduced essentially to the limits of their knowledge in probable quantitative terms of their tradition—just as Jesus also exposed about their temple worship (Mk 7:6-8). Jesus’ words and action communicated relational language against and beyond this reductionism, making definitive the whole relational context of God from inner out and opening the door to the whole of God’s relational context of family.

Furthermore, when his honor was challenged to demonstrate the basis for his action, Jesus only responded with the words: “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days” (v.19). A critical shift in the temple emerged before their eyes. His challengers were focused only on the quantitative aspect of the temple and the limits of the probable, thus they could not understand his relational language opening them to the improbable. Jesus was not playing word-games with them. He was exposing them to the strategic shift in God’s thematic relational action. In the improbability of this strategic shift, Jesus constitutes the transition of the contextual location of the temple from a place as the *referential base* of God’s dwelling directly to its *relational basis* in the whole of God, Face to face—which he openly disclosed unpredictably to the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:21,23). The improbable whole of God, the Trinity, beyond their probable monotheistic God, would now be vulnerably present in direct relationship and ongoingly be relationally involved intimately together in the whole relational context of family and

relational process of family love. And nothing less and no substitutes of the whole of God can be sufficient to distinguish the Face who has turned and shines on them for *siym* and *shalom*, to bring the change necessary for new relationship together in wholeness.

The transition of the temple to the whole relational context and process of the Trinity progresses to its eschatological relational conclusion and holds together the eschatological hope in its innermost:

As Jesus disclosed of the improbable, “the Spirit of truth whom *the probable* cannot receive because it neither sees *the improbable* nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you and he will be in you” (Jn 14:17); “My Father will love you; and we will come to you and make our home with you” (Jn 14:23); this is, by the relational nature of the whole ontology of the Trinity, the relational outcome in the innermost for both individual persons and those persons by necessity in relationship together in likeness of the Trinity, “that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us.... The glory that you gave me I have given them that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one *as our family*...and have loved them even as you have loved me...so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them and I in them” (Jn 17:21-23,26); in Paul’s accounts of the church, “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?” (1 Cor 3:16); “in him you too are being built together to become *the family* dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit” (Eph 2:21-22, NIV); to the Johannine account of the eschatological relational conclusion in the New Jerusalem, “I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb” (Rev 21:22).

As John’s Gospel unfolds the improbable, Jesus embodied in whole this relational progression throughout the incarnation and ongoingly constituted it even before the cross. The distinguished Face embodied the whole theology and hermeneutic necessary for the whole gospel, which Paul further embodied with the Spirit for its whole (*pleroma*).

Jesus’ exposure of God’s strategic shift begins to illuminate the vulnerable reality of the improbable that the heart of the ontology of the whole of God is relationship, whole relationship together—the whole context and process of which continues to develop in John’s Gospel. Jesus took this transition further and deeper in his next major interaction, a communication which essentially intruded on the probable and jolted the status quo of the prevailing perception, interpretation and expectation of salvation. But, then, that’s what black swans do epistemologically and hermeneutically, and further and deeper, theologically and relationally. Jesus embodied in whole these keys to the improbable from outside the universe who constitutes the innermost.

The second major interaction involved a key Pharisee, Nicodemus (mentioned in chap. 4, Jn 3:1-21) who apparently was dissatisfied with what he knew and perhaps unsettled in his messianic expectations, and thus who was willing to expand his epistemic field to query Jesus. The epistemic process is critical to this familiar encounter and should not be overlooked. Nicodemus understood that Jesus was a dissonant voice among what prevailed, particularly in his religious tradition but also in the surrounding sociocultural context. Even though he correctly defined the source of Jesus’ identity as



“has come from God” and determined his function as “from the presence of God,” he still did not expect to encounter the improbable.

In order to establish this interaction’s larger context, it seems reasonable to assume some matters about Nicodemus. He came to Jesus that night for answers to questions which were framed by his Jewish identity, by his involvement as a ruling member (Sanhedrin) in Israel (v.1) and as one of her teachers (v.10); thus he came with the expectations associated with their Scripture, which were shaped likely by an interpretive framework from Second Temple Judaism and no doubt by a perceptual lens sociopolitically sensitized to Roman rule. While Nicodemus came to Jesus as an individual person, his query was as the collective identity of Israel and the corporate life and practice of a Pharisee’s (of whatever variation) Judaism.

Apparently stimulated by Jesus’ actions and perhaps stirred by the presence of “a teacher who has come from God” (v.2), he approached Jesus respectfully, if not with some humility. Yet, he very likely engaged Jesus with the framework and lens which Jesus critiqued elsewhere of “the wise and the intelligent” (Lk 10:21). This would be crucial for Nicodemus. Though his position represented the educated elite of Israel, his own posture was about to be humbled and changed.

Jesus understood Nicodemus’ query and anticipated his questions that certainly related to God’s promises for Israel’s deliverance (salvation), the Messiah and God’s kingship in the Mediterranean world. Therefore, Jesus immediately focused on “the kingdom of God” (v.3), the OT eschatological hope, about which Nicodemus was probably more concerned in the present than the future. Yet, the whole of God’s kingship and sovereign rule is integral to the OT, and thus a primary focus of Nicodemus’ query, however provincial. And he was concerned about it strongly enough (and perhaps inwardly conflicted) to make himself vulnerable to initiate this interaction with Jesus; his query appeared genuine and for more than referential information or didactic reasons. This suggests that Nicodemus stepped out of his probability box to pursue the *more* of ‘eternity substance’ in his heart.

The conversation that followed evidences a purpose in John’s Gospel to clearly distinguish and make definitive the whole of God’s thematic relational action of grace in response to the human condition—first, in continuation to Israel and then to the nations—that is, to unfold the history of God’s salvation. Yet, the language communicated in this conversation became an issue, and this proved to be revealing not only for Nicodemus but for all he represented—as well as for all who would follow, even through a postmodern period.

The notion of membership and participation in the kingdom of God being contingent on a concept “born again” was taken incredulously by this “wise and learned” leader, whose sophisticated reason was unable to process and explain in referential terms from a narrowed epistemic field. “How can” (*dynamai*, v.4) signifies the limits of the probable. Then to be told “you [pl] must *by its nature*” (*dei*, v.7, not *opheilo*’s obligation or compulsion), as if to address all Jews, was beyond the grasp of his reason. *Dei* points to the nature of the improbable. Even after Jesus made definitive (“I tell you the truth”) *gennaio anothen* as “born from above,” that is “born of the Spirit” (*ek*, indicating the primary, direct source, vv.5,8), Nicodemus was still unable to process the words of Jesus; the probable continues to prevail (“How can,” v.9). Why? This brings us back to the interpretive framework and perceptual lens of “the wise and the intelligent.” He was

unable to understand Jesus' language because the words were heard from an insufficient interpretive framework limited to the probable of his knowledge and an inadequate perceptual lens constrained in focus only on the secondary in referential terms.

Jesus exposed this as the conversation continues: "Are you a teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand *the improbable and the primary*?" (v.10). How is Jesus' question connected to Nicodemus' question since "born again" (or from above) is not in the Hebrew Scriptures? With this rhetorical question, Jesus implied that from a valid OT perspective (namely "the covenant of love," Dt 7:7-9) the thematic relational action of God's covenant relationship would be understood; moreover, the relational outworking of *siym* for *shalom* from the LORD's definitive blessing would be expected and apparent. Jesus was vulnerably extending this covenant relationship of love in wholeness together directly to Nicodemus (and, by implication, to all Jews) by communicating openly what he, himself, knew intimately by witnessing as a participant (*martyreo*, not merely by observation, v.11) in the life of God (v.13, cf. Jn 1:18). His communication was not with ethereal (*epouranios*) language but discourse (*lego*) in the human context (*epigeios*, v.12), yet with relational language. It was the qualitative nature of relational language that Nicodemus was unable to understand with his perceptual-interpretive framework. Nicodemus remained incompatible for relational connection.

The movement of God's thematic relational action in the covenant relationship of love had been consistently reduced to quantitative situations and circumstances throughout Israel's history—despite the fact that "the Lord set his heart on you and chose you" was not on a quantitative basis (Dt 7:7). In functional similarity, Nicodemus paid attention to the quantitative limits of human biology in probability terms reducing the person while ignoring the qualitative primacy of whole human ontology. Thus he demonstrated the same framework focused on the quantitative situations and circumstances probable for the covenant, whereas Jesus focused on the ontology of the whole person and the qualitative relationship signifying the covenant of love and wholeness together. The establishment of nation and national identity formation were the prevailing quantitative expectations of any messianic hope in the kingdom, with which, most certainly, Nicodemus came to Jesus that night. In contrast and conflict, Jesus focused on the whole persons necessary in new covenant relationship in wholeness to constitute the kingdom in its innermost—nothing less and no substitutes.

Their prevailing perceptual-interpretive framework made some critical assumptions about the kingdom besides the quantitative situations and circumstances probable for the covenant. The two most critical assumptions were relational barriers to understanding Jesus' relational language:

1. Membership in the kingdom was based on generational descent and natural birth in quantitative referential terms; to understand the qualitative functional significance of Jesus' relational language, his relational message (v.7) must be integrated with the incarnation's fulfillment of God's thematic action in relational terms of the covenant relationship of love (as summarized by the evangelist in Jn 1:10-13; cf. his discourse on those redeemed in Jn 8:31-36,42).
2. In addition, participation in the kingdom was based on what one did from outer in, accordingly adherence to a purification code of behavior was imperative, especially for national identity maintenance; to understand the whole relational

context and process of Jesus' relational language, his message (v.6) needs to be embodied in the vulnerable relational context and process of his whole person from inner out intimately disclosing the whole of God in the innermost (made evident in his further disclosure of the improbable, Jn 6:54,63).

In this latter relational disclosure, would-be followers came to a similar conclusion as Nicodemus: "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (Jn 6:52) and "This *improbable* is difficult; who can accept it?" (6:60), compared with Nicodemus' "How can *this improbable* be?" (3:9)—all of which reflected these assumptions in quantitative referential terms from outer in that limited both their knowledge to the probable and their learning of the improbable.

What Nicodemus and the others were predisposed to by their perceptual-interpretive framework, and also were embedded in as their practice and expectation within the limits of the probable, was essentially a *salvation of the old*—a quantitative outcome of reductionism. What Jesus vulnerably engaged them in and with went beyond the probable to the *salvation of the new*—the qualitative relational outcome of the whole of God's relational response to not only Israel but the human condition. God's thematic relational work of grace embodied in Jesus for covenant relationship of love constituted the new covenant from inner out, the relationship of which was now directly and intimately involved together with the Trinity in the innermost to be the whole of God's family (kingdom of those born of the Spirit, of the Father, of the Son). This is the whole gospel vulnerably disclosed by Jesus in relational language which jolted the status quo of *the old* represented in Nicodemus that night.

Nicodemus came to Jesus as "the wise and learned" in *the old*. He was now humbled by Jesus' intrusion on his probable with the improbable "born again or from above," and by the necessary transition from old to new Jesus distinguished unmistakably in its relational language. Though that term itself is not in the OT, it is clearly evident that "a new heart" and the Spirit's work for "a new covenant" and Israel's kingdom (Eze 36:26-27, Jer 31:31-34) would not be unfamiliar to Nicodemus as Israel's teacher. The meaning of Jesus' relational message to Nicodemus (and the status quo) defined the needed transformation of human ontology for this new covenant relationship of love, which for Nicodemus functionally involved the transition from "the wise and learned of the old" to the qualitative framework and function of "the little children of the new" (cf. Mt 18:3-4)—undoubtedly a jolt to Nicodemus and the status quo. Yet, apparently, Nicodemus humbly transitioned to "a little child of the new": first, to receive the whole of God's self-disclosure embodied in whole by Jesus with a new perceptual-interpretive framework (Lk 10:21, cf. his vulnerability in Jn 7:50-52), then to relationally respond to God in qualitative involvement (Lk 18:17, cf. his involvement in Jn 19:39-42).

John's Gospel clearly illuminates the relational process of salvation from old to new in Nicodemus and what he is saved *to*. In this relational context, the evangelist almost seems to give a metaphorical sense to Nicodemus. Certainly, for all who follow, it is the whole relational context and process, necessary by the nature of salvation, to which to respond and by which to be involved in order to belong to the whole of God's family. Unfortunately, we never hear if Nicodemus became one of the teachers of the old covenant and new, who relationally experienced following Jesus in the relational progression to the family (kingdom) of God, as Jesus defined for such teachers (Mt 13:52). Nevertheless, the transition of God's thematic relational work of grace emerges

further and deeper in this relational discourse. The strategic shift to the qualitative relational significance of *the new* was present and unfolded in its innermost.

This would be relationally disclosed further and deeper not only as present but also as vulnerably involved from inner out, as Jesus did in his communicative action with the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:1-30, discussed in chaps. 2 and 6). The presence of the improbable embodied in whole was neither merely an Object to be observed nor to gather information from. The whole of God is vulnerably present and relationally involved as Subject with nothing less than whole ontology and function. In clear disclosure of God's strategic shift, this was the pivotal relational message that this improbable Subject communicated in an unpredictable action to a Samaritan woman. Equally important, the whole of who, what and how God is was improbably presented to her as Subject not to inform her but only for relationship together Face to face. This distinguished Face-to-face relationship together, however, necessitates by its nature compatibility with the innermost of God's whole ontology and function, who is vulnerably present and relationally involved as Subject for this whole relationship together. Therefore, "in spirit and truth" (4:23-24) are irreducible and nonnegotiable contingencies for compatible relationship with the improbable whole of God, who is embodied in whole relational terms and not fragmented referential terms. In other words, our whole ontology and function, constituting the open and vulnerable involvement of our heart from inner out with nothing less, are the only relational terms which will go beyond the limits of the probable to receive and be involved compatibly with the improbable Subject in the innermost.

Though the depth of this woman's relational response to Jesus "in spirit and truth" is not clear, she certainly made an impact on many Samaritans in her city with the good news of the improbable (4:39-42). This level of qualitative relational involvement with Jesus that required going beyond the probable was a relational barrier and hermeneutic impasse for others wanting to follow Jesus (noted earlier, Jn 6:24-63). The issues in their minds focused ostensibly on 'flesh and blood'. Underlying this were the real issues: the contrast and conflict between being preoccupied with the secondary and pursuing the primary (6:26-27), between referential terms and relational terms (6:28-29), between the quantitative from outer in and the qualitative from inner out (6:30-42), between remaining within the limits of the probable and stepping out to go beyond to the improbable (6:43-63)—all of which overlap and interact in the most critical issue between reductionism and its counter-relational work and God's whole and relationship together in wholeness.

The black swan embodied in whole does indeed challenge us, confront us, pursue us to redeem and transform us epistemologically, hermeneutically, theologically, ontologically and relationally—from inner out to be held together in the innermost.

## **Dividing Theology and Its Hybrid**

As evidenced by these various encounters with the improbable, how we perceive Jesus and approach the Word will determine how probable or improbable our conclusions will be epistemologically, hermeneutically, theologically, ontologically and relationally. The critical issue involves how deeply our conclusions hold together and as a result how complete they are. The implications of remaining within the limits of the probable, for

example, are constraining for theology, the consequences of which continue even to this day to separate, divide, fragment and otherwise reduce the integrity of whole theology constituted by the improbable. These consequences are evident today in the disjointed relationship between theology and Christian ethics, as well as with other practical functions, consequently requiring separate disciplines for ethics, practical theology, missions and spiritual formation.<sup>4</sup> For Stanley Hauerwas, “the task of the theologian is not to deny that for certain limited purposes ethics can be distinguished from theology, but to refuse their supposed ontological and practical independence.”<sup>5</sup> Moreover, this fragmenting includes a disconnect between theological and biblical studies. What Paul critiqued in the Corinthian church (noted below) speaks to dividing theology from its determining source in Scripture—“Nothing beyond what is written” (1 Cor 4:6). This interdependent and indispensable relationship has been separated, treated as distant or casual in significance, and its function between biblical and theological studies essentially absent. Markus Bockmuehl further observes today: “Much theological and biblical scholarship does not now pay even lip service to the once universal conviction that Christian theology is at its heart an *exegetical* discipline. ...For its [early church] theologians, the study of Scripture was both source and destiny of their reason and wisdom.”<sup>6</sup>

Any division or separation, however, should be expected and cannot be sufficiently addressed until the underlying reductionism is confronted. This involved Paul’s integral fight both for the whole gospel and against reductionism. Since Paul did not distinguish his theology from his function, he never separated theology and practice. This is why his theology often does not appear to be theology in conventional terms of a prevailing theological framework, yet Paul communicated a knowledge and understanding of God to complete (make whole, *pleroo*) the word from God (Col 1:25); and his undivided theology essentially both extended and exceeded the relational work that Jesus started (Jn 14:12). So, when Paul raised the question “Has Christ been divided?” he exposed a critical issue involving both theology and practice. The issue is twofold:

1. To divide theology from practice in their inseparable relationship is by implication to reduce both to a fragmented condition (1 Cor 3:16-17, 21-23; 14:33).
2. In their disjointed condition, both theology and practice become narrowed-down to the limits of what persons know, so that each of them becomes shaped by the probable apart from their whole constituted by the improbable (1 Cor 3:18-20; 4:6-7; 8:1-2).

The critical issue Paul exposed also implies conversely: To remain within the limits of what you know (the probable) engages a process of reductionism—whether epistemologically, hermeneutically, theologically, ontologically and/or relationally—that necessitates dividing the improbable Christ embodied in whole into fragments which can

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<sup>4</sup> For a discussion on how theology and ethics have been disjointed and the need to restore their unity, see Stanley Hauerwas, “On doctrine and ethics,” in Colin E. Gunton, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 21-40.

<sup>5</sup> Hauerwas, 22.

<sup>6</sup> Markus Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word: Refocusing New Testament Study* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 88.

be shaped and aggregated down to the limited understanding of our knowledge. In other words, if we do not perceive the black swan who emerged from outside the universe and receive the improbable Subject vulnerably present and relationally involved, we have to give some basis for a substitute, which leaves us with only one alternative: human shaping and construction in referential terms which are limited to self-referencing theories and conclusions. This alternative also provides us with a basis for not being vulnerable to the improbable whole of Jesus and his intrusion on his terms.

The improbable vulnerably disclosed in the above encounters was not embodied in whole according to referential terms but irreducibly and nonnegotiablely according to God's relational terms. Theology defined in referential terms redefines the improbable (and the whole) by the probable, thereby determines theology based on the limits of fragmentary knowledge and related understanding—or what Paul referred to as human wisdom and what emerged notably from the Enlightenment as the primacy of reason. Biblical revelation in referential terms narrows down the improbable of God's relational disclosures to that which can be understood by the probable. The explanatory conclusion that can result from a narrowed epistemic field, and does indeed result for many, is a hybrid theology of doctrinal certainty, even of the Bible itself. Such certainty, however, is just based in probable terms. Moreover, this certainty circulates in a referential epistemic process, which Jesus identified as characteristic of “the wise and learned” in contrast to the relational epistemic process of “little children” open to the improbable (Lk 10:21). This brings us back to the matter of self-referencing in our theories and any resulting conclusions and knowledge. In their pursuit of certainty, self-referencing was demonstrated by those who theorized about the bread from the improbable (Jn 6:41-42) and about Jesus' flesh and blood (6:52,60).

Self-referencing is a critical issue in theology because its defining process—as demonstrated by those above defining Jesus on their terms—relies on (intentionally or unintentionally) a perceptual-interpretive lens that does not process beyond the limits of self-understanding to determine the shape of theology. This process certainly then includes depending on (knowingly or unknowingly) what we know within the relative limits of the probable. The application of a narrowed epistemic field, even with assumptions subscribing to God's revelation, can only result in a narrowed-down theology (or hybrid theology) which is fragmentary at best or misleading, distorted or incorrect at worst (cf. Peter's theology, Mt 16:15-17, 21-23). Only such theology can emerge because its understanding does not basically go beyond referential terms and thus can only reference the self-determining perceptions, interpretations and resulting knowledge from the probable, even entitled as revelation. No further and deeper theology emerges since its formulating epistemic process is unable (and unwilling) to go beyond self-referencing in order to distinguish the unfamiliar black swan of whole *theology* from the prevalent white swans of *egology*—the human shaping of which may claim to be distinct from natural theology but whose function still operates in the primacy of reason.

Yet, what compounds the limits of this epistemic process is less about reason and more about the human condition. Even as we may affirm the improbable God from outside the universe in referential terms, we still could keep God's vulnerable presence and intimate relational involvement from intruding our innermost. This lack of vulnerability remains problematic for the improbable and thereby an ongoing issue for whole theology. The whole of God's improbable theological trajectory and intrusive

relational path are inseparable, integrally composing the Black Swan. The improbability of a black swan cannot be affirmed, on the one hand, while, on the other hand, avoiding the Black Swan's intrusion. The whole of the Black Swan cannot be narrowed down to fragment his intrusive relational path to the less vulnerable probable terms of our shaping of relationship together. This reductionism of relationship signifying the human condition is incompatible with God's whole presence and relational involvement, and this relational condition needs to be addressed for theology to be whole.

The irreplaceable relational work of the Spirit is the necessary relational means that constitutes theology beyond the referential terms of the probable in the relational epistemic process to the improbable. Therefore, for our theology to go further and deeper than self-referencing, we need to honestly examine both our functional position in relation *to* the improbable and most important our relational involvement *with* the improbable. The absence, lack or distance in relationship with the improbable Subject embodied in whole renders us to just referential terms with God, with only information about God to refer to within the limits of our self-understanding—an understanding which at best is fragmentary lacking *synesis* (whole understanding). This was the issue for Peter and the problem with his hybrid theology.

Peter clearly illustrates the theological problems we face when we try to reconcile the Jesus embodied in whole to a narrowed epistemic field, that is, within the limits of what we know or can rationalize. Of all the original disciples, Peter had the most opportunity to experience the more dramatic of Jesus' self-disclosures, which should have formed the integral basis for his initial knowledge and understanding of God, his theology. His first experience of Jesus happened when he became a disciple. After working all night without catching any fish, Jesus instructed Peter to fish again, resulting in more fish than they could handle (Lk 5:4-11). Peter's response to Jesus rightly went beyond the situation to recognize the distinguished presence of the qualitative: "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man" (v.8). By falling down at Jesus' knees, Peter demonstrated his humble submission to Jesus' self-disclosure. His response, however, did not necessarily define his functional position in relation *to* the improbable and determine his relational involvement *with* the improbable Jesus embodied in whole.

Later, when Jesus asked his main disciples if they also wish to stop following him, Peter makes this summary statement: "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God" (Jn 6:67-69). Peter's confession of faith certainly distinguished him from the would-be followers of Jesus in this context. His theology at this stage appears to have doctrinal certainty, which suggests it is more referential than relational and hence based in the probable terms of what Peter knew from his previous experience with Jesus and of what he could rationalize. This becomes evident as Peter's theology is about to redefine the improbable Jesus embodied in whole by the probable—in contrast and conflict even with his confession. Yet, confession alone is insufficient to follow Jesus' whole person, who is disclosed only for relationship—the relationship together with which Peter clearly starts to struggle and negotiate on his reduced terms. This struggle was ongoing for Peter and continued even after the resurrection, which necessitated from Jesus an urgent restatement of his original relational imperative to Peter to refocus Peter on the primacy of whole relationship together: "you, follow me" (Jn 21:22).

Peter's relational condition with Jesus, and his related theological problem, seemed to first emerge with his response to Jesus' person and their relationship together during their interaction walking on water (Mt 14:22-33). Seeing Jesus in this context challenged Peter to expand his epistemic field to test the improbable. Various dynamics converge in this experiential (and perhaps experimental) moment. Peter initially engages Jesus' whole person ("if it is you...") in Jesus' relational context ("...command me to come to you"). The situation is only the secondary matter to pay attention to here whereas the relational process of their involvement together is primary. Peter is making his whole person vulnerable to Jesus on Jesus' relational terms—though there is some element of "prove it" contingency to Peter's faith, yet not in a passive sense without Peter's full relational involvement. Unfortunately, Peter only pays attention to Jesus' person and the relationship for a brief significant moment. His focus soon shifts to the situation, which then produces the fear causing a plea to Jesus only in the role to save him *from* his circumstances. The significance of this shift, in contrast to the beginning of this interaction, involves a critical dynamic: Jesus' person is reduced to what he can do and the primacy of relationship is replaced by the secondary matter of the situation and circumstances. That is, as Peter's focus shifted to the secondary, his epistemic field quickly narrowed back to the probable of his perceptual lens that defined the limits of his theology. Obviously, then, 'certainty' became an urgent matter for Peter, yet walking on water was not an issue until the secondary became primary. While the matter of Jesus' self-disclosure on the water becomes obscured here, Peter's theology—shaped by his function and not his earlier confession—can no longer account for the improbable. Based on a theology of the probable, Peter had no business walking on water; and his theology could only include being saved *from* trying to do so, in spite of the reality of Jesus' self-disclosure on the water to signify what Peter is saved *to*: "to come to you"... "Come" in the primacy of relationship together. This reduced their relationship together and attempted to renegotiate it to Peter's terms. And the fragmenting process that Peter engages becomes the basis for his emerging hybrid theology.

When Jesus further queried his disciples about their personal opinion of his identity, Peter made another summary confession affirming Jesus' deity: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God," a revelation which Jesus acknowledged Peter had received from "my Father in heaven" (Mt 16:16-17). Yet, though Peter's confession was theologically correct *about* Jesus, his theology could not translate into function *with* Jesus in relationship together because this would require going beyond his limits based on the probable in order to engage the improbable Jesus face to Face on Jesus' relational terms—a relational position of vulnerability that Peter still avoided. This was clearly evident soon after his confession when Jesus vulnerably disclosed the painful course "he must" (*dei*, necessary, unavoidable) take to the cross and the resurrection (16:21). Rather than receive the face of Jesus (and God's relational response of grace), however, Peter takes Jesus aside as if to counsel him (maybe partly from the confidence gained due to his confession), not to console Jesus. Peter acts boldly "to rebuke him" (v.22). The word "rebuke" (*epitimao*) means to censure, blame, berate; it is an abrupt and biting charge sharply expressing disapproval, harshly taking someone to task for a fault (cf. Mk 1:25). The word implies that Peter expressed a warning as he confronted Jesus on this absurd disclosure. "God forbid it, Lord!"—the term (*hileos*) functions in such phrases as an invocation for overturning evil (cf. in our vernacular, "Heaven forbid!" or "Absolutely no



way!”). We have to appreciate Peter’s honesty in sharing his feelings with Jesus. In this sense, Peter made himself vulnerable to Jesus. Yet, despite his honesty, was he really opening his whole person to Jesus? The answer involves why Peter had these feelings.

Jesus’ response to him helps us understand. He responds back even more strongly by identifying Peter as the enemy (v.23)—in contrast and conflict with moment’s earlier (v.17). Why? Because he was a “stumbling block” to Jesus; the term (*skandalon*) always denotes enticing or trapping its victim in a course of behavior which could ruin the person. Compared to earlier (v.17) when Peter was influenced by the Father’s revelation over human rationalizing, Peter shifted from God’s whole terms to his reduced function on the basis of the probable terms of his hybrid theology limited to “human things” and “not on divine things.” His focus “in mind” (*phroneo*) means to think, have a mindset—that which underlies one’s predisposition or bias. This is the activity of one’s perceptual-interpretive framework, which also involves the will, affections, conscience, therefore to be mindful and devoted to that perspective—the lens of Peter’s predisposition that emerged from his hybrid theology. In other words, his theological framework and lens defines what he pays attention to and what he ignores, thereby determines how he will function as a person and in relationships, most notably with Jesus.

The issue that has fully emerged for Peter in this interaction is not focused on being made whole and having a whole theology but on defining relationship with God and shaping it by his reduced terms on the basis of his hybrid theology. Peter had strong feelings against Jesus’ self-disclosure because that was incongruent with his perceived image of God and what God should do; for Peter, the improbable was incompatible with the probable. This is not merely about his messianic hopes and expectations but exposes a deeper issue. That is, Peter’s perceptual-interpretive framework reduced Jesus’ whole person and determined the terms of their relationship; this then redefined Jesus to function in Peter’s reduced context, not his whole relational context, consequently to be something less than and some substitute for the One whom Peter professed to be earlier. In contrast and conflict with the whole of Jesus and Jesus’ vulnerable self-disclosure here of his relational work to constitute whole relationship together, Peter remains within the limits of the probable in which he can feel more certain and less vulnerable. By its nature, a hybrid theology invariably becomes a wide-gate-and-road theology. This exposes the relational dynamics engaged in a hybrid theology and its predisposition for a dismissive functional position to and a distant relational involvement with the improbable embodied in whole who intrudes his innermost.

These constraints on Peter’s function shaping his hybrid theology keep emerging, as further evident in the next extraordinary self-disclosure of the whole of God. Six days after the above interaction, the face of Jesus is presented the most vulnerably than at any other moment during the incarnation. This happens when Jesus is “transfigured” (*metamorphoo*, to transform, to alter fundamentally) before Peter, James and John (Mt 17:1-9)—a privileged experience for them that should be integral in taking Peter beyond his limits.

The transfiguration marks a pivotal point of Jesus’ disclosure of God’s glory, which these disciples have the unique opportunity to experience further and deeper: the “visible” heart of God’s being, as Jesus is transformed to exalted form and substance (cf. Moses’ face, Ex 34:29); the intimate relational nature of the whole of God, as the Father, along with his Son, communicates directly with them in relationship (cf. with Moses, Ex

24:15-16; with Elijah, 1 Kg 19:8-18); and the vulnerable presence and involvement of God, as illuminated clearly in this amazing experiential moment. At this reunion of key persons in God's family, the whole of God's thematic relational action coheres from the past (represented by Moses and Elijah) with the present (presented by the Messiah in God's glory embodying God's grace) to the future (by the present constituting reality of God's kingdom/family). In the Father's relational communication (an extension from Jesus' baptism, Mk 1:11) specifically directed to these disciples to build relationship together, two vital messages summarize all that God relationally has disclosed, promised and experienced with his people: (1) the full affirmation of his Son in the trinitarian relational context of family and by the trinitarian relational process of family love, and (2) the clear relational imperative ("Listen to him!") for all his followers to pay attention and respond to him in his relational context and process—imperative because Jesus' relational language communicates the whole of God, not only with his words but from his whole person, for the whole understanding (*synesis*) necessary to have wholeness in theology and practice (cf. Mk 8:17-18).

The whole of God's glory is vulnerably disclosed in the face of Jesus, as Paul later made definitive (2 Cor 4:6). Moses and Elijah responded to God's glory "face to face" on God's terms to build the covenant relationship together. What does Peter do with God's glory; how does he respond to the face of Jesus?

God's glory is not disclosed to observe for information, even to use to construct theology, or merely to behold in awe, but only for relationship—by the necessity of God's being, nature and presence. When Peter wanted to erect three tents (for Jesus, Moses and Elijah) as the opportune purpose for him to be present (Mk 9:5), consider what this does to the whole of God's heart and intimate relational presence vulnerably presented to him. In the tension of this vulnerably improbable moment, Peter resorts to the past, both immediate and distant, which is still present in function for him. His old mindset (perceptual-interpretive framework and lens) exposed by Jesus six days ago, quickly expressed itself further when he tries to constrain God's glory to a place—just like the OT ways of relating to God indirectly in the tabernacle (tent). Once again, Peter reduces Jesus' whole person and relates to the face of Jesus on his reductionist terms, not Jesus' relational context and process as the Father makes imperative for him. Peter's shift to the tents further exposes the relational dynamics in his hybrid theology: the reductionist substitute he uses for the face of Jesus; how reductionism diminished his direct relational involvement with God's glory embodied by Jesus' whole person; and as a result the relational distance he maintains from intimate relationship together with Jesus and the whole of God as family. The relational consequence is that how Peter functions directly prevents their relationship from functioning together in the relational significance of "Follow me."

Peter's function in these relational dynamics is inseparable from his theology; and the unavoidable interaction between function and theology was consequential for both his function and theology. By shifting away from the inner out to narrow down his epistemic field to more quantitative terms from outer in, Peter's theology cannot account for the qualitative and relational in God's ontology and function, and consequently cannot account for Peter's whole person created in the qualitative image and relational likeness of God. Ontology and function have been reduced to fragmentary terms, which become barriers to vulnerable involvement in the primacy of whole relationship together. Peter's

person struggled in this relational condition, as he was constrained within the limits of his reduced theological anthropology, the most notable indicator of a hybrid theology.

All of these relational dynamics converged at Jesus' footwashing (Jn 13:1-17), at which Peter's hybrid theology continues to emerge. As discussed previously, it is vital to see Jesus' engagement beyond referential terms of what to do in serving to its depth in relational terms of how to be involved in relationship ("he loved them"). The intimate depth of Jesus' relational involvement in footwashing was the most vulnerable self-disclosure of his whole person that emerged in the unique relational context of his table fellowship as family together. This depth of relational involvement unfolds in his relational process of family love to constitute his family in Communion together—that intimate table fellowship of worship indivisible from his footwashing. When Peter refused Jesus' footwashing, he fragmented both Jesus' person and his person to their roles and status, reducing the person to outer in by what one does—or in reference to Jesus, what he should not do. The function of Peter's theology merely extends from his earlier attempt to prevent Jesus from going to the cross (Mt 16:22). Consequently, in the limits of his hybrid theology the probable and secondary continue to prevail, and Peter simply rejected the most vulnerable presence and intimate relational involvement of the whole of God.

Seemingly incongruent with these relational dynamics at this pivotal table fellowship, moments later Peter declared without hesitation "Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you" (13:37). Such a statement, however, along with his earlier confessions of faith, are not incongruent when made in referential terms from a hybrid theology that has reduced Peter's person to what he does—or doesn't do in the matter of footwashing. As the evening progresses and the weekend unfolds, even a lack of performance in what he does did not turn Peter from his reductionism and away from his secondary focus. This is indicated in the qualitative and relational significance of Jesus' final words to Peter before his ascension: "Do you love me, Peter?" then "*don't focus on the secondary of your service but 'follow me' in the primacy of whole relationship together*".

Peter's ministry was still problematic as long as he engaged in a fragmenting process with his hybrid theology. Despite the successful beginning of his ministry, Peter still functioned from a reduced theological anthropology that fragmented persons with outer-in distinctions. In contrast and conflict, Jesus, in post ascension, corrected Peter's hybrid theology (Acts 10:9-20, 34-35, 44-48; 11:17), which Peter should have processed into his theology earlier if he had listened to Jesus' relational language of the primacy of the qualitative and relational signifying Jesus' theology from inner out (Mt 15:15-20). Yet, even a redefined theology from inner out did not make Peter's function whole from inner out—that is, the redemptive change of *metamorphoo*, not the outer-in change of *metaschematizo*. Peter remained engaged in a fragmenting process and ignored Jesus' warning about functioning in reductionism, which Jesus clearly indicated signifies *hypokrisis* (Lk 12:1). Consequently, he still divided his theology from practice and thereby engaged in the outer-in function of role-playing (*hypokrisis*), that Paul exposed to Peter's face for the sake of the whole gospel (Gal 2:11-14). In contrast and conflict, Peter continued to 'divide Christ' and practiced a gospel that was consequentially in both a dismissive functional position to and a distant relational involvement with the improbable Jesus embodied in whole. His early ministry was characterized by proclaiming the gospel

of salvation *from* sin. Yet, his message of repentance did not adequately include the sin of reductionism; therefore his gospel lacked the qualitative and relational depth of what Jesus saved *to*. This lack was initially indicated by a disparity in the early church (Acts 6:1), that Jesus later corrected in Peter's theology and that Paul confronted in Peter's practice. Despite his early boldness to proclaim the good news (e.g. Acts 4:18-20), his soteriology was fragmented and lacked the wholeness of being saved *to*. In this sense, Peter's ministry can also be characterized by—what the writer of Hebrews exposed and boldly challenged (Heb 5:11-6:2)—a focus on milk (“the basic teaching about Christ”) without the substance of meat (“for the mature,” cf. 1 Cor 3:1-2).

This lack and disparity in Peter's own theology and function reflect the fragmentation of his person, the extent of which had a reductionist influence on a segment of the early church—including Barnabas, as Paul exposed to Peter's face at Antioch (Gal 2:13-14). Even though Peter advocated for equality at the church council in Jerusalem, his advocacy likely still focused on an incomplete soteriology, with no indication of being saved *to* the primacy of whole relationship together as family (Acts 15:6-11). It is critical to understand, that in Peter's hybrid process (in anyone's hybrid process) there were limits to what could emerge both theologically and functionally. This raises a related question about Jesus' declaration after Peter's confession that “on this rock I will build my church” (Mt 16:18). How is this compatible with Peter's theology and function? I affirm that Peter's confession in this context was also made as the spokesperson for the disciples; and on this basis Jesus responded to the collective “you” to build his church as family together, of which Peter was certainly one member but only a fragmentary part (as Paul clarified, 1 Cor 3:11). God's relational whole as family cannot and is not built in a fragmenting process on reduced terms, and that, in my opinion, is the basis for Paul becoming the lead apostle for the whole of both the gospel and the church. Later, in the church's transition Peter appears to affirm Paul's lead and the important depth of Paul's letters for the church (2 Pet 3:15-16).

What we see unfolding in Peter is a pattern of his reshaping God's self-disclosures on God's whole terms, fragmenting the whole of Jesus and redefining his person in a narrowed-down epistemic field for a hybrid theology based on the limits of Peter's reduced terms. Hybrid theology not only divides theology but also separates theology from function, such that its practice can be neither congruent nor even compatible, with its theology, thus reducing both to a fragmented condition—the critical issue Paul exposed earlier in the church in Corinth. This fragmented condition goes unrecognized as long as one remains within the limits of understanding from one's knowledge or rationalizing. As Peter demonstrated, this fragmentation of theology may have doctrinal certainty and appear to be united, yet it is not whole. These are the results of epistemological illusion and ontological simulation from reductionism and its counter-relational work, which inevitably can only be in contrast and conflict with the whole of God and the whole ontology and function improbably embodied in Jesus. This hybrid process is also evident in Jesus' further post-ascension communication with various churches. In his relational discourse for ecclesiology to be whole, Jesus' family love exposed reductionism in church practices to hold them accountable for engaging in a fragmenting process in order to be whole as his church (Rev 2-3). We will discuss one church now with further discussion following below.

A hybrid process emerges clearly in the church in Thyatira (Rev 2:18-29). Thyatira's economy emphasized trades (including brass-working) and crafts (cf. Acts 16:14). In the Greco-Roman world of that time, trade guilds organized the various trades and were necessary to belong to if one wanted to pursue a trade (much as unions today). These guilds served various social functions as well, one of which was to meet for common meals dedicated to their patron deities, thereby engaging in activities of pagan worship and immorality. For Christians not to belong to a guild and participate would generally mean becoming isolated economically and socially,<sup>7</sup> which may suggest a pragmatic approach to church practice in Thyatira.

In the nature of this surrounding context, Jesus acknowledged this church's extensive "works" (*ergon*, work that defined them, Rev 2:19): "love" (*agape*), "faith" (*pistis*), "service" (*diakonia*, service, ministry that benefits others, especially compassion to the needy), "patient endurance" (*hypomone*, enduring and not giving in to bad circumstances, in contrast to *makrothymia* which is patience with respect to persons), and that their "last works are greater than the first," indicating not a status quo situation but actually doing more *ergon* than before. Yet, their practice also "tolerated" (*aphiemi*, to let pass, permit, allow, v.20) Jezebel's teaching. What they let pass, permitted or allowed is important to understand in the above context.

Jezebel (probably a byword symbolizing the OT character of Jezebel, cf. 1 Kg 18:19) appears to be a woman (or possibly a group) accepted within this church fellowship. The practice associated with her teaching probably refers to compromise with prevailing activity related to trade guilds prominent in the city which "misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols" (2:20, NIV). What is significant to understand here is not the obvious disparity of this teaching and practice with the desires of God. What is more significant is how these prevailing influences of the surrounding context were absorbed into the practices of this church along with all its other so-called good works acknowledged above. This is not simply an issue about syncretism, synthesizing competing ideologies, or even pluralism, but goes beyond merely maintaining doctrinal purity to the deeper issue about participation *in* a surrounding context having the prevailing presence of reductionism and its subsequent influence on their perceptual-interpretive framework. This is the lens which determined what they ignored and paid attention to, thus the lens by which they practiced their works. When reductionism is not negated, its influence then affects how those other works would be engaged with something less and some substitute for the whole of persons and relationships, therefore raising critical issues of their qualitative and relational significance, and their wholeness since the fragmenting process is not disengaged.

Theologically, Thyatira demonstrated a weak view of sin, namely sin as reductionism, which was the normative character of their surrounding context and was embedded in its collective order. Functionally, they also lacked relational involvement, or maintained relational distance, with God in the process of reciprocating contextualization needed to distinguish their identity in that surrounding context without being determined by it; and any pragmatism in their practice became a euphemism for reductionism—the rationalizing composing 'a wide gate and road'. Their tolerance was essentially a

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<sup>7</sup> For further contextual information, see Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000).

fragmentation of both their theology and function in a hybrid process, consequently they reinforced the counter-relational work of reductionism and functioned incompatibly to be whole, God's relational whole on God's whole terms. The influence of reductionism is usually more subtle than that observed in the Thyatira church.

As long as our perceptual-interpretive framework is reductionist—most notably with a reduced theological anthropology—our lens' view of the qualitative, the ontological and the relational will not discern the extent of the surrounding influences reducing the whole of church practice. The underlying issue critical for our understanding is the ontology and function of both the person and persons together as church; and the challenging question remains: Is it reduced ontology and function or whole ontology and function? The relational demands of grace, however, clarify for church ontology and function that nothing less and no substitutes than to be whole is the only practice which has any significance to God (as Jesus made definitive about worship, Jn 4:23-24). Additionally, the lens of repentance in conjoint function with a strong view of sin makes no assumptions to diminish addressing sin as reductionism, first and foremost within church practice and then in the surrounding contexts—in other words, being accountable for nothing less and no substitutes. This is the ontology and function that composes 'the narrow gate and road' leading to whole life (*zoe*). And Jesus wants "all the churches" to clearly "know that I am the one who searches minds and hearts" (Rev 2:23, as he did with Peter); that is, he examines the qualitative significance of persons from inner out, whom he holds accountable to be whole in the relationships that hold together in the innermost as the whole of God's family (2:25; 3:11). In their effort to be relevant and possibly pragmatic in the surrounding pluralistic context, by engaging in a hybrid process the Thyatira church overlooked (knowingly or unknowingly) in their many admirable church practices what was necessary to be whole and to make whole (cf. a similar error by the church in Pergamum in a reductionist context, Rev 2:12-15).

The issue about being whole is that it always involves reductionism, whether it is reductionism of our theology or our function. What Jesus made definitive in his formative family prayer (Jn 17:13-23) is crucial for our whole understanding (*synesis*) of this issue. What prevails in (*en*) any context of the world is reductionism. Jesus calls his followers relationally out of (*ek*) these contexts in order to be whole together as his family, then also relationally sends them back into (*eis*) those surrounding contexts to live whole together as his family and to make whole the human condition. Without the reciprocating dynamic of this *ek-eis* relational involvement, church ontology and function become defined and shaped based on the narrowed-down terms *en* (in) the surrounding context. This relational condition is problematic because of the relational barriers or distance it creates for the ongoing relational involvement necessary with the whole of God on God's relational terms to constitute the whole of who we are as church and whose we are as God's family. Without this reciprocating contextualization, our identity in the world becomes fragmentary and, therefore, is rendered ambiguous as the light and/or shallow as the salt (Mt 5:13-16). This is not the embodied whole of his family and the gospel that Jesus prayed for the world to see, receive and respond to.

It is insufficient for churches to be a mere presence, or even merely to function, *en* the world; their only significance is to function *eis* (relational movement into) the world both to be relationally involved with others as God's whole and, by the nature of this function, also to confront all sin as reductionism of the whole. Jesus teaches us about

ecclesiology in his relational discourse, and the lesson we need to learn from the hybrid process of the Thyatira church is indispensable: to let pass, indifferently permit or inadvertently allow—“tolerate,” which other churches also did more subtly—the influence of reductionism in any form from the surrounding context proportionately diminishes the wholeness of church practice and minimalizes their relational involvement with God, with each other in the church and with others in the world, consequently rendering its relational condition to a level no longer distinguished for, and perhaps from, the human relational condition. For churches to get beyond practice merely *en* the world, they need a different dynamic to define and determine their practice.

By searching hearts Jesus communicates the relational message to us that church ontology and function are about being whole in the innermost, not merely doing correct ecclesial practices. And the *eis* relational engagement of church function has to be conjoined with the *ek* (movement out of) relational involvement with the whole of God as its defining antecedent in the *ek-eis* dynamic, or else church ontology and function remain susceptible to engagement in a fragmenting process. This reciprocating relational process negates the continuous counter-relational work of Satan and its reductionist influence (Rev 2:24) by ongoingly engaging, embracing, experiencing and extending God’s whole, that is, the irreducible whole in the qualitative significance of the integrated ontology of both personhood and the church constituted in and by the Trinity, the whole of God. The relational outcome is the theology of wholeness, the only alternative integrally in contrast and conflict with a hybrid theology.

It is vital for our whole understanding (*synesis*) to learn from Peter and the early church (notably in Thyatira) that the irony of a hybrid process and a wide-gate-and-road approach in fact imposes critical limits on what can emerge from our theology and function. The improbable Jesus embodied in whole, in integral relationship with Paul, together provide us with the *synesis* necessary to take us beyond such limits in order to be whole—theologically, ontologically, functionally and relationally.

## The Theology of Wholeness

The whole of God’s thematic relational response of grace to the human condition unfolds in a theological trajectory and along a relational path that converge in the narrow gate and road of the incarnation—and that cannot be divided or fragmented to “widen” the gate and road. By the narrow gate and road, the improbable embodied in whole by Jesus was vulnerably disclosed (beyond *apokalypto*) in the distinguished relational context and process (to *phaneroo*) that fulfilled God’s definitive blessing to his family to enact *siym* for *shalom* to bring the change necessary for new relationship together in wholeness (Num 6:24-26, discussed previously). The relational context and process distinguishing the Face of God involved the relational work of Face-to-face relationship that intruded on the probable (the common) and challenged them with the improbable (the Uncommon). For whole understanding—our indispensable and irreplaceable *synesis* (as Paul defined, Col 2:2-4)—it is necessary to follow this theological trajectory and relational path.

Crucial to understanding the theological trajectory of the distinguished Face of God now embodied in whole is understanding his relational language. For most persons,

this initially requires a major shift away from referential language focused on quantitative information about God in order to receive Jesus' relational language involved in communicating qualitative knowledge and understanding of God only in relationship—a significant difference for the epistemic process that needs to be accounted for. This shift is unavoidable if we are to follow the theological trajectory of the Face of God, because without shifting we would not be on the same trajectory.

Referential terms puts God on a different theological trajectory merely as the Object to be observed and for faith. The information gained and conclusions formed about God in this common epistemic process are shaped by the limits of what we know or can rationalize, that is, shaped by our self-understandings. In contrast and even in conflict, the relational terms of God's face unfolds in the theological trajectory as Subject (beyond a mere Other) to be involved in reciprocal relationship together Face to face, whose Face cannot be defined and whose relationship cannot be determined by our face. What we know and understand of God is distinguished in the relational epistemic process emerging from our involvement in reciprocal relationship with Subject-Face—whom the early disciples had issues distinguishing without *syniemi* (putting the pieces together) in its necessary relational epistemic process (Mk 8:17-18). The difference in these trajectories may seem unnecessarily nuanced when in fact the difference is immeasurable if knowing and understanding the whole of God are primary and therefore is composed by the relational Word. As Subject, God speaks for himself, and theology is contingent on God's communication in relationship. As Object, God's voice is mute and God's words are disembodied, fragmented and otherwise subjected to human shaping in the theological task. As Subject, relationship with God is only on God's whole terms. As Object, relationship and relating to God is negotiated by reduced human terms, shaped by the probable down to a fragmentary condition; this is how Christ becomes divided, as Paul exposed in the critical twofold issue discussed earlier. To follow Jesus' theological trajectory as the distinguished Face, we must, by his nature as Subject, be involved with him along his relational path (cf. Jn 12:26). Yet, as witnessed in earlier discussion, the relational Jesus embodied as Subject is both improbable (uncommon) and whole, and that is problematic for the probable (common) and fragmentary—an unsettling intrusion on what prevails (the common, as 'the wise and learned' and would-be followers discovered) and a jolt to the status quo (distinguished from the uncommon, as Nicodemus learned).

As the relational dynamic of Jesus' improbable theological trajectory unfolds to fulfill the whole of God's thematic relational response to the human condition, his first disciples continue to shift to be compatible for relationship face to Face in their pivotal table fellowship together. Not understanding Jesus' relational language, one of them asks him, "Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?" (Jn 14:22) The question was in response to Jesus outlining his theological trajectory and relational path for them with the whole of God (the Father and the Spirit along with the Son) and the relational epistemic process necessarily involved for this relational outcome (14:15-21). The issue is that Jesus discloses his person as Subject who is improbable and whole, which neither the probable can process nor the fragmentary can compatibly engage to understand. The disciple's question focuses on seeing Jesus as a quantitative Object, that they themselves often related to without knowing (14:9) and had relationship with on their reduced terms (14:5-6, and particularly Peter). The relational words of Jesus'



relational language involve the qualitative experience of him as Subject in relationship together. Therefore, the theological trajectory of Jesus' disclosures of the whole of God involves only his relational work as Subject (14:1-11)—the relational work that his disciples, in reciprocal relationship, can also extend and exceed (14:12-14), as was fulfilled in the relational dynamic of Jesus *into* Paul.

Without responding to the referential question, Jesus continues in his relational language to compose conclusively the relational outcome of his theological trajectory and relational path: whole relationship together as family, with its primacy established 'already' in relational progression to 'not yet' (14:23-28). The distinguished Face's trajectory and path emerged from God's definitive blessing and converged in this pivotal table fellowship for nothing less and no substitutes of this relational outcome, which is composed by the further relational language of Jesus' formative family prayer (Jn 17:20-26).

The primacy of whole relationship together as family in the already is the peace from God's definitive blessing fulfilled by Jesus that "I leave you; my peace I give to you" (Jn 14:27). The theological trajectory and relational path of this peace, however, should not be confused with the common, probable and fragmentary notions of peace shaped by the world—"I do not give to you as the world gives"—but clearly distinguished as from the Uncommon, by the improbable, and as whole. Here again the critical difference between a referential God as Object and the relational God as Subject emerges with further clarity and depth. Historically, Christian peace movements and peacemaking have often taken a different theological trajectory than the one Jesus as Subject fulfilled relationally from God's definitive blessing. The theological trajectory and relational path of the peace Jesus enacts converge in the narrow gate and road of wholeness and its uncommon and improbable relational outcome of whole relationship together in the very likeness of the relational ontology of the whole of God—"that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one" (Jn 17:22-23).

As much as the human condition and its human relational problems need all the help they could get, Jesus is unequivocal about his theological trajectory and relational path: "Do you think I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division" (Lk 12:51, "but a sword," par. Mt 10:34). What Jesus goes on to describe is the division, conflict and breakdown within families that he came to cause (12:52-53)—in apparent contradiction to the whole relationship together as family defined above. The issue, however, is the theological trajectory and relational path of the peace Jesus gives, that converges in the narrow gate and road of the uncommon, improbable and whole, and therefore that cannot be determined by incomplete notions of peace to widen the gate and road in the common, probable and fragmentary. These relational words by Jesus must be understood by the relational message he painfully communicated as his relational path penetrated Jerusalem: "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes" (Lk 19:41-42). Then he intruded on the temple to forcefully cause its "division" in order to make it whole for God's family (19:45-46). What constitutes Jesus' theological trajectory and relational path and what emerges are irreducible and nonnegotiable.

Nothing less and no substitutes but wholeness of the person and persons together in relationship constitutes Jesus' peace and distinguishes it as uncommon, improbable

and whole. It is the uncommon, improbable and whole that, by the nature of its ontology and function, intrudes on the common, probable and fragmentary notions of peace to expose its epistemological illusions and ontological simulations (even in families and the temple/church) shaped by the reductionism of human-shaped relationships prevailing in the human condition. Jesus' seemingly divisive statement is his relational language composing the qualitative depth of his relational work necessary in direct response to the human condition to make it whole in relationship together as family. This is Jesus' theological trajectory and relational path of peace that constitutes the qualitative and relational significance of the gospel; and anything less and any substitutes can neither be definitive of the good news of wholeness (as Peter learned, Acts 10:34-36) nor determine the gospel of wholeness (as Paul proclaimed, Eph 6:15). And if our theology does not have this improbable trajectory and follow this intrusive relational path, then our theology cannot be whole but only divided, separating theology from practice (such as ethics and peacemaking), and thus fragmenting both without the *synesis* "that make for wholeness." The theology that emerges from this fragmentary condition is at most a hybrid theology.

Moreover, the wholeness Jesus gives in relationship together as family in likeness of the Trinity is the experiential truth 'already' that "I will not leave you orphaned" (Jn 14:18), and that determines our whole ontology and function both as church family and in the world: "so that they may be one, as we are one...that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (Jn 17:22-23). This is the integral basis for the theological anthropology of whole ontology and function in critical contrast and conflict to reduced ontology and function. The roots of this ontology and function go back to creation, and its theological trajectory and relational path emerged in covenant relationship with Abraham when God directly communicated the clear relational imperative to him: "walk before me and be *tamiym*, not merely blameless but be whole" (Gen 17:1). If our theological anthropology does not have this theological trajectory and follow this relational path, then the ontology and function of the person and persons together as church family will not be *tamiym*. The relational consequence is that persons essentially become relational orphans and their gatherings become more like orphanages, in contrast and even conflict to the wholeness Jesus gives them in relationship together (cf. Jn 16:33).

During their pivotal table fellowship together—integrally involving his footwashing and Lord's Supper—Jesus made conclusive the whole theology that his theological trajectory and relational path vulnerably embodied and relationally disclosed (Jn 13-17):

1. The whole of who, what and how God is; the whole of Jesus by nature is unable to be divided ("you still do not know me?") nor can the whole of God be separated ("seen me has seen the Father," "we are one"); Jesus embodied and disclosed only God's whole ontology and function, nothing less and no substitutes.
2. The whole of who, what and how the person is; our ontology and function are whole in his qualitative image ("not *of* the world just as I am not") and relational likeness ("one as we are one"); and we are whole together as God's very family ("make our home with them," "*the Father's* love...in them, as I in them," "they

become completely one”); this is the definitive identity of both who we are and whose we are.

3. The whole of God’s relational response of grace to the human condition to make persons whole in relationship together as God’s family (“*the Father* sent me into the world,” “I am the way...to the Father,” “to give eternal life...that they may know *the whole of God*,” “I will not leave you orphaned,” “we will come to them and make our home with them,” “I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me”); nothing less and no substitutes constitute the gospel.

Grace and peace—that is, the whole of God’s relational response of grace and the relational outcome of wholeness—are relational dynamics integrated in Jesus’ theological trajectory that are integrally enacted and fulfilled along his relational path in the primacy of whole relationship together in God’s family. Wholeness in relationship together involves the primacy of whole persons (from inner out, cf. “in spirit and truth”) in intimate involvement to *know* the whole of the other person, as signified by Jesus’ footwashing and as constituted by participating in Jesus’ sacrifice (his body and blood) behind the veil in the temple in the intimate presence of God. In Jesus’ theological trajectory and relational path, grace and peace emerge without the veil in the primacy of intimate relationship together with the whole of God and the whole of each person as family—the primacy of wholeness with the veil removed that Paul clarified theologically and functionally (Eph 2:14-22; 2 Cor 3:16-18). Therefore, whole theology—whether of God, the person or the gospel—involves the vulnerable involvement and relational intimacy in the primacy of whole relationship together with no veil. This primacy of relationship is irreducible and nonnegotiable in Jesus’ theological trajectory and relational path.

The reduction or renegotiation of this primacy was the critical issue for two other churches which Jesus exposed in his post-ascension relational discourse, along with the church in Thyatira discussed earlier. The church in Ephesus was exemplary in maintaining its church identity and doctrinal purity in the surrounding context (Rev 2:1-3,6). Their church ontology and function, however, had become a substitute for the primacy of relationship together: “But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first *in the primacy of relationship and renegotiated what’s primary*” (v.4). The church in Sardis was a successful church with a prominent reputation in the surrounding context (Rev 3:1). Yet, their ontology and function was a mere simulation of the primacy of wholeness, so Jesus jolted them in their illusion because “I have not found your works *pleroo*” (v.2), that is, complete, whole “in the sight of my God’s *perceptual-interpretive lens*” (*enopion*, before, in the presence of, cf. Abraham before God, Gen 17:1). In spite of their high church performance, both churches were on a different theological trajectory and relational path than Jesus.

In his relational messages to the churches in Ephesus, Sardis and Thyatira, Jesus teaches us a critical lesson that delineates a simple reality of life about the human person and the surrounding social context—matters we either pay attention to or ignore depending on our assumptions of theological anthropology and the human condition (e.g. the church in Thyatira). His lesson is integrated with his formative family prayer (Jn

17:9-19) and addresses the issue of contextualization defining us. Since we do not live in a vacuum, our ontology and function (both individual and corporate) are either shaped by the surrounding context we are *en* (v.11, thus “of the world,” v.14) or constituted by what we enter *eis* (dynamic movement “into”) that context with. In the latter constituting process, for the dynamic of *eis* to define and determine our ontology and function in congruence with Jesus (v.18) necessitates the *ek* (“of” indicating source) relational involvement to negate any defining influence on us from a surrounding context (“not of the world”) in order to determine us by our primary source in the whole of God’s relational context and process, therefore constituting the whole ontology and function in the primacy of relationship together for the *eis* relational movement back to the world (vv.16-18). Human contextualization, though neither disregarded nor necessarily unimportant, is clearly secondary to God’s in this process that integrally distinguishes our primary identity of who we are and whose we are (v.9). This reciprocating relational process (*ek-eis* relational dynamic, cf. reciprocating contextualization discussed previously) signifies the relational demands of grace for reciprocal relationship conjointly compatible with the theological trajectory of Jesus’ coming *eis* the world and congruent with his relational path of wholeness for all of life with which he engaged the world. Nothing less and no substitutes can distinguish the whole ontology and function of Jesus and of those in likeness who indeed follow him in the primacy of whole relationship together without the veil.

The clearest indicator that we have not shifted from Jesus’ theological trajectory and veered from his relational path is our theological anthropology. Our ontology and function reveal if we have, on the one hand, reduced and renegotiated the primacy of relationship and, on the other, kept the veil—both of which have the same relational consequence. The ontology and function in *shalom* and *tamiym* emerge only in the primacy of relationship and confirm that we are compatible with Jesus’ theological trajectory and congruent with his relational path (as the ancient poet anticipated, Ps 37:37). *Tamiym* was critical for Paul’s life. He was on a different theological trajectory when he entered the Damascus road. Then the whole of Jesus intruded on his ontology and function and jolted his theological anthropology, causing a retrospective for Paul in which he received *tamiym*’s epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction. The relational outcome was that the distinguished Face shined on him to bring change for new relationship together in wholeness—without the veil. The Paul who emerged from the Damascus road was now not on a reshaped variable theological trajectory parallel to Jesus’—yet whose congruence has been questioned—but whose theological trajectory was integrally compatible and wholly congruent with Jesus’ theological trajectory and relational path. Paul was vulnerably involved in ongoing reciprocal relationship with the whole of God (the Son and the Spirit, together with the Father), who composed the whole of Paul and his witness, as well as the whole in Paul and his theology. This is signified in Paul’s standard greeting in his letters, “grace and peace” (discussed previously), his shorthand for the relational dynamics of God’s relational response of grace and its relational outcome in the primacy of whole relationship together with the veil removed. The relational dynamics that unfold are the relational work of Jesus’ theological trajectory extended *into* Paul and exceeded by him with the Spirit—just as Jesus promised for those relationally involved with him (Jn 14:12-13) and defined for Paul (Acts 26:16).

Jesus' theological trajectory that extended into Paul continues its progression on Jesus' relational path in relational response to the human condition to make it whole. This focused concern for the human relational condition is the focal point in Paul's theological lens—and should be the core and sustaining function for all theological discourse—because this is what concerns the whole of God and involves God's whole disclosures as Subject to constitute the theological trajectory vulnerably embodied by Jesus. Paul embodied this whole theology in likeness of God's whole disclosure as Subject who confronted the historical Paul on the Damascus road, and because God's relational concern for Paul's and the human relational condition is what the relational Paul experienced in whole relationship together with God without the veil to integrally constitute the theological Paul. The relational path of function, inseparable from Jesus' theological trajectory, was always antecedent to Paul's theology. Therefore, the hermeneutic key to whole theology, and to the whole in Paul's theology, is the integral interaction of the human relational condition “to be apart” from God's relational whole with God's thematic relational response of grace to this human condition. The sum total of God's actions revealed post-creation were initiated and enacted to fulfill God's concern to restore human persons to be whole in relationship together—the good news for the human need and problem. This is what Paul clearly proclaimed as the gospel, not of his shaping but only directly revealed from Jesus (Gal 1:11-12). No other theological discourse speaks of God and thus can define God, nor speaks for God's presence and involvement—beyond, that is, the speculation of a theological monologue. If theology is considered truly discourse or talk of God, then the essential question becomes: does theology involve a word ‘from above’ directly from God's self-revelation by communicative action in the relational context and process of God's terms, or does theology just engage words ‘from below’ in human contextualization shaped or constructed by human terms. The former is definitive, the latter is speculative.

For theology to be indeed whole *theology* and not fragmentary by the human shaping and construction of *egology*, then *theos* must be a separate ontology and function from *ego* (individual or collective)—though not merely as Object but distinguished as Subject on a relational path. For Paul, the definitive emergence of his theology (e.g. his ecclesiology in Eph) was not the result of a theological exercise (even when isolated in prison). Though his *synesis* (whole understanding) of the theological “forest” of God's thematic relational action (Eph 1:3-14) certainly involved his reflection with the Spirit (1 Cor 2:10, perhaps while in prison), this was only a relational outcome for Paul (Eph 3:3-5). Moreover, Paul's “*synesis* of the mystery of Christ” (3:4) was never shaped by his own theological effort but only by God's communicative action “revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit” (3:5). This relational process of involvement with the Spirit precludes the need for words ‘from below’ of human speculation, shaping or construction. In other words, the theological Paul emerged definitively only from the relational Paul, who was wholly involved with the Spirit in the relational epistemic process.

The embodied Word of God's communicative action was revealed to Paul neither in propositional terms nor even in conventional theological language. It was only in relational language and terms for relationship together. For Paul, the incarnation became the functional meaning of good news for his and the human relational condition—the meaningful relationship to fulfill the inherent human need that even neuroscience

identifies. No other theological discourse constituted the good news for the inherent human need and problem. Therefore, for Paul nothing less and no substitutes than the experiential truth of the gospel of the embodied Word from God had relational significance. And the theological Paul emerging from the relational Paul witnessed in terms of function, not in doctrine. Accordingly, all of Paul's theological concerns converged in his focus on the gospel. Likewise, all of Paul's theological discourse cohered in his integrated fight for the experiential truth of the whole gospel and against reductionism. Anything less or any substitutes for Paul were what he clearly defined as "a different gospel" (Gal 1:6-7) and would not have been *theology* but *egology* (Gal 1:11-12, cf. 1 Cor 2:10-13; Col 2:8-9).

The issue of human contextualization, and its influence of reductionism, was critical for the whole of Paul and the whole in his theology. Human contextualization is the underlying process for Christ being divided and thereby for forming the basis for hybrid theology. This fragmentation is unavoidable when the influence of human contextualization becomes primary. Paul understood its consequences from his own experience previously embodied in the historical Paul, which is the basis for not interpreting his theology merely by the historical Paul. We cannot understand his theology and its trajectory apart from the relational context and process of its relational path for the following factors: (1) this was his definitive basis for his thought and theology (1 Cor 2:13; Gal 1:11-12), (2) this was the only process by which his thought and theology developed (1 Cor 2:4-5; 2 Cor 4:6; Col 1:25-26; Eph 3:2-5), and (3) this is how the theological Paul emerged definitively from the relational Paul and why these aspects of Paul are inseparable for the whole of Paul's person and must be integrated without reduction in order to integrally understand the whole in Paul's thought and theology. Anything less or any substitute for this relational context and process results in either deconstructing or reconstructing, or both, Paul's theology to something less or some substitute of the whole in his theology. In other words, Paul is disconnected from Subject-*theos* and his *theology* is elusive or lost, consequently rendered to a reduced theology fragmented by human contextualization.

Paul's theological discourse in human contexts was based primarily on the whole of God's discourse to him in the relational context and process initiated by Jesus and deepened by the Spirit. This is the paradigm for theological engagement in human contexts on the relational path of God's terms that the whole of Paul witnessed to deeply with the Spirit, and which critically speaks to us today. Whether the issue is construction, deconstruction or reconstruction, as a quintessential premodernist Paul puts both modernism and postmodernism into the full perspective of the whole of God, just as he himself was by the embodied Word from God, the *pleroma* (fullness, whole) of God (Col 1:19; 2:9). Past and present, this was Paul's relational responsibility for God's family (*oikonomia*) to *pleroo* (complete, make whole) the word of God (Col 1:25)—that is, which was vulnerably embodied by the *pleroma* of God in relational response to the human condition (Col 1:15-20). The relational outcome of this process for Paul is what signified his whole theology (Col 2:10; Eph 1:23; 2:14-22; 3:7-12). In contrast to and sometimes in conflict with conventional theology, Paul was only involved in the theological trajectory and relational path of wholeness embodied by Jesus.

Paul's new qualitative interpretive framework (his *phronema*) renders the meaning of the whole gospel, and his new relational interpretive lens (his *phroneo*, Rom

8:5-6) provides understanding for the theological anthropology of the whole person and the relationships together necessary to be whole—that is, the good news of the definitive relationship that conclusively fulfills the inherent human need and problem to have the intimate relationships together held together in the innermost without the veil (2 Cor 3:16-18). This is the same inherent need and problem that even neuroscience identifies in the human person from outer in. Both this qualitative and relational significance in Paul and his theological trajectory are critical for his readers to interpret the whole in his theology. Wholeness for Paul was first an experiential truth, the relational reality of which constituted the ontological identity of who Paul was and whose he was. These are the experiential levels of Paul's theology which conventional theological categories do not account for, and accordingly are inadequate to understand this wholeness of Paul and are incompatible to explain the wholeness in his theology. What the continued use of these categories does help indirectly to understand, however, is how in any practice the presence of God's whole is needed to expose the influence and workings of reductionism.

Paul's theology did not have a systematic quantity that could be collated for systematic information about God. Likewise, a systematic format to his theological discourse is nonexistent in his letters. I will assert, however, there is a *systemic* quality to his theology which signifies the systemic framework for the whole in his theology.<sup>8</sup> It is this systemic framework that is necessary in order to integrally understand the coherence of Paul's thought in his letters and this whole at the heart of his theology. His theological systemic framework is rooted in revelation initiated by God as Subject and thereby based on whole knowledge from top down in the relational epistemic process, not on fragmented knowledge constructed from bottom up in, at best, a limited epistemic process observing the theological trajectory of God as Object. The outcome from this systemic framework in Paul's theological discourse made conclusive the theology of wholeness, without which the human species will remain reduced and fragmented, unable to be restored to whole ontology and function in God's relational whole from inner out—that which holds together all of creation in the innermost (Rom 8:15-16, 19-21).

Discourse focused on the theology of wholeness was constituted “in the beginning” for Paul, just as Paul revealed the theological unknown and thus the mysteries of the *kosmos* and of human life and function to the Athenians (Acts 17:24-31). The theology of wholeness involves the relational dynamic of God's creative and communicative action which constitutes the whole knowledge and understanding necessary for the cosmos and the human person. In this theological discourse from above is revealed the systemic framework to all creation which defines and determines its wholeness (Col 1:15-17). Within this systemic framework both the cosmos and human life are integrated to define wholeness for each, therefore also establishing their need for this systemic framework in order to determine the function of their wholeness (Col 1:17, *synistemi*, to consist together). Without this systemic framework there is nothing other than speculation to integrate the parts of creation—leaving the cosmos and human life fragmentary and as a result limited only to their fragmented knowledge and understanding, unable to be whole. Left fragmentary and essentially on their own (as were the Athenians), cosmology and physics as well as anthropology and neuroscience

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<sup>8</sup> For an expanded discussion on Paul's systemic framework, see my study *The Whole of Paul and the Whole in His Theology*, 105-134.

can only speculate or, by its own misplaced faith, only hope for what its wholeness is.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, they are confined within this limitation to determine their function just on the basis of human terms, fragmentary as they are.

In other words, definitive wholeness is constituted entirely within the whole of God's systemic framework. Paul's theological discourse on wholeness was unequivocal: Apart from God's whole, there is only some form of reductionism which for the human person constitutes the human condition ("to be apart")—the inherent human need and problem correctly identified by neuroscience research (cf. the "groan" in 2 Cor 5:2,4; Rom 8:19-22). In this human condition there is undeniable (yet misplaced) longing for wholeness and motivated (yet misguided) pursuit for fulfillment of this relational need—both of which are ontological-functional givens for Paul and intuitive for human persons in his theological anthropology. Moreover, Paul can be definitive about the whole and decisive about reductionism because the dynamic of wholeness in his theology was exclusively from above, initiated by God only on God's terms (cf. Col 2:9-10) and thus not subject to human terms, even Paul's or Peter's. Human terms can only, at best, redefine wholeness by epistemological illusion and reconstitute wholeness with ontological simulation from reductionism—which is evidenced in the modern digital world,<sup>10</sup> not to mention in the globalization of human economy today.

In the theology of wholeness, Paul purposefully stressed the necessary epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction by which his own person was confronted to be whole (*tamiym*), and by which he confronted Peter to be whole. This epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction were critically signified with the simple address in the beginning of each of his letters (as noted previously in chap. 6): "grace and peace" (both of Timothy's letters add "mercy"). He also closed most of his letters with a greeting containing these terms. The simplicity and frequency of this greeting should not define its significance as formulaic and thereby ignore his distinguishing purpose (*semeion*, 2 Thes 3:17). These terms are critical to Paul's thought and theology and basic to his gospel—aspects his closing greeting further emphasized.

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<sup>9</sup> Consider the following statement on the current state of human knowledge in physics by physicist Steve Giddings: "Despite all we have learned in physics—from properties of faraway galaxies to the deep internal structure of the protons and neutrons that make up an atomic nucleus—we still face vexing mysteries.... We know, for example, that all the types of matter we see, that constitute our ordinary existence, are a mere fraction—20%—of the matter in the universe. The remaining 80% apparently is mysterious "dark matter"; though it is all around us, its existence is inferred only via its gravitational pull on visible matter." Taken from "The physics we don't know," op-ed, *Los Angeles Times*, Jan 5, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> Consider this critique of the digital world by Jaren Lanier, a computer scientist known as the father of virtual reality technology: "Something like missionary reductionism has happened to the internet with the rise of web 2.0. [Uniqueness of persons] is being leached away by the mush-making process [of fragmentation]. Individual web pages as they first appeared in the early 1990s had the flavor of personhood. MySpace preserved some of that flavor, though a process of regularized formatting [i.e., a template] had begun. Facebook went further, organizing people into multiple-choice identities, while Wikipedia seeks to erase point of view entirely.

If a church or government were doing these things [to impose conformity], it would feel authoritarian, but when technologists are the culprits, we seem hip, fresh, and inventive. People will accept ideas presented in technological form that would be abhorrent in any other form. It is utterly strange to hear my many friends in the world of digital culture claim to be the true sons of the Renaissance without realizing that using computers to reduce individual expression is a primitive, retrograde activity, no matter how sophisticated your tools are." *You Are Not a Gadget: A Manifesto* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 48.



“Grace and peace” were not combined by Paul as mere theological concepts but as a theological paradigm. They integrally compose part of his shorthand theological discourse for the functional convergence of the interdependent relational action and relational outcome directly from God the Father and Christ—whom Paul identified as “the God of peace” and “the Lord of peace” (1 Thes 5:23; 2 Thes 3:16; 2 Cor 13:11; Rom 15:33; Phil 4:9). The relational dynamics involved between relational action and outcome was an interaction Paul never separated nor assumed to be in operation.

This unfolding relational dynamic of “grace and peace” establishes the integral flow which outlines Paul’s theological framework to wholeness:

1. The *relational context* of the whole of God and God’s family, only from top down.
2. The *relational process* of the whole of God and God’s grace (family love), only from inner out.
3. The *relational progression* to the whole of God as God’s whole family, only on God’s qualitative-relational terms.

Paul’s theology of wholeness makes functional the qualitative and relational significance of this relational outcome.

After creation, *tamiym* reemerged with Noah (Gen 6:9) and was reestablished with Abram in covenant relationship together (Gen 17:1-2). “Blameless” is the common rendering of *tamiym*, but “complete” and “whole” more significantly denote *tamiym* and its qualitative and relational significance to God. Not surprisingly, blameless tends to be measured merely on the basis of adherence to the torah (which Abram didn’t have) or to a further Christian moral and ethical framework (as some perceive in Paul’s letters). As mentioned in the previous chapter, interrelated to “grace and peace” in Paul’s letters is “blameless and holy,” or a variation (1 Thes 3:13; 5:23; 1 Cor 1:8; Col 1:22; Eph 1:4; 5:27; Phil 2:15; 1 Tim 6:14). This composes his further shorthand discourse for a functional paradigm to supplement his theological paradigm above. Paul did not emphasize “blameless and holy,” for example, for the church at Thessalonica’s eschatological concerns, merely for the sake of purity when Christ returns. It is critical to pay attention to his shorthand language in order to have whole understanding of his relational message. Paul builds on “blameless” (*amemptos*) only from *tamiym* and deepens it: (1) what it means for the person to be whole qualitatively from inner out (“holy,” *hagios*, uncommon function), and (2) what it means for whole persons to live in relationship with the holy (uncommon) God together to be whole, the relational whole of God’s family only on God’s relational terms. Therefore, “holy and blameless” signify function only “uncommon and whole”.

To summarize what unfolds in Paul’s thought and theology: the functional paradigm of “holy and blameless” converged with the theological paradigm of “grace and peace” to signify being whole in relationship together (peace and blameless) only on the ongoing basis of the whole of God’s relational response and terms for the relationship (grace and holy). This integrally summarizes the irreducible gospel of peace for which Paul so lovingly fought, while necessarily fighting against reductionism so uncompromisingly (Col 2:8-10). Despite the reality that longing for wholeness was a

given and intuitive for the human person in Paul's theology, the function of wholeness was never a mere assumption by Paul nor left to the interpretation from human terms.

Paul made definitive this wholeness 'in Christ' (both 'already' and 'not yet') as the integrated function of two inseparable and nonnegotiable aspects of life:

1. "Let the peace of Christ rule *to be the only determinant* in your hearts" (Col 3:15a). The first aspect of wholeness involves by necessity the whole person from inner out constituted by the qualitative function of the heart restored to the qualitative image of God (Col 3:10; 2 Cor 3:10). This whole person is the qualitative function of the new creation (2 Cor 5:17), which Jesus made whole from above (Jn 3:3-7). Consequently anything less and any substitutes defining the person and determining one's function are reductionism (Gal 6:15). Wholeness 'in Christ', however, is neither the whole person in isolation nor the whole person merely associated with other persons.
2. "...to which [peace] indeed you were called in the one body" (Col 3:15b). The second inseparable aspect of wholeness is the integrated function of whole persons from inner out vulnerably involved in the relationships together necessary to be whole. By its very nature, this relational dynamic necessitates the qualitative function of the restored heart opening to one another ("Do not lie to each other..." Col 3:9) and coming together in transformed relationship as one ("In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew..." Col 3:11, cf. Gal 3:26-29), thereby constituting the integrated function of equalized persons from inner out in intimate relationships of "love which binds everything together [*syndeo*], *the inseparable and nonnegotiable relational bonds* in perfect harmony" (*teleitos*, completeness, Col 3:14) for definitive wholeness. This integrated function of whole persons in whole relationships together constitutes the qualitative-relational significance of new covenant relationship together, which Paul made further definitive for the ecclesiology necessary for the whole (2 Cor 5:18; 13:11; Eph 2:14-15; Col 2:10; Rom 8:6) in relational likeness to the relational ontology of the whole of God (just as Jesus prayed for his family, Jn 17:20-26).

Wholeness 'in Christ', therefore, by its very nature necessitates the integrated function of both whole persons in the qualitative image of God and whole relationship together in the relational likeness of God in order to constitute being whole. This interdependent dynamic of wholeness also illuminates the interdependence between the three crucial issues in human life and function:

1. The lens we use to perceive the person (from outer in or inner out) determines how we functionally (not ideally) define ourselves and others.
2. Then, how we function in relationships is generally determined by how we define ourselves and others; and in reflexive interdependence, how our relationships are can determine how we define ourselves.
3. And thus, how both of the above influence, define, even determine how we actually see church and function in relationships at church, in our gatherings together as church.

Each of these corresponds directly to each of the three relational aspects (the relational context, process and progression) which outline Paul's theological framework to wholeness, and they interact together by necessity in order to be whole. The main flow of these issues, from (1) how we define ourselves to (2) how we function in relationships, is the primary correlation of ontology as the determinant of function, definitive for both God and human persons. Paul ongoingly addressed these interdependent crucial issues throughout his corpus in order to be God's whole family, most notably addressed in the churches at Corinth and Galatia and with persons like Peter and Philemon.

Nothing less than and no substitutes for this wholeness integrated Paul's person, thought and theology, as well as his relationships and the function of the church. Therefore, for Paul, God's relational action and the relational outcome of wholeness (peace contingent on grace) is "the mark [*semeion*, distinguishing his purpose] in every letter of mine" (2 Thes 3:17). This was nonnegotiable and accordingly irreducible in the theology of wholeness basic to his systemic framework.

In the systemic framework of Paul's theology, God's creative and communicative actions are always relational actions only for whole relationship together. God's relational action does not impose a template on the human person to reduce human function. By God's relational nature, relationship is never unilateral but necessitates compatible reciprocal response and involvement. On this relational basis, Paul never assumed that the function of wholeness would simply emerge, nor did he leave wholeness' function to the interpretation of human terms. Therefore, as Paul made definitive the integrated function necessary for wholeness, he also made imperative the ongoing redemptive change vitally necessary to turn from reductionism to wholeness, and transition to be whole, live whole and make whole—God's irreducible relational whole on God's nonnegotiable relational terms (Rom 12:1-2).

In the first eleven chapters of Romans, Paul provided the theological clarity for the whole of God's thematic relational response of grace to the human condition. Paul now concentrates on the functional clarity (building on his Galatians letter) necessary to function whole. Based on his theological discourse in the previous chapters, "therefore" (12:1), Paul issues to his family ("brothers and sisters") a nonnegotiable call (*parakaleo*, "appeal to") "to present" (*paristemi*) their persons to God in the necessary reciprocal relational response to God's relational response of grace ("by the mercies of God"). What is this necessary reciprocal relational response?

A variation of this call was first issued to Abram: "I am *El Shaddai*, walk before me and be *tamiym*" (Gen 17:1). Just as Abraham was not reduced to being defined by the perfection of what he did ("blameless"), *paristemi* ("to present," stand before) also should not be reduced to 'what to do' (i.e. "sacrifice") according to religious norms (e.g., *torah* or a reduced popular gospel)—which would essentially be done in front of the veil. Rather Paul's call to *paristemi* was only about 'how to be involved in relationship' according to the whole gospel constituted by God's relational response of grace that removes the veil. Then, "to present, stand before" God in what necessary way? How?

This involves the three basic interrelated issues integral for determining all practice:

1. The integrity and significance of the person presented before others.
2. The quality of what that person communicates to those others in relationship.

3. The depth level of involvement that person engages with those others in those relationships.

These issues are implied in Paul's discourse. In his nonnegotiable call, he is making definitive a further functional paradigm to extend his earlier functional paradigm of "holy and blameless." This added paradigm is necessary both to be whole in reciprocal relationship with God and to live whole in transformed relationships together as God's church family—which is a functional requisite to make whole in the world, just as Jesus prayed about relational wholeness together (Jn 17:21-23).

Paul's nonnegotiable call to his family was simply nothing other than the relational call to be whole, congruent with Jesus' call to his followers first and foremost to be whole. And congruent further with Jesus' prayer for this wholeness for his family (Jn 17:20-26), Paul prayed for the church family (Eph 3:14-19). This was the qualitative significance and relational nature of his theology of wholeness embodied in Jesus' theological trajectory and relational path. This integral theology illuminated from inner out ("has shone in our hearts") the whole knowledge and understanding of the qualitative being and relational nature of the whole of God ("to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God") vulnerably revealed relationally "in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6), the *pleroma* of God (Col 1:19), of whom were created human ontology in the qualitative image and human function in the relational likeness (Acts 17:28; Col 1:15-16), and by whom human persons are restored to whole ontology and function (Col 2:9-10; 2 Cor 3:18; 5:17), nothing less and no substitutes (Gal 6:15; Col 3:9-11). Therefore, what Jesus constituted *in* the incarnation of his own person and, likewise, constituted for our persons (both individually and collectively) *by* his incarnation is the irreducible and nonnegotiable dynamic of wholeness: *the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes* for all life and function that holds them together in their innermost.

Paul's paradigm, conjointly theological ("grace and peace") and functional ("holy and blameless" and "to present..."), makes definitive the wholeness and its function for human life in the cosmos. In his systemic framework composed by God's creative and communicative action, this theology of wholeness conclusively integrates all knowledge and understanding into the wisdom and experiential truth of the whole, that is, the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes of God's qualitative-relational whole embodied by the undivided Jesus—the experiential truth of the whole gospel for the inherent human need and problem. This relational epistemic process and theological discourse do not stop here, however. While Paul's theological systemic framework always involves an eschatological trajectory, there is much more 'already' to unfold further and deeper on this adventure as sojourners together in relational progression to 'not yet'—as Paul shared intimately of his own journey (Phil 3:10-16, cf. Jn 17:3) and kept praying for the church (Eph 1:17-18; 3:19).

## **Is Christ Divided Today?**

The critical issue that Paul exposed with his original question continued to be of importance—whether paid attention to or ignored—throughout church history; and it continues today to be no less important. The twofold issue, however, currently has less to do with the quests for the historical Jesus and involves more the theological trajectory

and relational path of those engaged in biblical study and theology. In relational terms of the Word, can Christ be divided? No. Of course, this was Paul's point in his rhetorical question because he was congruent with Jesus' theological trajectory and relational path. By engaging the Word in any reduction of these terms, namely in referential terms, is Christ divided today? Yes, indeed.

Anything less and any substitute of the whole of God's theological trajectory as Subject disembodies the Word from his relational path. Jesus then is observed for the transmission of information in a narrowed epistemic field shaped by the limits of the probable of what is more familiar to our knowledge, thereby making us less vulnerable to uncertainty, error or simply our human shortcomings. Much of this process goes unnoticed due to the predispositions from our tradition, yet mostly because of our underlying theological anthropology determining our ontology and function in the epistemic process and in relationships, notably with God. These limitations were clearly demonstrated by temple leaders after Jesus deconstructed the temple from their tradition and reconstructed it for the primacy of God's family (Mt 21:12-16). Part of the relational outcome for the temple involved children crying out "Hosanna to the Son of David." Certainly in our tradition we have no problem with this but within the limits of those leaders' epistemic field they strongly objected to the improbable. The improbable was twofold for them: (1) the whole of God's theological trajectory as Subject embodied by the vulnerable presence and relational involvement of Jesus, who to them—within the limits of their tradition—was a mere object transmitting information about God that they disputed; (2), and by implication equally improbable to them—yet based more on their ontology and function rather than their tradition—was essentially that these children knew better than the leaders what they were saying—improbable because the leaders had the key knowledge about God in general and about the messiah in particular from their rabbinic education. Based on an ontology and function defined by what they did and had, there was no way children could make definitive statements about the probable with certainty and without error, much less about the improbable; and they needed to be kept in their place in the socio-religious order based on reduced ontology and function.

Jesus' response to them redefined the person and transformed the existing relational order. He pointed them to God's relational action having "prepared praise" from children (*katartizo*, 21:16). *Katartizo* connotes either to complete or to repair and restore back to completion (cf. Eph 4:12), which in this context points to God's relational action to make whole the person reduced to outer-in distinctions and the relationships necessary to be intimately involved together in God's whole family. This wholeness is signified in the vulnerable openness of these children involved with Jesus in their relational response of trust. This more deeply connects back to when Jesus leaped for joy over his Father's "good pleasure" (*eudokia*, righteous purpose) to disclose himself to the intimate relational involvement of "little children" and not to the "the wise and learned" in what integrally constitutes the whole ontology and function of the new relational order (Lk 10:21, NIV). Jesus' action at the temple fulfilled God's thematic relational response to reduced persons and their relationships "to be apart" to restore them to God's whole. Therefore, any ontology and function defined by what a person does (particularly, performance of roles) and has (namely, resources and those roles) both remain within the limits incompatible with Jesus' action and are essentially complicit with the temple leaders, even though one's tradition may affirm the children's behavior. What unfolds in

this process of reductionism selectively divides Christ to the parts which fit into our limits, and consequently fragments our theology and disjoins theology and function.

The issue of dividing Christ is intensified as Jesus' actions continue. The relational response and relational outcome of Jesus' involvement at the temple cannot be separated and thus to divide Jesus days later from his vulnerable relational involvement in footwashing and the conclusive sacrifice behind the curtain to make whole the "temple" without the veil in the primacy of whole relationship together as God's family. Our tradition today would certainly not separate Jesus from this theological trajectory, though we still could disembody Jesus as Subject from his relational path by an ontology and function that is neither vulnerably involved with the whole of Jesus in intimate relationship together (the qualitative-relational significance of "Follow me," as Peter struggled with) nor ongoingly engaged with the whole of God (notably the Spirit) in the relational epistemic process (as Jesus and Paul made a relational imperative, Jn 16:12-15; 1 Cor 2:13,16). As Jesus made conclusive, the ontology and function of the relationally distant determined the limits of the wise and learned, in contrast and conflict with the whole ontology and function signified by children who were vulnerably involved in Jesus' relational path.

Relational distance emerges from an ontology and function that has not been relational involved with Jesus in his sacrifice behind the curtain for the relational outcome to have the veil removed (as Paul clarified, 2 Cor 3:16-18). Ontology and function with the veil is a critical indicator that our theological trajectory has shifted from Jesus' trajectory, consequently dividing Jesus and fragmenting our theology. Understanding this shift makes explicit this process: the presence of the veil separates Jesus' theological action from his function, such that we can practice relational distance within the limits of our theology without needing to address our incompatibility with the relational path of Jesus' function (e.g. the intimacy of his footwashing). In other words, relational distance disembodies Jesus' theological trajectory from his relational path, and this separation allows us to function in relationships with the veil. Does this relational condition exist, perhaps even prevail, in church and academy today?

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

1. An incomplete Christology tends to be overly christocentric because it has diminished or minimized the whole of God, that is, God's whole ontology and function vulnerably present and relationally involved not only distinguished as Subject but integrally distinguished as Son, Father and Spirit in the relational ontology of the Trinity.
2. Moreover, an incomplete Christology renders Jesus' theological trajectory to a truncated soteriology that may necessarily include what Jesus saved us *from* (sin, yet without sin as reductionism) but insufficiently involve what he saved us *to*—the whole relationship together as God's family in likeness of the relational ontology of the Trinity, whose primacy is 'already' in function only with no veil.

Therefore, an incomplete Christology assumes a reduced ontology and function for both Jesus and those who have claimed this fragmentary gospel. Consequently, what emerges from the Word and unfolds in the incarnation do not go beyond the hermeneutic impasse shaped by the limits of our human terms from the influence of reductionism—the sin of reductionism that a truncated soteriology is insufficient to save us from. If soteriology saved us from the sin of reductionism, by its nature this would necessitate being saved to wholeness.

The uncommon and improbable Jesus embodied in whole interposes in our human context and does indeed challenge us, confront us, pursue us to redeem and transform us epistemologically, hermeneutically, theologically, ontologically and relationally—from inner out to be held together whole in the innermost. Conjointly, the undivided Jesus together with Paul in whole relationship integrally present, communicate and relationally engage us with the *synesis* necessary to take us beyond our critical limits—limits which constrain what can emerge from our theology and function—in order to be whole, theologically, ontologically, functionally and relationally. Whole theology is nothing less and no substitutes, and composes only whole ontology and function both for the persons of God together and for human persons together.

As improbable as this may appear, the intrusion of the Black Swan is inescapable. His presence and involvement continue to pursue us for our vulnerable reciprocal involvement in new relationship together in wholeness.





## Chapter 8      The New Wine and Old Wineskins

**For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything;  
but a new creation is everything!**

Galatians 6:15

The irony of something new is that it creates either joy or controversy, depending on how we feel about the old. Whatever controversy (e.g. sadness, uncertainty or resistance) emerges involves a comparative process between old and new based on a limited epistemic field of what we know or can rationalize. This irony was evidenced when Copernicus (a Catholic canon, 1473-1543) presented a new model of the world—a heliocentric model in which the earth revolves around the sun—to refute the old geocentric model constructed by Ptolemy, and hereby threatened the basic beliefs of the church. Ironically, the new model of the world also remained within a limited epistemic field, despite opening the way for new knowledge from scientific inquiry. The influence of this new approach essentially narrowed down our knowledge just to the probable. This narrowing process was further evidenced by a “Copernican shift” in philosophy, in which theocentricity was replaced by anthropocentricity: “a methodical beginning from the human being, the subject, his reason and freedom.”<sup>1</sup>

The new has always been unsettling in human history, particularly in a comparative process with a limited epistemic field. This was the issue for Nicodemus when Jesus introduced him to the new born from above—from outside the universe and human contextualization. What Nicodemus was introduced to is what Paul distinguished in his Galatians letter above: that is, the *new* is distinguished from what exists or prevails in human context, and therefore cannot be compared or confused with that. Beyond what can be compared in a limited epistemic field, Paul earlier defined this new reality as emerging from Jesus (2 Cor 5:17) and later clarified it theologically as those relationally involved with Jesus in his theological trajectory and relational path (Rom 6:4). What interposed the original creation and existing life from outside the universe—in the relational action of God’s strategic, tactical and functional shifts—was a new creation and its new life for the human condition, yet not without controversy for those remaining within the limits of the old.

In God’s relational action there are complex theological dynamics which converge in Jesus’ theological trajectory and relational path to constitute the whole of God’s thematic relational response of grace to the human condition. The roots, growth, outcome and maturing of the new creation were integrally signified in a metaphor used by Jesus about the new wine (Lk 5:33-39). The focus of new wine provides us with an integral understanding of the new creation and its related issues.

When Jesus initiated the Lord’s supper for the pivotal table fellowship, the “cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood” (Lk 22:20). The disciples had yet to understand the significance of the new covenant for relationship together in the

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Küng, *The Beginning of All Things*, 46.

context of God's kingdom, since immediately after the supper they disputed about which of them was the greatest (Lk 22:24-30, cf. 13:29-30). While Jesus exposed their reductionism and constituted their relationships in the relational wholeness of his kingdom, the disciples evidenced their need to be changed (cf. Mt 18:1-4)—that is, the process of redemptive change in which the old dies so the new rises. This is the significance of the *new* that Jesus anticipated at the earlier table fellowship with the parable of new wine. This parable tends to be used incorrectly to emphasize new forms and practices, but the new is about changed persons experiencing new relationship together (the focus in Lk 5:34-35). Perhaps, at that stage, the disciples only practiced ontological simulation of the new by following just Jesus' example without relational involvement with his whole person. Yet, redemptive change was soon available for them when Jesus fulfilled his salvific work, as the Lord's supper pointed to signifying his sacrifice for the new covenant relationship.

In this new wine table fellowship, Jesus addresses the juxtaposition of "eat and drink" (the new) and "fast and pray" (the old). The shift from the old to the new is more than a paradigm shift but the transformation that emerges from Jesus' anticipated sacrifice behind the curtain for the relational outcome of new relationship together in wholeness with the veil removed. Their new wine table fellowship anticipated their new covenant relationship without the veil such that they could enjoy the vulnerable presence and intimate involvement of Jesus without the constraints of the old. The veil can be understood as the gap between the universe and that which is beyond, the barrier between human limits and the transcendent God, the qualitative distance between the human heart and the heart of God, and the relational distance between the human person and the whole of God. The absence of the veil, therefore, is critical for new covenant relationship together; and the new wine table fellowship is only a function of this new creation.

In his emphasis of the gospel for all people, Luke's Gospel further highlights this process. Various table fellowships Jesus had with persons (Levi, Lk 5:27-31, a prostitute, Lk 7:36-50, Martha and Mary, Lk 10:38-42, Zacchaeus, Lk 19:1-10) disclosed this process of the new wine, yet it also brought controversy. Why all the controversy about the new wine table fellowship that fulfills the human condition? This is a question that needs to be addressed even today amongst ourselves. The answer necessarily involves both how the new is defined and the old is perceived.

## **Seeds of the New Wine**

While the source of the new creation is clearly from outside the universe, the seeds of the new wine are planted in the innermost of human life (Eze 11:19; 36:26). Therefore, the new wine emerges only from inner out and not from outer in (Jer 31:31-34; 2 Cor 3:3). A foretaste of the seeds of this relational dynamic was given when Moses summoned all the Israelites back to covenant relationship together with God (Dt 30). Understood in relational terms, this is a key dynamic underlying either the unfolding of God's blessing (30:16,19) holding life together in the innermost ("heart," from inner out, vv.1-2,6,10,17) for the wholeness in the gospel ("Life," vv.15,19-20), or the only alternative of reductionism ("death," "curses," vv.15,19). In this underlying relational dynamic, we are accountable to distinguish ourselves ("choose life," v.19) in reciprocal

relational response from inner out in the primacy of relationship together (“loving the LORD your God,” v.20). This is a foretaste not only of the new wine but the unsettling it brings: accountability to distinguish ourselves in reciprocal relational response as whole persons in relationship together face to Face with the whole of God.

The unfolding of the blessing from God’s face to bring change for new relationship together in wholeness (*siym* for *shalom*) is the integrating dynamic for the new creation. What then unfolds in the OT is not a history of events, or the narrative of situations and circumstances of a people. Rather what unfolds is the primacy of relationship and the relational progression of God’s thematic relational response to the human condition, and the whole of God’s involvement with the people of God in relationship together (as evident in Moses’ summons above). An outline of God’s thematic relational action and response includes the following:

1. The creation and fragmentation of God’s whole (Gen 2:18; 3:1-7).
2. The human effort to restore and shape God’s whole (Gen 11:1-9).
3. God’s response for whole relationship together (Gen 17:1-2; cf. Ps 25:16; 68:6).
4. Redemption necessary only for relationship together (Ex 6:1-7).
5. Summary of God’s response (Num 6:24-27).

God’s definitive blessing integrates the relational progression unfolding in the OT to the NT. This is what is embodied and fulfilled in the NT; thus the OT is not only about the past or simply old (e.g. superseded) but inseparable in the relational dynamic of the OT *into* the NT. Therefore, the whole gospel is not an NT phenomenon emerging with the incarnation of Jesus and was developed by Paul. The whole gospel originated even before creation and has unfolded in relational progression since (Eph 1:4; Mt 25:34). This outline continues in the NT:

6. Jesus fulfills (*pleroo*) the whole of God’s relational response.
7. The Spirit sent to complete (*pleroo*) God’s relational action.
8. Paul makes whole (*pleroo*) God’s word for the ontology and function of God’s new creation family—in the relational dynamic of Jesus *into* Paul.
9. The Spirit completes God’s eschatological relational conclusion for the new creation (Jn 16:13; 2 Cor 1:22; 3:17; Rev 21:1-5,22).

As God’s relational dynamic unfolded from the OT *into* the NT, it extended from Jesus *into* Paul. Yet, this process cannot be limited to their historical human contexts, for example, Jesus and Paul were both Jews. Here in human contexts, of course, their stories neither end nor, just as important, did their stories begin. This is certainly obvious for Jesus, though this is usually not the focus for the origin of Paul’s story. Jesus and Paul extend us further than their prevailing human contexts to the divine (divine and deity used interchangeably) person of Jesus and Paul’s primordial human person; therefore, they take us deeper to the innermost whole of both God’s divine being and human being, of which Paul was not merely a Jew but more importantly a human person in the image of God. The story of the divine person and being integrally emerges in the story of Jesus, and Paul’s story is the reciprocal emergence of the human person and being. These are seeds of the new wine that cannot remain buried. While each person lived in human contexts, they cannot be limited to those historical frameworks and thus be defined by them. The new wine emerges only from inner out and, at best, can only be simulated

from outer in. Paul's story emerges wholly as the person and being God created from inner out because it converged with Jesus' story to be redeemed, *recreated* and made whole. These are their integral stories for the gospel of wholeness further constituted by Jesus *into* Paul.

God's relational dynamic of both the OT *into* the NT and Jesus *into* Paul always unfolded integrally from inner out with nothing less and no substitutes. The reciprocal response of nothing less and no substitutes for inner out is the critical issue that creates controversy about the new wine and that confronts the old in us. God's relational dynamic from inner out with nothing less and no substitutes gives primacy to the qualitative and relational and, therefore, renders all else secondary—not necessarily unimportant but nevertheless secondary. Anything less and any substitutes from us, even with good intentions (e.g. Peter), make the secondary primary, thereby reducing the primacy of the qualitative and relational and, unintentionally or intentionally, reinforcing the old. By its nature, the seeds of the new wine are planted in the innermost of human life for the emergence of the new wine from inner out in the primacy of new relationship together in wholeness with no veil. What emerges from these seeds is irreducible and nonnegotiable, notably to secondary matters and the old of human contextualization.

As we shift our lens to perceive the convergence of Jesus and Paul along with the Spirit, and understand the relational dynamic that not only integrated them in the gospel but also further unfolded and extended them in the new creation family of God (the church) to the eschatological relational conclusion of the whole of God's thematic relational action, then we gain whole understanding of the human relational condition and the whole of God's thematic relational response since creation to make whole his creation in the innermost. Jesus is the integral person in the relational process to the new wine but not the central figure around which all this revolves theologically and functionally. As the embodied whole of God, Jesus fulfills the Face of God's relational response; Paul is transformed by it and thereby extends its relational dynamic, and the Spirit brings it all to completion. Fragmenting any of their persons or all of them together has critical consequences for the relational outcome of the new wine—namely for the new wine table fellowship in the primacy of relationship together without the veil (signified in Jesus' parable, Lk 5:36-37). When the distinguished Face of God is embodied in whole, and vulnerably present and intimately involved, then his family "eat and drink" in face-to-Face relationship together, not by maintaining relational distance in "fast and pray."

In spite of any controversy, the seeds of the new wine sprout to grow the new wine, whose qualitative and relational expansion cannot be contained in the old.

## **The Identity of the New Wine**

Part of misinterpreting or inadequately understanding the new wine involves again Jesus' relational language. Jesus was not focused on situations and circumstances in life and, for example, being innovative in what we do in those situations and circumstances to maximize them. The seeds of the new wine are planted in the innermost of human life, not in secondary matter. Jesus' primary concern is not about *what* we do but for *who* we are and *how* we live. Therefore, in relational terms Jesus engages the ontology and function of those present (even his critics) and unfolds the whole ontology

and function of the new creation—in contrast and conflict with reduced ontology and function. This contrast in ontology and function was demonstrated in this context by Levi's transformation for the relational outcome of the new wine table fellowship together as family (Lk 5:27-32), further constituted later with Zacchaeus (Lk 19:1-10). The new wine emerges only from the inner out of ontology and function made whole in the innermost. When the new wine emerges from redefined and transformed persons, then its relational outcome is unmistakable in the family relationships together with no veil.

By engaging the ontology and function of those present, Jesus challenged their theological anthropology. In his concern for who they were and how they lived, Jesus addressed their identity. Since Jesus did not separate theology from function, he defined the inseparable interaction between their theological assumptions and identity formation. That is, who we are emerges from our theology, and the identity formed determines how we will live. This underscores the three major issues discussed throughout this study: (1) how we define ourselves, which then determines (2) how we function in relationships, which together further determines (3) how faith and church are practiced. By interposing the new wine into the process, Jesus discloses the theological dynamic that redefines who we are and transforms what we are and how we live. Therefore, both our identity and its relational outcome are contingent on the theological dynamic we assume with Jesus.

Theological anthropology and Christology converge at table fellowship with Jesus, as Peter experienced in Jesus' footwashing. The clarity and depth of the identity emerging from this theological interaction is contingent on the completeness of Christology and its integral influence on theological anthropology. This completeness and integral influence are inseparable from Jesus' own identity—signified as “the bridegroom” at the new wine table fellowship (Lk 5:34). Yet, Jesus' own ontology and function are identified further and deeper than this.

While the embodied Jesus was distinctly Jewish, and his predominant surrounding context was Jewish Galilee and Judea, the person Jesus presented (who and what) and how he interacted at the various levels of social discourse were a function of a *minority identity*, not the dominant Jewish identity. That is to say, Jesus functioned in a qualitatively different way than prevailing Judaism, yet he was fully compatible with OT faith and the teaching of Scripture—not as a religious code but as a relational process with God. He was uniquely both part of and apart from the religious mainstream; the latter was reflected in conflicts with certain religious leaders and by tension with would-be followers, as discussed previously.

One advantage of his minority identity was to clearly distinguish his significance from the prevailing majority—including from the broader context pervaded with Greco-Roman influence. A major disadvantage, however, was to be marginalized (i.e. considered less, or if not intrusive even ignored) by the majority or dominant sector. This disadvantage is problematic at best for his followers and can precipitate an identity crisis, that is, if his followers are not experiencing the truth of who, what and how they are. Yet, the experiential truth of his followers' identity is a relational outcome of embracing Jesus in his identity, the clarity and depth of which become a christological contingency. In other words, the specific identity of who Jesus is (or perceived to be), determines the nature of their involvement together, and will be definitive for who his followers are or become.

The key, and thus the contingency, is who Jesus is. If who Jesus is defines the basis for our identity as his followers, then Jesus by necessity is both the hermeneutical key and the functional key for identity formation. This, of course, makes our life and practice in discipleship contingent on our working Christology—specifically, whether or not it involves the embodied whole of Jesus.

When Jesus said in his formative family prayer “I sanctify myself” (Jn 17:19), this was not about sanctifying his ontology but about sanctifying his identity to function clearly in the human context to distinguish the whole of his ontology. Since Jesus’ ontology was always holy (*hagios*), this sanctifying process was mainly in order that his followers’ ontology and identity may be sanctified (*hagiazō*) in the experiential truth of his full identity (as Jesus prayed). Moreover, since Jesus’ embodied identity did not function in a social vacuum with relational separation, it is vital to understand his sanctified identity for the experiential truth of our identity to be in his likeness and our ontology to be in the image of the whole of God (as Jesus further prayed).

What is Jesus’ sanctified identity? As the embodiment of the holy God, Jesus’ identity functioned in congruence with the origin or source of his ontology. Earlier in his formative family prayer, he indicated the source of his ontology as “I myself am not of the world” (vv.14,16, NIV). “Of” (*ek*) means (here in the negative) out of which his identity is derived and to which he belongs. Yet, this only points to Jesus’ full identity. In his prayer he also defined his function as “in the world” (v.13, cf. Jn 13:1). “In” (*en*) means to remain in place, or in the surrounding context, while “out of” the context to which he belongs, thereby pointing to his minority identity. It is the dynamic interaction of Jesus’ full identity with his minority identity that is necessary for the significance of his sanctified identity. They are conjoined, and if separated our understanding of who, what and how Jesus is is diminished. This fragmentation signifies an incomplete Christology that is consequential for the clarity and depth of identity to emerge.

The conventional perception of the holy is something sacred thus set apart or separate from ordinary things. This is not incorrect since *hagios* denotes separated from ordinary or common *usage*. Yet, this tends to limit our understanding of ‘sanctified’ and to predispose us either to separatist practice or to unattainable practice for function in the world. Jesus’ minority identity was not as a separatist but functioned with relational involvement in the surrounding context of the world, specifically in the common’s context (*koinos*, cf. Mk 7:1-2). His minority identity, however, was a minority not because it was quantitatively unique or different but rather due to his qualitative depth and relational clarity distinguished from the common’s function—always while in the common’s context (cf. Mk 7:15). The qualitative depth and relational clarity of his minority identity could only function as an outcome of the dynamic interaction with his full identity.

As Jesus prayed, without the function of his full identity there is no truth and function of his minority identity; and without the functional truth of his minority identity there is no experiential truth of his full identity. This interaction is a function of relationship, not doctrine, piety or ethics, a function of a relational process not a missional paradigm. Accordingly, whole understanding of this interaction emerges from a relational epistemic process, not a conventional referential epistemic process. Sanctified identity is the relational outcome of this ongoing relational dynamic, the function of

which is the ontology of the whole and holy God embodied in Jesus and extended in his followers by the Spirit.

In relational terms and not referential, Christian identity must by its nature be qualitatively rooted in and ongoingly relationally based on Jesus' identity. On this irreducible and nonnegotiable basis, Christology is basic to our identity; and any reduction of our Christology renders our identity to a lack of clarity (as "light") and depth (as "salt"), consequently precipitating an identity crisis ("no longer good for anything," Mt 5:13). Therefore, questions like those by the disciples ("Who is this?" Mk 4:41) and Paul on the Damascus road ("Who are you?" Acts 9:5: cf. Jn 8:25) need to be answered in complete (*pleroo*) theological determination for the answer to be definitive of the qualitative and relational significance of both the incarnation and the gospel. The disciples struggled with this relational epistemic process, while Paul received the epistemic clarification and hermeneutic correction to engage the whole of Jesus for relationship together without the veil—the relational outcome of the new wine redefining who Paul was and transforming what he was and how he lived.

Directly related to the above questions are questions such as "Where are you?" (Gen 3:9) and "What are you doing here?" (1 Kg 19:9,13). These are questions from God involving our theological anthropology (discussed earlier in chap. 2), and related theological assumptions of Christology, that are critical for identity formation. Both sets of questions need to be answered to define the depth of our theology (as signified in "Do you also wish to go away?" Jn 6:67), and to determine the depth of our reciprocal relational response (as signified in "do you love me?" Jn 21:16). Our response emerges from the primary identity of who we are, and the identity we form emerges from our theology, that is, the interaction between our theological anthropology and Christology. The ontology and function that result are contingent on this theological process.

Leading up to their new wine table fellowship, Levi certainly had not knowingly assessed his theology, but he was taken through this theological process by meeting Jesus. He had a critical identity issue to address in the presence of Jesus' whole person, who relationally disclosed an ontology and function in contrast and conflict to his. Since Levi's identity was a product of a comparative social process defining persons by what they do, as a tax collector he was relegated to the bottom of the social ladder—unable to climb higher, even if he had had more wealth and influence as a chief tax collector (e.g. Zacchaeus). This was consequential both for how others defined and thus saw Levi and for how Levi defined and saw himself. The underlying theological anthropology of this reduced ontology and function is based on the *ontological lie* rooted in the human condition: the value or worth of persons measured by what they do and have is always relative in a comparative process that otherwise renders persons to a social position of *less* (cf. 1 Cor 4:6-7), thereby defining their condition in ontological deficiency (cf. Gen 3:5). In other words, this is human identity based on a *deficit model* of being *less* than the prevailing standard, or unless one can assume a position of *more* that would only be relative to an inevitable comparison to someone else having more (cf. 2 Cor 10:12). The deficit model is the prevailing human alternative for identity formation and shaping relationships together that ongoingly needs to make up for an *identity deficit*—the ontological lie for human ontology and function signifying reductionism and its counter-relational work, both of which are in contrast and conflict with Jesus' identity of whole ontology and function. His disciples clearly demonstrated this deficit dynamic by arguing

among themselves over who was the greatest (Lk 9:46), even at their pivotal table fellowship (Lk 22:24), by asking Jesus for the answer (Mt 18:1), by the request of James and John (Mk 10:35-37) and their mother (Mt 20:20-21), all of which caused further tension among the disciples (Mt 20:24; Mk 10:41). Whether or not Levi participated in this later, he openly addressed his critical identity issue by responding to Jesus' whole person in reciprocal relationship together, therefore engaging the theological process that redefined who he was and transformed what he was and how he lived. Levi's ontology and function was no longer relegated to an identity deficit based on the ontological lie, and clearly became the identity of the new wine.

The above dynamics evidence that the new wine identity does not emerge merely from having a belief system in Jesus. The human context ongoingly exerts influence and pressure on our belief system to shape it based on the ontological lie, and consequently to construct our identity from a deficit model and to shape our relationships accordingly. If our theological anthropology is not clearly distinguished from the human context's influence by the integral influence of our complete Christology, our ontology and function are subject to broad interpretation or determination. The following discussion further evidences contextual influence.

The basic issue underlying our knowledge to define the origin of the human person and to determine how persons function was raised to Job by God (Job 38:2,36). The extent of epistemology depends on its determining basis—for example, a prevailing epistemic process or a relational epistemic process. Job learned that he spoke beyond what his knowledge warranted, resulting in ontological deficiency or ontological insufficiency (42:5). This issue also needs application today to human ontology and what can be said about origin and function.

**Origin:** Developments in molecular biology have further illuminated the evolutionary process with knowledge of the human genome. This has established the evolutionary development and make up of the human species, casting serious doubt about Adam and Eve as the first humans from which all others came. Theistic evolution has been proposed, with God as creator of all organisms who used the evolutionary process to bring forth humans. This view can be affirmed with a major addition that would be compatible with Scripture and congruent with God's creative and salvific actions. This major addition is to distinguish the quantitative human body and the qualitative human person. Unlike classic dualism, however, this addition involves wholeness, in contrast with some reductionism fragmenting the whole person. That is, the quantitative human body and genome developed in the evolutionary process, which God used at some point to create the human person by enacting on the human body a quality from God's likeness to make whole the human person from inner out. It is this qualitative-quantitative human person, created in the image and likeness of the whole of God, who cannot be accounted for by a mere quantitative evolutionary process, and whose function cannot be explained by merely quantitative measures without the consequence of ontological deficiency or insufficiency. In other words, the quantitative human body and genome cannot be separated from this distinguished quality and still have the human person. When the qualitative is not integral to the quantitative life of humans, the consequence is to reduce the defining integrity of the whole person, therefore fragmenting the person's wholeness to something less than whole—for example, parts without integration and coherence.



This deficit dynamic underlies the ontological lie that transposes into ontological deficiency and an identity deficit. Moreover, this consequence not only impacts the individual human but also, and equally significant, affects their relationships with one another—the consequence from both the influence of reductionism and its counter-relational work. These combined consequences compose the human condition, the human relational condition. The relational consequence may not be measured in quantitative terms but in the reduction of quality in relational involvement and in the absence of wholeness in relationships together, which modern communication on the Internet has compounded exponentially. The wholeness in relationships together signifies both the qualitative image of the whole of God and the relational likeness of the relational ontology of the Trinity, which are created in the human person to distinguish the whole ontology of persons and to determine their unique function to be whole as qualitative persons bonded in relationships together in their innermost—nothing less and no substitutes. Anything less and any substitute of this wholeness involve the human condition and the human problems emerging from such reductionism in the human context, and therefore are in contrast and conflict with the new wine identity.

**Function:** The human genome finds its outworking in the human brain. Neuroscience has been accumulating extensive knowledge of brain function. The science involved in the origin and function of the human body is neither good news nor bad news, and Christians need to understand this. How this knowledge is used, however, can be good or bad, depending on what it defines and determines. Applied to human function, for example, such knowledge can be used for positive gains to extend human longevity, or it can be used for unnecessary intervention to prolong physical life simply because medical science can, without any significance or meaningful gain. Whenever such knowledge reduces the human person to a quantitative human body, what is defined and what is determined from that definition cannot be whole, only ontologically deficient. The results from any ontological insufficiency at best can only be ontological simulation and epistemological illusion of the whole person created in God’s image and the whole relationship together created in God’s likeness. The quantitative can never account for the qualitative, though, as previously discussed, neuroscience research does point in the direction of the qualitative, for example, with increasing awareness of feelings and right hemisphere brain function in contrast to the left hemisphere. The quantitative separated from the qualitative can never be whole, which some neuroscience research is discovering about the inherent human need and problem for quality human relationships. Inadvertently, neuroscience has illuminated the bad news about sin as reductionism, not in rational or moral terms but in cognitive terms exposing the negative effects of reductionist practices—albeit by neuroscience’s use of reductionist means. The quantitative illumination of the sin of reductionism is good news both for further understanding the human condition and for helping us to understand the full significance of the Good News of God’s creative and salvific actions. The use of such quantitative knowledge in interaction with, and thus with epistemic humility to, God’s communicative action is compatible with God’s self-revelation in nature and in Scripture, and on this basis is congruent with the relational context and process by which the whole of God is vulnerably present and relationally involved with human persons and all of creation, the human genome included. Anything less and any substitutes cannot be whole but only

fragment human ontology to a deficit condition, and reductionism's counter-relational work further fragments human function to be apart from the relationships together necessary to be whole in the innermost to fulfill the human relational condition and need.

The good news for the human person, and thus the human condition, is the whole knowledge that God communicates—"Listen now, and I will speak" (just as Job experienced, Job 42:4)—and further interposes to our relational condition for the change necessary for new relationship together in wholeness without the veil. This was Paul's pivotal experience on the Damascus road. Accordingly, in Paul's theological forest *pleroma* (complete) Christology is God's relational dynamic of grace and *agape* relational involvement from which emerges conclusively *pleroma* soteriology. Paul's antecedents from the Jesus tradition—the new covenant in Christ's blood (1 Cor 11:2,25), being saved by Christ's death and resurrection (1 Cor 15:2-4)—are illuminated further and deeper by Paul with epistemic humility (cf. 1 Cor 11:23; Gal 1:12; Eph 3:3-4). Christ's death for Paul was less about the sacrifice for only saving from sin, as necessary as that was, and more about his relational involvement saving *to* with his sacrifice removing the veil for intimate relationship (cf. 2 Cor 3:16; Eph 2:14,18). The miracle of the resurrection for Paul certainly involved the historical fact, physical reality and propositional truth of Christ rising from death, but even more significant, it deeply involved the new covenant relationship of wholeness together with God as his new creation family (1 Cor 15:17-19). As Paul made clear to the church at Corinth, faith as trust functioning in reciprocal relational response to Christ is not futile because the face of Christ is wholly involved relationally for the redemptive means of being saved from reductionism to fulfill God's relational purpose of being saved to God's relational whole together. Those who belong to Christ have risen together with him to become "his body, the *pleroma* of him who *pleroo* [completes, fulfills] all in *pasin*, the whole" (Eph 1:23; cf. Rom 12:4-5).

The irreducible and nonnegotiable identity of the new wine emerges entirely from the inner out of ontology and function made whole in the innermost. As the new wine emerges from persons redefined in who they are and transformed in what they are and how they live, the relational outcome is clearly distinguished in the intimate relationships with no veil, belonging together in the innermost as the new creation family. This relational outcome is rooted in the fulfillment of Jesus' formative family prayer for those who belong to him: "I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one" (*teleioo* from *teleios*, i.e. whole, God's relational whole, Jn 17:23). Therefore, the definitive relational outcome of relationally belonging to the *pleroma* of God is the ontology of God's new creation family. And the ontological identity of this new creation 'already' is the church family, "so that the world may believe...may know..." (17:21, 23; cf. Eph 3:5-12).

Paul provided further theological and functional clarity for the depth of the ontological identity of God's new creation family. As the relational connection with Christ is completed by the reciprocal means of relational trust, the following ontological and relational changes take effect. From relational involvement in the process of redemptive change in being "baptized into Christ" (*eis*, dynamic relational movement to the person of Christ), the relational outcome is the new identity of who we are and whose we are (Gal 3:26-27). For those who now relationally "belong to Christ" (3:29), Paul

clarifies this new identity (4:1-7). The primary identity of who we are emerging from the relational outcome of adoption involves both of the following: (1) the ontological change from inner out essentially of a minor enslaved to reductionism (4:3) to the ontology of sons/daughters (4:6a; 3:26) by the redemptive relational work of the Son (4:4-5); moreover, the new identity involves (2) the relational change in God's family from a mere place as minor/slave to the relational position of son/daughter and hence an heir (4:7; 3:29). These definitive changes together clearly compose the new identity not only of *who* we are but conjointly *whose* we are.

Given the new identity of those relationally belonging to Christ—signifying the ontology and relational changes of who and whose we are—nothing less and no substitutes can define our ontology or determine our function. This new identity does not emerge from merely belonging to God's family theologically, or by the mere certainty of any truth-claims. Nor does it emerge from merely having faith/belief(s), or by mere membership and participation in a church—both of which can be engaged by reduced ontology and function. As Paul made unequivocal, “so you *are* no longer...but *are*...” (4:7), that is, *eimi*, verb of existence here, not a mere copula, in second person singular, as a result definitive for each person belonging to Christ.

Moreover, when Paul said “no longer” (*ouketi*), he also means no further, not any more and not again in reference to previous or other identities (as in Gal 4:8-9). This points to the reality in human life that there are multiple sources/inputs which go into the ongoing process of identity formation. Identity is not a static condition defining who persons are, or a singular signifier determining what and how persons are. Various influences, both past and present, shape human identity, making it fluid, transient, ambiguous, elusive or even amorphous. Therefore, what is necessary for identity not to be fragmented—which defines and determines persons by reductionism—is for the primary identity to be rooted and ongoingly involved in the definitive whole of Jesus' sanctified identity in order for the innermost of the person to be made whole from inner out. This innermost is the person's ontology, whose function from inner out is signified only by the heart for the involvement necessary to live whole with no veil (cf. 2 Cor 3:18). It is this ongoing involvement of the person's whole ontology and function from inner out that constitutes the ontological identity, which is irreducible and nonnegotiable to other sources/inputs/influences having secondary parts in a person's identity formation. This process points to Jesus disclosing decisively that those rooted in and ongoingly involved with him have wholeness despite facing the world's reductionism (*thlipsis*, Jn 16:33).

## **New Wine Identity Formation**

The new wine identity—of persons redefined in who they are and transformed in what they are and how they function—involves a process of identity formation that distinguishes this identity from common incomplete and fragmentary identities. For the wholeness of his followers, Jesus made definitive the integral process of identity formation necessary for the clarity and depth of identity to emerge, develop and mature. The outline of this process was clearly distinguished in the beginning of his major discourse in the Sermon on the Mount: the beatitudes (Mt 5:3-12).

When our identity adequately informs us of who, what and how we are, there is opportunity to experience wholeness and the satisfaction to be whole—which Jesus points to in the beatitudes with “blessed” (*makarios*, fully satisfied). The problem, however, with most identities in general and Christian identities in particular is that these identities only inform us of who and what we *should* be, and thus how we should act. This merely defines what we need to do in order to be associated with that identity without defining our integral ontology; this then becomes a process of trying to measure up to that identity so that we can achieve definition for our self—an ongoing effort to erase an identity deficit. The theological and functional implications of such a process for Christian identity are twofold: First, it counters and hereby nullifies God’s relational work of grace, and then in its place, it in effect constructs human ontology from self-determination.

As we discuss identity formation, it seems necessary to distinguish identity formation of the new wine from identity *construction*. Identity construction describes the human process of quantifying an identity for a measure of uniformity or conformity to some standard (cf. Gen 11:1-4). New wine identity formation involves a qualitative growth and maturation in a cooperative relational process with God for wholeness (cf. Gen 17:1-2). It is problematic if any identity constructions substitute for or are imposed on this identity formation. Therefore, since the ontology of the whole person is a vital necessity for the identity of Jesus’ followers as the new wine, it may require identity deconstruction of many Christian identities to get to this ontology. While any identity deconstruction would not be on the basis of postmodernist assumptions, it has a similar purpose to discredit ontological simulation and epistemological illusion. Yet, this would not be merely to expose reductionism but to go beyond it for the relational whole of God distinguishing new ontology and function. This describes Jesus’ major relational discourse with his disciples and the whole context of the Sermon on the Mount.

New identity formation involves the necessary functional convergence of identity with righteousness and human ontology in a dynamic process based on God’s grace in order to go beyond the reductionism exposed (deconstructed) by Jesus to be whole. This integral process, summarized in the Sermon on the Mount (discussed initially in chap. 5), is composed by the following: To go beyond reductionism (Mt 5:20), our righteousness necessitates an identity of clarity and depth (5:13-16), which requires the ontology of the whole person; and, in reflexive action, the significance of this process necessitates righteousness to make it functional, which further needs wholeness of identity for our righteousness ongoingly to go beyond reductionism; therefore, this must by nature involve the human ontology created in the image and likeness of the whole of God—all of which are constituted by the whole of God’s relational work of grace, functionally signifying the relational basis of whose we are. This process of integrally interrelated function is crucial for our understanding and practice, which Jesus illuminated in the beatitudes to establish his followers in his call to be redefined, transformed and made whole.

The beatitudes taken together establish the whole identity of his followers. I affirm, rather than each beatitude understood independently, they constitute interdependent functional characteristics of the basic identity for what, who and how his followers are. Joined together in dynamic function, the beatitudes form the outline of the integral process of identity formation. Not surprisingly, Jesus began the process by

focusing immediately on the ontology of the person and giving us no basis to define our self by what we do or have.

Though Jesus was not explicit in the beginning of his discourse about the irreducible importance of the heart, the function of the heart underlies everything he said and all that we do (e.g. Mt 5:28; 6:21). The innermost person, signified by the heart, constitutes the qualitative distinguishing the person, and we cannot assess what and who a person is based merely on aspects from the outer-in person—notably what we do and have (cf. Mt 15:10-20). Yet, since the latter perception is a prevailing perceptual-interpretive framework for human ontology, whole Christian identity forms essentially by beginning with the process of redefinition of the person from the inner out. When we functionally address redefining our own person from the inner out, however, we encounter a major difficulty. Once we get past any resistance, what is it that we honestly see of our person as we look inside? This can become an issue we may rather dance around.

In the first three beatitudes (Mt 5:3-5) Jesus provides us with the critical steps in the process of identity formation as the new wine, that is, to functionally establish his followers in his call to be redefined, transformed and made whole, therefore clearly distinguished from reductionism.

**First Beatitude:** When we honestly look inside at our person, Jesus said the natural effect would be realization of the condition signified by “poor in spirit” (v.3). This condition is deeper than an identity deficit from a comparative process. “Poor” (*ptochos*) denotes abject poverty and utter helplessness; therefore this person’s only recourse is to beg. Just to be poor (*penes*) is a different condition from *ptochos* because this person can still, for example, go out to work for food. *Penes* may have little but *ptochos* has nothing at all. *Ptochos*, Jesus immediately identifies, is the true condition of our humanity, which precludes self-determination and justification. This is human ontology after the Fall, yet not the full ontology of the whole person which still includes the viable image of God. Without the latter, *ptochos* would be a worthless person, and this is not Jesus’ focus on the ontology of the person. Nevertheless, *ptochos* does prevail in human ontology, which clearly makes evident the need for God’s relational work of grace. This juxtaposition is what we need to accept both about our person and from God—not only theologically but functionally because anything less than *ptochos* counters God’s grace, for example, by efforts to measure up, succeed or advance on the basis of what we do and/or have. By necessity, however, the *ptochos* person ongoingly appropriates God’s relational work of grace to relationally belong to the whole of God’s family, as Jesus said, “theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Yet, *ptochos* only begins the process of forming this new identity.

Most of us are resistant to operate with this self-definition, especially if we define ourselves by what we do or have. We may be able to accept this “spiritually” in an isolated identity but for practical everyday function in the real world, to live with this self-definition is problematic. While any alternatives and substitutes masking our true condition may make us feel less vulnerable, we will never be able to dance completely around the truth of our condition and this reality of human ontology.

In this first critical step in the formation of the new wine identity, Jesus provided no place or option for self-determination. Who and what we are as his followers is determined only by the function of relationship with him as whose we are; and how we

are in relationship together is only on his terms, which constitutes the relationship and thus our identity in God's grace. By this, Jesus discloses unmistakably that God's grace demands *ptochos* of our person (the honesty of heart) for ongoing relationship together to be whole—the same honesty of heart he strategically disclosed to the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:23-24).

**Second Beatitude:** Since the ontology of the person (from inner out) is never static, Jesus extends its dynamic function in this next critical step. When we are indeed *ptochos*, our honest response to our true condition is to “mourn” (*pentheo*, lament, grieve, deep sadness, v.4). If we accept our condition as *ptochos*—and not merely perceive it as *penes*, that is, a deficit needing to be overcome—then mourning would be the natural response of our heart. Yet, too often we insulate ourselves from such experience, though unknowingly we may get depressed. The tension involves issues of self-worth, which revolve around *ptochos* in terms of how we see and feel about ourselves. We tend not to recognize this matter because our heart is unaware of experiencing *pentheo*, likely only feeling insecure.

In this second critical step in the process of identity formation, the person is taken further and deeper toward being redefined, transformed and made whole. This necessitates the functional ontology of the whole person, contrary to a reductionist practice which insulates the heart or keeps it at a distance of diminished involvement. The dynamic necessary is to open our heart and expose the *pentheo* by fully acknowledging, admitting and confessing our *ptochos*—which may not only be about one's own condition but also the condition of humanity in general.

The ironic influence of reductionism on human ontology is the simulation and illusion to be strong, self-determined, self-sufficient, and accordingly not in need of redefinition and transformation. In contrast and conflict, persons who *pentheo* address reality without reducing the person, yet not in self-pity but by vulnerably opening their person to God. In this vulnerable relational process, their whole person is presented to God for comfort, healing, cleansing, forgiveness, and deeper involvement, so they can experience God's intimate response—as Jesus assured “they will be comforted” (*parakaleo*, term used for every kind of call to a person which is intended to produce a particular effect). As Jesus further relationally disclosed ongoingly in his sanctified identity, the whole of God is relationally vulnerable to our humanity, and we must (*dei*) relationally reciprocate in likeness with what and who we are in our innermost. Functional intimacy in relationship involves hearts open to each other and coming together. Intimacy with God, therefore, necessitates by nature that our heart functions in its true humanity (as “in spirit and truth”)—nothing less and no substitutes. The process from the first beatitude to the second engages this qualitative relational involvement. And these two critical steps involve the relational moments we extend our person to God the most openly and hereby give him the best opportunity to be with us—*parakaleo* not from outer in but for our ontology inner out.

Since identity is rooted in whose we are, its formation is contingent on the ongoing function of this relationship—its further and deeper growth. While *pentheo* defines only a degree of experience relative to each person—no set quantity of sackcloth and ashes—God does not let us remain in a state of gloom and perhaps fall into depression or despair. God's thematic relational action never unilaterally allows for

human ontology to remain in reductionism but only functions to make us whole. As Jesus did with tax collectors, a prostitute and others lacking wholeness, he extends God's relational work of grace to us in our helplessness, pursues us vulnerably in the poverty of our humanity, redeems us (the *parakaleo* mainly from the common's enslavement of reductionism) back to his family (on the terms of the Uncommon), therefore transforms our whole person for intimate relationship with the Father, and formally by covenant (through adoption) constitutes us as his very own children permanently belonging to the whole of God's family ("theirs is the kingdom of heaven"). This relational process defines God's thematic relational response only as family love—a process based on the whole of God's relational work of grace, which continues as the basis for God's new creation family to experience now even further and deeper in whole relationship together as the church until eschatological completion of God's whole. This operationalizes the relational progression constituted by Jesus in his tactical shift, the ongoing function of which he summarized in this major discourse.

**Third Beatitude:** The experiential truth of this relational reality is not usually functional in a linear process as it is reflexive (back and forth). God's thematic relational response and ongoing vulnerable involvement with our humanity, most vulnerably disclosed in the incarnation, demonstrate the faithfulness and righteousness of the whole of God whom we can count on to trust intimately in reciprocal relational process. As we go up and down, in and out in our *ptochos* and *pentheo*, the initial relational experiences of God's family love rightfully conclude with only one understanding of our person. This understanding forms the core function of the redefined self, the new identity of the transformed in Christ.

In the interrelated critical steps involved in this process of self-understanding, Jesus defined the core function forming the identity of his followers: "the meek" (*praus*, v.5). While the sense of meekness should not be separated from *ptochos*, *praus* (*prautes*, noun) denotes to be gentle—that is, not hard or resistant to live as one truly is. *Praus* involves heart function conjoined with overt behavior to demonstrate what and who one is. Contrary to most perceptions of "meek," this function is not timid weakness but humble strength and truth of character based on one's true condition. How this specifically would be demonstrated or expressed can be defined best by the various behaviors of Jesus with others. Whatever its form in a particular situation, the most significant issue is that there is no lie or illusion about one's person in being meek (including being humble).

Yet, meekness is not so much a characteristic of the Christian person, especially by which to be defined and thus to behave. The latter only simulates humility. Rather it is, most importantly for the whole person, a function of relationship both with God and with others. Being meek is a core function in relationship with God for two reasons: (1) with no illusions about self-determination and justification (*ptochos*) and with response to one's *pentheo*, the only basis and ongoing functional base for the person's life and practice is the whole of God's relational work of grace; and (2) on this basis, relationship together is only on God's terms, hence irreducible and nonnegotiable by human persons. God does not work by any human agenda, notably for self-determination and justification. Being meek is this core function involving the relational process of turning

away from the falsehood in self-autonomy and entrusting one's whole person to the grace of God; this is basic not only for conversion but for ongoing sanctification.

Furthermore, who and what this meek-humble person is and how this person functions also must by nature be involved in relationship with others in two qualitatively distinguished ways: (1) with God's grace the basis for the person, there is no basis for comparison with others, for climbing any human ladder or one-upmanship, and accordingly no basis for stratified relationships which reduce the whole person, but rather a qualitative loving involvement with others (without employing reductionist distinctions) in the relationships necessary for wholeness; and (2) therefore this relational involvement allows no basis for the function of individualism which gives priority to the individual agenda and reduces the primacy of the intimate relationships necessary to be God's whole. *Praus* then is a clear function only of ontological humility, relational humility as well as epistemic humility (cf. Paul's critique of the church, 1 Cor 4:7; 8:1-2).

Meekness is a direct relational outcome of the first two critical steps (beatitudes) signifying the above functions of relationships. There is no theological or functional basis for any other self-assessment, regardless of how much one does, has or accomplishes. Yet, we encounter difficulty when lies or illusions keep us from facing our *ptochos* or experiencing our *pentheo*. In strong contrast, being meek also signifies a functional admission of one's enslavement—that is, not being free from some form of self-sufficiency (even in a collective context), self-determination (even with a theology of grace), or self-centeredness (even in acts of service)—and one's need for redemption.

Jesus said the meek “will inherit the earth.” This is not a result of what they do but only a relational outcome constituted in relationship with Jesus and by his relational work of grace. These beatitudes have roots in the promise from the OT covenant, yet Jesus was not taking us back into that context but extending and fulfilling God's thematic relational action. The meek's inheritance is not the earth per se (or land, cf. Ps 37:11), with a sense of redistribution for the poor and dispossessed. This inheritance is not about a place, situations or circumstances. This is about the distinguished context of God's whole and dwelling, hereby the relational context in which their inheritance is the whole of God for relationship—just as it was for the OT priests and Levites (Nu 18:20, Dt 10:9). The meek (as the poor in spirit, and so forth) are “blessed” (*makarioi*), that is, fully satisfied, because God is vulnerably present and intimately involved in their life—the relational outcome of God's definitive blessing (Num 6:24-26). Therefore, this is about well-being and wholeness experienced as the relational outcome of God's covenant love and faithfulness, of Jesus' vulnerable grace and truth (Jn 1:14), that is, as with the Trinity who is intimately involved together in their “spirit and truth”—nothing less and no substitutes. This blessed relational condition cannot be reduced merely to happiness about one's situation and circumstances; everyday life is not reduced to our situations and circumstances. In this redefinition of self, the irreducible importance of our whole person (from inner out) and the nonnegotiable priority of intimate relationship together become the perceptual-interpretive framework for what we pay attention to. And the full relational significance of being *makarioi* is the ongoing relational outcome of these and the rest of the beatitudes in the integral process of new wine identity formation.

Reductionism is an ongoing challenge to this process, from which we cannot underestimate our need for redemption. The issue of inheritance makes this evident, raising the question of inheriting eternal life. Inheritance was not possible in the ancient



world from a position of enslavement. Redemption (payment made for one's release) was necessary to change this relational condition, which was the critical error of relationship made by the rich ruler who pursued Jesus (Mk 10:17, discussed in chap. 5). Merely being freed, however, was insufficient to establish a relational position necessary for inheritance, which was the critical error of relationship likely made by the lawyer who queried Jesus (Lk 10:25). The redemptive history of the whole of God's thematic action has had a singular trajectory, which Jesus' vulnerable redemptive work constitutes and the Spirit brings to completion. This purpose is the trinitarian relational process of family love composing a new covenant (by fulfilling both the charter of the original covenant and its relational significance): relationship together as the whole of God's family, in which we permanently belong as God's very own children through adoption (Jn 1:12-13; 8:31-36, Gal 4:4-5, Eph 1:3-5). This new creation family is the relational outcome of the relational progression fulfilling Jesus' formative family prayer (Jn 17:20-26), and the complete soteriology of what he saved us *to*. Without the process of adoption constituted in Jesus' functional shift—however this process is interpreted that composes the relational reality of becoming the sons and daughters of God (cf. 2 Cor 6:18)—we would be in a relational position of enslavement, or merely redeemed for no relational purpose and outcome, consequently leaving unresolved the human relational condition “to be apart” from God's whole.

While reductionism may not discount the theology of adoption, it either separates the purpose of redemption from it, consequently using the concept of redemption merely to promote the freedom and autonomy of individualism, which becomes functionally enslaving. Or reductionism creates an illusion of being free, masking any enslavement. Meekness (in process with *ptochos* and *pentheo*), however, by signifying a vulnerable admission of one's enslavement and need for redemption, becomes the functional clarity of the relational posture necessary for submission to the God who can redeem us from our enslavement and make us whole. The alternative is a false sense of strength or freedom, or the lack of humility, exhibited by those who avoid acknowledging their enslavement, and thus think they are free (e.g. Jn 8:33). Without meekness there is no relational involvement with God's relational work of grace on God's terms, only renegotiated terms; without God's relational work of grace there is no adoption; without adoption there is no relational position in the whole of God's family, much less an inheritance. In relational terms, the seeds of the new wine have not sprouted for the emergence of the new wine identity, whole ontology and function.

For Paul, the relational dynamic of adoption involves the integrated outcome of belonging as possession, relationship and ontology. Those adopted ‘in Christ’ now belong to God, who “put his seal on us” (2 Cor 1:22), that is, the identification of ownership as God's possession (*peripoiesis*, Eph 1:14). More importantly for Paul, in distinguishing God's relational whole from the human shaping of reductionism, those adopted into God's family also relationally “belong to Christ,” the *pleroma* of God, thus relationally belonging to the whole of God (belong rendered in the genitive case, 1 Cor 3:23; Gal 3:29; 4:4-7). Equally important in this relational dynamic, since “Christ belongs to God” both relationally and ontologically, by relationally belonging (not ontologically) to Christ those adopted also relationally belong to each other as well as belong ontologically to each other in wholeness together (1 Cor 3:22; 12:15-16; Rom 7:4; 12:5, belong also rendered by *ginomai*, verb of becoming, and *eimi*, verb to be).

What unfolds in this theological dynamic ‘in Christ’ is the integrated outcome of belonging. The emphasis of the theology of belonging for Paul in his theological forest is on relational belonging and ontological belonging to signify the new covenant relationship and the new creation. Relational belonging dynamically interacts with ontological belonging in the new creation, and their interaction is the relational outcome of the full soteriology in being saved to wholeness in God’s family together (2 Cor 3:18; 5:16-17; Col 3:10-11). Moreover, conjoined with the integrated outcome of belonging, the relational outcome of adoption in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes (the theological dynamic of wholeness) is the relational ontology and identity of the new creation of God’s family as the church (Eph 1:22-23).

Hence, adoption is not a mere doctrinal truth in which to secure our faith. Adoption must by its nature be an experiential truth, which is an ongoing function of reciprocal relationship together with relational responsibilities that the Spirit cooperatively brings to wholeness (cf. Rom 8:6,15-16). And any functional enslavement practiced by Jesus’ followers (notably Peter) counters this experience of intimate relationship together as family. Therefore, the function of adoption is the very heart of the relational significance for our ontology, and accordingly our identity—who and what we are, and whose we are—which makes definitive the relational posture of meekness as *the core function*. Further implications of adoption will be discussed in later chapters.

**Fourth Beatitude:** Identity formation is an ongoing process of growth and maturation, which is implied in this beatitude. The relational progression for Jesus’ followers implicit in the beatitudes leads us to the next identity function for growing the new wine: “hunger and thirst for righteousness” (v.6). The experience of the first three beatitudes, establishing vulnerable involvement with Jesus who takes us to the Father to become a part of his very own family, provides the relational process and the context of family to understand the fourth beatitude.

In contrast and conflict with reductionism, righteousness is not a mere conformity of actions to a given set of legal and ethical standards but about the relational responsibility which is in keeping with reciprocal relationship between God and his people (his family). Going beyond reductionism necessitates the shift in righteousness from merely exhibiting character traits and practicing an ethic of right and wrong—our common notions about integrity and being upright—to the distinctly deeper qualitative involvement of what, who and how to be in relationships—both with God and with others. New identity formation of Jesus’ followers necessitates this same shift and becomes inexorably integrated with the process to righteousness for the clarity and depth of their identity. Therefore, this fourth identity function is not a pursuit about ourselves, though it certainly further and more deeply constitutes our ontology and identity as his family in an essential process of transformation.

Our definitive and functional understanding of righteousness comes from the righteous God’s action in the context and process of relationship. Righteousness is no static attribute or quality of God but always a dynamic relational function. Righteousness is the immanent relational function of God which all other persons can invariably count on from and with God. By the nature of being righteous, this distinguished involvement is the only way God acts in relationship; moreover, by the nature of being righteous, this

ongoing relational involvement is the only way God functions. That is, righteousness is intrinsic to the ontology of what, who and how God is.

“Hunger and thirst” represent the primary acts to sustain life and to help it grow, which is a metaphor for this basic pursuit. To pursue righteousness is to pursue how God is, and accordingly to pursue what and who God is—that is, the ontology of God. In other words, this ongoing pursuit of righteousness is the basic relational process of pursuing God and of becoming like God in relational function, not in ontology (e.g. by some deification). This involves the process of transformation (cf. Eph 4:24) of our whole person (from inner out) to the image of the Son (*metamorphoo*, 2 Cor 3:18, cf. Rom 8:29; 12:2), who is the image of the whole of God (cf. 2 Co 4:4); the relational outcome of this process further constitutes our ontology as the *imago Dei* in likeness of the Trinity, the function of which in relationship together with no veil makes us whole. The functional purpose of this process of ongoing transformation is only relational: first, for deeper relationship together with the whole of God as family, and further, for more deeply representing the Father to extend and to build his family with family love (the immediate relational responsibilities of those adopted). This defines the relational significance of the new wine identity and clearly distinguishes that identity formation must include this process of transformation in order to be whole.

As these beatitudes interrelate, therefore, pursuing the righteousness that goes beyond reductionism involves not seeking character traits or ethical behavior but vulnerably pursuing the very qualitative and relational innermost of God and compatibly reciprocating to participate further and deeper in the whole of God’s life (cf. Mt 6:33). Without this qualitative relational significance of righteousness, our identity will merely exhibit shallowness or ambiguity in who, what and how we are in relationships. For those who “hunger and thirst” for the relational righteousness of God, Jesus asserted “they will be filled” (*chortazo*, to be filled to satisfaction) because their whole persons will experience deeper intimate relationship with the whole of God as family together with no veil. This is *the growth function* of identity formation denoted by the fourth beatitude. The other beatitudes will converge in this process shortly.

As the formation of the new wine identity develops in clarity and depth, God’s new creation family increasingly is challenged both in its life together and in the surrounding context of the human condition. Therefore, in congruence with the relational dynamic resulting in adoption, the ontology and function of the new church family must always be in the dynamic of ‘nothing less and no substitutes’ for whole relationship together, which Paul integrally made unequivocal (Eph 4:1-6, 13-16, 22-24). As these theological dynamics of wholeness, belonging, and ontological identity converge in Paul’s theological forest, at the same time the dynamic of reductionism and its counter-relational work are always seeking to redefine the qualitative-relational process constituting their theological interaction and to reshape, reconstruct or otherwise fragment the relational outcome emerging from their theological integration. In relational terms, the consequence of this contrary influence is that the new creation family is rendered to an ambiguous ontology and shallow function; and its new wine identity is reduced of its clarity and depth that by necessity distinguished it in human contexts. This conflict for Paul necessitates distinguishing the truth of the whole gospel clearly from “a different gospel” (Gal 1:6-12). In his polemic for this conflict, Paul made definitive two

critical and necessary conditions to constitute the only gospel, both of which he implies in Gal 3:28:

1. While the incarnation embodied the *pleroma* of God in human contextualization, the whole of Jesus and his gospel are incongruent and incompatible with any human shaping. Culture in some particular ways can give secondary human characteristics of outer-in form to the gospel but is unable to determine the substantive composition of the gospel itself. Human culture in general is always subject to the sin of reductionism, and thus can never be assumed to be neutral. In Paul's examples, reductionist distinctions, stratified contexts and systems of inequality are the primary functions of human constructs which impose human shaping on the gospel (cf. 1 Cor 4:6-7).
2. The only composition of the gospel is *whole*, which by its nature must be determined solely by the whole of Jesus, the *pleroma* of God, who by God's initiative (grace) alone relationally involved (*agape*) the whole of God for the irreducible and nonnegotiable whole relationship together of God's new creation family.

The reciprocal relational means for experiencing this definitive whole relationship together as God's family was also at the center of this conflict for Paul. He understood that this issue is unavoidable and ongoing unless understood in its proper context. In Galatians, the conflict of relational means appears to be between "the law" and "faith" (Gal 3:1-26). Yet, this would not only be an oversimplification of Paul's polemic but also a reduction of the law as God's desires and terms for covenant relationship, as well as a reduction of faith as the necessary reciprocal relational response to God's promise of covenant relationship together. Paul put the issue into its full perspective.

Galatians represents Paul sharing the functional clarity for the whole gospel to address their current issue, situation and related matters in order to take them beyond the human contextualization of reductionism (not only of Judaism) to the further and deeper contextualization of God—the whole of God's relational context of family and relational process of family love embodied in the whole of Jesus. Within God's relational context and process, the law neither reduces nor renegotiates the covenant relationship. In reality, as God's terms for relationship together, the law is wholly compatible with the covenant and even is a vital key for the emergence of whole relationship together. That is, not as a functional key to fulfill the promise (3:21), the law serves rather as a heuristic framework (*paidegogos*) for both learning our human condition and discovering the source of its whole solution (3:10, 22-24; Rom 3:19-20).

Paul's focus on the law addressed the condition of human ontology in two vital ways, both of which perceived the law as God's desires and terms for covenant relationship:

1. The law unequivocally exposes reduced human ontology and function and the insufficiency and relational consequence of all human effort, notably for self-determination and self-justification, which are critical to accept in any response to

God for relationship (as Paul noted above and Jesus outlined in the first three beatitudes above).

2. Moreover, the law also clearly identifies the whole human ontology and function necessary for the relational involvement in reciprocal response to the whole of God, which is congruent with God's desires and compatible with God's terms for relationship together (Gal 5:14; 6:2; cf. Jesus on the law, Mt 5:43-48, and James on faith, Jas 2:8).

When Paul refers to "the law of Christ," this is God's law/desires constituted by Jesus' whole ontology and function in the incarnation (cf. 1 Cor 9:21b), who takes the law of Moses further and deeper into the whole of God's relational context and process. By vulnerably embodying God's relational ontology and function, the *pleroma* of God is the hermeneutical key to interpreting God's law/desires and the functional key for its practice in relationship together (as Jesus defined in the Sermon on the Mount, Mt 5:21ff), which by necessity requires whole ontology and function (as Jesus implied about practice of the law in likeness of the Father, Mt 5:48).

This became the critical issue for Paul because human ontology is inexorably embedded in the sin of reductionism; and this enslavement needs to be redeemed for human ontology and function to be freed to become whole. Yet, whole human ontology is constituted only by the redemptive relational dynamic of adoption for relationship together in God's family. Reduced human ontology is incapable of a response which would be compatible to Jesus for this relationship together. In Paul's whole perspective, the issue underlying the law is nothing less than the issue of human ontology. Therefore, his discourse on the law challenges existing assumptions on human ontology to expose reduced human ontology, while his discourse on faith assumes the definitive ontology that illuminates the whole human ontology and function needed for relationship together in God's family—and which also fulfills the law of Christ (Gal 5:6; 6:2).

The reciprocal relational means both necessary to receive and compatible to respond to Jesus for whole relationship together is the issue for Paul, which then necessarily involves human ontology. When human effort is relinquished—namely, cease in self-determination and desist in shaping relationship together—and replaced by the relational response of faith, Paul adds for functional clarity that we are no longer under the *paidagogos* of the law (Gal 3:25). Paul is only referring to the law's *paidagogos* function. This does not mean that the law (as God's desires and terms for covenant relationship) is finished and no longer functional for the practice of faith (5:14; 6:2; cf. Rom 3:31; 1 Cor 9:21). Paul in truth wants the law to be fulfilled by human persons, and he may confuse us by stating that the law cannot be fulfilled by human effort (Gal 3:10; 5:3). By focusing on the relational involvement of *agape* (5:14), however, he makes definitive how the law is or is not fulfilled. By necessity, this engages the two conditions of human ontology (whole or reduced), and Paul differentiates their respective involvement with the law (5:6; 6:15). Whole human ontology functions from inner out in the relational response of trust to be vulnerably involved with God and others in family love—just as Christ functioned (cf. Jn 15:9-12)—thereby reciprocally responding to God's desires and terms for relationship together. Reduced human ontology, in contrast and conflict, functions from outer in to try to fulfill the quantitative aspects of the law,

consequently renegotiating God's terms for relationship by human terms shaped from human contextualization. This reductionism essentially redefined relationship with God to mere relationship with the law, which then disembodies the law from the whole of God and God's desires for relationship together. For Paul, the underlying issue between function by law and function by faith is clearly between reduced ontology and function and whole ontology and function. The relational consequence of the former is not only the inability to fulfill the law but enslavement to the reductionist futility of human effort (Gal 5:3-4). The relational outcome of the latter is to receive and respond to Christ for whole relationship together with nothing less and no substitutes.

The new wine identity emerging from these dynamics is irreducible in ontology and nonnegotiable in function. This integral process of identity formation necessitates the ongoing integration of identity and righteousness. For Paul, righteousness is the relational function of the heart that lives not according to reduced notions of by faith but in whole ontology and function in the image and likeness of the whole of God (Col 3:10; Eph 4:24). This inner-out function of the heart signifies ontological identity, the primary identity necessary to have wholeness despite the presence of reductionism (Col 3:15). Therefore, ontological identity is definitive of who the person is and the determinant of what and how the person is. And the integrity of identity is rooted in a person's ontology, which needs to be whole or its integrity will be fragmented (cf. Paul's discourse about the church at Corinth). As Paul summarized in Galatians 6:15, any function of reductionism is without any ontological significance of existence (*eimi*); only the new creation exists in ontological wholeness. Also, the credibility of identity is rooted in a person's righteousness, which must not be fragmentary (cf. Peter's *hypokrisis*, Gal 2:14) or it will lose both its credibility and the integrity of wholeness in identity (cf. Jesus' expectation of righteousness as whole ontology and function, Mt 5:20). The whole of Jesus' identity in the incarnation was based on the integrity of his ontology and the credibility of his righteousness, which persons could count on and trust in relationship together. The image and likeness of his whole ontology and function is *what* we are transformed to (2 Cor 3:18) and *who* we become (Col 2:10; 3:10), and only on this basis *how* we function (Eph 4:24; Col 3:15; cf. Ps 71:15). Therefore, anything less and any substitutes defining our ontology and determining our function are a reduction of our wholeness together, a fragmentation of the ontological and relational whole of who we are and whose we are in Christ.

Moreover, as our identity reveals the underlying roots or heart of how we define our ontology and determine our function, our primary identity also signifies the composition of our gospel—if it is whole or reduced. Paul's gospel and thus his own identity were not defined and determined by what he had and/or did (both past and present, cf. Phil 3:7-9) or even by his current weaknesses (2 Cor 12:7-9). In his polemic for the gospel and against reductionism, Paul made definitive both the ontological and relational changes which must by nature (*dei*) compose the truth of the whole gospel and its relational outcome. It must by the nature of who and what Jesus embodied as "the image of God" and relationally involved of the whole of God's ontology and function "in the face of Christ" (2 Cor 4:4,6). Anything less or any substitute is not the gospel of the glory of Christ, the gospel of wholeness, but a different gospel of reductionism.

The new wine identity emerges, develops and matures entirely from whole ontology and function. As the new wine grows from redefined and transformed persons,

its relational outcome is distinguished unmistakably in the primacy of family relationships together with no veil—signified in the table fellowship of the new creation.

## The Relational Outcome of the New Wine

As Paul theologically and functionally clarifies the new creation, there is a realistic sense interjected in his message: “As for those who will follow this...*wholeness* be upon them, and mercy” (Gal 6:16). Perhaps his disappointment or frustration with church practice has affected him (Gal 1:6; 4:9; 5:7). Nevertheless, the term for follow (*stoicheo*) involves progressing within a certain framework. This engages the perceptual-interpretive framework by which Paul defined ontology and determined function. For Paul, he follows Jesus’ whole ontology and function in the relational progression of Jesus’ theological trajectory and relational path for the relational outcome of the new creation family. *Stoicheo* requires the qualitative and relational framework of the whole of Jesus to progress to this relational outcome.

At the first new wine table fellowship, the disciples present did not taste the new wine yet but could only be associated with it. Their perceptual-interpretive framework still reflected the old in their transition to be redefined and transformed. The practices of the early disciples and early church raise further questions about the relational outcome of the new wine, questions that still need to be raised today. What is this relational outcome? Where do we see it? Why don’t we see more evidence of it? What are the issues involved here?

When Paul interjected that “mercy” (compassion, *eleos*) be upon those who follow in this framework, he is building on Jesus’ framework of discipleship that involves Jesus’ distinguished relational process and progression disclosed at the new wine table fellowship (Mt 9:10-13; cf. Mt 12:7)). This relational dynamic also interacts with the integral process of identity formation in the remaining beatitudes for the further development of his followers—“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy...” (Mt 5:6-12, discussed below). God’s relational response of grace underlying this relational dynamic constitutes Jesus’ theological trajectory and relational path, the relational outcome of which involves mercy, compassion. Yet mercy must be experienced first before it can be extended to others. This necessitates whole understanding and experience of God’s relational response of grace in Face-to-face relationship.

Complex theological dynamics converge in the mercy enacted by the whole of Jesus in his theological trajectory and relational path. The relational process of Jesus’ vulnerable involvement led him to the cross for the atonement sacrifice necessary for Face-to-face-to-Face relationship (Rom 3:25; Heb 9:11-28; Mt 27:51; Heb 10:19-25). As the “sacrifice of atonement” (*hilasterion*, Rom 3:25), Jesus is both the place (relational context) and means (relational process) for the propitiation and expiation of sin. This dynamic must by the nature of atonement always be seen, understood and thus experienced as Jesus’ relational work of *redemptive reconciliation*. Therefore, once Jesus’ sacrifice for atonement was completed, the torn curtain was no minor detail in the events of the cross; nor is it merely symbolic but in improbable relational terms it opened up the Holy Place of God’s intimate presence to be vulnerably involved in direct

relationship together Face to face. Jesus' sacrifice unmistakably constituted "the new covenant in my blood," as he disclosed in communion together (Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25). This composed the improbable of Jesus' theological trajectory and the intrusion of his relational path.

The removal of the veil, a necessary condition for the new covenant relationship Face to face, was contingent on the nature of the sacrifice. Prior sacrifices behind the curtain were insufficient to open direct access to the whole and holy God. Nothing less and no substitutes of God in whole can constitute this sacrifice to bring about this relational outcome; likewise, nothing less and no substitutes of our whole person, with all our sin (notably as reductionism), can receive and respond back to the whole of God in the depth of Jesus' relational process and progression for the wholeness of reciprocal relationship together *in* the innermost of God's holy presence, *with* God's holy involvement and *by* God's holy relational work of grace. Anything less and any substitute of God or of our persons will be insufficient to enact or engage the depth of Jesus' relational work of grace, consequently cannot reconcile life together in the innermost of relationship without the veil with God (Eph 3:12) and in relationship together with no veil in God's family (Eph 2:13-16; 2 Cor 3:16-18). Paul claims to be sufficient (*hilkanos*) only in the new covenant (2 Cor 3:5-6).

The primary focus of the new wine is not being redeemed from the old, as Paul clarified for the gospel (Gal 4:4-6; Rom 6:4). Though being saved from sin is a necessary condition for the new wine, it is insufficient for the relational outcome of the new wine. The relational outcome of God's relational response of grace cannot be experienced in just the atonement for sin but necessarily also what Jesus' sacrifice saves to that emerges solely without the veil: the primacy of whole relationship together as God's family that is reciprocal both Face to face and face to face. It is a critical reduction of God's grace, therefore, to make the primary focus merely being saved from sin because there is no relational outcome beyond this truncated soteriology; moreover, there is no accounting of the sin of reductionism because such an accounting necessitates being saved to wholeness—the integral relational outcome of God's relational response of grace.

A truncated soteriology may appear to claim God's grace, yet, at best, only in referential terms, because there is no relational involvement with God's relational response of grace. Contrary to a relational outcome, the relational consequence is the lack of emergence of the new wine. The integral reality of the complete soteriology is imperative for our whole understanding and experience: God's relational response of grace *accounts* for our sin in the relational dynamic that no longer *counts* our sin against us (Rom 4:6-8) but also holds us *accountable* not to engage in sin in reciprocal relationship face to Face (e.g. Rev 2:4; 3:2, 19-20). The primary sin in reciprocal relationship is keeping relational distance, which involves our shaping of relationship together. Peter's refusal of Jesus' footwashing involved this sin in their relationship that prevented face-to-Face connection with Jesus' whole person vulnerably involved, thereby precipitating Jesus' vital critique in relational language "you have no share with me" (Jn 13:8). Earlier, when Peter fell down at Jesus' knees (Lk 5:8), his posture certainly reflected humility before God; yet this posture can also either take place in front of the curtain or be a substitute for deeper involvement face to Face. In relational response of grace, the distinguished Face of God—in the integral relational significance of kneeling before us to wash our feet—is vulnerably present and intimately involved for the sole



purpose of ongoing reciprocal relationship together Face to face. Furthermore, Jesus' atonement sacrifice removed the veil, and to engage in relational distance essentially negates his sacrifice and denies his relational work of grace constituting the new covenant relationship, which then relegates us back in front of the curtain in the old covenant (cf. Gal 5:4). Therefore, we cannot maintain or justify relational distance as Peter did and expect to experience God's relational response of grace and the relational outcome of the new wine.

In a truncated soteriology the sin of reductionism is not accounted for, as a result our understanding of God's grace at best is fragmentary and more likely distorted. A reduction of God's grace commonly occurs today in the doctrine of saved by grace through faith and not works, taking Paul out of the whole context of his *pleroma* theology (e.g. by referencing Eph 2:8-9). This so-called "gift of God," however, is perceived through an interpretive lens that pays attention to this gift in the referential limits of a gift, while ignoring the relational process embodying the gift. This not only prevents the relational outcome of God's response of grace but promotes a relational consequence as pointed to above in Jesus' post-ascension critique of churches.

It is immeasurable for our whole understanding and experience of the relational outcome of the new wine, that God's grace is not reduced to our terms. The irreducible experiential truth and nonnegotiable relational reality are that *grace* is not a gift given, a resource shared and an action enacted by God in the context and for the purpose of *unilateral* relationship. Grace only creates the opportunity for reciprocal relationship together, for which the recipients of God's relational response of grace are responsible and therefore accountable. As Jesus made clear to various churches, God is not unaffected by the sin in reciprocal relationship; and as Israel's relational history evidenced, God has reciprocated with his own relational distance ("hide my face from them," Dt 31:17; 32:20; Isa 1:15; 45:15; 54:8). In other words, God's grace comes with relational demands. Compatible with God's relational response, the demands of grace are irreducible and nonnegotiable that God wants the whole person from inner out for the relationships together necessary to be whole as the new creation family in likeness of the whole of God. Congruent with God's relational response, grace ongoingly does not allow for anything less and any substitutes.

Whole understanding and experience of God's grace emerge in Face-to-face-to-Face relationship, with the relational outcome constituted *by* mercy (compassion) from God and on this relational basis constituted *with* mercy for others. This ongoing reciprocal relational process, distinguishing the relational outcome of the new wine, further engages the integral process of the new wine identity formation in the remaining beatitudes.

**Fifth Beatitude:** Jesus' call to his followers to be redefined, transformed and made whole is increasingly realized by ongoing involvement in the whole of God's relational context of family and the experience of his distinguished relational process of family love. This ongoing involvement and experience reconstitute how his followers function, not just reform them. The whole outcome of being the relational object of the Trinity's loving involvement and of experiencing further intimate relationship together cannot remain a private (even within a group) or solely individual matter. If this relational outcome is confined to a private context (personal or collective), it will become ingrown,

self-serving, and ambiguous or even shallow, and thus fragmentary. If this outcome is reduced to an individual focus, it will become enslaving, not redeeming and transforming, and consequently incomplete. Therefore, as the relational outcome of life together in wholeness, Jesus necessarily extends the process of identity formation to relationships with others.

With the relational outcome emerging from the previous beatitudes, this next function of identity formation (Mt 5:7) is more than a restatement of Levi and Hosea 6:6 (Mt 9:9-13), and of the lawyer and the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37). This function is not merely about mission or fulfilling what is rightfully expected of us. It is integrally focused on the ontology of what persons (his followers) have become (in the relational progression) and on the emerging identity of who they are and whose they are, and thus how they function in relationship—not only with God, not only among themselves, but now also with others.

Mercy (*eleos*, compassion) denotes action out of compassion for others which responds to their distress, suffering or misery. Yet, such acts can be performed merely out of missional service or Christian duty—perhaps with paternalism, intentional or inadvertent—without the relational involvement of a person who essentially has been in their position. With the mercy experienced from God’s relational response of grace, Jesus’ whole followers from inner out become more than good servants but first and foremost become intimate personal recipients (as adopted children) of compassion (Gal 4:4-5; Eph 2:4-5). Accordingly, in reciprocity from this redeemed and transformed ontology, this person functions to extend that compassion in likeness of relational involvement with others—notably with those lacking wholeness (or value) and suffering the relational condition “to be apart” from the whole.

Reductionism would define this beatitude to promote the act and benefits of mercy, not the relational involvement of persons with other persons; consequently, its practice of mercy would signify either paternalism, even with sacrifice, or a quid pro quo in human relations. Jesus, however, leads the process of identity formation deeper in contrast and conflict to go beyond reductionism. The relational outcome of vulnerably following Jesus in the relational progression constitutes the ontology of the whole person and the relationships necessary to be whole. It naturally follows then: being compassionate (*eleemon*) is a given function in identity formation, not an option; and those persons are blessed (*makarios*, fully satisfied) because they are relationally functioning with others in qualitative involvement for wholeness and fulfilling God’s relational desires in the innermost for his creation. In the process these persons ongoingly experience deeper compassion themselves, not suggesting their own future problems but the further relational outcome indicated in the next beatitude.

**Sixth Beatitude:** The deeper compassion the compassionate also experience involves the relational work of God’s grace. These persons, who are being further redeemed and transformed, are engaged in the process of becoming whole by involvement necessarily both from their whole person and in the relationships together constituting the whole. These next two beatitudes outline what is involved in this process to wholeness, and therefore the maturation of our identity.

The tendency in a context pervaded by reductionism, even though not enslaved by it, is to pay more attention inadvertently to the behavioral/activity aspects of our life and

practice. We readily make assumptions about the qualitative presence and involvement of our person in that behavior or activity. A relational context and process make deeper demands on our person; the whole of God's relational context and process hold us accountable for nothing less and no substitutes than our whole person—the demands of grace. Accordingly, we should never assume the ongoing condition of our heart nor the state of our relationship with the whole of God. Wholeness is contingent on their qualitative function.

A shallow identity lacks depth. A shallow person lacks the presence and involvement of heart (cf. Mt 15:8). Persons lacking heart in function (even inadvertently) lack wholeness. Intimate involvement with the whole of God (i.e. who is unreduced) necessitates an ongoing process of our hearts open and coming together--God's nonnegotiable terms. As discussed previously about holy, the Uncommon and the common are incompatible for relationship, further necessitating our ongoing transformation to "the pure in heart" (*katharos*, clean, clear, Mt 5:8) to be compatible. This *katharos* is not a static condition we can merely assume from God's redemption and forgiveness. God's relational acts of grace are always for relationship, thus "pure in heart" is a dynamic function for deeper relationship to be whole together. This involves a heart functioning *clear* of any relational barriers or distance, functioning *clean* of Satan's reductionist lies, substitutes and illusions—signifying *the catharsis of the old* to be constituted in the whole of the new. Yet, any subsequent turn from the heart interjects gray matter, making our function ambiguous.

An ambiguous identity lacks clarity. An ambiguous person lacks clarity of one's ontology. Christians lacking ontological clarity lack the qualitative distinguishing them from the common's function in the surrounding context, notably from reductionism. Being distinguished includes from the mindset, cultural practices and other established ways prevailing in our contexts, which we assume are compatible with God but effectively shift relationship with the holy God to our common terms (cf. Rom 8:5-6). When the identity and ontology of the Uncommon cannot be clearly distinguished from this common function (even in a Christian subculture), this generates ambiguity in our identity and counteracts wholeness for our ontology—which increasingly becomes life and practice without the whole person and without the primacy of intimate relationships necessary to be whole (cf. Col 3:15). The theological implication is that the Uncommon and common can neither coexist in functional harmony nor can their functions be combined in a hybrid. The functional implication is that the tension between them must by nature always be of conflict, the nature of which is ongoing and, contrary to some thinking, irremediable. Therefore, "pure in heart" also signifies *catharsis of the common* to be constituted in the whole of the Uncommon.

The function of the depth of this person's heart will have the relational outcome to more deeply "see God." The significance of "see" (*horao*) implies more than the mere act of seeing but involves more intensively to experience, partake of, or share in something, be in the presence of something and be affected by it. This depth of significance in "seeing" God in the substance of relationship is the intimate process of hearts functionally vulnerable to each other and further coming together in deeper involvement to be whole—the purpose of Jesus' sanctified life and practice and formative family prayer (Jn 17:19-26). When our ongoing experience (not necessarily continuous) with God is not *horao*, we need to examine honestly where our heart is and address any

assumptions. If, for example, we don't dance around our *ptochos* and *pentheo*, our heart will respond with greater functional trust and vulnerable intimacy—the relational posture of submission to God's terms signified by meekness. It is only when we assume or ignore this inner-out aspect of our person that we essentially keep relational distance from God, hereby impeding the process to be whole and the relational outcome of the new wine.

The early disciples' struggles were essentially with heart issues, and consequently they had difficulty seeing (*horao*) God even in Jesus' vulnerable presence (Jn14:7-9). Without a clean and clear heart there will be shallowness in our identity formation and ambiguity in the ontology and function of our person (both individually and together) in ongoing relationship with the whole of God. The catharsis of both the old and common make the sixth beatitude critically evident as *the contingency function* in the process to be whole and for the maturation of our identity as the new wine.

Yet, wholeness is never about only the individual person, nor about just the person with God. The next beatitude extends the process.

**Seventh Beatitude:** While this beatitude integrated with the sixth outlines the process to wholeness, it is also conjoined with the fifth beatitude for the person made whole to function in the relationships necessary to be whole. As the process of the new wine identity formation engages others in relationship, there emerges a distinguished presence and involvement that is neither ambiguous nor shallow. Yet this beatitude is often not fully understood or integrally enacted.

Peace is generally perceived without its qualitative significance and with a limited understanding of the relational involvement constituting it. As discussed previously about Jesus approaching Jerusalem in his triumphant entry, he agonized over its condition: “If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace” (Lk 19:41-42). “The things that make for peace” is a critical issue focused on *what belongs to peace*, and thus by necessity involves the persons who bring this peace, not just the work of peace.

Reviewing previous notes on peace, in the classical Greek sense peace is perceived as the opposite of war. The NT, however, does not take its meaning of peace from this source; its concept of peace is an extension from the OT and of the Hebrew *shalom*. The opposite of *shalom* is any disturbance to the well-being of the community. That is, biblical peace is not defined in negative referential terms by the *absence* of any conflict but in positive relational terms by the *presence* of a specific condition of ontology and function. Throughout the Bible the primary concept of peace is well-being and wholeness. Peace is a general well-being which has both an individual dimension and a corporate/collective dimension. This wholeness extends to all aspects of human life and by necessity included salvation and the end times but it certainly is insufficient to limit it to the latter. Going beyond the mere absence of negative activity, all of this involves what must be present for peace; this is what belongs to peace—and is more than commonly understood or even wanted.

The gospel is clearly affirmed by this peace (cf. Acts 10:36; Eph 6:15). This is the peace in which Jesus constituted his followers, and distinguished from conventional peace (Jn 14:27). It is thus insufficient to signify the gospel of peace with a truncated soteriology (only what Jesus saved us from) without the relational outcome of what he saved us to. The whole gospel's salvation necessitates the relationships together of the

whole of God's family in which Jesus constituted his followers to be whole as the new creation. Wholeness is intrinsic to this peace, and to be whole is a necessary relational condition for those who bring this peace. Who then are the peacemakers?

Their identity is clearly defined by Jesus as the sons and daughters of God (v.9), not God's servants but the Father's very own children (cf. v.44-45). This tells us not only who and what they are but whose they are and how they are as peacemakers.

The adopted children of God have been made whole in God's family and partake of the new wine communion together with the whole of God without the veil. As whole persons receiving the whole of God's relational work of grace, it is insufficient for God's children merely to share mercy (compassion) with others. It is also insufficient for them merely to engage in the mission (however dedicated) to reduce violence, stop war or create the absence of conflict. On the basis of the ontology of who they are and whose they are, how they function to clearly reflect the depth of their wholeness—thus the relational responsibility to represent the Father and to continue to extend his family— involves a deeper level of relational involvement. "Peacemakers" (*eirenopoios*) denotes reconcilers, those who seek the well-being and wholeness of others, just as they experience (cf. 2 Cor 5:17-18). The reciprocal nature of the process of peacemaking is both a necessary and sufficient condition for peacemakers. This means not only to address conflict but to restore relationships in the human condition to wholeness, just as God's thematic relational action and the relational work of the Trinity engage.

In these seven beatitudes Jesus defined the natural relational flow from repentance to redemption to reconciliation to wholeness. Jesus functioned vulnerably in this relational flow and ongoingly engaged the relational work necessary to be whole. While peace describes interpersonal relationships only in a corollary sense, the condition of wholeness and well-being is the new relational order of the new creation as the whole of God's family (as Paul made definitive, Eph 2:14-22; Col 3:15). Peace, therefore, is a necessary condition for the relational outcome of the new wine. Moreover, each emerging act of reconciliation and peacemaking must function in the same natural relational flow to become whole. This will further the relational process to wholeness for others and will deepen the wholeness of those so engaged, and therefore the maturation of the distinguished clarity and depth of their identity.

Yet, the experiential truth and reality of this wholeness is intrusive to others, which is unavoidable for those following Jesus' relational path.

**Eighth Beatitude:** The reality for human life and practice is that reductionism prevails; and not everyone is seeking resolution to the human relational condition "to be apart" from the whole. Consequently, in this last function of their whole identity Jesus made clear to his followers the repercussions of being composed in his call to be redefined, transformed and made whole: the function of this new ontology in relational involvement with others will encounter strong negative reaction "for righteousness' sake...on my account" (vv.10,11). Identity formation of his followers remains incomplete until they experience this consequence of their ontology and function in the world, which may include some Christian subcultures. That is to say, the relational outcome of the new wine includes this repercussion in human contexts because by its nature it is intrusive to the human shaping of relationships together.

Along with the benefits and responsibilities of belonging to his family as one of the Father's very own, this consequence is another given unavoidable function in their identity. These repercussions are not the result of being doctrinaire, condescending or otherwise relationally uninvolved, though Christians certainly have experienced reactions for these reasons, justifiably or not. Nor are these reactions against only certain servants of God, which our notion of prophets often gets reduced to (v.12). These are the relational reactions from others to God's children who are functioning whole in their reciprocal relational responsibility ("for righteousness' sake") as the Father's very own to extend the whole of God's family ("theirs is the kingdom") to others in the relational righteousness of family love vulnerably constituted by Jesus ("on my account"). The new wine emerges in his call to be whole and to make whole.

This last beatitude is the consequence of both the qualitative distinguishing the ontology of God's people and the relational involvement of their function, both of which intrude in the human context. Just as the prophets and Jesus experienced, this is the relational outworking of the identity of being in God's family and intimately involved with the whole and holy God (the Uncommon). This may be a difficult identity function to embrace, and so in our thinking we may tend to limit it to unique situations for only a minority of Christians. Yet, the relational reality is inescapable that not only is the qualitative distinguishing the Uncommon incompatible with the common function but in conflict with it also; anything less reduces the ontology of the Uncommon and those who have become uncommon. And relational reactions from the common function will come in all forms and varying degrees (even from within Christian contexts) as long as the uncommon relationally extend themselves to the common with a critique of hope for change.

To avoid those reactions is to reduce our ontology and function to a level more ambiguous and shallow. To function as a peacemaker, for example, merely by being irenic, consensus building and unity forming is insufficient, and tends to become the ontological simulations and epistemological illusions of reductionism shaped in a hybrid theology. This beatitude's last function integral in identity formation completes the process of being whole, both individually and together as family, in the human context suffering the relational condition "to be apart" from the whole. The repercussions are an integral part of the new wine fellowship, which Paul was blessed to participate in with Jesus and desired to grow in further and deeper (Col 1:24; Rom 8:17; 2 Cor 1:5; 4:10; Phil 3:10). Nothing less and no substitutes for this whole define the new wine identity and determine its relational outcome as the whole of God's family. Anything less and any substitutes for wholeness of our identity lack the clarity and depth for our righteousness to go beyond the reductionism that Jesus made imperative for his followers in this major discourse (Mt 5:20). The resulting ambiguity and shallowness will neither be fully satisfying (*makarios*, "blessed"), nor be taken seriously in the world.

As the *consequential function* of the new wine identity, this beatitude must not be taken lightly or be lost in our identity formation; to do so is consequential for the relational outcome of the new wine.

The above eight beatitudes are the interdependent functions which together formulate our whole identity in who, what and how we are as Jesus' followers and whose we become in the relational progression as his family—therefore distinguishing the

ontology of the person and the whole. The beatitudes taken separately are problematic for *makarios* (fully satisfied, beyond being merely happy), since some beatitudes seen individually strain to be defined as blessedness; moreover, any beatitude by itself does not yield the relational outcome connected to it. Blessedness is synonymous with wholeness, and to be fully satisfied emerges only from vulnerable involvement in the whole of God's life who has removed the veil for intimate relationship together.

The beatitudes together, however, are only the outline of the integral process of identity formation. Functionally, this process immediately addresses the whole person by opening our heart to be redefined. In the relational process, Jesus (in conjoint function with the Spirit) redeems us from the old (and the common) and transforms us to the new (and the uncommon) to be made whole in relationship together with the whole of God, whereby to function whole in likeness of the Trinity, including making whole in human contexts. The beatitudes' integral process, therefore, is ongoing and its outline is not just linear but reflexive in our identity's growth and maturation. As identity issues of ambiguity and shallowness become resolved, our identity as Jesus' followers takes on a distinguished qualitative presence with others in the world. This is the basis for Jesus' definitive declaration immediately following the beatitudes that *we are the light and the salt*, in which the ontology of *we* is the whole understanding of the light and the salt that integrally distinguishes the relational outcome of the new wine.

Implied in this identity formation and the relational outcome of Jesus' new wine fellowship is the relational process of discipleship. Along with identity, however, discipleship easily becomes ambiguous or shallow, lacking the clarity and depth of this relational process. For this reason Paul interjected "As for those who will follow" to his message of the new creation (Gal 6:16), therewith challenging those to follow in progression within Jesus' qualitative and relational framework for discipleship.

The early disciples demonstrated an ambiguous, if not shallow, discipleship that focused mainly on what they did in serving with minimal relational involvement with Jesus. While discussing what is primary in life, Jesus disclosed the defining paradigm for serving him: "Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also" (Jn 12:26). Jesus' relational imperative has some parallel to Copernicus' presentation of a new model of the world. That is, embracing Jesus' new model for discipleship (in contrast to a prevailing rabbinic model) required a paradigm shift: a radical reordering of one's beliefs, way of living and perceptual-interpretive framework—a shift from the quantitative work to be done (the focus of *diakoneo*, serving) to the qualitative function and primacy of relationship (the focus of *akoloutheo*, following), and accordingly a shift from a view and function of the person from outer in to a view and function of the person from inner out. In Jesus' framework for discipleship, his paradigm for serving implies both the primacy of relationship (making the work secondary) and defining the person and determining their discipleship in qualitative terms from inner out. That is to say, to distinguish his followers, Jesus assumes a change to whole ontology and function in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God ("where I *am*, there will my servant *be*," *eimi*, verb of existence). Anything less or any substitutes of this whole ontology and function—no matter how well-intentioned and dedicated to serve Jesus—is a reduced ontology and function based on shaping and constructing discipleship by human terms, which may be the prevailing model even in

churches (cf. Rev 2:2-4; 3:1-2); such terms no longer follow Jesus only on his relational terms.

This is a common reduction of discipleship that prevailed in Peter's life and signified the gap in relationship the early disciples had with Jesus (Jn 14:9), and that prevails for many Christians and churches today. Therefore, in Jesus' discipleship framework, his paradigm for serving requires a transformation, the redemptive reconciliation that restores persons and relationship together to the wholeness of the gospel distinguishing the new wine—the integral relational flow of which is irreducible and nonnegotiable to human terms, regardless of how sincere, committed and doctrinally correct. This was Paul's experiential truth of relationship together intimately following the whole of Jesus from the Damascus road (2 Cor 3:16-18), and Jesus' relational framework that composed the whole of Paul and his witness as well as the whole in Paul and his theology.

Understanding the various parts of Paul's *synesis* (whole understanding, Eph 3:4, cf. Col 1:9; 2:2) makes clear that the whole of his witness and the whole in his theology were deeply rooted in *pleroma* (complete) Christology. Following Jesus' whole ontology and function in the relational progression of Jesus' theological trajectory and relational path is how the relational Paul emerged from the historical Paul to compose the theological Paul. The experiential truth of the fullness of Christ's whole ontology and function by necessity involved *pleroma* soteriology making functional 'already' the relational outcome of being saved to God's new creation family. The whole of this family was developed as the church's ontology and function by Paul, signifying the *pleroma* of Christ (Eph 1:22-23). In the complex theological dynamics of Paul's theological forest, God's whole family in transformed relationships together without the veil is the gospel of the glory of Christ (2 Cor 3:16-18; 4:3-6), the gospel of wholeness in the face of Christ's whole ontology and function (Eph 2:14-16; 3:6; 6:15), the *pleroma* of God (Col 1:19-20; 2:9-10; 3:10-11)—all emerging for Paul in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes. Therefore, in his theological forest the theology of ontological identity emerges only from the theological dynamic of belonging, both of which are inseparably integrated and rooted in the theology of wholeness.

This wholeness is the primary identity that defined Paul's ontology and determined his function (the historical Paul notwithstanding), and the identity by which all who relationally belong to Christ need to be contextualized to be whole, both as persons individually and collectively. The relational outcome of God's whole family together is the ontological identity of conjointly who we are and whose we are. Whose we are is always the determinant of who we are, never the converse or there is reductionism by human shaping. And the *what* that whose we are determines for who we are is always about family, not about the individual. Whole persons have been set free by Christ not for self-autonomy but are freed to be whole in whose we are, that is, in likeness of the whole of God (2 Cor 3:17-18; Gal 5:1, 13-14; Eph 4:24-25; Col 3:15; cf. 1 Cor 8:1). Wholeness for the person is contingent on wholeness in relationship together, therefore the whole person is inseparable from and indispensable for God's new creation family—which in Paul's theological forest is the church, "the *pleroma* of Christ who makes all whole in the whole" (Eph 1:23; cf. Rom 12:4-5). For the whole of Paul and the whole in his theology, there is no other relational outcome from the gospel of



wholeness—the “new creation is everything” for those who follow the whole of Jesus in the new wine fellowship with the veil removed.

## **The Nature of Old Wineskins and the Flow of the New Wine**

Old wineskins are implied in the anything less and any substitutes discussed above. Certainly then, old wineskins both constrain the flow of the new wine and reduce it of its qualitative and relational significance (par. Mk 2:22). The nature of old wineskins emerges with any reduction of ontology and function, thus from an ambiguous or shallow identity with relationships still having the veil, in contrasting and conflicting function with Jesus’ new wine table fellowship.

Jesus disclosed the new wine when the issue of fasting was raised to him. His response is inseparable from his major discourse for his followers in the Sermon on the Mount. Focused on efforts of self-determination, Jesus exposed trying to get closer to God through fasting from outer in (Mt 6:16-18). This effort to establish one’s righteousness (*dikaiosyne*, 6:1) assumes a reduced ontology and function that constrains the person in an outer-in discipline having no qualitative significance from inner out, and consequently has no relational significance to God. For Jesus, this fasting is an old wineskin that cannot contain the new wine. In Jesus’ relational language, reduced ontology and function are both incompatible and incongruent with whole ontology and function; and the nature of old wineskins is reduced ontology and function, defining the person from outer in and determining relationships still with the veil—unable to be vulnerably involved with God face to Face in the nature of the new wine, the new covenant, the new creation family.

Old wineskins are the relational consequence of becoming embedded in an ontological lie from reductionism that imposes an identity deficit, in which a person struggles to erase any deficit by efforts of self-determination in what one can do (e.g. fasting). The more control one can exercise over this process, the more certain the results of one’s efforts can be expected. The pursuit of certainty, however, requires a reduction epistemologically, ontologically and relationally in order for the control needed to succeed in self-determination—notably narrowing the epistemic field to the probable and minimizing vulnerability in relationships. This is how God’s terms for covenant relationship outlined in the *torah* have been reduced to a behavioral code, how persons seek to become justified by what they do, how Jesus’ teachings become disembodied to mere principles to follow, how the new wine gets put into an old wineskin. The nature of old wineskins, therefore, is the nature of the human condition *in* its reduced ontology and function, seeking self-determination and self-justification *by* its reduced ontology and function in order to overcome the deficit *for* its reduced ontology and function. And, accordingly, old wineskins emerge from an ambiguous or shallow identity necessitating the veil in relationships, because it fails to engage the integral identity formation of the first four beatitudes and pursues a reduced righteousness from outer in rather than whole righteousness from inner out (contrary to Mt 5:20).

Old wineskins first emerged in the primordial garden in the form of the fruit for self-determination and then with their loincloths for self-justification, and most significantly in their relational distance (Gen 3:6-10). The ontological lie from

reductionism imposed an identity deficit to create an illusion of climbing the ontological ladder to a higher status: “you will not be *reduced*...you will become like God” (3:4-5). Constructing the tower of Babel was another old wineskin of reduced ontology and function seeking to climb the human contextual ladder for self-determination and justification (Gen 11:1-4). These examples demonstrate that old wineskins can have the appearance of something new (the fruit), innovative (loincloths) and a new venture (the tower); yet their reality is merely an illusion for reduced ontology and function.

The influence from human contextualization for innovation and new ventures has accelerated in the modern world of science and technology. At the same time, these efforts have also required a reduction epistemologically, ontologically and relationally in order to produce results. For example, the illusions of new skins developed by the recent changes in media technology are consequential for diminished involvement in relationships and minimalizing the quality of life, even though they have greatly increased our information, productivity and other quantities in life. As noted previously, such innovation stemming from modern technology has only reduced the primacy of the qualitative and the relational. These results, however, witness to the limits of what can emerge from reduced ontology and function. The new wine does not emerge and flow from the changes of innovation but only with transformation from inner out of whole ontology and function.

Shifting from innovation and its ambiguity of function and usefulness, we turn to a more practical approach. Pragmatism is another old wineskin constraining the new wine that needs more attention if the concern is for the flow of new wine. While a pragmatist may have significance by not separating theology from its practical function—in this sense Paul can be considered a pragmatist—pragmatism has a purpose and concern of less depth. Pragmatism should not be confused with pragmatics in linguistics that concerns understanding the meaning of messages in the relational context of the speaker—an ongoing necessity for Jesus’ relational language and messages. In a more limited concern, even with good intentions, pragmatism involves the effort in discipleship that focuses primarily on situations and circumstances, and concerns what is most practical in them. With this narrowed-down focus and concern, pragmatism essentially reduces the relational involvement of the whole person with God by shifting this primacy to the situations and circumstances. Often unknowingly, this limits the relational process of discipleship to outer-in engagement by redefining one’s person from inner out to outer in, thereby renegotiating relationship with God on our terms. By reordering the primacy of relationship, pragmatism unintentionally promotes the counter-relational work of reductionism and reduces the whole ontology and function constituting both the new wine and its discipleship, therefore disregarding Jesus’ relational imperative for his followers.

Jesus’ conflict with the reductionist segments of Judaism involved their pragmatism in contrast to their needed relational function in the covenant relationship together. Pragmatism also emerged at another new wine table fellowship to try to constrain the new wine (Mt 26:6-13; Jn 12:1-8). The new wine flowed from Mary with her vulnerable involvement in relational response to Jesus. The expensive perfume was secondary to the primacy of relationship together but the disciples made it an issue of discipleship in primary response to the situation of the poor. By rebuking Mary harshly (par. Mk14:5), they demonstrated the limited concern of their pragmatism, therewith

exposing their continued reduced ontology and function that still had not tasted the new wine but indeed tried to constrain it. In contrast and conflict, Jesus fully experienced the primacy of Mary's involvement and the depth of her discipleship—celebrating the new wine together and anticipating her flow of the new wine to give clarity and depth to “wherever this gospel of *wholeness* is proclaimed in the whole world” (Mt 26:13).

The new wine distinguishing God's whole on God's terms always involves making choices. Choosing what we will pay attention to and what we will ignore. Choosing what is a greater priority, what is primary or what is secondary. Choosing what will define our person and what we will not let define us. Choosing how we will define others and how we will not define others. Choosing how we will be involved in relationships and how we will not do relationships. Choosing the uncommon (holy) over the common. Choosing *zoe* over *bios*, the qualitative over the quantitative. Choosing to live more by the opportunities of *kairos* than by the constraints of *chronos*. That is to say, choosing to be whole, to live whole and to make whole. Yet, these choices are not about human agency but about involvement in reciprocal relationship together in response to God's relational grace, the basis and ongoing base for relationship together to be whole.

Making these choices signifies celebrating the whole, signified in the new wine table fellowship. With each choice, we celebrate God's whole and being whole in communion together. Making the choice may be difficult but what also emerges in making it is celebrating the whole of God's new creation family together. This is the family responsibility which we humbly submit to and thankfully account for in the relational process of family love because we are “not left as orphans” but have been adopted into God's family. Therefore, we celebrate our redemption to be free to make these choices. We celebrate our transformation to make these choices in family love. We celebrate our reconciliation to make these choices for relationship together in God's new family. And we celebrate making these choices in relationship together without the fragmenting presence of the veil. In other words, by making these choices we celebrate being made whole to be whole in order to live whole and to make whole, God's whole on God's terms.

The critical choices made by persons in the first new wine table fellowship and then by Mary involve not choosing the secondary (fasting and the old wine, ministry to the poor) over the primacy of whole relationship together from inner out. The choice to live vulnerably in relationship together to be whole is what the Father seeks (Jn 4:23) and the Son searches for (Rev 2:23b) and pursues in post-ascension (Rev 3:20). The choice of the primacy of relationship together and building intimate communion together as family is the choice of God's relational whole on God's relational terms. Making this choice, as Mary beautifully made with Jesus, is the experiential reality of having *good news*, in which Mary's whole significance has yet to be established today because of a fragmentary gospel. By making this choice in the primacy of God's relational terms to live whole in vulnerable relationship and to build intimate communion together as the new creation family, even at the expense of ministry, they celebrated God's relational whole—which is indeed the experiential truth and functional significance of the gospel. Accordingly, in this choice and the celebration signified with it, they experienced even greater depth of living whole. This is the flow of Mary's new wine that needs to distinguish our gospel today, indeed for the whole world.

These two new wine table fellowships clearly demonstrate the importance of making these choices and celebrating God's whole in conjoint function in order both to enjoy the breadth of being whole and to experience the depth of living whole—the *makarios* (fully satisfied) from the beatitudes and from the relational outcome of God's definitive blessing. Making the choice and celebrating God's whole converge most definitively for his church family in relationship together when they function in Eucharistic worship. Celebrating in Eucharistic worship is the most integral opportunity of God's new creation family to build intimate communion together. Yet, this distinguished opportunity is not a mere spiritual tradition and practice of faith merely engaged *before* God; such practice may signify still being in front of the curtain. Tradition easily becomes a substitute for deeper involvement in relationships without the veil, and hereby serves as an old wineskin. Thus, *what* we participate in and *how* we participate are vital; that means even the logistics are important to help us build God's relational whole that holds us together in our innermost. This communion is a qualitative function only of relationship, intimate relationship together *with* the whole of God, therefore relationship not embedded in the past or simply anticipating the future but relationship vulnerably functioning in the present. By removing the veil with his sacrifice, Jesus constituted the new creation family 'already'. In Eucharistic worship, when his church functions in vulnerable relationship to build intimate communion together, his church family in whole ontology and function experiences the height of relational involvement with the whole of God.

Together with the presence and reciprocal relational work of the Spirit (the Son's relational replacement), Jesus' transformed followers are theologically and functionally reconciled together to be the new creation whole of God's family in likeness of the Trinity, ongoingly in the trinitarian relational process of family love. At this integral new wine table fellowship *with* the whole of God, his church can celebrate God's whole only as church family together without relational distance, not as relational and emotional orphans functioning as orphanage. Without this relational celebration of God's whole, our Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, pneumatology and eschatological hope become merely narrowed-down referential doctrine essentially disembodied with nothing qualitatively distinguished to practice and relationally significant to experience both with God and with each other together. The only alternative left to practice and experience in this relational condition is "old wine," that some say "The old is good *or enough*" (Lk 5:39).

Jesus raised up Paul to extend and exceed his relational work of the new wine fellowship (Acts 26:16; Jn 14:12). Vulnerably involved with the whole of Jesus and in reciprocal relationship with the Spirit, Paul became the hermeneutical key for the theological and functional clarity of the church as God's family in whole ontology and function. Therefore, even circumcision and uncircumcision became old wineskins for the new wine fellowship in his perceptual-interpretive framework—"neither...is anything." For Paul, as a reduced person made whole, the new covenant and new creation were indispensable for the gospel, irreplaceable for its relational outcome, and irreducible for its emerging ontology and nonnegotiable for its ongoing relationship together. Nothing less and no substitutes either defined Paul or determined his theology and function. The flow of the new wine in the new covenant and creation constitutes the relational dynamic

of Jesus *into* Paul, and the who, what and how of Paul embodying the theology and hermeneutic of the whole gospel.

The new creation is everything, 'already'.



## Chapter 9

## Jesus' Relational Replacement

**Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.**

Ephesians 4:30

John the Baptist testified that “I saw the Spirit...and he remained [*meno*, dwelled] on him” at Jesus’ baptism (Jn 1:32, cf. 3:34). Thereafter, Luke’s Gospel records that Jesus was full of the Spirit and led by the Spirit and the Spirit’s power (Lk 4:1,14). These early accounts clearly distinguish the presence and function of the Spirit in the whole of Jesus’ embodied life and practice, that Jesus himself confirmed in his vulnerable disclosure of the gospel (Lk 4:18, cf. Isa 11:2; 42:1); and their function together dynamically continued in Jesus’ post-resurrection interactions (Acts 1:2), into his post-ascension involvement (Acts 9:17; 13:2; 16:7, cf. 2 Cor 3:17-18; Rev 2:7,11,17; 3:6,13,22). Throughout Jesus’ vulnerable presence and relational involvement, the Spirit *meno* with Jesus together to constitute the improbable relational context and process of the whole of God. Therefore, as noted in chapter seven, the relational work of the Spirit is irreplaceably the necessary relational means who constitutes theology beyond the referential terms of the probable in the relational epistemic process to the improbable. The Spirit provides the needed hermeneutic for the embodied Word’s whole theological trajectory and relational path (Jn 14:26; 15:26). Necessary beyond mere acknowledgement of the Spirit, for our theology to go further and deeper than self-referencing we need to honestly examine our theological assumptions of pneumatology. The gospel and its relational outcome that Jesus embodied in whole are contingent on who the Spirit is and what his function is.

The integration of Jesus *into* Paul was constituted by the primary relational work of the Spirit, not a construction in referential terms. Jesus *into* Paul is a relational dynamic that has significance only as the relational outcome of the Spirit’s presence and function. As Jesus identified the Spirit as the integral key to what unfolds after his ascension (Jn 14:16-18,26; 15:26; 16:8-15; Acts 1:4-5, 7-8), Paul confirmed the Spirit as that key and affirmed his reciprocal relational work as the innermost of God’s presence and involvement (1 Cor 2:9-16; 12:3-13; 2 Cor 3:17-18; Rom 8:9-16; Eph 1:13-14; 2:22). The synthesis of Jesus *into* Paul and their gospel of wholeness and its relational outcome of the new creation family unfold only in our whole understanding of the Spirit.

### The Missed-understood Person

As noted above, the Spirit’s presence and function dwelled (*meno*) with the embodied whole of Jesus together to constitute the trinitarian relational context of family and relational process of family love in ongoing reciprocal relational involvement with the Father—an irreducible relational dynamic ongoingly integrated through post-resurrection and into post-ascension. While the Spirit is certainly an integral member of this triangulated context and process, his person and function in the Trinity tends to be minimalized and often functionally ignored. When given attention, what tends to be paid

attention to are various functions related to the Spirit without the involvement of his person. This reduces both the Spirit as an integral person in the Trinity and consequently the Spirit's involvement as person in relationship together with the Father and the Son. The functional repercussion, if not theological conclusion, from this is a binitarian view of God focused on the Son alone with the Father. When the Spirit is reduced from personhood, the Spirit's person is lost in the whole of God, thereby relegating the Spirit at most to some dynamic between the Father and the Son—for example, an impersonal dynamic of “love.” Yet, the Spirit grieved like the other trinitarian persons, and this makes evident his involvement as a person (Isa 63:10, Eph 4:30).

Moreover, reduced from personhood, the Spirit only functions apart from the primacy of relationships; and without this primacy what the Spirit does no longer has the qualitative significance of relational work, thus only involves the quantitative aspects such as guiding in cognitive truth, providing spiritual gifts and empowering to do things. Whatever reduction or variation takes place, the relational consequence for the Spirit is to be the missed Person, the forgotten Person, or even the lost Person in the whole of God.

When the Spirit is reduced from personhood, the Spirit's function is without relational significance; and this condition implies a condition about Jesus. This is a condition in which the Spirit serves a Jesus who has been reduced to his teachings, principles and example in an incomplete Christology for a truncated soteriology with a fragmentary ecclesiology that is not whole. Essentially, the Spirit can be no less in substance and no more in significance than what, who and how Jesus is. Pneumatology is conjoined to Christology and is contingent on it. In other words, as Jesus goes so goes the Spirit. When the whole of Jesus embodies the whole of God and vulnerably discloses the whole and holy God only for relationship together to be God's whole, then the Spirit's person, presence and function extend the relational Whole as the ontological One with the same qualitative substance and relational significance as the Son to complete our relationship together in God's whole. This was the what, who and how of the Spirit that the whole of Jesus definitively disclosed.

In Jesus' vulnerable interaction with the Samaritan woman at the well in which he intimately disclosed God's strategic shift, he offered her living water (Jn 4:10,14). While he continued on to disclose the Father's intimate desires for communion in relationship together, we must not overlook the relational significance of the living water. Later, John's Gospel informs us that the living water is the Spirit (Jn 7:38-39, cf. Rev 22:17). Jesus did not reduce the Spirit from personhood with the metaphor of living water; that would have reduced his own person since the Spirit dwelled with him in relationship together. Rather, Jesus disclosed to the Samaritan woman the strategic shift of God's thematic relational action, in which the living water pointed to the Spirit's person who together with Jesus constituted the trinitarian relational context of family and trinitarian relational process of family love. In conjoint involvement, they functionally and relationally embodied God's strategic shift for intimate relationship together. Therefore, Jesus opened to her access to the whole of God for relationship together with all the trinitarian persons. Though the Father was highlighted in this interaction, all three trinitarian persons were extended to her. And in Jesus' definitive disclosure, we must not overlook or reduce this reality: (1) the emerging person of the Spirit integral to the whole of God for relationship together, and (2) the emerging relational significance of the



Spirit's person in Jesus' salvific work, whose relational significance further increased integrally for what Jesus saves us *to*.

The increased relational significance of the Spirit's person emerged as Jesus' salvific work approached the critical steps to its climax. Jesus disclosed to his disciples in his so-called farewell discourse, not in referential terms but using relational language to communicate that his whole person embodied the Truth for relationship with the Father—relationship together as the whole of God's family (Jn 14:6). After startling them with the intimate disclosure of the Father (14:9-11), he further disclosed in relational terms that the Spirit's person will soon replace his person as this truth (14:17, later 15:26; 16:13). Jesus' relational language is crucial to fully understand both *what* is replaced and *who* replaces.

Jesus as the Truth was always for the purpose of relationship and functioned only for relationship together to be the whole of God's family (see Jn 8:32,35-36). His well-known relational communication on the truth is usually taken out of its relational context of God's family by reducing the truth to the cognitive aspects of propositional truths and referential doctrine. Additionally, Jesus' own person tends to be separated functionally (not theologically) from his teachings, thereby reducing the qualitative whole of his person to such quantitative parts of him that disciples follow in a reductionist discipleship without relational significance to his whole person (contrary to what 8:31 makes definitive, and Jn 12:26 makes imperative). Jesus' whole person embodied the Truth only for relationship together in God's family; and this is *what* is replaced.

This is *what* Jesus focused on when he disclosed "I will ask the Father and he will give you another" (Jn 14:16). The term "another" (*allos*) means another of equal quality, not another of different quality (*heteros*). The Spirit then is defined by the Son as of the same qualitative substance and as equal to himself, that is, as whole person in full personhood; this is *who* replaces. The Spirit's person as truth needs to be understood in function as the Son's relational replacement whom the Father gave as "another" in lieu of the Son; Paul later described them in a relational sense as interchangeable (2 Co 3:17-18).

Yet, '*who* replaces' needs to be in conjoint function with '*what* is replaced' to maintain compatibility and congruence with the whole of Jesus and to have continuity of his relational work. The Spirit's whole person functioned in the trinitarian relational context and process as the Son's relational replacement and as the relational extension of the Father only for relationship together as God's family (Jn 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-15). Therefore, as *who* replaces, the Spirit of truth must not be reduced from personhood to no longer be *allos* of the whole of Jesus. As *who* replaces *what* is replaced, the Spirit's person as truth cannot reduce truth from the relational significance of Jesus as the Truth. Just as the Truth cannot be reduced to his teachings and referential knowledge, the Spirit's function must not be reduced to merely a guide in referential truth, a helper, counselor, or empowerer for the individual. When the Spirit is utilized only for these ends, these become reductionist functions and a misuse of the Spirit's person. Jesus defined the Spirit as *who* replaces *what* is replaced: "the Holy Spirit...will remind you of all that I have said to you" (14:26), "the Spirit of truth ...will testify on my behalf" (15:26), "he will not speak on his own but will speak whatever he hears...take from what is mine...all that the Father has is mine...and declare it to you" (16:13-15). Therefore, Jesus conclusively disclosed the whole of the Spirit's person with the same functional and relational significance as his person: the truth and self-revelation of the whole and

holy God only for our relationship together to be whole as God's new creation family in likeness of the Trinity.

The whole of the Spirit's functional and relational significance emerges and converges with Jesus' defining enactment of family love: "I will not leave you orphaned" (14:18). The Spirit's person with full personhood in the relational ontology of the Trinity completes this family love to make functional our relationships together in likeness of the Trinity and on this basis to consummate Jesus' formative family prayer. The whole functional and relational significance of the Spirit's relational work integrally involves convicting of sin, redeeming and sanctifying for what Jesus saves us *from*; in the same process, by the nature of *what* is replaced, the Spirit's work is further integrated with reconciling, transforming and perfecting what Jesus saves us *to* for our relationships together to be the whole of God's family, and for us together to live God's whole and to make God's whole in the human condition throughout God's eschatological plan. For church function to be in likeness of the Trinity, it must (*dei*) by its nature ongoingly practice in relational cooperation with the Spirit. Therefore, as *allos* for the Son, the Spirit of truth is and functions in the following: (1) the *functional truth* only for this relationship together, (2) only the *experiential truth* for this relationship together to be whole, (3) the *relational truth* for this relationship together to be only God's whole on only God's terms, and accordingly (4) the only *definitive truth* for our relationships together to be Jesus' church and not relationships in a mere gathering of relational and emotional orphans signifying a virtual orphanage.

Furthermore, as Jesus disclosed, "the Spirit of truth...will guide you into all the truth...and he will declare to you the things that are to come" (Jn 16:13). "Guide" (*hodegeo*, lead, explain, instruct) us in all the above truth for relationship together to be whole, and conjointly "declare" (*anangelo*, declare freely, openly, eminently) to us the big picture "to come." The verb *erchomai* (to go, to come) implies motion from the Spirit's person to the person of the Son who is to come (cf. v.14), the relational process in which the Spirit is directly involved (as indicated by *erchomai* in Gk middle voice). Yet this language is not about informing us in referential terms, because God's truth and self-revelation are communicated in relational language only for relationship. As the '*who* replaces', the Spirit's person is only involved in *what* is replaced. The Spirit's disclosure is only about the unfolding, completing and concluding of the whole of God's new family in God's eschatological plan and final thematic relational action in response to the human condition to be whole. Eschatology (doctrine of last things) functionally emerges with the Spirit and involves the relational process of the Spirit's reciprocating movement (*erchomai*) to the Son for only this eschatological relational conclusion, not a mere eschatological event. Hence, the Spirit of truth additionally functions as (5) the *eschatological truth* for church function within the big picture to be in likeness of the Trinity in movement to our ultimate communion as family together with the whole of God consummated by the Son's return. For church function to be in likeness of the Trinity both in its immediate life and practice 'already' and conjointly within God's eschatological big picture 'not yet', it must ongoingly engage the whole of the Spirit of truth.

If we reduce soteriology to only what Jesus saves us from, or we lack whole understanding of what Jesus saves us to, then we will not take seriously the relational significance of never being left as orphans. This would mean that we neither have

adequately understood the truth of the Spirit nor have integrally experienced redemptive reconciliation with the embodied Truth in relational progression to the Father (as Jesus made imperative earlier, Jn 8:31-32, 35-36). Complete Christology involves Jesus' full salvific work for adoption to relationally belong to the whole of God's family as the Father's very own daughters and sons in transformed relationships together. Adoption (however the term is perceived) is the trinitarian relational process of family love to be constituted together in the trinitarian relational context of family. The Father replaced the Son with the Spirit's person to consummate his family so that we would not have to live in the relational condition as orphans. Jesus also disclosed that the Spirit's definitive feedback (*elencho*, to expose, rebuke, refute, show fault, convince, convict, Jn 16:8-11) directly addresses the barriers to relationship together—namely our sin of reductionism, our difficulties in counting on God (for relational righteousness) in Jesus' embodied absence, and our unawareness and susceptibility to reductionism's counter-relational work promoted by Satan. Without the functional and relational significance of the Spirit's person in our church life and practice, we have no other basis and means to be God's relational whole on God's relational terms. Moreover, without embracing the Spirit's *eschatological truth*, a church struggles to find its place, purpose and function beyond itself locally to the whole of God's family in the eschatological big picture.

The personhood of the Spirit signifies that the Spirit's presence engages us in *interpersonal* relationship, and that the Spirit's function is involvement with us in reciprocal *interpersonal* relationship. The relational work of the Spirit's person is not unilateral but only in cooperative reciprocal involvement with Jesus' followers as family together. Despite his embodied departure, Jesus conclusively declared the ongoing truth of his church family not having to experience the relational condition of orphans only because the Spirit would replace him to extend and complete the relationships together necessary to be the whole of God's new creation family. Yet, the mere presence of the Spirit's person engaging us in interpersonal relationship is not sufficient for this relational outcome and conclusion; it is necessary for this outcome but not sufficient for it. This is a critical distinction to keep in focus about the Spirit's involvement, both for its necessity and the nature of its sufficiency.

That is to say, the Spirit's person is present to be involved in relationship that by nature must be reciprocal relationship together—not unilateral relationship, not optional or arbitrary relationship, nor relationship negotiable to our selective terms. Accordingly, Jesus' intended relational outcome of the Spirit's involvement extending his relational work is contingent on our compatible reciprocal involvement in the relationship; in this limited sense, whether the Spirit's relational work is sufficient can be in part measured by the extent of our relational reciprocity. This is not to say that we are the significant cause of the outcome of the Spirit's relational work, but only to indicate that the Spirit does not work unilaterally and impose any outcome or conclusion on us as in power relations. This cooperative-bilateral relational approach is evident in the metaphor of the Son knocking on church doors, not breaking through them to impose himself, for relationship together to be whole (just as he knocked on the church door in Laodicea, Rev 3:20)—which also needs to inform how church leadership is approached (cf. Mk 10:42-44). Consequently, though the Spirit's person is always present and ongoingly relationally involved intimately with us, the Spirit's person can be missed, ignored or even forgotten

specifically in functional and relational significance to render the Spirit's presence and involvement without significance, and hereby causing the Spirit to grieve.

To ignore the whole of the Spirit's functional and relational significance, or even to inconsistently pay attention to the Spirit's person—including misusing the Spirit's person with selective reductionist functions—must be understood clearly as consequential for church life and practice. The main consequence is unavoidable. When our focus ignores or pays attention to the Spirit in this narrowed way, we are using the very lens from which orphans are the relational consequence and orphanage-gatherings emerge—however unintentional and despite good intentions—which nevertheless is contrary to the Son's defining enactment of family love not to leave us in that relational condition.

Christology is not complete without this integral pneumatology, nor can soteriology be full, ecclesiology be whole and eschatology be functionally clear without the Spirit of truth—the *allos* ('who replaces', 'what is replaced') person never forgotten by nor apart from the Father and the Son. This is the ontology of the whole of who, what and how God is: ongoingly vulnerably present and intimately involved with us only for whole relationship together. This is the ongoing involvement with us intimately in family love, by which the Trinity holds us ongoingly accountable to be in likeness, just as the Son clearly made evident for church practice to be whole (Rev 3:19). And Jesus, in post-ascension, ongoingly makes this reciprocal response the relational imperative for the new wine table fellowship of his church (Rev 3:20) because his relational replacement remains (*meno*) in the reciprocal relationship necessary to complete the new creation family.

## The Spirit and Paul

The whole of Paul's gospel and the whole in his theology integrally emerged from the embodied whole of Jesus. Furthermore, and equally significant, this distinguished wholeness of Paul unfolded only from the relational outcome of the Spirit's reciprocal relational work. This relational process is critical to account for by Paul's readers. We should not look for a unity in Paul's thought and theology within his letters until we understand where Paul is coming from, that is, what primarily defines and determines his life and practice. Without this understanding of Paul, any apparent unity and coherence will either be imposed on Paul by his readers or remain elusive to them. The congruence in Paul's life and practice to his purpose and thus his coherence were composed in cooperative relationship with the Spirit. This is the often missed-understood and forgotten trinitarian Person, whom Pauline scholarship has neglected or conveniently minimalized,<sup>1</sup> yet whom Paul depended on to further unfold, develop and bring to completion the whole of God's thematic relational response to the human condition in the eschatological big picture—including the relational outcome 'already' of the new creation family constituted by the Spirit, that is at the heart of Paul.

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<sup>1</sup> As one exception to this urgent discussion on pneumatology, see the exegetical study by Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994).

Paul was focused on and concerned for communicating theology that illuminates the good news and constitutes the relational outcome of whole relationship together—perhaps also articulating their doctrinal clarity but not formulating a systematic theology. While these concerns involved the historical Paul, they emerged from the relational Paul who constituted the theological Paul in the relational epistemic process with the whole of God, notably with the Spirit. This vulnerable involvement signified the relational Paul qualitatively determining the functional significance of the theological Paul; therefore, to have whole understanding of Paul’s theology also implies a contingency to understand the relational Paul. In this relational epistemic process, what emerged was not his theological speculation and theory from bottom-up but God’s vulnerable self-disclosure from top-down in the whole of God’s relational context and process, distinguished clearly from human contextualization and terms. What unfolded in Paul’s theological systemic framework and integrated his theological forest was the relational embodiment of the *pleroma* (fullness, complete, i.e. whole) of God (Col 1:19; 2:9-10). In the relational epistemic process with the whole of God, the theological Paul (unified with the relational Paul) was restored to whole knowledge and understanding in the relational context and process of God’s communicative action, specifically, as relationally embodied by the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:6) and relationally extended by the Spirit (1 Cor 2:10-13). The relational outcome was the wholeness of Paul who was taken from partial knowledge and understanding to whole knowledge and understanding to compose the whole in his theology. This included both understanding signified as the grasp of meaning (not its density but its intensity, cf. Eph 3:18-19) and wisdom signified as the understanding of the whole, God’s relational whole (cf. *synesis*, Eph 3:2-4; Col 1:9).

Since Paul’s theology was first his experiential truth of this good news, theology for Paul was always inseparable from function and can never be reduced to conventional theological discourse. The relational discourse, jointly theological and functional, in Paul’s letters put together (*syniemi* for *synesis*) the theological basis for the truth of the whole gospel (Eph 3:4-6; Col 2:2-3), by which he also engaged in the deconstruction of ontological simulations and epistemological illusions from reductionism (e.g. Gal 1:6-7, 11-12; 5:6; 6:15; Rom 2:28-29; Col 2:4,8-10; 3:10-11) and, when possible, engaged in their reconstruction/transformation to be made whole (e.g. 1 Cor 3:21-22; Gal 2:11-14; Phlm; cf. Eph 2:14-18). The relational outcome of Paul’s theological engagement is the integrated dynamics of the theology of wholeness, relational belonging and ontological identity—the relational outcome ‘already’ and the relational conclusion ‘not yet’ in the whole of God’s relational context and process vulnerably embodied by the Son in *pleroma* Christology for *pleroma* soteriology, and ongoingly being completed by the Spirit.

Paul’s only concern, both theologically and functionally, is for the irreducible embodiment of the *pleroma* of God to be further relationally embodied and extended in nonnegotiable ontology and function for the inherent human need to be fulfilled and the human problem to be resolved. This further embodying vulnerably involves the whole ontology and function of those who relationally belong to Christ. In the experiential truth of Paul’s theology, how does the relational progression of God’s relational dynamic of grace and *agape* involvement become embodied from the *pleroma* of God to the *pleroma* of Christ (his church, Eph 1:22-23) and continue in its eschatological trajectory for the relational conclusion of the gospel of wholeness? And according to the experiential truth

of the whole of Paul's person and the whole in his theology, how do persons belonging to Christ—by necessity both as individual persons and as persons together in God's family—engage in this relational progression *with* God and accordingly participate *in* the whole of God's life to the relational completion of whole relationship together?

This qualitative process of embodying and its relational process of participation deeply involve the theological dynamics that are wholly integrated in Paul's theological forest to *pleroo* the communicative word of God—thereby illuminating the embodied *pleroma* of God who is relationally from God, and now in relational extension for God (cf. Col 1:25; 2:9-10). And for Paul, the Spirit is the key to the wholeness of this relational process.

A prevailing presence in the systemic framework of Paul's theology which pervades his theological forest is *pneuma* (spirit). The presence of *pneuma* is in both ontology and function, both in God's ontology and function (1 Cor 2:10-11; 3:16; 2 Cor 3:6,17; Rom 8:11; 1 Tim 3:16) and for human ontology and function (1 Cor 6:11; 12:13; 2 Cor 1:22; 3:6,18; 7:1; Rom 8:11; Eph 2:18,22). What is *pneuma* for God and what is *pneuma* for human person?

In terms of God's ontology and function, *pneuma* is not *what* but *who*, though Paul does not specifically call the Spirit a person. Yet Paul implies personhood for the Spirit by identifying the Spirit as having a will to decide and using it (*boulomai*, 1 Cor 12:11), who also can be “grieved” (*lypeo*, afflicted with sorrow, distressed, mournful, Eph 4:30; cf. Heb 10:29), and, moreover, who bears witness to us of our family status (Rom 8:16). The Spirit's grief, for example, is over not being engaged in reciprocal relationship together (cf. Eph 2:22), which is not an anthropomorphism but signifies the whole of God's being and relational nature. This identification is the *who* of a person, the person of the Spirit, who is also vulnerably present and relationally involved. This does not imply, however, that Paul was a trinitarian in the later sense, though his theology certainly provides definitive basis for trinitarian theology.

The doctrine of the Trinity emerged in the fourth century as a response to theological conflict and reductionism. Arius specifically taught that Jesus was subordinate to God in substance (*ousia*) and was created (begotten by the Father). The Council of Nicea (the Nicene Creed in 325) countered that Jesus was begotten (i.e. generated, not created) from the substance of the Father, of the same substance (*homoousios*) with God. In further response to another form of Arianism (from Eunomius: divine substance is unbegotten and belongs only to the Father), the Cappadocian fathers (Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus, between 358-380) formulated the distinction between the same substance of God and the different persons (*hypostasis*) of God, thereby establishing the doctrine of the Trinity: one God existing in three persons.<sup>2</sup>

Essentially, from the fourth century into the twenty-first, we have observed one aspect of God emphasized over another (e.g. the oneness of God or the divine threeness), and some aspect of God reduced (e.g. God's substance [*ousia*] or the persons/personhood [*hypostasis*] of God), as well as redefined or ignored (e.g. as “begotten” or the

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<sup>2</sup> J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 2004), 252-69. Catherine Mowry LaCugna, ed., *Freeing Theology: the Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), 85-87. Stanley J. Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 7-8.

relationality of the Trinity). If not in the theology most certainly in function, these perceptions and interpretations critically affect how we define God's ontology and function—notably in the relational nature of the whole of God. I suggest that much of this theological difficulty can be resolved or prevented if trinitarian theology emerged first and foremost from *pleroma* Christology, and thereby better put together (*syniemi*) the whole in Paul's theology needed for the whole knowledge and understanding (*synesis*) of any theology of the whole of God.

Since Paul was no trinitarian, his purpose and responsibility to *pleroo* the word of God was not to theologially clarify the Trinity or to develop theological concepts like *homoousios*, *hypostasis* and *perichoresis*. His purpose was more functional and distinctly relational in order to make definitive the gospel as whole without any reductionism. Within his purpose, Paul instead epistemologically clarified the whole of God and hermeneutically corrected human shaping and construction of theological cognition, challenging theological assumptions which were either limiting or reductionist. Therefore, Paul indeed took Judaism's monotheism beyond its limited knowledge and understanding, and he extended the Jesus tradition into the depths of the whole of God. In making relationally functional the *pleroma* of God, Paul focused also in making relationally definitive the whole of God in the relational presence and relational work of the Spirit.

## **Integral, Pleroma Pneumatology**

In *pleroma* Christology of Paul's theological forest, salvation was constituted by Christ and completed in Christ for the relational outcome of *pleroma* soteriology. *Pleroma* soteriology is the relational act solely by Christ and the relational outcome is the function solely of relationship with Christ (Rom 6:5-11); and both of these are constituted in reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit (Rom 8:11; 1 Cor 6:11; 12:13; 2 Cor 1:22; 3:6,17; Eph 1:13; 2:18,22; 1 Tim 3:16; cf. Jn 1:32-33; Lk 4:1). In the whole of God's ontology and function, *pneuma* is person, the Holy Spirit, and not to be reduced to a power, also noted by Paul (1 Cor 2:4; Rom 15:13,19). There is a dynamic interaction for Paul between the embodied *pleroma* of God and the person of the Spirit—that is, the Spirit as the functional cohort of Jesus who shares in, even constitutes, and now completes the relational work of the Son, whose embodiment (prior to and after the cross) fulfills the relational response of grace from the Father (Gal 4:4-6; Rom 8:9b-11). This is the dynamic interaction between *pneuma* and *soma* (body) of the *pleroma* of God, that is vital for integrally understanding the whole of God's ontology in its depth, as Paul claimed for the Spirit (1 Cor 2:10-11) and Jesus promised about the Spirit (Jn 16:12-15). Paul understood that *soma* without *pneuma* can be confused with or reduced to *sarx* ("flesh," cf. Paul's polemic about the resurrection, 1 Cor 15:35-44). In this sense, *pneuma* is also a *what*—distinguished from *who*—that signifies the qualitative depth (the innermost) of God's ontology which is irreducible for God to be God (cf. Phil 3:3 and Jn 4:23-24).

Moreover, the dynamic interaction between *pneuma* and *soma* is critical for putting together the whole of God's function, as well as understanding God's ontology, in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes. *Pneuma* will not allow for the embodied

*pleroma* of God to be reduced or renegotiated to anything less than and any substitutes for whole ontology and function. There is indeed mystery involved in this interaction, but for Paul *pneuma* is unequivocally the person of the Spirit. Even though Paul had whole knowledge and understanding (*synesis*) from the Spirit, he did not claim to totally understand this dynamic (1 Tim 3:16).

This dynamic interaction with the Spirit likewise points to the embodiment of the *pleroma* of Christ (Eph 1:23). *Pneuma* is the person who constitutes also those who belong to Christ (Rom 8:9). In cooperative reciprocal relationship as well with these human persons, the Spirit—who functions as the relational replacement of the Son, as Jesus promised (Jn 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; cf. Eph 1:13)—constitutes persons (both individually and together) in whole ontology and function, that is, the qualitative ontology and relational function from inner out in likeness of the *pneuma* of God’s whole ontology and function (2 Cor 3:17-18; Rom 8:11, 14-17). For Paul, in other words, the Spirit is not a mere Object of theological discourse but the experiential truth of Subject-*theos*, who is present in us and relationally involved with us for relationship together as God’s whole family (“dwells,” *oikeo* from *oikos* and its cognates in reference to family, Rom 8:11, 14-16; 1 Cor 3:16; Eph 2:22). Paul goes beyond merely the Spirit’s agency (e.g. power, instrumentality) to make definitive the depth of the Spirit as Subject’s *agape* relational involvement as the whole of God (Rom 5:5). Importantly, Paul understands that the person of the Spirit is Jesus’ relational replacement for the continued involvement necessary to complete the relational work Jesus constituted. When Paul speaks specifically of “the Spirit of Christ” (Rom 8:9; Gal 4:6; Phil 1:19; cf. Acts 16:7), this is Paul’s shorthand-relational language implying the Spirit’s relational replacement and extension of Jesus (‘*who* replaces’ and ‘*what* is replaced’), whose further involvement is irreplaceable for extending the qualitative process of embodying the *pleroma* of Christ and making functional its relational process of participation in the whole of God’s life and family together (cf. 1 Cor 6:14-15a; Rom 8:11; Eph 1:23).

**What emerges from this reciprocal relational involvement together with the Spirit?** Paul first addresses what does not emerge when relationship with the Spirit becomes incompatible. The issue of incompatibility, incongruity or discontinuity with the Spirit (as with Jesus and with the whole of God) hinges on theological anthropology and our assumptions about the human person. This specifically involves defining the person by what one does/has and, on this basis, engaging in relationships with both God and each other, individually and together as church. What underlies this process is an ontological deficit and reduced function of the person. Paul exposed such reductionist assumptions of theological anthropology in the church at Corinth (1 Cor 3:1-4; 4:6-7). This reductionism directly fragments the person from the dynamic interaction between *pneuma* and *soma*, thereby leaving *soma* without the quality of *pneuma* to then be confused with or reduced to *sarx*: “I could not speak to you as *pneuma* people but rather as people of *sarx*, as infants in Christ *without identity formation as whole persons*” (1 Cor 3:1). *Sarx* (and its cognates *sarkikos* and *sarkinos*) signifies reduced human ontology and function in Paul’s discourse, whereas *pneuma* is inseparable from *soma* in the whole ontology and function of the person.

This reduction of *soma* to *sarx* is the issue in Paul’s polemic when he made the ambiguous claim: “Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself” (1 Cor 6:18). Paul’s focus goes beyond sexual immorality



and is not implying that all other sins are inconsequential for human ontology and function. He is focused on the sin of reductionism that fragments *soma* from *pneuma* to reduce a human person's ontology and function to that signified by *sarx* (6:16-17). The consequence is reductionist embodiment diminishing the whole person, which further includes the relational consequence of fragmenting the embodiment of whole relationship together (6:14-15, 19-20). Essentially, Paul argues rather that every sin a person commits is the sin of reductionism, therefore against the embodiment of wholeness. Whole human ontology and function is the inseparable embodiment of both *soma* and *pneuma* by the Spirit (Rom 8:11), which is irreducibly and nonnegotiablely embodied together by and with the Spirit in God's whole family (1 Cor 12:13).

In Paul's theological systemic framework and theological forest, the Spirit functions to bridge the quantitative of *bios* (including all creation) with the qualitative of *zoe*. Even more than bridge, the Spirit integrates the quantitative into the qualitative to embody irreducible wholeness and the nonnegotiable embodiment of God's whole (2 Cor 3:18; Col 1:20; 2:9-10; 3:10-11,15; Rom 8:18-23). This is why cosmology and theological anthropology converge in Paul's theological systemic framework, and how they are integrated in the theological dynamic of wholeness. Therefore, the Spirit's person is inseparable from both the whole of God and God's whole, and the Spirit's involvement is irreplaceable for the embodying of wholeness. Anything less and any substitutes of this whole, either of the Spirit or of human persons, are reductionism for Paul, the sin of reductionism that must always be exposed and its counter-relational work confronted—whatever its form, conditions or assumptions.

In Galatians, Paul extended his polemic against these assumptions reducing theological anthropology and their broader relational consequence for human persons. While the situation in Galatians involved "false believers" (2:4) who were teaching "a different gospel" (1:6) and "confusing you" (1:7), and had "bewitched you" (3:1), the underlying dynamic involved assimilation in human contextualization (3:2-5; 4:8-31). Paul challenged their theological anthropology by framing the issue within the further and deeper relational context and process embodied by Christ and extended by the Spirit. Here again, the dynamic interaction between the *soma* of the *pleroma* of God and the *pneuma* of the whole of God is inseparable. If fragmented, *soma* becomes confused with or reduced to definitions from human contextualization ("elemental spirits," *stoicheion*, basic principles, 4:9; cf. Col 2:8,20) and consequently shaped by the reduced ontology and function of *sarx* (3:3). Moreover, when fragmented, *pneuma* is reduced to mere Object, at best only in agency to do something or to help us to do something based on the reductionist self-definition of what one does: "Having started with *the person of the Spirit*, are you now *epiteleio* [fully completing your purpose] with *sarx*?"—that is, by human effort in reduced ontology and function (3:3). For Paul, this is incompatible, incongruent and discontinuous with the Spirit (5:16-17; 6:8; cf. 2 Cor 7:1)—a relational condition that even acknowledgement of the Spirit is insufficient alone to make whole.

The whole of the Spirit is received, experienced and ongoingly engaged in relationship together solely on the basis of our reciprocal relational response and involvement of trust, not on the basis of human effort shaped by human terms from human contextualization (Gal 3:5-14). The latter is consequential for the human person and persons together to be enslaved in a reductionist comparative system of human ontology and function based on quantitative human effort/possessions—the self-

determination and self-justification to erase the ontological deficit—resulting in constructing false human distinctions which relegate persons to stratified relationships together in systems of inequality (3:28; 4:3, 8-9)

This fragmentation can never be whole because the *who* of *Pneuma* as Subject is not engaged in relationship together within the whole of God's relational context and process (5:16,25; Rom 8:5-6; cf. 1 Thes 4:7-8), and because the *what* of *pneuma* is divided from *soma* in dualistic ontology and function characteristic of shaping by *sarx* from human contextualization (cf. the wholeness in 1 Thes 5:23; 2 Cor 7:1). These are the consequences of assimilation in human contextualization and its defining and determining influence by reductionism. For Paul, the dynamic interaction between *pneuma* and *soma* precludes this fragmentation and duality (cf. his claim in Phil 3:3). Throughout his letters, Paul addressed various situations involving moral and ethical issues. Yet, Paul's readers must understand what Paul is further speaking to and where he is speaking from. As Paul addresses these situations, he goes beyond moral and ethical behavior to speak directly to the underlying and more far-reaching issue in human contextualization: reductionism, exposing reductionism as sin and confronting the sin of reductionism, and its pervasive consequence on human ontology and function. Paul was definitive and decisive about this without being shaped, diminished or minimized by human terms from human contextualization because with epistemic humility he spoke from God's relational context in God's relational process through reciprocal involvement with the Spirit, the integral Subject of the innermost of God (1 Cor 2:9-16, cf. Rom 8:27).

#### **What does Paul also make definitive as the outcome of reciprocal relational involvement together with the Spirit?**

What clearly emerges from ongoing relationship together with the Spirit is the functional wholeness that is incompatible, incongruent and discontinuous with reductionism pervading human contextualization, as Paul clarified functionally and theologically (Gal 6:14-16; Rom 8:6). When Paul boasts of the cross of Christ through whom he has been crucified to human contextualization ("to the world," Gal 6:14), the *soma* of the *pleroma* of God and the *pneuma* of the whole of God are integrated and resurrected for the whole embodying of the new creation. That is, this is the embodying in qualitative *zoe* (not quantitative *bios*) and wholeness ("life and peace," Rom 8:6), in which the *Pneuma* inseparably dwells also in mortal *soma* for whole relationship together as God's family (Rom 8:11, 14-16; cf. Eph 2:22). The theological dynamics Paul illuminates have only functional significance for this relationship together (Eph 2:18). Apart from the function of relationship and its relational embodiment Paul's theological clarity has no significance, both to God and to human persons for the fulfillment of the inherent human relational need and the resolution of its relational problem (Eph 2:14-16). The Spirit is present and relationally involved for the whole ontology and function necessary for the ongoing relationship together to be God's whole—the embodying as the *pleroma* of Christ 'already' in relational progression to its completion in the relational conclusion 'not yet' (1 Cor 12:13; cf. Jn 7:37-39).

The Spirit's relational involvement notably emerges in the resurrection, in which the Spirit's dynamic interaction also involves us wholly (*soma* and *pneuma*) to be embodied in the new creation (new person, new life, new covenant, Rom 8:11). Involvement together in this relational process is also defined by Paul as being baptized in the Spirit (1 Cor 12:13; cf. Mt 3:11; Acts 1:5; 11:16). The theological dynamic of

baptism is complex and mysterious but the relational process involved is uncomplicated yet rigorous: death to the old and raising of the new (Rom 6:3-8). Being baptized with the Spirit makes functional the redemptive change from reduced ontology and function (consequential of the sin of reductionism) necessary for the emergence of whole ontology and function (cf. Ti 3:5). The relational outcome of this relational process is the redemptive reconciliation of whole persons embodied in relationship together as the new creation family of God (Col 1:19-22; Eph 2:14-22)—“baptized into one body” without false human distinctions from reductionism (1 Cor 12:13). This *zoe*, the embodying of the new creation, emerges specifically from the relational work of the Spirit (Rom 8:11; 2 Cor 3:6; cf. Jn 6:63; Rom 8:6)—“we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13; cf. Jn 7:38-39). On this basis, Paul declares unequivocally: “Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him... For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God” (Rom 8:9,14); furthermore, “no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3). Therefore, the experiential truth of the theological dynamics of wholeness, relational belonging and ontological identity functionally emerge from reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit for their experiential reality.

The dynamic interaction of the Spirit and the *pleroma* of God always constitutes ontology and function in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes. Accordingly, the reciprocal relational involvement by the Spirit is neither with only the human *pneuma* nor with just the human *soma*. Such involvement would create a duality which fragments the person. Human *soma* without *pneuma* is a critical condition because it is a reductionism focused on the outer in that the person cannot distinguish unequivocally from *sarx*, consequently is rendered to the sin of reductionism notably in ontological simulation (as discussed earlier about Paul’s polemic beyond the situation to the underlying reductionism in 1 Cor 6:12-20). Likewise, human *pneuma* apart from involvement of *soma* becomes disembodied, which is also a reductionism focused on a subjective part of a person, not the whole person qualitatively integrated from inner out. The focus of such a person cannot distinguish from subjectivism, esoteric individualism or self-centered separatism—as often found in spiritualism, mysticism and asceticism—thus rendered to the sin of reductionism notably in epistemological illusion (cf. Paul’s polemic about reductionism in spiritual practice disembodied from the church in 1 Cor 14). The Spirit is relationally involved only with the whole person (*soma* and *pneuma* inseparably) from inner out signified by the function of the heart and embodied in the primacy of relationship together (2 Cor 1:22; Gal 4:6; Rom 5:5; 8:16; Eph 1:17-18; 3:16-19). Additionally, the Spirit’s relational involvement with the whole person from inner out includes both the person’s mindset (*phroneo*, Rom 8:5) and its basis, the person’s perceptual-interpretive framework (*phronema*, 8:6). In this involvement, the Spirit transforms quantitative *phroneo* and reduced *phronema* and composes the qualitative *phroneo* (interpretive lens) in its whole *phronema* (interpretive framework). Both of these changes are necessary for the Spirit to embody persons in qualitative *zoe* and wholeness together (“life and peace”), and to function ongoingly in this new embodiment (1 Thes 5:19,23; 2 Thes 2:13; Rom 15:16).

Paul is clear about the experiential truth of the Spirit’s relational involvement. Yet, it is important for his readers to understand that by God’s relational nature the Spirit is involved in reciprocal relationship, not unilateral relationship. The Spirit’s reciprocal relational involvement implies a necessary compatible reciprocal relational response to

and involvement with the Spirit—not as contingency limiting God’s relational nature but as the condition/terms for relationships together according to God’s relational nature (cf. Paul’s conditional sense in Phil 2:1; 2 Cor 13:13). Therefore, in relation to the Spirit, Paul always assumes the presence of the Spirit (e.g. 1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 1:21-22; Gal 5:5), but he does not assume that the Spirit has the opportunity to engage in reciprocal relational involvement and work, as he implies in his ongoing relational imperative (not moral imperative) “Do not quench the Spirit” (1 Thes 5:19). Certainly, the Spirit can and does act unilaterally; yet his primary concern and function is in reciprocal relational involvement with persons who “belong to Christ” (Rom 8:9) to extend and complete the whole relationship together constituted by the embodied *pleroma* of God—all of whom the Spirit also raised up together in order to functionally embody the *pleroma* of Christ as Jesus’ relational replacement.

This is the depth and breadth of the Spirit’s relational involvement with persons belonging to Christ, and the likeness of involvement necessary from those persons to be compatible, congruent and continuous in reciprocal relationship together with the Spirit. The dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes constitutes the ontology and function of the Spirit and needs to constitute the ontology and function of those in whom the Spirit dwells. In Paul’s theological forest, anything less and any substitutes of the Spirit’s ontology and function are an immature pneumatology still undeveloped and needing to be whole; anything less and any substitutes of human ontology and function are a deficient theological anthropology, the assumptions of which for Paul always need to be challenged in order to be made whole. That wholeness, however, is made functional solely by the relational dynamic of *pleroma* pneumatology.

In the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes, the relational involvement of the Spirit’s whole ontology and function makes functional the theological dynamics of wholeness integrated with relational belonging and ontological identity for the experiential truth of their embodiment in those belonging to Christ. The emergence of the new (wine) identity for these persons is functionally constituted only by the reciprocal relational work of the Spirit; human terms from human contextualization cannot establish the identity formation of who they are with Christ and whose they are in Christ (Rom 8:9-11). Paul is definitive that this identity is not formed by a social process but by the relational dynamic of the Spirit in reciprocal relationship together (Rom 8:12-17; Gal 5:16-26). The new creation identity constituted in this relationship together as family is neither a static condition nor a contextual characteristic, but a dynamic process of relationship together necessitating by its nature ongoing reciprocal relational involvement with each other without the veil. Paul also describes this reciprocal response as “we are debtors” (*opheiletes* from *opheilo*, Rom 8:12), that is, not in human terms and contextualization but to God’s favor (indebted to a benefactor). Yet, *opheiletes* in this context should not be reduced to an obligation (*opheilo*) to fulfill. Paul is not defining an ethical mandate but illuminating, by the nature (*dei*, not *opheilo*) of God’s relational response of grace, the reciprocal relational response necessary for whole relationship together. Moreover, when Paul further defines this reciprocal response by “Live by the Spirit” and “are led by the Spirit” (Gal 5:16,18), he is also not defining a moral imperative for our conduct (outlined in 5:19-24). Rather this is another relational imperative by which he further illuminates the reciprocal relational involvement with the

Spirit necessary for functionally constituting the new identity distinguishing who we are with Christ and whose we are in Christ (5:25).

What this reciprocal involvement with the Spirit constitutes is the ontological identity and embodying of God's new creation (Gal 5:6; 6:15; 1 Cor 12:13; Col 3:10-11; cf. 2 Cor 3:17-18). Just as *pneuma* and *soma* are inseparable for the whole ontology and function emerging from the Spirit's involvement, ontological identity and embodying of the new creation are also inseparably integrated for the wholeness made functional by the Spirit (examine Paul's relational connections: 1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:26-28; 4:6-7; Rom 8:14; 12:5; Col 3:15; Eph 2:14,18,22). And this ontological identity and embodying of the new creation are integrally based on the functional reality of relational belonging to God's family as definitive daughters and sons, the experiential truth of which only emerges from the reciprocal relational involvement of the Spirit (Eph 1:13-14; 2 Cor 1:21-22; Rom 8:14-16; Gal 4:6-7). Without the Spirit's reciprocal involvement and relational work, this identity and new creation are rendered, at best, to only ontological simulation and epistemological illusion of wholeness—simulation of whole relationship together with illusions of the whole of God (Gal 6:16; Col 3:15; cf. Rom 12:3-5; 1 Cor 3:21-22).

This relational dynamic of belonging or not belonging is either the relational outcome with the Spirit or the relational consequence without the Spirit, which Jesus made unmistakable in his promise "I will not leave you orphaned" (Jn 14:18). The term for "leave" (*aphiemi*) means to let go from oneself, essentially abandon to a condition deprived of their parents and family, which in the ancient Mediterranean world was an unprotected, helpless position. What Jesus defines, however, is only that the significance of orphans is relational, not situational, which directly involves the condition of wholeness in relationship together constituted by the Spirit—the what and who, respectively, that Jesus *did* leave them (Jn 14:26-27; 16:33). Paul further illuminates the relational belonging emerging with the Spirit and its embodying by the Spirit, which includes the counter-relational issue of orphans, to be discussed in Paul's ecclesiology.

In Paul's theological forest, along with God's relational dynamic of grace, the Spirit's reciprocal relational involvement is indispensable—and thus irreplaceable as with grace—for the experiential truth of the theological dynamics of wholeness, relational belonging and ontological identity. Clearly for Paul, those who are relationally involved with the Spirit in reciprocal relationship together—"who are led by the Spirit of God"—are the daughters and sons of God (Rom 8:14). Paul is not using family language merely for emphasis in a kinship-oriented context, perhaps as a hyperbole, for example, to evoke obligation in response to the Spirit. Rather Paul is illuminating the depth of the theological dynamics involved in the gospel and clearly identifies the person who is necessary for its fulfillment and completion. In dynamic interaction with the embodied *pleroma* of God, the Spirit of the whole of God relationally extends *pleroma* Christology to make functional *pleroma* soteriology by the embodying of God's new creation family. That is to say, the Spirit makes functional the experiential truth of the whole gospel in its relational outcome 'already' in whole relationship together, just as the Son prayed for the formation of God's family (Jn 17:20-26).

**What is the significance of distinguishing this relational outcome 'already' by the Spirit?** As Jesus' relational replacement, the Spirit both fulfills this relational outcome 'already' and completes what is necessary for its relational conclusion 'not yet'

(2 Cor 1:21-22; 5:4-5; 1 Thes 5:19-23; Rom 8:23; Gal 5:5 Eph 1:13-14; Phil 3:21). In Paul's theological forest, pneumatology is conjoined with eschatology. Paul adds theological and functional clarity to the relational outcome already of the embodying of God's new creation family by engaging his family further and deeper into the big picture of God's eschatological plan framing the trajectory of God's thematic response to the human condition (Rom 8:18-23). Just as the Spirit is the functional bridge for the quantitative of *bios* with the qualitative of *zoe*, the Spirit functionally connects the whole embodying of God's family with all of creation, with the cosmos and those in it in order to be involved as well with the world for the redemptive reconciliation necessary to be restored to God's whole in the innermost—as Paul also made definitive in other letters (2 Cor 5:17-19; Col 1:20), and as Jesus constituted in prayer for the already (Jn 17:21-23).

The big picture Paul paints goes back to creation and the emergence of the human condition (cf. Gen 3:17-19 with Rom 8:20). Not only human persons were enslaved in the condition 'to be apart' from God's whole but the rest of creation was also (Rom 8:20-22; cf. Gen 5:29). God's whole also encompasses all of creation; and God's relational response of grace to the human condition is the redemptive key for the rest of creation to "be set free from its bondage to decay" and restored to God's whole—"obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (8:21). God's whole is what holds together the world and all in it in their innermost. Therefore, all of creation is dependent on the relational outcome and conclusion of the Spirit's relational involvement to raise up and embody God's whole new creation family: "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God" (8:19). The timing of this revealing is ambiguous in this verse but the contingency is clearly eschatological. If our eschatology involves both 'already' and 'not yet', as Paul's did, then that new creation family 'already' is revealed by the Spirit's relational involvement in those who belong to Christ (8:9), in those whom the Spirit has wholly embodied along with Christ and already dwells now (8:11), and thus in those "led by the Spirit" (8:14) and the Spirit relationally constitutes already and ongoingly as the whole daughters and sons of God's family (8:15-16).

Paul further illuminates this already/not-yet eschatological picture to provide deeper clarity for God's family. As all of creation waits eagerly for the embodying of God's children together, "we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies" (Rom 8:23). Paul is not suggesting that the theological dynamics of redemption and adoption have not taken place, only that their functional significance is in the relational process and progression of being completed by the Spirit—who has already constituted the relational outcome for those belonging to Christ as God's daughters and sons, and who continues to embody them for the relational conclusion 'not yet' in this eschatological process. Paul clarifies that the Spirit has not yet completed this relational progression, and the basis for this expectation ("hope") is conclusive in the experiential truth already of having been both saved *from* and *to* (*sozo*, delivered and made whole in Gk aorist tense, 8:24). This hope for full completion "now" is always present and ongoing along with the already ("wait for it with patience," v.25); yet this unequivocal hope should not be confused with 'already' ("hope...we do not see"), nor should it be perceived with a reductionist interpretive lens ("hope that is seen," v.24).

As Paul clarifies the line between the already and the not yet, he understands that God's children vacillate between them, even unintentionally or unknowingly. This

happens notably when situations and circumstances are difficult. These tend to create various scenarios, drama and anxiety which can define and determine who we are and whose we are, thereby rattling our sense of belonging and straining our relational response of trust, just as Paul summarized (8:28-39). In such moments, God's presence may seem distant and perhaps too transcendent to make relational connection with. Paul addresses the equivocation of relational connection and the ambiguity of relational involvement in those moments. With more than just his own empathy, Paul makes definitive God's deep understanding and intimate involvement with us through the relational involvement of the Spirit (8:26-27). Especially in our deepest moments of weakness when "we do not know how to *be relationally involved* as is necessary" (Paul uses *dei* not *opheilo*, v. 26), the Spirit helps us be involved in God's relational context and process—"that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words; and God who searches the heart, *intimately* knows what is the *phronema* of the Spirit because the Spirit *is reciprocally relationally involved* with and for the saints according to *the whole ontology and function of God.*" This further clarifies Paul's relational experience with the whole of God while in his weakness, in which Christ's power is the Spirit's person (2 Cor 12:9, cf. Acts 1:8; Eph 3:20). Therefore, the Spirit ongoingly helps God's children in the relational connection and involvement with God necessary for engagement in the process of reciprocating contextualization (dynamic interaction between God's context and human context) in order not to be defined and determined by human contextualization, whether in difficult moments or not—just as Paul's weakness did not define his ontology and determine his function.

The already-now embodying of God's new creation family, ongoingly functioning in reciprocal whole relationship together, unequivocally in relational progression to 'not yet', is the integrated relational dynamic at the heart of Paul's pneumatology. The presence of the person of the Spirit as Jesus' relational replacement and the Spirit's reciprocal relational involvement must be accounted for both theologically and functionally. Therefore, Paul's pneumatology is a theological dynamic always in integral function with an eschatology that is not either-or but both-and, both already and not yet. The significance of Paul's eschatological picture above is to further deepen theologically the experiential truth of the whole gospel for the definitive wholeness in both the theology and function of the church as God's new creation family. Paul's primary concern always focused on the present from which the future will emerge—necessarily because the depth of the gospel is the sole source for responding to and fulfilling the breadth of the human condition.

In the complex theological dynamics of Paul's theological forest, the dynamic presence and involvement of the whole person of the Spirit functions while inseparably on an eschatological trajectory. Yet for Paul, this does not and must not take away from the primary focus on the Spirit's presence and involvement for the present, just as Paul addressed the Thessalonians' eschatological anxiety with the relational imperative not to quench the Spirit's present relational involvement (1 Thes 5:19). The Spirit's present concern and function is relational involvement for constituting whole ontology and function, for making functional wholeness together, and for the embodying of the whole of God's new creation family in whole relationship together as the church, the *pleroma* of Christ—which is why the person of the Spirit is deeply affected, grieving over any reductionism in reciprocal relational involvement together.

In Paul's theological forest, the theological dynamic of the Spirit in wholeness is *pleroma* pneumatology, which is integral for all theology and function, not only Paul's. Anything less or any substitute for the Spirit is an immature pneumatology, both underdeveloped and stunted, the practice of which signifies the reduction of our reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit. In such reductionism, Paul rightly defines the Spirit's grief (Eph 4:30) because it clearly diminishes the Spirit's relational involvement for wholeness and being whole already ("blameless," *amemptos*, as in *tamiym*, 1 Thes 5:19,23; cf. Gen 17:1). Even the historical theology of the church's spirituality and spiritual formation often has diminished involvement in whole relationship together reciprocally with the Spirit's person, ironically in efforts to participate in God's life. Any such immature pneumatology is underdeveloped or stunted and continues to grieve the Spirit. Moreover, any fragmentary efforts, even with good intention to know God, serve Christ and participate in God's life, by its nature participate in reductionism with its counter-relational work, and essentially reflect, reinforce or sustain the human relational condition (cf. Mt 7:22-23; Lk 13:26-27).

## **Participating in God's Life**

The primacy of whole relationship together is the theological trajectory and relational path that Jesus embodied in whole. As 'who replaces' and 'what is replaced', the Spirit's presence and involvement function only in this primacy of relationship to complete the theological trajectory and relational path of the whole of God, whose relational response 'already' resolves the human relational condition and fulfills the human relational need (as Jesus prayed, Jn 17:21-23). The relational outcome of whole relationship together as God's new family is contingent irreducibly and nonnegotiable on the Spirit's reciprocal relational work (Jn 14:16-17; 1 Cor 3:16; Eph 2:22; Rom 8:9,15-16). Without the Spirit's presence and involvement there is no relational belonging to God's family, only a membership in referential terms (1 Cor 12:13); and without the Spirit's ongoing reciprocal relational work there is no intimate relational connection to participate in God's life, only an association in referential terms (Rom 8:9,26-27). The primacy of whole relationship together is the innermost of God's desires, and the whole of God's presence and involvement vulnerably constitute the heart of God's family love to remove the veil for participation in relationship together Face to face to Face—relationship both improbable and intrusive. This was the experiential Truth and his relational replacement who transformed and extended into the whole of Paul.

For Paul, participating in God's life is neither precluded by a somatic limitation nor limited to just a pneumatic experience, but rather involves the relational dynamic of whole human ontology and function with the whole of God's ontology and function. In contrast, and at times in conflict, with how some of Paul's readers (past and present) have interpreted him, this relational involvement was not defined or determined by mysticism, nor was its depth esoteric and thus limited to certain individuals (cf. 1 Cor 14:36; Col 2:8). In Paul's theological forest, participating in God's life is the relational outcome that emerges from ongoing reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit.

How does this relational outcome emerge? Related to this question, I think it is accurate to say that prior to the Damascus road Paul participated (however limited by



reductionism) in the life of God's *people*, and that after the Damascus road he began participating in the life of *God*. What is the difference, and how is this difference constituted and its dynamic significance experienced ongoingly?

Participating in God's life necessitates by God's qualitative being and relational nature the following: the relational involvement of whole persons (*pneuma* and *soma*) of whole ontology and function from inner out, who are vulnerably involved by the heart with the whole of God's ontology and function, who initially is vulnerably disclosed to them in direct Face-to-face, intimate heart-to-heart relationship together as family. As Paul indicated previously, Moses participated face to face in God's life, but it was limited (2 Cor 3:7-13; cf. Num 12:6-8). By the nature of reciprocal relationship, God's children can participate in God's life only to the extent that God participates in theirs; however, participation in God's life is never the result of unilateral human effort. In Paul's theological forest, the whole of God's thematic relational response and involvement is fulfilled by Christ and completed by the Spirit (2 Cor 3:14-18; 4:4-6). In other words, with the depth of God's whole participation, it is now insufficient for God's children to participate in the whole of God's life with anything but face-to-Face involvement compatible with God's qualitative being and congruent with God's relational nature—that glory of God vulnerably disclosed in the distinguished face of Jesus Christ's whole ontology and function (not just *soma* or *pneuma*, as some have interpreted the incarnation, but *soma* and *pneuma* together, inseparably without reduction). This is “the gospel of the glory of Christ” (4:4), the meaning of which is rendered without relational significance by the lack of reciprocal relational involvement face to Face, thereby reducing the gospel of its experiential truth.

Paul focuses all participation in “the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” first on Christ's blood and body and participating in his death (1 Cor 10:16-17) in order to participate in his resurrection (Rom 8:11,17; Phil 3:10). This participation involves being baptized with Christ and the Spirit for the death of reduced ontology and function and the raising of whole ontology and function (Rom 6:3-5; 1 Cor 12:13). Relational involvement with Christ and the Spirit in these theological dynamics is critical for face-to-Face-to-face involvement compatible with God's qualitative being (the whole and holy God) and thus congruent with God's relational nature. To participate in the whole and holy God's life begins with the necessary transformation of human persons integrally both to ontology in the image of God's qualitative being vulnerably disclosed by Christ (“the image of God,” 2 Cor 4:4), and to function in the likeness of the whole of God's relational nature together (2 Cor 3:18; Rom 8:29; Col 3:10). Paul defines this critical initial participation with the term *koinonia* (“sharing,” 1 Cor 10:16) and its cognate *koinonos* (“partners,” 10:18), from which our notions of fellowship and Communion come. Basically these *koin* terms define a common bond among its participants which is relational involvement definitive of having a share in something together—that is, the intimate involvement of the new wine table fellowship with the veil removed. This understanding of participation goes further and deeper than what our practices of fellowship and Communion tend to be; moreover, it goes beyond common efforts of spirituality to participate in God's life.

For Paul, the definitive relational involvement of sharing together in Christ's death is a complete participation in his sacrifice behind the curtain, which is irreducible and nonnegotiable to *koinonia* and *koinonos* in human contextualization (1 Cor 10:20-21). Accordingly, this undivided-complete participation is inseparable from sharing

together also in Christ's resurrection, by which the necessary transformation to whole ontology and function emerges without the veil (2 Cor 3:16-18) in order to wholly participate compatibly and congruently in God's life as God's whole family in relationship together (Rom 6:5; 8:11,15; Gal 4:5-6). This inner-out change from the process of redemptive reconciliation is an ongoing necessity for increasing and deepening participation in the whole of God's life. The embodying of this new creation in *koinonia* with the whole of God is both of the whole person and of whole persons together (1 Cor 10:17) in reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit (1 Cor 12:13; Eph 2:22; 4:3-4). Therefore, participating in the qualitative whole of God's life is neither limited to the intimate involvement of the individual person, nor is individual involvement sufficient by itself to constitute participation in the relational whole of God's life. Participation is complete with only whole persons together (Col 3:15; Eph 2:14-18); this challenges our theological assumptions about God, the human person, and the church. Paul makes these vital distinctions for the reciprocal relational involvement in whole relationship together both with God and with each other, which is integral to embody God's new creation family—the intimate dwelling in relational terms (not referential) for the whole of God's participation in whole relationship together (Eph 2:22; cf. Jn 14:23).

Through the relational involvement of the Spirit, participation in the whole of God's life is unequivocal in its relational outcome 'already' (Eph 2:18,22; 3:12; Rom 5:5; cf. Jn 17:23). And by reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit, participation in God's whole life in family is ongoing to its relational conclusion 'not yet' (Rom 8:14,17; Phil 2:1; 3:10)—just as Paul prayed for the church family (Eph 3:16-19) and Jesus vulnerably disclosed in his face and prayed for his family (Jn 17:26). The whole of Paul's person and the whole in his theology fight for nothing less and no substitutes of this gospel of wholeness, and thereby nonnegotiable against any and all reductionism.

As those belonging to Christ through the Spirit gather for the *koinonia* at the Lord's table to celebrate the Eucharist—that is, without reductionism to human terms shaping relationship together by human contextualization, as Paul's polemic makes indisputable about incompatible and incongruent participation (1 Cor 10:21; 11:17-22, 27)—their whole persons together deeply participate in the embodied *pleroma* of God. Conjointly, their intimate relational involvement with the whole of God in whole relationship together also embodies them together in the whole ontology and function of the church, the *pleroma* of Christ (1 Cor 10:17; Eph 1:23; 3:19; 4:13). This embodying is the relational outcome of only direct participation in God's life without the veil, not from participation just in church life in front of the curtain (note Paul's polemic, 1 Cor 11:20, 29).

Therefore, the church emerges as God's new creation family only to the extent that its reciprocal relational involvement is compatible and congruent with the extent of God's participation in its life, notably now by the Spirit. Given that God's participation is solely by the relational response of grace with the theological dynamic of wholeness to remove the veil, the participation of God's children likewise can be nothing less and no substitutes. Only this whole relationship together embodies the *pleroma* of Christ in Paul's theological forest, which Paul makes theologically definitive in Ephesians for the functional clarity necessary for the whole ontology and function of the church in the relational belonging of family in contrast and conflict with a gathering of relational orphans.

Paul was reciprocally involved with the Spirit embodying the theology and hermeneutic of the whole gospel that constituted the integral extension of Jesus *into* Paul. The theological dynamics deeply involved in this qualitative process of embodying and its relational process of reciprocal participation not only have converged and are integrated in Paul's theological forest. These dynamics, both theological and functional, are also relationally extending 'already' "by the power of *the Spirit's person* at work within us" to go beyond what Paul can only rightly describe as "abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church" (Eph 3:20-21).



## Chapter 10

## Paul's *Pleroma* Theology

**For in him the whole fullness [*pleroma*] of deity dwells bodily,  
and you have come to fullness in him.**

Colossians 2:9-10

The relational dynamic of Jesus *into* Paul is illuminated in Paul's theology. How clearly this synthesis is illuminated for us depends on our perceptual-interpretive lens of various issues. While the synthesis of Paul and Jesus perhaps suggests a systematic theology—which I emphasize never concerned Paul—their synthesis involves a systemic framework that accounts for the relational dynamic of God's thematic action from creation (and prior to) in response to the human condition. This was Paul's integral concern and purpose to *pleroo* (make full, complete, whole, Col 1:25) the word of God for the further embodying of the theology and hermeneutic of the whole gospel. And he engaged this function to illuminate for us whole knowledge and understanding of God (*synesis*, Col 2:2-4), which includes more than some integration of parts of Jesus and Paul and more deeply involves the relational outcome of their synthesis.

Paul did not engage in the *referentialization* of the Word, the process which narrows down the embodied Word to referential knowledge and information about what God does (e.g. delivers, miracles, teaches, serves) and has (e.g. attributes, truth, power and other resources), and likely aggregates these parts of God in a narrowed unity for greater explanation and certainty of that information about God (e.g. in systematic theologies or explanatory theories). In contrast and even conflict with this narrowed epistemic field, Paul was involved in the relational epistemic process with the Spirit to *pleroo* the communicative word from God, most vulnerably communicated by the *pleroma* of God (Col 1:19), to complete the communication of whole knowledge and understanding of God in relationship. This distinguished Paul from many of his readers after him (cf. Peter's assessment of Paul, 2 Pet 3:16), including in Pauline scholarship today.

“The *pleroma* of God” was not a concept signifying some esoteric knowledge about or vague sphere of the mystery of God, as Valentinus misinterpreted from Paul to develop the Pleroma for Gnostics in the second century. Nor was “the *pleroma* of God” a conceptual-theological person. Rather this *pleroma* personally residing (*katoikeo*) in the embodied Jesus was the whole God person who functioned only to reconcile for relationship together in wholeness with God (Col 1:19-22). Nothing less and no substitutes than the relational ontology of the whole of God could constitute this *pleroma*, nor could anything less and any substitute constitute Jesus as “the image of God” (Col 1:15; 2 Cor 4:4) to disclose this relational function—which Marcion erred in doing by also misinterpreting Paul in the second century to support his docetic view that Jesus only appeared to be in bodily flesh. This was the One and Only who exegetes God (Jn 1:18)

with his whole person in vulnerable face-to-face involvement in relationship: “God... who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). This was in continuity with God’s disclosure “face to face” with Moses (Num 12:6-8), yet now with complete self-disclosure of the whole of God vulnerably embodied in the face of Christ.

Both Jesus and Paul ongoingly challenge our theological and functional assumptions, just as the prophets did. Jesus challenges our assumptions of how we perceive and define his person, how we follow him, how we function in relationship with him, serve him and practice church—in other words, challenge our basic assumptions about the gospel. Paul extends these challenges and clearly illuminates *pleroma* theology, from which emerges the ecclesiology of the whole nonnegotiable based on the experiential truth of the whole gospel irreducibly constituted by whole relationship together with the whole of Jesus, the *pleroma* of God, in order to integrally embody the *pleroma* of Christ (the church, Eph 1:22-23).

In this sense, Paul’s theology was polemic discourse composed as the definitive apologist for the whole gospel, fighting conjointly *for* the integrity of this gospel and *against* all reductionism of its wholeness (e.g. Eph 6:15). To understand the whole in Paul’s theology, therefore, is inseparable from understanding the integral witness of his whole person, not just as a Jew or a Christian. In Paul’s journey, what must emerge, by the nature of his human person and being, are the whole *of* Paul’s person and his witness as well as the whole *in* Paul and his theology. This wholeness is the primary identity that defined who and what Paul was and that determined how he functioned. The relational dynamic of this process both illuminated Paul’s experiential truth of relationship with the whole of God and challenges what is necessarily involved for any and all theological engagement. It is critical for Paul’s readers to pay attention to, and for theological and biblical studies not to ignore, this integral process Paul engaged theologically and functionally.

Colin Gunton’s view was that Irenaeus is a model for all systematic theologians: “Irenaeus is less concerned with systematic consistency, more with the integrity of the faith in the face of attack...he thought systematically in a broad sense.”<sup>1</sup> Perhaps Irenaeus learned the theological task from Paul, whose theological systemic framework to *pleroo* God’s word continues to challenge both any fragmentary theological engagement and any incomplete theological assumptions—particularly in the referentialization of the Word. However we may approach theology today, it is imperative for us essentially not to merely defend the gospel—notably referentially in modernist terms and with mere systematic doctrines—but indeed to justify its good news relationally, the experiential truth of which makes whole the human condition by resolving the human relational problem and fulfilling the human relational need. In the same sense as Paul, we are all apologists for the gospel, whether we accept the relational responsibility and engage in it or not—just as Jesus clarified the identity of his followers from the reductionists (Mt 5:13-16), extended this responsibility to them (Jn 15:16), and prayed for them to be whole together and thereby live and make whole in the world (Jn 17:21-23). Yet, unlike Paul, it would be insufficient to limit our fight just *for* the gospel. That is, we cannot fight for the whole gospel unless we conjointly fight *against* reductionism, both in the world

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<sup>1</sup> Colin E. Gunton, “Historical and Systematic Theology” in Colin E. Gunton, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1997), 15.

and in our own persons (individually and collectively) and the function defining us in church and the academy. Reductionism was and continues to be the most formidable challenger we face in life as well as study. For Paul, reductionism's challenge is inescapable, though the fight against its influence can be ignored—with significant consequences both theologically and functionally. Therefore, in this study it is critical that we take to heart this integral rule of faith from Paul: “let the *wholeness* of Christ rule in your hearts” to define and determine our theology and practice (Col 3:15).

This whole gospel embodied by Jesus, the *pleroma* of God (Col 1:19; 2:9)—who embodied its theology and hermeneutic—was further embodied *into* (*eis* denoting relational movement to) Paul who extended the embodying of the gospel of wholeness—and its theology and hermeneutic—in the body of Christ, the *pleroma* of Christ, in reciprocal relationship with the Spirit. This relational dynamic emerges wholly in Jesus' story and converges with Paul's story. From the beginning, Jesus is the theological, ontological, relational and functional keys to God and the integral pivot for God's thematic salvific action in history throughout the unfolding words in the Old Testament and New Testament. Paul is a functional bridge between the OT and NT to *pleroo* the communicative word from God. Therefore, he only illuminated what Jesus embodied in whole and never went beyond the *pleroma* of God to construct his own theology. This addresses our perception of Paul's antecedents and the issue of continuity in his thought and theology.

## **Paul's Antecedents and His Continuity**

It is important to reemphasize for Paul's readers not to forget or be misled to ignore that Paul did not emerge from the Damascus road a fully developed apostle with ready-made theology. With this in mind, most importantly for Paul was that the qualitative-relational process of being whole, God's whole on God's qualitative relational terms, constituted the ongoing basis and significance of all that develops in Paul's life, practice, thought and theology. God's wholeness—being whole in ontology, living whole in function, and making whole the human condition—was the integrating theme for Paul.

Paul's Christophany on the Damascus road could have made him wonder if he were experiencing what came to be known as Jewish mysticism, or Merkabah (“throne”) mysticism—not a contemplation of God but a mystical vision of God on the throne.<sup>2</sup> Such epiphanies were not uncommon in Jewish history and Scripture. Later, Paul appeared to highlight his mystical visions (2 Cor 12:1-6) and had a series of other apparent mystical visions (Acts 9:12; 16:9-10; 18:9-10; 22:17-21; 23:11; 26:19; 27:23-24; Gal 1:12; 2:2). During the experience of these various visions, perhaps Paul was pointed to the process of visions introduced to Ezekiel (Eze 1:1ff). Furthermore, Paul may have interpreted his own call in part through the lens of the “Servant Songs” (Isa 42 & 49). Yet, while epiphanic influences were certainly present for Paul, these antecedents were insufficient to explain what Paul experienced and to understand his life, practice,

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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion on mysticism as background to the NT, see Jon C. Laansma, “Mysticism”, in Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter, eds., *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 725-37. For a discussion on mysticism in Paul, see Seyoon Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective: Second Thoughts on the Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 165-213.

thought and theology. Such mysteries involved the knowledge that was associated with revelation (cf. 1 Cor 13:2,8-9,12; Eph 3:3-5); and revelation was closely connected with prophecy (cf. Rom 16:25-26; 1 Cor 14:6,25,26,30). This was a relational dynamic which ongoingly involved Paul in the relational epistemic process.

What unfolded in Paul's journey was no transition to a further (or even new) aspect of his previous service. What was developing was the transformation from old to new (2 Cor 5:17, cf. Col 3:9-10; Eph 4:22-24). The experience of Paul's visions (mystical or prophetic) involved a word from God, not some unique vision of God or some hidden information about God. That is, these visions involved the communication of God's revelation, as Paul made unmistakable (1 Cor 2:9-10; 2 Cor 12:1; Gal 1:12; 2:2; Eph 3:3,5; cf. Acts 26:16). Since this involved the self-revelation of the heart of God's desires, the relational connection for this communication to be received necessitated engaging God only in God's relational context and process—that is, received compatibly with how the revelation was given, as Paul further distinguished (2 Cor 4:2-6). Paul soon understood that any valid claim of prophetic utterance can only be based on the relational outcome of the Spirit's presence and work with him (1 Cor 2:10)—the whole of God's relational context and process.

Though the continuity with the OT is clearly distinguished in Paul, his journey also involved the transformation from old to new. Paul was not limited to these OT antecedents because foremost for him was God's vulnerable self-revelation to him directly 'in Christ'—"who is the image of God...in the face of Christ" (2 Cor 4:4-6). To interpret this revelation in terms of epiphany or by Jewish mysticism is highly inadequate and can even result in reductionism. This self-revelation, constituting the heart of God's desires, vulnerably communicated the embodied (neither propositional nor doctrinal) fulfillment of God's promise for covenant relationship, which opened the relational progression to the Spirit's presence fulfilling those OT promises and prophecies to the eschatological completion, as Paul made clearly unmistakable (2 Cor 1:18-22). In other words, God's face shined on Paul in the relational response of grace; God's face turned to him and made him whole only from above, all of which Jesus embodied in whole not for Paul's observation but only for the experiential truth of relationship together. This relational outcome determined the ongoing development of Paul's involvement with Jesus directly in relationship together, the experiential truth (neither propositional truth nor doctrinal certainty) of which also defined Paul's Christology and thereby his soteriology. Paul's development would deepen the continuity with the words from God in the OT as well as widen the discontinuity with any of its reductionist faith-response and practice.

The continuity-discontinuity emerging from Paul's development certainly involves a hermeneutical issue. In the process of transformation to the new, I affirm that Paul's lens of Hebrew Scripture also changed. That is, Paul changed from a hermeneutic of the OT that reduced meaning to referential representation of God—for example, by reducing God's desires and terms for covenant relationship together to a code of behavior to observe and perform, or simply to identity markers as God's people (Rom 2:29; 7:6; Col 2:14). His change was partly the result of *tamiym*'s hermeneutical correction and, of further importance, was more deeply a relational outcome. In improbable relational terms, Paul was restored to whole meaning in the relational context and process of God's communicative action—the words from God's mouth (cf. Dt 8:3; Ps 119:13; Mt 4:4; Jn



6:63, 68-69). This changed his hermeneutic of the OT from situational content to the relational context and process of God's thematic action for covenant relationship together, of which Paul was a unique recipient of God's relational response of grace. This also took his hermeneutic beyond an apocalyptic interpretive framework.

Perhaps with his new lens Paul saw the key antecedent of his experiential truth signified in Psalm 33: "Rejoice in the LORD...singing to him a new song...for the word of the LORD is upright...by the word of the LORD—the *purpose* of his heart—he *creates* the hearts of all." The new song Paul was singing indeed was pointed to in the OT but was not made wholly functional until the embodied Word 'in Christ', the *pleroma* of God who was the basis for Paul's experience and the truth of his gospel. Therefore, though Paul's continuity with the OT precluded his conversion to a new religion, the development of his journey can neither be wholly understood from OT antecedents nor adequately explained from Judaism's practice. Paul's new song then raises one lingering question from the Damascus road that still needs our attention: Was Paul introduced to a new covenant relationship on the Damascus road? Yes and no. No, since the relationship still involved the same covenant relationship with Abraham. Yes, because the relationship necessitated the further and deeper involvement in it than was accessible as well as practiced in much of Israel's history, which signified the need to go beyond reductionism (as Paul clarified, 2 Cor 3:6-18, cf. Jer 24:7; Eze 11:19).

The continuity-discontinuity issue is compounded by reductionism, the function of which must be recognized as the source of discontinuity and thus distinguished from the new song. As Ezekiel pointed to (Eze 36:26-27), Paul's new song was only the transformation from old to new: a new creation of the heart of the person from inner out made whole from above for new covenant relationship together (cf. Gal 5:6; 6:15), just as the embodied Word from God made conclusive for Nicodemus (a key antecedent for Paul noted earlier, Jn 3:1-15). It is critical to understand what Paul had continuity with and discontinuity from. Besides whether Paul converted to Christianity or remained in Judaism, our perceptual-interpretive lens of related issues include whether Christianity is a new religion or not, and whether Paul's emphases were innovations about Christ or an extension of Jesus. Paul's continuity or discontinuity varies with our view of each issue, which reductionism influences by narrowing down the epistemic field to fragmentary terms lacking wholeness.

This transformation to wholeness was the heart of Paul's experience and ongoing development (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; Rom 6:4), and thereby the heart of his thought and theology. In order to fully understand Paul, he needs to be contextualized deeply into God's relational context and process. Paul was being transformed from old to new to go beyond a prophetic call and function in order to take the lead of God's people, perhaps analogous to Moses' call yet beyond even that. In this sense Paul was neither an apostle of Israel nor an apostate from Israel—to respond to the paradox about Paul raised by James Dunn (noted previously). Moreover, by having his heart circumcised conclusively, Paul shifted essentially from 'majority Israel' to 'minority Israel', as he clarified theologically (Rom 2:28-29; 9:6-8; 11:1-10). On this significant basis, Paul was neither an apostle of majority Israel nor an apostate of minority Israel.

What has continuity in Paul's development involves only God's whole and covenant relationship together only on God's qualitative relational terms. What has discontinuity is only about any reductionism of these. Paul's journey developed beyond

those OT antecedents because the embodied Word from God directly spoke “Face to face” with Paul, with the relational outcome that went beyond merely seeing mystical visions; Paul more deeply experienced the whole of God’s vulnerably-involved-person, and thereby understood God even more clearly than Moses (cf. *horaio*, Acts 26:16). This is *who* Paul illuminated with the veil removed (2 Cor 3:12-18). In this ongoing relational process Paul also gained *synesis* of the functional and relational significance of God’s whole (Eph 3:2-6). It was on this developing basis that Paul spoke unequivocally, decisively, without compromise about the truth of the gospel (just as Peter experienced from him, Gal 2:11-14). And by its nature Paul increasingly illuminated clearly the whole of the gospel’s functional and relational significance for its experiential truth and reality for all persons (Col 1:19-23; Eph 2:19-22). This is *what*, inseparably with *who*, that Paul also illuminated integrally.

In a dynamic developmental process, Paul’s thought and theology were ongoingly exposed to various inputs. Each source could have affected Paul, positively or negatively, Paul in one way or another. The most significant influence and shaping of his thought and theology had to be the defining impact of the following sources:

1. Judaism—namely from the Hebrew Scripture of the OT and not variants from this canonical text, which some forms of Judaism gave human shaping to and thus should not be assumed as OT Judaism (to which Paul later provided theological clarity, Rom 9-11).
2. Paul’s Damascus road experience—which included all discussed above.
3. Jesus tradition—the existing Christian beliefs from the early church in Jerusalem during Paul’s day, including narrative tradition of Jesus, his sayings and teachings which appear later in the written Gospels.
4. God’s direct revelation to Paul—which also involves the ongoing teaching of the Spirit to disclose the experiential truth further and deeper to Paul in the relational epistemic process (as Jesus promised, Jn 14:26; 16:13). The Spirit’s influence was the significant source in Paul’s theological reflection and formations, which is rarely acknowledged in Pauline studies.

In Paul’s dynamic development, the interaction process of the above antecedents and sources occurs integrally both in his life and practice as well as in his thought and theology. His theological reflection was not a separate task of doing theology but deeply integrated to living his life and practice in the context and process of relationship together with the whole of God. In this relational process, for example, Paul was able to critique variants of Judaism on the basis of sources 2, 3 and 4, along with the correct lens of source 1; yet he was also able to clarify the limits of an authentic Judaism (source 1) by sources 2, 3, 4, notably 4. Moreover, Paul was able to add critical assessment to the Jesus tradition (source 3) on the basis of the further understanding and deeper meaning he received from source 4, in order to establish the theological clarity and operationalize the functional clarity necessary for God’s whole on God’s terms—the respective clarity he made conclusive in his Romans letter and Galatians letter. This clarifying effort, for

example, would be similar in principle to a so-called ‘Lutheran view’ of Paul (on justification) in reaction to a Roman Catholic view of works; yet such a reading of Paul has also limited, or even distorted, his views from source 1, Judaism.

Paul, himself, had clarified for God’s people the definitive basis necessary for function in epistemology, hermeneutics, and thus theology: “Nothing beyond what is written” (1 Cor 4:1-7). This was a key statement about the source defining Paul’s purpose and determining his practice and theology, as well as his reciprocal relational responsibility determining his fight against human shaping and construction (“who makes you different,” 4:7), which reduced (“went beyond”) the truth of the whole gospel (cf. Paul’s functional clarity and distinction of the gospel, Gal 1:6-12).

For Paul’s readers after the early church period, “what is written” is defined by the canonical text of Scripture—neither in part (as a proof-text for human shaping) nor in fragmentation (as a biased selectivity for human construction) but only in its whole. For Paul, “what is written” also involved what God directly revealed to him (source 4 integrated with the embodied Word overlapping from source 2) for what was also to be written for inclusion in the canonical text of God’s Word.

Paul’s initial Damascus road experience extending into ongoing relationship with the embodied Word from God (source 2) and the subsequent direct revelations from the triune God (source 4) converged in Paul’s theological reflection as the basis for his unfolding thought to develop first the functional clarity of the truth and whole of the gospel (namely in Gal)—which was unmistakably distinguished from any alternative gospel (the ongoing tension and conflict not only in Gal). Then Paul integrated this functional clarity with the necessary theological clarity by developing the conclusive theological basis for this gospel (namely in Rom, the basis for my assumption of its order after Gal). The interrelated development of functional and theological clarity and their integrated definition constituted the truth and whole of the gospel beyond the limits of doctrine to the whole of God’s relational context and process in response of grace to the human condition. This experiential truth always unfolded first in his life and practice and then was developed by Paul ongoingly with the Spirit in contrast and conflict with reductionism, which includes perceiving this as only propositional truth. His theology, for example, in his Colossians letter reflected further development from Galatians and Romans, which Paul likely gained with the Spirit while in prison. The specific situation in Colosse represented a sort of test-case applying the functional and theological clarity from Galatians and Romans, which were needed to expose, challenge and negate reductionism in order to be the whole of God’s family and to make God’s whole on God’s terms. Paul further developed this theological clarity in the general Ephesians letter to define its theological forest and the necessary ecclesiology for relationships together to be whole, that is, to make God’s relational whole functional on God’s relational terms. This dynamic developmental process in Paul’s thought and theology needs further explanation.

When Paul talked about “what I had received” and thus “have handed on to you” (e.g. 1 Cor 11:2, 23; 15:3; 2 Thes 2:15; 3:6), there are three extensions respectively for sources 2, 3, and 4, which need to be considered: (source 2a) from Jesus directly (Gal 1:11-12,16; 1 Cor 11:23); (source 3a) further from Jesus tradition (1 Cor 11:2; 2 Thes 2:15; 3:6, including as source 3 above); and (source 4a) only from the Spirit directly (1 Cor 2:10, cf. Jn 14:26; 16:13). These three extensions were not mutually exclusive and

must be understood as interrelated since they mutually involved the embodied Word from God. While Jesus tradition (source 3a), along with Judaism (source 1), tends to be the focus in Pauline studies, the extensions from Jesus directly (source 2a) and the Spirit (source 4a) have more significance. Therefore, despite their mistaken association with mysticism, they must not be dismissed or minimized. To the contrary, they are critical to account for in Paul's thought and theology both in his letters in general and in his connection and continuity with Jesus in particular.

What is critical about the Spirit as source 4a involves the relational epistemic process of *synesis* (understanding the whole from *syniemi*, e.g. which reductionists lacked, 2 Cor 10:12). The process of *synesis* helped Paul put the pieces of God's revelation together to integrally understand God's whole (Eph 3:3-5)—a process which Jesus scolded his disciples for not engaging (*syniemi*, Mk 8:17-21). Paul made this illumination of God's whole integral to his purpose for the church in order to help them have this whole understanding (*synesis*) to specifically know (*epignosis*) Christ and God's revelation for relationship together (Col 1:9; 2:2). In this process together with the Spirit, Paul struggled to counter the human shaping of the gospel by reductionist substitutes (e.g. in Colosse, apparent philosophical notions, Col 2:1,4).

If Paul's readers are to understand the depth of his thought, theology and practice, then we must go beyond the existing situations and conditions he addressed in his letters. In order to get to the depth-level of the whole constituting Paul's life and practice and thus his thought and theology, his readers have to engage deeper qualitative sources than those of Judaism and even Jesus tradition. This involves the further and deeper contextualization of Paul with Jesus directly (source 2a) together with the Spirit (source 4a) in the whole of God's relational context and process—which a narrowed-down epistemic field does not and cannot include. In this dynamic developmental process, the whole of God ongoingly was relationally involved to redemptively change, transform and make whole Paul's person, additionally his practice, then his thought and theology in the relational epistemic process. Paul's ongoing relational reciprocity involved the qualitative relational context and process basic to the faith of covenant relationship together—the faith which signifies the necessary relational response to the whole of God who constituted the relational context and process of grace embodied by Jesus and made functional by the Spirit.

Since God's thematic action is a function only of relationship, the nature of God's relational involvement necessitates reciprocal human relational response. The human response compatible to God by necessity is part of the continuity question, which includes the extent of continuity existing between Abraham's faith and NT faith, specifically as delineated by Paul. Moreover, as the significance of the relational purpose and outcome of God's thematic action is integrally understood—which Paul did in his experiential truth and *synesis* from the Spirit—the continuity-discontinuity issue becomes the inseparable issue between God's whole and reductionism.

Therefore, the issue of continuity-discontinuity in Paul needs to be understood in the deeper issues both relational and qualitative: (1) congruity and incongruity with God's thematic relational action, and (2) compatibility and incompatibility with God's whole and wholeness. These deeper issues, and their importance for Paul, do not fully emerge from focusing on the historical Paul merely from human contextualization and its related questions, but only from the relational Paul in God's whole relational context and

process—that is, from the whole ontology and function of Paul’s person who composed the theological Paul and the whole in his theology, in continuity with God’s revealed whole and in discontinuity with reductionism, which is anything less and any substitutes. Decisively for him and unequivocally in his thought and theology, continuity in Paul depends functionally on the presence of this whole *in* Paul, which is contingent on the reality of the wholeness *of* Paul. And discontinuity in Paul depends conjointly, on the one hand, on the experiential truth of this wholeness and, on the other, on the reality of reductionism and its presence and influence in human life.

Church tradition had perceived a continuity between Jesus and Paul, without always understanding the relational dynamic integrating them, and less often having whole understanding of the experiential truth constituted by and with the Spirit for the whole of Jesus’ and Paul’s gospel. Modern scholarship has often created a gap between Jesus and Paul without adequately defining their discontinuity, thus shaping theories in an epistemic process with the obvious absence and/or the lack of involvement of the Spirit. Alan Torrance points to Athanasius who identified the necessity of the Spirit in order to make direct statements (first-order claims) about God. Torrance defines this hermeneutic necessity as the “third Horizon” (building on Thiselton’s fusion of two horizons) without whom contemporary readers of Scripture cannot have semantic continuity with the theological paradigms of the apostles.<sup>3</sup> This lack in scholarship has reflected the epistemological illusion from reductionism that has been consequential for ontological simulation both in theological engagement and in church practice, signifying reductionism’s counter-relational work. The primary example of this emerges from the referentialization of the Word that narrows down the epistemic field for better explanation and certainty. Paul challenged and continues to challenge these theological and functional assumptions by distinguishing his continuity with the whole gospel relationally embodied by Jesus and his discontinuity with any reductionism of its wholeness and the *pleroma* of God.

### ***Pleroma* Christology**

In spite of the activity of the early apostles, Jesus curiously told Paul that he will “testify to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you” (Acts 26:16). Jesus and Paul converged on the Damascus road for the integration of the embodied Word with Paul’s witness to *pleroo* the word from God and of God, in order for God’s people together to be whole, God’s whole family on God’s qualitative relational terms. The apostles notwithstanding, Paul’s “witness to all the world of what you have seen and heard” (Acts 22:15) would be integral to the experiential truth of the whole gospel distinguished by the Word from outside the universe in the beginning. The Jesus of the so-called quest for the historical Jesus is not congruent with God’s self-disclosure in the incarnation, indeed not even compatible. Accordingly, if Jesus cannot be incompatible with God’s thematic relational response to the human condition, and thus must be congruent with God’s revelation, then our view of Paul would be incongruent

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<sup>3</sup> Alan J. Torrance, “Can the Truth Be Learned?” in Markus Bockmuehl and Alan J. Torrance, eds. *Scripture’s Doctrine and Theology’s Bible: How the New Testament Shapes Christian Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 143-163.

with all of God's communicative action (as in the canon) if Paul himself were not also completely compatible with the whole of Jesus, and thereby a complete witness of Jesus, God's revelation and thematic response (cf. Paul's implied position on the "canon," i.e. "what is written," *kanon*, 1 Cor 4:6; 2 Cor 10:13). The implication is, therefore, if we can't get Jesus right, then we can't get Paul right; and if we don't have Paul right, then we haven't gotten Jesus right.

Jesus and Paul can only be wholly integrated on the level of the whole of God's relational context and process, in which the Word (relational not referential) and his *pleroo*-witness emerge in relationship together to be whole, live whole and make whole. "Witness" (*martys*) is a term for a person who possesses knowledge of someone (or something) and thus can confirm that one (or thing). The epistemic process engaged by the witness determines the level of knowledge the witness possesses, and thereby the extent of confirmation that witness can make about someone. That is, a full witness of Jesus of "what you have seen and heard" has to, as Jesus made requisite earlier, "pay attention to [*blepo*, carefully examine and be aware of] how you listen" (Lk 8:18), and accordingly "listen to the words you hear" with the necessity of relational involvement based on the paradigm "to the extent you are involved, to that extent you will receive, and more will be given" (Mk 4:24). Carefully examining and ongoingly being aware of how one listens to the Word from God characterizes the development of Paul's witness in this reciprocal relational epistemic process; and Paul was a witness deeply involved with Christ in relationship together. It is curious, then, why Jesus did not simply count on his first disciples to be the integral witnesses of "what you have seen and heard." What, if anything, distinguished Paul's witness from theirs?

A witness with only quantitative knowledge about Jesus from a conventional epistemology can only confirm limited information about the historical Jesus as Object-for-observation—information which could be referentially compatible with Jesus but also would be relationally incompatible with his person and hereby lack congruence. To witness to the whole of Jesus' person also as Subject-for-relationship involves a deeper epistemology engaging the relational epistemic process with the relational outcome of whole knowledge, not merely quantitative knowledge about informational fragments. This requires a perceptual-interpretive lens that pays attention to the qualitative and relational significance of Jesus and engages him in relationship accordingly—with which the first disciples demonstrated having difficulty. A true and full witness of Jesus, therefore, must be vulnerably involved as a direct participant in whole relationship together with Jesus, not a mere observer, in order to confirm the whole of who, what and how Jesus is. Paul was this complete participant-witness of Jesus not by mere appointment but from his reciprocal relational involvement constituted by the whole of God's vulnerable relational response of grace to him—the whole of whom he continued to experience further and deeper in relationship together "to know Christ" intimately without the veil (Phil 3:10-11). The relational outcome was that Paul's whole knowledge of Jesus, the embodied Truth only for relationship, was the experiential truth of the whole gospel for whom he was a witness—the integral witness of the *pleroma* of God and who *pleroo* the words of God.

Paul's Christology initially emerges in his cosmology to establish Christ as the Creator (Col 1:16-17), defined as the immortal, invisible, *mono* God (1 Tim 1:17). From his transcendence, Christ enacted God's complex relational dynamic from top down in

the mysterious and improbable relational process of embodiment—the outcome of which made Christ vulnerable for intimate relationship with reduced persons, and the consequence of which made Christ vulnerable for the effects of the sin of reductionism—that Paul highlighted in a hymn most likely from the Jesus tradition (Phil 2:5-8).

In Paul's Christology the incarnation set in motion the relational dynamic embodying the *pleroma* (fullness, complete, whole) of God (Col 1:19), the *pleroma* of the Godhead (Col 2:9), who is the image of God (Col 1:15) vulnerably revealing the whole of God's glory (qualitative being and relational nature) in the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:6) only for relationship together as God's family (Eph 1:5, 13-14; Col 1:20-22). God's relational action 'in Christ' involves these complex theological dynamics, which often need the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction of *tamiym* for their wholeness. For example, 'in Christ' is Paul's major use of shorthand relational language for the complex theological dynamics continuing to unfold in his forest. This is neither a motif for theological discourse merely about Christ's death and its significance, nor a mere theological construct for the doctrine and events of Christ—both of which tend to perceive 'in Christ' with only a quantitative lens. For Paul, 'in Christ' is not a conceptual phrase without functional significance. Moreover, it is insufficient to shift to a qualitative perception of 'in Christ' as Paul's mysticism devoid of his whole knowledge and understanding (*synesis*) of the mystery of Christ embodying God's relational dynamic.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, this language should not be spiritualized for application only to the individual and hereby reduce it from its relational function for relationship together in God's family. In Paul's shorthand, 'in Christ' is the relational action and outcome from God's relational dynamic embodying the deepest desire of God's purpose planned with the relational context and process necessary for whole relationship together in God's qualitative image and relational likeness.

The image of God combined with the glory of God and integrated in the face of Christ has been interpreted, for example, in terms of epiphany in the OT and Jewish mysticism (*Merkabah*-vision in Eze 1).<sup>5</sup> This lens perceives something qualitative with a hermeneutic taken from within the quantitative limits of terms defined or shaped by human contextualization, albeit primarily religious. Paul's Christology, however, is rooted beyond human contextualization and deeper than mysticism; and Paul's readers must keep in focus that his Christology was first his experiential truth of the incarnation relationally extended to him by the whole of Jesus. In this relational contrast with both human contextualization and mysticism, the image, glory and face of God are deeply understood only in the relational context of God's relational response of the definitive blessing of his people (i.e. Num 6:24-26)—the face of God illuminated on his children for wholeness in relationship together (cf. Ps 67:1-2). This is the distinguished Face that the face of Christ, as the image of God, wholly embodied in the incarnation to relationally disclose the glory of the whole of God only for vulnerable involvement in relationship. Paul's Christology signified the fulfillment of this definitive relational blessing in which the whole of God's face intimately turned, shined and restored wholeness to all life and function, notably Paul's own life and function.

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<sup>4</sup> For such a perspective of Paul's position on mysticism 'in Christ', see James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 390-412.

<sup>5</sup> For an example of this interpretation, see Seyoon Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective*, 165-213.

As the *pleroma* of God embodying the whole of God's desires and purpose, the incarnation is constituted only by the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes (i.e. wholeness) and, conjointly, the incarnation composes the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes for all life and function (Col 2:9-10). That is to say, the qualitative whole of God's heart functions only from top down and from inner out with nothing less and no substitutes in order to be embodied Face to face with human persons for relationship together in wholeness. To be compatible, human persons and function need to function only by this same dynamic in order to be whole (cf. Rom 8:29; Col 3:10). Anything less or any substitutes of God's ontology and function could neither constitute the incarnation from inner out, nor constitute God's relational dynamic embodied 'in Christ' from top down. This was part of the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction that Paul experienced in his encounter with the whole of Jesus on the Damascus road.

In Paul's theology, the complex theological dynamics of God's relational response converge in the gospel of Christ; and in the reflexive dynamic of Paul's theology, the whole gospel converges in the incarnation, the whole of Jesus embodying the whole of God. Without converging and being contextualized in the incarnation, any other gospel can only have a human shape that essentially *misre*-presents the gospel. That is, any gospel contextualized apart from 'in Christ' has reduced the relational significance of the whole of God's thematic relational dynamic embodied by Jesus in response to the human condition, and consequently has diminished, minimalized or precluded the wholeness of "the gospel of Christ" and substituted a gospel shaped or renegotiated by human terms (Gal 1:6-7; Col 2:4,8).

Thus, a theology of Jesus has to be both compatible with the whole gospel and sufficient against any human shaping or construction from reductionism. These were accounted for in Paul's Christology of the whole of Jesus, who was neither reduced by bottom-up shaping nor renegotiated by human terms. His Christology then went further than the limits of the Jesus tradition and even deeper than the early perceptions of the other apostles (cf. Gal 2:6-9; 2 Pet 3:15-16). The developing depth of experiential truth with Christ and the Spirit illuminated the whole knowledge and understanding (*synesis*) to constitute Paul's Christology (cf. Eph 3:4; Col 1:25-27). This dynamic flow to his theology is signified in the following framework:

1. Experiencing Christ: the embodied presence and experiential truth of the whole of Jesus, who is the qualitative Word and relational Truth from the whole of God.
2. Following Christ in relationship: discipleship of his person in the primacy of relationship, not his disembodied teachings or example.
3. Witnessing 'in Christ' and thus for the whole of God: the experiential truth in function.
4. Theologizing 'in Christ' and thus with the Spirit to illuminate the whole of God.

This is not only a linear flow but a reflexive dynamic, which signifies the involvement in relationship together necessary for the relational epistemic process both to know God and to make God known (cf. Col 2:2; Eph 1:17-19; 3:16-19). The whole of Paul's witness



was complete only because of experiencing Christ in whole relationship together and following Christ in this primacy, without which the whole in his theology has no basis and significance.

Paul's *pleroma* Christology does not elaborate on the incarnation as event (cf. Gal 4:4-5), but assumes that knowledge with the Jesus tradition. His theological discourse on Christ did not follow the footsteps of Jesus' deeds and example; nor did it follow the footprints about Jesus' teachings for a christocentric doctrine. Paul concentrates instead on the complex theological dynamics of God's relational dynamic embodied 'in Christ'. His discourse on Christ was the experiential truth of following the whole of Jesus' person embodying the relational context and process of God's relational dynamic. This, I emphasize, explains why Paul made little reference to Jesus' sayings/teachings in his letters. Paul neither reduced Jesus to nor disembodied Jesus' person from his teachings or example. Moreover, even though Paul gives major attention to Christ's death and resurrection, he was not focused on this as event (the Christ-event), a focus which ironically reduces and disembodies the whole of Jesus from the cross—not referentially but relationally. Paul's focus was illuminating the qualitative function of Jesus' whole person embodying from inner out God's relational dynamic in whole response to the human condition—just as Jesus called Paul to illuminate and confirm (*martys*) “the *qualitative* things in which you have seen me *from inner out* and to those *relational dynamics* in which I will appear to you” (Acts 26:16). By the clear nature of the incarnation constituted in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes, Paul's discourse on Christ did not define Jesus by the reductionist terms of what he did (death), even in reality, and of what he had (teachings), even in truth. Therefore, the emergence of Paul's theological discourse on Jesus Christ was nothing less and no substitutes indeed of *pleroma* Christology.

**What distinguishes *pleroma* Christology from an incomplete Christology of anything less or any substitutes?** Wholeness—that is, the whole of God's relational dynamic embodying the whole of God's relational context and process in whole response to the human condition to fulfill God's whole desire and purpose to be whole in relationship together as God's whole family, nothing less and no substitutes. Incomplete Christologies may point to or address some aspect(s) of God's relational dynamic, notably grace and love; yet they remain fragmentary and thus incomplete because God's relational process or even relational context is not perceived with the qualitative lens necessary for the whole knowledge and understanding (*synesis*) to take in the irreducible and nonnegotiable experiential truth of this embodied wholeness of God's whole. Paul's *pleroma* Christology is inseparable from the experiential truth of the whole gospel, for which Paul relationally fought so lovingly in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes while conjointly fighting passionately against anything less and any substitutes from reductionism. It is within Paul's functional purpose for the gospel that much of his theology in general and Christology in particular converge; on this basis they are expressed in inseparable functional terms, not in what has since become conventional theological discourse. 'In Christ' is the summary functional expression of Paul's relational language that signifies definitive discourse of the *pleroma* Christology unfolding in his theological forest.

Read from a quantitative interpretive framework, Paul's Christology appears to be both fragmentary in its lack of direct reference to Jesus' sayings/teachings, as well as

incomplete or skewed due to his dominant focus on Jesus' death and resurrection. Yet, such a reduced framework using a quantitative lens (in contrast to *phronema* and *phroneo* by the Spirit, Rom 8:5-6) does not account for the whole of Paul's witness to which Jesus called him; nor can it account for the whole in his theology for which he was given relational responsibility (*oikonomia*) to *pleroo* the word of God (Col 1:25). Not to understand this whole of and in Paul is not to understand the whole of God in the incarnation and thus 'in Christ', leaving in fact only an incomplete Christology which is fragmentary or distorted.

Paul's theology of wholeness (noted earlier in chap. 7) is the underlying dynamic of his *pleroma* Christology. The irreducible and nonnegotiable dynamic of wholeness is what Jesus constituted *in* the incarnation of his own person and, likewise, constituted for human persons (both individually and collectively) *by* his incarnation in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes for all life and function (both for his person and human persons, Col 2:9-10). Therefore, Paul's *pleroma* Christology further emerges to make definitive 'in Christ' the functions for epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction necessary for wholeness in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the *pleroma* of God. These functions 'in Christ' are the following:

1. Christ is *the epistemological-theological key* to whole knowledge and understanding of the whole of God's ontology, the glory of God's qualitative being and relational nature (2 Cor 4:6; Col 1:15,19; 2:9).
2. Christ is *the hermeneutical key* to whole knowledge and understanding of the whole of God's function in relational context and process (Col 1:20-22; 2:2-3; Eph 1:4-11; 3:4-6, 18-19).
3. Christ is *the functional key* to the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God for human ontology and function, both individually and collectively as God's family (Col 1:15; 3:10-11; 2 Cor 3:18; Eph 2:21-22).

These qualitative and relational functions 'in Christ', both for his person and human persons in relationship together, function always by the nature of wholeness in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes. This is the *pleroma* Christology unfolding in Paul's theological forest.

**How did Christ fulfill these functions to be the definitive keys for wholeness in Paul's Christology?** After establishing epistemological clarification of the incarnation as the whole of God 'in Christ', Paul appears to jump directly from the manger to the cross in his theological forest, since he does not provide any narrative account of Jesus throughout the incarnation to the cross (e.g. Gal 4:4-6). Quite the contrary, however. In the presence of the Jesus tradition, a narrative account was unnecessary for Paul's Christology. Rather, his purpose, *pleroma* Christology, magnified the epistemological clarification of "the knowledge of the glory of the whole of God *vulnerably revealed* by the face of Christ *as the image of God*" (2 Cor 4:6), that is revealed in the whole of the incarnation. And, most importantly, Paul clearly illuminated these aspects' relational and functional significance 'in Christ'.

On the Damascus road, Paul was contextualized by Jesus essentially in the experiential truth of the incarnation, not contextualized in Jewish mysticism (cf. *Merkabah*-vision in Eze 1). The incarnation was the embodiment of the whole of God's relational context and process, the extension in which Paul was contextualized both by Jesus and with Jesus to be made whole 'in Christ'. What Jesus embodied was vulnerably disclosed throughout the course of the incarnation; and this extension into Paul was the experiential truth for the basis of his Christology, which was integrated with further whole knowledge and understanding (*synesis*) from ongoing involvement with Christ and the Spirit in the relational epistemic process together to make conclusive Paul's *pleroma* Christology.

The glory and image of God in the face of Christ disclosed in the incarnation are primary to the complex theological dynamics composing Paul's complete Christology. These dynamics illuminate the glory and image of God beyond their understanding in Judaism and further and deeper than in the Jesus tradition. In the OT, the image of God's glory is mainly characterized as strength and power (e.g. Ex 15:6,11; 16:6-8; Ps 24:6-8; 29:1-4; 59:9,17). The incarnation, however, deepens this image and glory of God to illuminate the qualitative heart, relational nature and vulnerable presence of God relationally disclosed by the whole of Jesus only for involvement in relationship together. This strategic shift did not exclude God's strength and power (as demonstrated by the resurrection) but presupposes God's reign (notably over darkness and now over death); on this basis it fully focuses on God's relational response of grace wholly extended within the innermost of the human condition—that is, not merely in its situations and circumstances but more importantly to the persons who are apart from the whole of God in order to reconcile them to the relationship necessary to be whole together. This relational outcome can only emerge from the function of relationship, and the incarnation constitutes only this function. As the function of relationship, nothing happens without the experiential truth from the incarnation of the relational dynamic of the image and glory of God, not the conceptual image or doctrinal glory of God. The Jesus tradition rightly understood this relational outcome as only from God's grace yet did not fully understand the theological dynamics involved or the theological anthropology necessarily engaged. This gap was demonstrated at a church summit in Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-29) and by Peter's interpretive framework and lens prior (10:9-16, 34-36), for which Paul later still had to give hermeneutic correction to Peter's practice for the experiential truth of the whole gospel embodied by Jesus (Gal 2:14).

In the incarnation of God's relational dynamic determined only by the relational function of grace, Jesus fulfills the whole of God's thematic relational response to the inherent human relational need and problem (which neuroscience rightly identifies). By fulfilling God's relational response only in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes, Jesus embodied the wholeness of the image of God (*eikon*). *Eikon* implies not merely a resemblance to but the total correspondence and likeness of its archetype, here the invisible God (Col 1:15)—just as Jesus claimed to his first disciples (Jn 14:9). The *eikon* of God is made definitive by the illumination (*photismos*) of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, whose vulnerable embodiment made God's qualitative being and relational nature functionally involved with persons for experiential truth in relationship together (2 Cor 4:4b,6). Beginning with his face-to-Face encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road, Paul experienced directly this relational dynamic of Christ's illumination

now extended also to him. In this relational process with Jesus, God's relational function of grace and its outcome of intimate relational connection together (not mysticism) provided Paul with his ongoing experiential truth of the glory of God 'in Christ', the image of God. All this was to definitively establish for the church at Corinth "by the open statement of truth" (*phanerosis* from *phaneroo*, 4:2) that the relational dynamic is from God and not from human shaping (4:1). For Paul, the image of God was unmistakable in the relational dynamic of Christ's illumination of God's glory, which Paul simply integrates in "the gospel of the glory of Christ" (4:4b). This relational dynamic of the image and glory of God is essential for Paul's *pleroma* Christology because it signifies the whole of Jesus' person vulnerably embodied, illuminated and involved for relationship together, fulfilling the three functions unique to the face of Christ:

1. Whole knowledge and understanding of the whole of God's ontology and nothing less and no substitutes of God's qualitative being and relational nature (Christ the epistemological-theological key).
2. Whole knowledge and understanding of the whole of God's function in the relational context and process only on God's relational terms of grace (Christ the hermeneutical key).

This "light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" can be seen only directly "in the face of Christ," which is made problematic if key epistemological, hermeneutic and functional distinctions and issues are not understood. Just as Paul did in his theological systemic framework, he continues in his theological forest to challenge assumptions of the cosmos, theological cognition and anthropology, and of the perceptual-interpretive framework (*phronema*) and lens (*phroneo*) used for this knowledge and understanding. Critical to Paul's *pleroma* Christology is the ongoing relational dynamic of wholeness from top down and inner out unique to the whole of God. By its nature from bottom up and outer in, reductionism is always positioned against God's whole to qualify it, redefine it, or shape it by human terms. "The face of Christ," not merely the concept of Christ, is crucial to which of these dynamics is engaged, and thereby who and what are illuminated and how they are received and responded to. Paul renounced reductionism's relational dynamic from outer in ("the shameful things that one hides"), which would reduce his whole person, and he did not engage in bottom-up practice which would compromise the whole of God's word ("falsify, distort," *doloo*, to dilute, water down, cheapen, as merchants did with wine to deceive consumers, 2 Cor 4:2). Paul's relational responsibility from God (*oikonomia*) functioned to present God's word in its fullness, complete, thus whole (*pleroo*, as Paul identified later, Col 1:25). The whole of God's word cannot be compromised without reducing what and who were embodied in the face of Christ, "the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Cor 4:4), "the hope of glory" (Col 1:27).

In Paul's *pleroma* Christology, the face of Christ is the exact *eikon* of God which illuminates the glory of God's qualitative being and relational nature in Christ's whole person and function, with the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes. This dynamic of wholeness is critical for how the face of Christ is perceived and his function interpreted. In his whole-reductionism discourse, Paul pointed to the relational outcome or

consequence of this issue of perceptual-interpretive framework as fundamental to the relational epistemic process necessary to “see [*augazo*, be illuminated by] the light” from top down (“God who...has shone”) and from inner out (“in our hearts”) “in the face of Christ” (2 Cor 4:4,6). The term “face” (*prosopon*) can be understood in two contrary dynamics: (1) like a mask worn in early Greek theatre to take on a different identity in a role or as in a masquerade (*metaschematizo*, cf. 2 Cor 11:13-15); or (2) “face” can signify the whole person, whose identity of who, what and how the person is is not hidden but made fully vulnerable to be wholly perceived and involved with (cf. what the Father seeks, Jn 4:23-24). The first dynamic functions from outer in (e.g. “that one hides,” 4:2) while the second dynamic only functions from inner out (e.g. “by the open statement of the truth”). The interpretive framework of the first dynamic perceives only the outer face of Christ and thereby interprets Christ’s function in reductionist human terms. This outward approach is an incompatible interface with Christ’s face of inner out, and creates distance and maintains barriers in relationship. The relational consequence is not seeing the light and consequently unable to make relational connection with the qualitative being and relational nature of God.

Contrary to the first dynamic, in the second dynamic the face of Christ is without reductionism of the whole of who, what and how God is—just as Jesus conclusively revealed to his disciples (Jn 14:9) and fulfilled for the Father (Jn 17:4,6,26). This is the face embodying, illuminating and involving the whole of God’s glory—nothing less and no substitutes of God’s qualitative being and relational nature—for relationship together. It is the only face and function which constitute *pleroma* Christology—“the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor 4:4). Moreover, then, this relational dynamic of the image and glory of God in Christ functions also to illuminate the whole knowledge and understanding of the face of Christ’s function from inner out in God’s relational context and process, whereby to function congruent to only God’s relational terms of grace from top down. Christ’s face and function together are irreducible and therefore indispensable for Christology to be complete. In Paul’s *pleroma* Christology, Christ’s face and function constitute the whole person vulnerably involved in relationship. The relational outcome, in contrast to the relational consequence above, is that the whole of God is now accessible for intimate relationship Face to face. The relational implication is that the function of this distinguished Face is compatible only with the human face in qualitative image and relational likeness of his for the qualitative-relational connection and involvement necessary to be wholly Face to face to Face.

This relational outcome is the purpose and function of the unequivocal image and glory of God vulnerably embodied by the whole of Jesus only for relationship together. Indispensably throughout the incarnation, Christ’s function illuminated the whole knowledge and understanding of the qualitative image and relational likeness of God in which the human person and function were created; and by his qualitative-relational function between the manger and the cross, Christ also vulnerably demonstrates the ontological image and functional likeness to which human persons need to be restored for whole relationship together face to Face. Therefore, the relational dynamic of the image and glory of God is essential in Paul’s *pleroma* Christology for a third function fulfilled in the distinguished face of Christ necessary for relationship together:

3. The qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God necessary for human ontology and function, individually and collectively as God's family, in the same dynamic as Christ of nothing less and no substitutes (Christ the functional key).

Without Jesus' whole person and function throughout the incarnation, whole knowledge and understanding of the image and glory of God would neither be illuminated for vulnerable self-disclosure in experiential truth, nor be definitive for vulnerable human reciprocal response in the image and likeness necessary for whole relationship together (2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10).

In Paul's *pleroma* Christology, the above three qualitative-relational functions are vital for the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction necessary to be whole. Jesus constituted this dynamic of wholeness *in* the incarnation of his own person, and thereby constituted this dynamic for wholeness *by* his incarnation for all human life and function (Col 2:9-10). Therefore, this dynamic in the face of Christ was irreducible and nonnegotiable by the very nature of the *pleroma* of God. Anything less and any substitutes are reductionism of the *pleroma* of God, the image of God, the glory of God in the face of Christ, consequently reductionism of the human person and function—shifting from the whole from top down to reductionism from bottom up, from the whole from inner out to reductionism from outer in. Paul's *oikonomia* to *pleroo* the word of God always fought jointly against this reductionism distorting, diluting it (*doloo*, 2 Cor 4:2) and for the whole gospel embodied by *pleroma* Christology.

The relational dynamic of the image and glory of God composes the heart of Paul's *pleroma* Christology, which emerges only as the function of relationship. From this integral function in the distinguished face of Christ unfold the remaining theological dynamics in Paul's forest, dynamics which always continue to be determined by God's relational function of grace. For Paul, this relational dynamic in "the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God" (2 Cor 4:4) also composed what is at the heart of the gospel: Christ's whole face and function. This is the indispensable gospel for the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction necessary in order for the whole of God to fully emerge, whole human persons and function to reciprocally emerge, and for wholeness to emerge in relationship together. When Christ embodied this top-down gospel, Christ's face and function from inner out constituted this good news in God's relational context and process. By the nature of the whole and holy God, God's relational context and process cannot be confused with, and thus must be distinguished from, any and all human context and process. The good news of the whole of God's qualitative being and relational nature, both vulnerably present and involved for relationship together, functions only in the relational context and process of God's terms.

This "light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" is by its nature both irreducible and indispensable. Though clearly undimmed, it is not always seen by Paul's readers (past and present), yet is at the heart of his *pleroma* Christology. It is not seen, understood, received or responded to because by its very nature these outcomes can take place only in God's relational context and process. The relational context and process of God were the means by which God's relational dynamic of grace was embodied by Christ's face and function. Paul himself was first contextualized beyond human contexts when God's face from top down turned and shined on him, even beyond the context of

Judaism's definitive blessing (Num 6:24-26). On the Damascus road Paul was contextualized in the incarnation of Christ's face and function, the whole person in relationship, to constitute Paul from inner out into the whole of God's relational context and process. Only in God's relational context and process did Paul see in Christ's face and function the light of the gospel of the image and glory of Christ and thereby relationally respond back (Acts 22:16) for the relationship together necessary to be whole.

This was the only gospel Paul knew and called his own. This was also his experiential truth of *pleroma* Christology, in which the whole of God's (from Father to Son to Spirit) relational dynamic emerges in fullness within only God's relational context and process—the irreducible relational context and nonnegotiable relational process made vulnerable by Christ's face and function for whole relationship together. Therefore, this gospel is contextualized by no fragmentary reductions of Christ's relational context and process. It therefore cannot be shaped by any other context and process and still embody Christ's whole face and function, and still illuminate the whole of God's qualitative being and relational nature, and still fulfill God's thematic response to the human condition. Within the *pleroma* of God's relational context and process, the relational dynamic of the integral face and function of Christ (as the image and glory of God) continues to deeply engage and to be vulnerably involved in fulfilling the other theological dynamics of Paul's forest. Apart from God's relational context and process, Christ's embodying does not have the abiding relational framework to complete these complex theological dynamics for the fulfillment of God's thematic relational response of grace. This is how Christology becomes fragmentary and thus incomplete, and when soteriology is truncated without the qualitative and functional significance of whole relationship together—resulting in a gospel different from the image and glory of Christ.

Paul's relational responsibility (*oikonomia*) to *pleroo* the word of God has been an elusive function for Paul's readers because not understanding the whole in Paul is compounded when to what Paul is speaking and from where he speaks are not clearly understood. As frequently noted, Paul was always fighting conjointly for the gospel of Christ and against reductionism, and this either-or tension pervades Paul's thought and theology and often becomes blurred as to what Paul is saying. In Paul's thought and theology throughout his letters, issues of continuity and discontinuity (real or perceived) directly involve the following: God's context and process or human context and process, thus top down or bottom up; the whole gospel or a human-shaped gospel, thus nothing less and no substitutes or anything less and any substitutes; wholeness of ontology and function or reductionism of ontology and function, thus inner out or outer in. Though Paul's letters address specific human contexts with various situations and circumstances (except for Eph), he is always contextualizing them in the further and deeper relational context and process of Christ's face and function. Paul always speaks to them from this relational dynamic to illuminate not any gospel but only the gospel of the image and glory of Christ. For Paul, the issue of continuity (or perceived discontinuity, e.g. regarding *torah*) is related solely to God's deep desire and thematic relational action for whole relationship together. When theology and the gospel, and their practice, are compatible and congruent with the outworking of God's relational dynamic in Christ's face and function, there is continuity in the thought and theology of Paul's letters. When these, along with human ontology and function, have been reduced from God's purpose

for relationship in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God, then this incompatibility/incongruence involves the discontinuity rightly seen in Paul. In these instances, Paul exposes and confronts substituting human terms and shaping, even as ontological simulation and epistemological illusion from reductionism in order to make them whole (e.g. 1 Cor 1:12; 3:4,22; 4:6-7; 2 Cor 10:12; 11:12-15).

In the discontinuity parts of his letters, Paul responds with the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction of the *old* life and function (e.g. Rom 2:28-29) necessary for the *new* to emerge (e.g. Gal 6:15; Rom 6:5-10; Col 3:9-11). In these examples noted, as a Jew who is also a follower of Christ, Paul clarifies the continuity of the original covenant and the new covenant (the OT and the NT). To the extent that the incarnation of Christ's face and function is an extension of OT theology, Paul has continuity with the OT and Judaism faithfully practiced. Anything less or otherwise, there is discontinuity, the influence of which did not determine or give primary shape to Paul's gospel even as a Jew. Moreover, continuity should not be confused with conformity or determinism, or discontinuity mistaken with nonconformity or freedom. Discontinuity signifies anything less and any substitute of the whole according to reductionism. This reductionist dynamic involves the formation of quantitative templates within which human life is defined and human function is determined. This conforming process constrains the whole person and in practice enslaves persons to fragmentary life and function. These templates generated in the world of human contextualization continue today, which computer scientist Jaron Lanier demonstrated about internet technology (noted previously) to highlight reductionism indeed as the origination of templates for human persons and practice to conform to. Human terms, shaping or construction from a reductionist perceptual-interpretive framework and lens are in fact the determining templates for human ontology and function which unmistakably constrain and enslave human life in the human condition (which even neuroscience identifies). For Paul, this process is not nonconformity and freedom but discontinuity with wholeness and consequently conformity and enslavement to reductionism (cf. Gal 4:8-10). Conversely, continuity reflects the relational dynamic of the whole of God's relational response to this human condition for God's purpose, not to conform human persons to function according to predetermined templates but to redeem them from such enslavement for the only purpose of being restored to wholeness of human ontology and function in whole relationship together (cf. Gal 4:3-7). Therefore, continuity in Paul unequivocally connotes fulfillment of the inherent human need and resolution for the human problem which neuroscience can only identify and describe in quantitative terms but has no qualitative solution and fulfillment for.

Critically, then, Paul's discontinuity-responses to some practice of a theology or a gospel, along with his challenges to the assumptions of human ontology and function, were necessary for the whole of God to fully emerge, for whole human persons and function to reciprocally emerge, and for wholeness to emerge in relationship together. Yet this discontinuity issue is not understood in Paul if his readers remain no further than human contextualization and do not go deeper to vulnerably engage God's relational context and process necessary for the continuity of Christ's face and function, his whole person vulnerably involved in relationship. For Paul, discontinuity at best results only in an incomplete Christology, not *pleroma* Christology.



## ***Pleroma* Christology Completed**

The relational dynamic of the integral face and function of Christ continues to be enacted in God's relational context and process to fulfill God's thematic relational response of grace to the human condition, and thereby to complete the theological dynamics of Paul's forest. This relational dynamic does not unfold in a narrative account by Paul but in the experiential truth of the whole of Paul's witness and with the development of the whole in his theology. The theological development of God's relational dynamic flows from the gospel of the image and glory of Christ's face and function in 2 Corinthians to *pleroma* Christology in Colossians and the emergence of the ecclesiology of the whole in Ephesians. In this flow, Paul's theological forest illuminates and makes definitive God's relational dynamic to its whole relational outcome 'already' and its eschatological relational conclusion 'not yet'. The process unfolds for Paul only within God's relational context and process in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes, which Paul engaged by the nature of Christ's face and function for ongoing qualitative involvement in relationship with Christ and the Spirit.

In an integrated flow of Paul's letters, following groundbreaking discourse in his Corinthian letters, Galatians establishes the functional clarity of the truth of the whole gospel to clearly distinguish it from any alternative gospels of human shaping. Romans follows to make definitive the theological basis for the truth of the whole gospel, thereby providing the theological clarity necessary to be integrated with the above functional clarity to constitute the whole gospel of the image and glory of Christ in the whole of God's relational context and process responding in grace to the human condition. These theological relational dynamics are unfolded by Paul in his forest, in ongoing contrast and conflict with reductionism.

Colossians, on the one hand, is perhaps a test-case application of both the functional clarity from Galatians and the theological clarity from Romans to an apparent context of philosophical notions (Col 2:8). On the other hand, Colossians reflects the further development of Paul's theology from Galatians and Romans. In Colossians, Paul's theology represents the further development which, in reflection with the Spirit, demonstrates his *synesis* (whole knowledge and understanding, cf. 1:9; 2:2) of God's relational revelation to make definitive the *pleroma* of God and to *pleroo* (make complete, whole) the word of God (Col 1:19,25), most significantly, in *pleroma* Christology. In the theological dynamics unfolding in Paul's forest, God's communicative action (the word of God) is made complete, whole, and thus fulfilled, by the embodied word from God constituting the whole of Christ's face and function—that is, by the *pleroma* of God whom God delighted (*eudokeo*) in vulnerably disclosing for relationship together. Paul's *synesis* involved the continuity of God's relational dynamic in thematic response to the human condition, initiated even before creation (1:12-20). Continuing God's relational dynamic in Christ as the image of God, Christ's face and function (his whole person in relationship) as the *pleroma* of God completes the complex theological dynamics necessary to make whole the human condition (Col 1:21-22; 2:9-10; 3:9-11). Yet, *pleroma* Christology in Colossians only identifies the relational outcome 'in Christ', leaving more for Paul to unfold.

The whole of God's relational purpose and dynamic are certainly salvific (cf. Ps 68:19-20). Christ's whole person in relationship, however, redeemed persons from enslavement to not only save them *from* the human condition; integrally and inseparably, persons were redeemed to be saved *to* reconciliation in God's family in whole relationships together (cf. Rom 5:9-11; Col 1:13). God's theological dynamic of saved from-to is inseparable from God's relational dynamic for the integrated outcome of redemptive reconciliation. Ephesians takes over for Colossians to fully summarize God's complex theological relational dynamics unfolding in Paul's forest and highlights the relational outcome of what persons 'in Christ' are saved *to*.

In Ephesians, Paul also further develops the theological clarity from Romans, hereby providing the theological forest for all the theological trees. Moreover, Paul added further theological discourse not included in Romans, most notably illuminating the relational outcome of 'saved to' by making definitive the ecclesiology necessary to be whole, God's whole family in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God—just as Christ's face and function constituted (Eph 1:22-23; 2:13-22), and Jesus prayed for his family's formation (Jn 17:20-26) that Paul's own prayer knowingly or unknowingly echoed (Eph 3:14-19).

Jesus' formative family prayer and Paul's prayer for the church signify the qualitative depth 'already' of the relational outcome of *pleroma* Christology. As a function of relationship, *pleroma* Christology defines the course of the continuing theological dynamics unfolding in Paul's forest and the coherence in his letters of God's relational dynamic, which Christ's whole person in relationship completes in whole relational outcome and the Spirit brings to eschatological conclusion. **How is this relational process completed?**

The thematic answer is simply "the Lord made his face to shine on us and be gracious to us and gave us peace." This, of course, involved complex theological dynamics which *pleroma* Christology completes in Paul's forest on only God's qualitative relational terms. Vulnerably disclosed throughout the incarnation was the embodied face of the *pleroma* of God's qualitative being and relational nature illuminated in the face of Christ. With this distinguished Face clearly embodied in human context and witnessing to human context, yet from only God's relational context and process, Christ's face and function turn and head to the cross to complete the whole of the gospel of the glory of Christ—the gospel of peace that God's face of grace shined on us and gave. The cross becomes the relational means to this relational outcome that is now the major focus of Paul's *pleroma* Christology.

Why the cross? For Jews, the cross would appear as an unnecessary priestly sacrifice and was certainly incongruent for Messiah; for Greeks, it seemed only foolishness, as Paul noted for both (1 Cor 1:23). Yet for Paul, the cross was unequivocal good news for the integral relational outworking of the whole of God's relational dynamic and the experiential truth of these theological dynamics (1 Cor 2:2; Gal 6:14). Therefore, in Paul's thought and theology the cross is no mere event that is vested with major significance he received from the Jesus tradition (1 Cor 15:3-4). The cross is only the relational extension of the incarnation and the relational outcome of the whole of God's vulnerable involvement with human persons—which also signified the further relational extension of the incarnation Paul personally received from Jesus on the Damascus road for the experiential truth of the good news in the cross. Paul then never

focused on the cross at the expense of discourse on the incarnation but only as the relational extension of it. Just as the incarnation was a function of relationship and not event, the cross signifies the same function of relationship that was embodied by Jesus' whole person vulnerably involved in relationship.

Shortly before Jesus went to the cross, he disclosed to his disciples for their assurance that he was “the way and the truth and the life,” the relational means to the Father for whole relationship together as family (Jn 14:1-6). As discussed previously, his declaration was also in response to Thomas' claim made from a quantitative epistemic process using a reductionist interpretive lens: “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” In their distress over his pending death and departure, Jesus necessarily shifted their reductionist focus from the quantitative outer in to the qualitative whole of inner out. Jesus focused them on the relational way to the experiential truth of the whole life (*zoe* not *bios*) together with the whole of God illuminated in the face of Christ—that is, the *pleroma* of God—thus “know me, know my Father...seen me, seen the Father” (Jn 14:7,9). Whether or not Paul knew of Jesus' disclosure to those disciples, Paul knew Jesus in the relational way to the experiential truth of whole *zoe* together to constitute his *pleroma* Christology, whose theological dynamics converge at the cross.

The major part of the complex dynamics converging at the cross involves the issue of election and determinism along with free will and freedom in the critical matter of sin. If God's election was the decision to predetermine outcomes, then God had no basis to hold human persons accountable for their actions or even reason to do so. This view renders sin essentially as irrelevant. Yet, regarding free will and freedom, in the primordial garden God allowed for only functional self-autonomy (not total) that did not include functional self-determination as the creature apart from the Creator. Nevertheless, human persons exercised their self-autonomy for self-determination, which then became their only functional means for self-justification (Gen 3:6-13; cf. Rom 1:21-25). This critical dynamic of self, with all its variations (both individually and collectively), is not predetermined by God but solely the consequence of human action extending beyond the nonnegotiable prescribed relational terms from the Creator for reciprocal relationship together, and thus is action rightly to be held accountable for—for example, “did God really say that?” This dynamic of self-autonomy, self-determination, self-justification enacts the human condition embedded in and enslaved to the sin of reductionism, that in Paul's theological discourse in relational terms clearly means to “fall short of the *qualitative and relational* glory of God,”—for which, in terms of reciprocal relationship, all persons are accountable (Rom 3:23).

For Paul, sin is more than a static condition, and it goes beyond the burden of moral failure and the debt of ethical shortcomings. Sin fully involves a dynamic relational process directly engaging the specific relational context of God. Engagement by individuals and collectives in the dynamic of sin is to “fall short of the glory of God” (*hystereo*), that is, to come short of the defining created ontology in the qualitative image of God and the determining created function in the relational likeness of God, thus contrary to the glory of God revealed in creation (Rom 1:23) and vulnerably disclosed in Christ's face and function (2 Cor 4:6). Consequently, the functional dynamic of sin—which includes on the contextual, structural and systemic levels—is to reduce human persons from their created whole qualitative ontology and relational function constituted

by the whole of God. This reduction of the human person and persons in relationship together engaged by Adam and Eve critically separated them from the definitive significance of the whole of God's relational context and process to then be defined and determined entirely by human terms from human context (cf. Rom 5:12). This human contextualization and agency, by its redefined nature, can only be reductionism of human ontology and function, consequently to come short of the glory of God's qualitative image and relational likeness by which human persons were created (cf. 2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10). Yet this *hystereo* should not be confused with not measuring up to some standard (moral, ethical, social, cultural, familial, etc) based on persons defined by what they do and have. Such confusion is often evident in the practice of faith, thereby renegotiating the terms of God's relational response of grace and engaging in self-determination (not Paul's polemic in Gal 1:6; 3:2-3; 4:8-9).

Such reductionism of the whole person and reductionism's counter-relational work on whole relationships together are consequential in function, which at best can signify only ontological simulation and epistemological illusion of the whole of God's glory. This reductionism was demonstrated by Jesus' first disciples discussed above prior to the cross. Their statements, "How can we know the way" and "show us the Father," would rarely be interpreted as moral failure or ethical shortcoming. It was their reductionist perception, both of Jesus and themselves, that prevented wholeness of ontology and function from being seen and known in Jesus as well as being lived in themselves, and as a result from experiencing together with Jesus, even after "all this time" (expressing Jesus' frustration, Jn 14:9). This was consequential of reductionism as the essential function of sin, the sin of reductionism, from which they needed redemptive change to be whole. Any and all reductions, whatever its variation, of God's whole on God's qualitative relational terms to human shaping on human terms engage the dynamic process of sin, all of which is consequential, accountable and in need of redemptive change (cf. Col 2:8-23).

In Paul's theological discourse, sin is a theological tree that can be fully understood only in its theological forest. Therefore, sin, by its functional nature, must always be perceived and interpreted in the breadth of the relational context and depth of the relational process constituted by the whole of God's thematic relational action. Anything less and any substitutes are sin itself, the sin of reductionism, with all its expressions critically converging at the cross. This is the cross illuminated by the gospel of the glory of Christ (2 Cor 4:4), the *pleroma* of God (Col 1:19-20), whose light Paul would not diminish by any reductionism of his own (1 Cor 1:10-17). Reductionism's presence and influence is pervasive and its practice is prevailing, often even in the church as Paul addressed at Corinth. This makes unequivocal the defining issue for the human condition converging with Christ at the cross:

All human life and function in self-autonomy, created with limits by God, are left with only two choices about self-determination and thus self-justification: either the functional means of human terms, shaping and construction, or the relational means in the face and function of Christ (cf. Paul's personal either-or, Phil 3:4-9, and the functional constraints of the person, Rom 7:15-25).

The former remains the incorrigible means to reduced ontology and function, and the latter is the redemptive means to whole ontology and function. The issue at the cross is whether the former means is relinquished and submitted to the latter means, so that human life and function can be complete in relational response.

Beyond the event and its drama, the cross signifies the function of relationship embodied by the whole face and function of Christ, who constitutes this relational dynamic even beyond merely sacrificial death for atonement and justification. The theological dynamics converging at the cross cannot be understood by the referential limits of these doctrines (theological trees), the theological discourse of which has traditionally been fragmentary without wholeness, if not reductionist (apart from their theological forest). The cross was fully embodied by the whole of Jesus to be paradigmatic of the dynamic flow of interaction as follows:

The convergence of, first, God's thematic relational response of grace to the human condition fulfilled ("It is finished," Jn 19:30) by the qualitative being and relational nature of God's glory embodied in Christ's whole face and function ("I am thirsty," Jn 19:28), and second, the human responses of self-autonomy at efforts of self-determination and self-justification now submitted to God's response ("Jesus, remember me," Lk 23:42) in order to fully share in ("you will be with me," 23:43) the redemptive means to wholeness ("Father, forgive them," 23:34) embodied by Jesus only in God's relational context and process ("Father into your hands," 23:46) for whole relationship together ("here is your son...here is your mother," Jn 19:26-27).

The submission of human reductionism to Christ's face and function is more than figurative because it entails the dynamic convergence and engagement by human persons in their sin of reductionism to participate in Jesus' relational response, notably behind the curtain—signifying the reciprocal, not unilateral, nature of relationship, notably with the veil removed (2 Cor 3:16). This reciprocal dynamic is the necessary convergence in which Christ functionally assumes their reductionism to fulfill God's response to the human condition (2 Cor 5:21), constituted by the relational sacrifice of atonement behind the curtain (Rom 3:25). The order of this interaction is not clearly linear and is distinctly not unilateral. The interaction of Christ's relational response of taking on human sin of reductionism is a theological dynamic that can be sufficiently explained only in the whole of God's relational dynamic; this vulnerably emerged in the incarnation, whose face and function now paradoxically integrates his whole life with reductionist death, not in dialectic tension but in God's relational response of grace for whole human life to emerge together. Though this certainly involved sacrificing the whole of his life, it is not paradigmatic of sacrifice but more deeply paradigmatic of the whole of his relational involvement with persons in the death of their reductionism—not merely the sacrifice of *agape* but the depth of *agape*'s relational involvement (discussed shortly). The *pleroma* of Jesus' assuming of sin, however, is paradoxical beyond physical death: resulting, on the one hand, necessarily in the relational consequence of the mystery of fragmenting the whole of God ("why have you forsaken me," Mt 27:46) for God's preplanned purpose, and, on the other hand, of the relational outcome of human redemption and reconciliation (Rom 5:6-11; Eph 1:4-10; Col

1:21-22). This is the dynamic paradigm of whole life relationally involved with reductionist life for the death of its reductionism so that whole life can emerge together in relationship.

Moreover, this reciprocal relational process is paradigmatic for the ongoing relational involvement—of reductionist life with whole life for reductionism’s death for whole life together—necessary for the redemptive reconciliation as God’s whole family (Col 2:8-14; 3:9-11; Gal 6:14-15; Rom 6:4; 2 Cor 3:18; 5:16-17; Eph 2:14-18). This ongoing relational dynamic by necessity converges at the cross for the old in human life and function to be redeemed in order for the new of wholeness to emerge. Therefore, the cross is the conclusive dynamic paradigm to wholeness, signifying the relational means in Christ’s face and function that exposes, critiques, receives, redeems and makes whole all reductionism at the cross.

For Paul, though the cross is foolishness in human contextualization, it is irreducible to human shaping and nonnegotiable to human redefining, the unequivocal good news of the whole of God’s continued relational involvement for wholeness. In *pleroma* Christology the cross is the only dynamic paradigm for the *old* sin of reductionism to die so that the *new* ontology and function can be raised whole, that is, in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God for reciprocal relationship together in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes. In Paul’s theological forest the cross is inseparable from the resurrection and their conjoint function is indispensable for God’s relational dynamic to wholeness—the relational *way* to the experiential *truth* of the whole *life* in God’s family together. A cross apart from the resurrection merely to save us from sin is fragmented, therefore signifies a truncated soteriology that can never be the whole life Jesus saves to.

Thus, from the interpretive lens based on his *synesis* received from Christ and the Spirit (Gal 1:12; 1 Cor 2:13; Eph 3:3-4), Paul perceived the cross in the flow and relational dynamic of the incarnation. Christ’s death was never reduced or separated from the qualitative being of Christ’s face and the relational nature of his function, which jointly illuminated the glory of the *pleroma* of God. The cross signified the same function of relationship as the incarnation. This congruence is critical in Paul’s *pleroma* Christology. Despite the major attention in his letters given to the cross, his theological focus is on the incarnation embodying the whole of God’s relational dynamic in thematic response to the human condition. An imbalanced view of the cross becomes overly christocentric based on an incomplete Christology, whereas for Paul, the cross extends from nothing less and no substitutes of the incarnation of the *pleroma* of God and therefore is centered on the whole of God (from the Father to the Son by the Spirit) composing *pleroma* Christology. This is who “the light of the glory of God in the face of Christ” illuminated and who was wholly embodied on the cross to illuminate further. This also is the distinguished Face of the *pleroma* of God on the cross with whose function in death Paul resolved wholeheartedly to know face to Face (1 Cor 2:2), to share intimately together in relationship (Phil 3:10) and to witness to nothing less and no substitutes (Gal 6:14).

Still missing from this discussion on Paul’s view of the cross through the whole of the incarnation is the principal dynamic of God’s thematic action, which I have purposely left out until now. **What is the principal dynamic of God's thematic action,**

**inseparable from the primary dynamic?** In Paul's theological forest, integral with the primary relational dynamic of God's grace is the principal relational dynamic of God's love, *agape* (Eph 1:4-10). *Agape* is the principal dynamic of God's thematic action which ultimately is enacted in the incarnation and extended to the cross (Rom 5:6-8; Eph 2:4-5, cf. Jn 3:16). The cross, however, is perceived by many to be the ultimate expression of *agape*, thereby eclipsing the incarnation in the whole of God's relational dynamic. This is a distortion because it skews both our view of the cross as well as our understanding of *agape*.

When we think of love in terms of *agape*, the main thought to emerge is about sacrifice, sacrificial love (e.g. taking Paul out of context in Phil 2:1-2, 6-8; cf. 2 Cor 8:9). Then, of course, the ultimate example of *agape* and sacrifice is seen in Jesus on the cross. The doctrine of atonement reinforces this perception, which points to the referential limits this doctrine, apart from the whole, imposes on the qualitative depth and relational breadth of Christ's involvement in fulfilling God's relational purpose and thematic relational response for the inseparable dynamic of redemption from sin and reconciliation to God's family (Eph 1:4-10; Rom 3:24-25; Col 1:13,22). Christ's face and function certainly included sacrifice, yet sacrifice neither fully embodied his whole person on the cross nor wholly constituted his relational function at the cross. That is, fulfilling God's relational purpose and response necessitated the whole of Christ's relational involvement with human persons to integrally save them *from* the sin of reductionism and save them *to* be whole together in God's family. This necessary qualitative depth and relational breadth of Christ's involvement was not constituted by sacrifice but by only the principal dynamic of *agape*. How are they distinguished?

The functional significance of *agape* is not sacrifice, though it may involve sacrifice; much more important, it is about relationship. Sacrifice tends to have the underlying focus on that individual and what that person does (e.g. even in common discourse about Christ's death), albeit explicitly intended for the sake of others. *Agape*, however, functions in the relational significance of *how* to be involved with others in relationship, not about *what* to do, even for others. The distinction between 'how to be involved with others' and 'what to do for others' may appear negligible to you, yet it is critical for understanding our actions in two vital issues: one, how we define our person and on this basis, secondly, how we do relationships.

1. 'What to do' is a quantitative focus on my behavior or action which may be needed for others but is even more important for defining my person from outer in by what I do/have. 'How to be involved' is a qualitative focus not primarily on what I do but rather on my person defined from inner out and functioning as nothing less and no substitutes of that person. The former is a reduced person and the latter is whole.
2. Persons defined by what they do/have give to others what they do/have; that is, they do relationships also from the outer in, which is not the deeper level of involvement of their person, only what they do/have. This implies only seeing those others also from outer in, which indicates the focus of concern is not really those others as persons but, for example, only as "needs" to act on to better define oneself by 'what I do'. In contrast, persons defined from inner out function with

their whole person to be involved with others as persons, not just their needs for example. This determines the level of involvement they have in relationship with others and also defines the primacy of relationship they give to all interactions. The dynamics distinguished between these two approaches is the significance of Paul's polemic in "Knowledge puffs up, but *agape* builds up" (1 Cor 8:1).

The nature of God's *agape* is relationship. By its nature, then, the focus in *agape* must (*dei* not *opheilo*, out of duty, obligation) be involvement with others in relationship together—not on me and what I do, even intended for the sake of others. Thus *agape* qualifies the whole matter of serving, challenges our assumptions about service, and makes problematic servant models focused on sacrifice. So much of this is concentrated on 'what to do', which Jesus' paradigm for serving critiques, chastens and makes whole (Jn 12:26).

When *agape* is understood as not about 'what to do' (even notably with sacrifice and service) but 'how to be involved in relationship', then the incarnation is the ultimate enactment of *agape* constituting the breadth and depth of the whole of God's vulnerable involvement with human persons. As Christ's whole face and function embodied throughout the incarnation, *agape* relationships are signified by the extent of involvement in the relationship. Depth of involvement necessitates increasing vulnerability from inner out by the person enacting *agape*, of which John 3:16 is the ultimate enactment yet inseparable from Jesus' footwashing. Thus, the incarnation—and all other examples of "incarnational" popular today—must by its *agape* nature be both embodying and engaging in the depth of relational involvement necessary to be whole; otherwise the incarnation is narrowed down to fragmentary referential terms. This depth of relational involvement continued to the cross as an extension of God's *agape* relationally embodied and engaged in the incarnation. Without the whole of God's relational dynamic of *agape* to constitute who is embodied and relationally involved on the cross, the cross also becomes fragmented in referential terms.

What the cross constitutes theologically in terms of atonement, as well as justification, needs to be understood in the whole of God's thematic response in the principal dynamic of *agape*. It is the relational significance of *agape* that constitutes the depth of Christ's relational involvement beyond the limits of doctrines to the experiential truth of the whole gospel. In this relational dynamic, Jesus' whole person from inner out vulnerably involved himself with the whole human person(s), therefore he involved his person with the person's sin as well as the person in the image of God. His *agape* involvement with the person's sin was fully vulnerable, to such depth that he took on and incurred the consequences of that sin, which also deeply involved the relational consequence of separation/rejection from the Father. In other words, Jesus went beyond merely doing what was needed for atonement and justification (Col 1:19-22). Accordingly, what the cross illuminates is the breadth and depth of *agape*'s relational involvement that Jesus engaged wholly both with human persons and the whole of God (the Father along with the Spirit), not about the referential fragments of what Jesus did even though it involved sacrifice albeit for human atonement and justification. Indeed, the cross is only the relational extension of the incarnation and the relational outcome of God's *agape* involvement with human persons, nothing less and no substitutes.



Jesus' whole person is whom Paul saw on the cross—the whole of Jesus in qualitative being and relational nature (“the glory of God in the face of Christ”) in relationship, not what Jesus did. This whole Jesus in *agape* relational involvement had extended even to the contrarian Saul for the relational way to the experiential truth of whole life in God’s family together. Thus, Jesus' whole person is *who*, not *what*, Paul increasingly knew face to Face, shared intimately in whole relationship together, and witnessed for with the whole of his own person in *pleroma* Christology. This is the relational outcome of the principal dynamic of God’s *agape* for which Paul prayed to the Father for his church family to experience from inner out (“in your inner being...in your hearts”) the *pleroma* of God’s qualitative face and relational function (“his glory”) in the qualitative depth and relational breadth of Christ’s *agape* involvement for the wholeness of reciprocal relationship together (Eph 3:14-19). Paul’s prayer does not close in doxology to end his letter (to which was added a second letter) but as a transition in affirmation of the relational means (way) to the experiential truth of whole life together as church family in God’s *agape* relational involvement and relational likeness (3:20-21); this integral relational process continues to develop in Ephesians not as ethical exhortation (paraenesis) of ‘what to do’ but as the principal dynamic of *agape* of ‘how to be involved’ in relationship both in the church and in the world (as in Eph 4:11-16), the lack of involvement in which grieves the Spirit (4:30). Paul’s emphasis on how to be relationally involved echoes Jesus’ formative family prayer for his church family—not to function in fragmentary sacrifice and service, but to live whole in *agape* involvement together in relational likeness to the experiential truth of the relational ontology of the whole of God, also “so that the world may believe...so that the world may know that you sent me and have loved them *by the relational involvement* even as you have loved me” (Jn 17:20-26).

All the theological dynamics embodied in the incarnation of God’s thematic relational response to the human condition and that converge at the cross are indeed the relational outcome of the principal dynamic of God’s *agape* relational involvement. Paul thereby gives his readers a new view of the cross and the Jesus on it. Anything less, even with doctrinal certainty, is fragmentary and does not understand the *pleroma* of God relationally present and vulnerably involved for only the experiential truth of whole relationship together; this is the relational consequence from the referentialization of the Word. The lens based on the relational significance of *agape* enacted by Jesus shifts the focus from Jesus (at the center of sacrifice and service) to his relational involvement with others, both humans and God—just as demonstrated in Jesus’ ultimate salvific discourse on the cross (noted above and developed in the next chap.). To only see Jesus on the cross in a christocentric focus is to reduce the Jesus, the *pleroma* of God, embodied on it, thereby assuming a view of the cross and of Jesus’ *agape* as about only sacrifice, not relationship together. Such a diminished view reduces the salvific function of the cross and distorts Jesus’ relational purpose. If the cross is not seen in its whole, and if who is seen on the cross is not wholly embodied by the *pleroma* of God, then the salvific outcome cannot be whole. At best, the outcome would be fragmented and diminished to a truncated soteriology of only what Jesus saved *from*, though often this outcome becomes merely an ontological simulation or epistemological illusion from reductionism substituting for the whole salvific outcome. The whole salvific outcome is constituted by

the *pleroma* of God only in full soteriology of what Jesus irreducibly and inseparably saves *from* and saves *to*.

Jesus himself did not in fact provide such a reductionist view of his person on the cross. His salvific discourse on the cross clearly illuminates the qualitative depth and relational breadth of his *agape* involvement in relationship with other humans and God. By his unequivocal face and function, clearly distinguished, the whole of Jesus allowed for little reflection on his self, but rather challenged the perceptual-interpretive framework of his viewers to go further and deeper to the relational dynamic of the *pleroma* of God vulnerably responding to them. This view of Jesus and the cross cannot be seen through a reductionist lens, however, regardless of the depth and breadth of his *agape* involvement. This was the lens used by the mocking criminal crucified with Jesus. With his quantitative focus, he only saw Jesus from outer in, embedded in their common circumstance, which was incongruent for the Messiah. Yet, in desperation he still said “Save yourself and us” (Lk 23:39); that is, he sought salvation (deliverance) only *from* his negative circumstance, disregarding what Jesus had just said about forgiveness. As Jesus enacted further relational involvement with his mother and John, he illuminated deeply what he also saves *to*, which this criminal still could not see and consequently could not pay attention to because he was predisposed by his reductionist lens.

Reductionism may allow for a truncated soteriology, as demonstrated in the church situation at Corinth (1 Cor 1:12-17). In reality, the sin of reductionism is often seeking deliverance *from* only this or that without desiring any further involvement, specifically qualitative relationship together, therefore not including saved from the human shaping of relationship together. Reductionism, however, will never allow for the full soteriology of *pleroma* Christology because what the *pleroma* of God saves *to* makes whole the human condition in relationship together as God’s family (cf. the contrasts in Corinth, 1 Cor 3:4-9, 21-22). This wholeness in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes is incompatible with reductionism, and consequently reductionism’s counter-relational work is always seeking to diminish, minimalize, fragment or deny the primacy of relationships together necessary to be whole in relational likeness to the relational ontology of the whole of God (cf. its basis, 1 Cor 4:6-7, and its implication, 8:1, and its contrast, 14:33)—that is, countering the relational outcome of the full soteriology (10:16-17; 11:25; 12:12-31).

Regardless of the extent of the sin of reductionism, the gospel of the glory of Christ’s face and function fulfilled God’s thematic relational response to make whole any persons in the human condition (Col 1:19-22; 2:9-10). Anything less functionally and any substitutes theologically of the *pleroma* of God could neither fulfill the whole of God’s relational dynamic, nor would such reductions even have all the complex theological dynamics converge at the cross to be completed. By its irreducible nature, the full soteriology can only emerge from and be constituted by *pleroma* Christology. Moreover, *pleroma* Christology cannot be reduced to or confused with mysticism and esoteric knowledge as developed in Gnosticism and its Pleroma, which Valentinus misinterpreted from Paul in the second century.

While the whole of Christ’s qualitative face and relational function has fulfilled God’s thematic relational response of grace to the human condition to complete *pleroma* Christology, the *pleroma* of God’s *agape* relational involvement continues further in

qualitative depth and relational breadth. Just as the cross and death of Christ is inseparable in dynamic function from his resurrection, the irreducible theological dynamic of *pleroma* Christology coheres further in the nonnegotiable theological dynamic of the full soteriology. These are the complex theological dynamics which continue to unfold in Paul's theological forest. Their convergence and thus coherence in his forest are understood in the theological dynamic of wholeness from his theological systemic framework, which now further interacts with the emerging theological dynamics of belonging and ontological identity. By their nature, these dynamics unfold always in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes, with the principal dynamic of *agape* relational involvement, and by the primary dynamic of God's relational grace completed by the Spirit. And their relational outcome can only be distinguished, and thus only has significance, in *pleroma* soteriology.

### ***Pleroma* Soteriology**

In spite of advanced medical knowledge today to prolong human life and function, the medicalization of modern life (similar to the referentialization of the Word) underdiagnoses the inherent human relational need and insufficiently intervenes on the human problem—the very human relational need which, ironically, has been also correctly identified by advanced neuroscience. All these human efforts merely attempt to save persons *from* this condition or that disorder, without any deeper knowledge and understanding of what human life and function need to be saved *to*. No matter how much and how long modern medicine can control human life and sustain its function, it cannot make them whole.

At the same time, if our primary focus remains on saving from the human condition of sin for extending life in eternity, this salvation is also not whole—neither understanding eternal life distinguished as *zoe* in *kairos*, nor knowing the whole of God in relationship distinguished by Jesus as eternal life (Jn 17:3). The reductionist perception (e.g. quantitative and referential) of saving human life and function is limited at best to saving it from its condition. Such narrowed-down salvation has traditionally involved the doctrines of atonement and justification, which may have limited functional significance (Rom 3:23-26, cf. Heb 2:17) yet lack their relational significance as the means of being saved to the full relational outcome (Rom 5:9-11; Col 1:21-22). Atonement and justification remain fragmentary until integrated in *pleroma* Christology for their whole understanding in God's relational dynamic, from which emerges the relational outcome composing *pleroma* soteriology (Col 2:9-10; Eph 1:22-23). In other words, what is necessary to save human persons beyond these limits is the whole knowledge and understanding that is the distinguishing (albeit improbable) function of *pleroma* Christology.

*Pleroma* Christology is not a religious statement but a relational dynamic that vitally connects all human life and function to its Creator in order for its condition to be fully restored from inner out and only on this basis made whole. This relational dynamic cannot be a function of static doctrine because the limits imposed by a static position also do not go beyond merely saving *from* this condition or that disorder, similar to the medicalization of life. Such Christology is incomplete and any soteriology associated

with it will only be truncated. *Pleroma* Christology, however, is only a function of the whole of God's relational dynamic vitally responding to make whole the human condition. By its very nature, this relational response conjointly saves human life and function *from* its condition and *to* whole ontology and function in relationship together. Therefore, the saving dynamic clearly emerging from and constituted by *pleroma* Christology can be only *pleroma* soteriology, whose function is also in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes.

**What constitutes the dynamic that salvation is the relational outcome of? And what is this relational outcome that by necessity is definitive for *pleroma* soteriology?**

In Paul's theological forest, the human condition of reductionism is a given for all human life and function, both for Jews with the *torah*<sup>6</sup> and Gentiles without it, (Rom 3:9,23). For Paul, a Jew, to declare "there is no distinction" (*diastole*, 3:22b) between human persons was, on the one hand, incongruent with the prevailing practice of Judaism and, on the other, compatible to the nature of the covenant relationship established with Abraham (cf. Rom 4; Gal 3:8-9). These may appear as contradictory positions, as may his statements between "no human being will be justified in his sight by deeds prescribed by the law" (Rom 3:20) and "the doers of the law who will be justified" (Rom 2:13). In reality, in these two sets of statements Paul is exposing critical dynamics specific to the sin of reductionism and is illuminating the definitive relational dynamic necessary for human life and function to be whole. The above two positions/statements do not contradict each other; in each pair of statements, the former is about reductionist Jews whose *diastole* (distinction) was embedded in practices for national identity, and, in contrast and conflict for Paul, the latter is about whole Jews who obey the law in reciprocal relational response to God's terms only for covenant relationship together. Since the Damascus road, Paul had not shifted from being a contrarian of Christianity to a contrarian of Judaism. He had become vulnerably involved in the relational dynamic of fighting jointly for the experiential truth of the whole gospel and against reductionism in Judaism (which he himself had practiced) and in all human life and function, even in churches, to make them whole. His involvement included challenging theological assumptions, particularly about human ontology and function.

Just as Paul wholly understood for himself, he spoke to the reductionism in Judaism necessitating the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction from *tamiym* (Gen 17:1-2; cf. Rom 4:16), from the covenant of peace (wholeness, Isa 54:10; Eze 37:26), and, most importantly, from the salvific relational work of the Messiah "that made us whole" (Isa 53:5; cf. Eph 2:14-17; 6:15; Col 1:19-20; 2:9-10). Paul clearly shifted the definition of Jews from their human contextualization in Judaism to contextualization in the whole of God's salvific response of grace as the only means for the human condition no longer "to be apart" from God's whole—God's thematic relational response initiated by the covenant relational promise to Abraham (Rom 4:13-17; Gal 3:17-18) and which now "is attested by the law and the prophets" (Rom 3:21, cf. 1:2; Gal 3:8-9).

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<sup>6</sup> This *torah*, and Paul's use of *nomos*, is the sum of the commandments and nonnegotiable desires required of Israel at Mt. Sinai with the accompanying sanctions, and is to be distinguished from the Torah (the Pentateuch) which contains much more than law. See Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 335-40.

Involved in the salvific process are various theological trees, which Paul integrates together in the whole of God’s relational dynamic so that salvation has the necessary relational outcome to be whole—*pleroma* soteriology. These theological trees included faith, the law, justification and righteousness. For reductionist Jews, the dynamics of these trees had become fragmented, misinterpreted and convoluted in practice for Israel’s self-determination as nation-state, or even for their self-justification before God. The OT attests to Israel’s recurring problem of getting embedded in the larger surrounding context rather than sojourning as God’s people in and to eschatological covenant relationship together. The consequence of their embedding was their immediate concern for deliverance to be saved from those surrounding contexts and related situations, yet just with the primary concern to restore their national identity. The relational consequence had deep repercussions: (1) it constructed a reductionist theology and practice of soteriology (*yesuah*) limited primarily to save them *from* (*yasa*) their immediate burdens, thereby reducing the perception of God to only a deliverer whose function is defined by what *Yesua* does in quantitative terms from outer in; then (2) this reductionist perception of God and God’s function was consequential both for reducing the ontology of their person (individually and corporately) from inner out to outer in, and for reducing their function from qualitative terms to quantitative terms outer in based merely on what they did without the qualitative function of their heart in the qualitative image of the holy God and without the qualitative involvement in the primacy of relationship together in the relational likeness of the whole and holy God (cf. Rom 2:28-29).

The dynamic interaction between this relational consequence from reductionism and the relational outcome of *pleroma* soteriology pervade Paul’s theological discourse as he makes the necessary epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction notably for faith, the law, justification and righteousness to be integrated in God’s relational dynamic of Paul’s theological forest. In contrast and conflict with human contextualization, what clearly emerges from the whole of God’s relational context and process is the fulfillment of God’s thematic salvific response embodied by Jesus Christ: “But now apart from the law, the righteousness of God as been disclosed” (Rom 3:21). God’s relational dynamic of grace vulnerably embodied in Christ is accessible to all persons equalized before him—whatever their sin of reductionism, “no distinction, since all...fall short of the glory of God” (3:22-23)—to be “justified...through the redemption *and reconciliation* that is in Christ, whom God *relationally* put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood” (3:24-25, cf. Eph 1:7-9; Col 1:22). Yet this relational outcome of Christ’s salvific work always includes by its nature the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction of the relational consequence discussed above. This dynamic interaction involves the experiential truth of Christ’s salvific relational work that “makes us whole” (Isa 53:5) in the covenant relationship together of wholeness (Eze 37:26; Rom 5:1; Col 1:19-20; 2:9-10; Eph 2:14-18)—just as the prophets in Scripture attested (Rom 1:2; 3:21). In other words, this gospel of peace (cf. Eph 6:15) from the peace of Christ (Col 3:15) is the irreducible salvation constituted by *pleroma* Christology.

In the fulfillment of God’s relational dynamic of grace in response to the human condition, the *pleroma* of God functioned in the dynamic of wholeness to integrally save *from* and *to*. The term “to save” (*sozo*) means both to deliver and to make whole, together composing the qualitative relational nature of *pleroma* soteriology. **How does this**

**dynamic of wholeness epistemologically clarify and hermeneutically correct the theological dynamics of faith, the law, justification and righteousness?**

Paul points to the experiential truth that “the righteousness of God has been disclosed” (Rom 3:21). Rather than a proposition about God framed in Scripture, this can be distinguished as the experiential truth of not only what has been disclosed but how it was disclosed—*phaneroo*, not *apokalypto*. *Apokalypto* tends to focus on just the object disclosed (as in Rom 1:17). *Phaneroo*, however, also engages a relational dynamic to focus on the person(s) to whom something is disclosed. That is to say, *phaneroo* illuminates God’s relational dynamic that is involved in disclosing the righteousness of God for persons to experience the truth of in relationship together. What they can experience of God is not the truth of a static attribute called righteousness (*dikaio syne*) or the mere outcome of what God does—namely to receive the gift of righteousness as only something about or from God. The distinction of *phaneroo* is vital for whole understanding of God’s relational dynamic: to experience the righteousness of God is to experience the fullness (rightness) of *who* and *what* God is and to be able to count on this whole ontology in *how* God functions in relationship together, nothing less and no substitutes. *Dikaio syne*, therefore, is never enacted in isolation but is always a function of how one lives in relationship. English translations lose this relational clarity of *dikaio syne*, according to E. P. Sanders, by rendering *dikaio syne* with ‘justification’ and its cognate verb, *dikaioo*, with ‘to justify’, which connote legal action and status.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, these also connote proof of a character trait of God, all of which narrow God down to referential terms. For example, God’s salvific relational dynamic in response to the human condition was a demonstration, proof (*endeixis*) of “his righteousness...that he himself is righteous” (Rom 3:25-26)—not in legal terms of “his justice” (in NIV)—which Abraham relationally counted on God to be and thereby to fulfill in relationship together (Rom 4:13, 19-20). God’s righteousness goes beyond God’s character to also be God’s relational function.

On the basis of God’s relational dynamic to clearly *phaneroo* the righteousness of God for human persons to experience in relationship together, the other theological dynamics also emerge to make whole the human condition. God’s thematic relational response of grace disclosing his righteousness made definitive the relational context and unequivocally put in motion the relational process necessary for human persons to engage in reciprocal relational response to who, what and how God is in order to be made whole, and hereby to live whole in relationship together. Abraham’s relational response constitutes the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction needed for human response to be relationally congruent with God’s relational context and relationally compatible to God’s relational process. In Paul’s theological forest, God’s relational context is irreducible to human contextualization and God’s relational process is nonnegotiable to human terms. This necessary distinction involves Paul’s theological anthropology basic to his theological systemic framework that challenged prevailing assumptions of human ontology and function. In Paul’s theological discourse, this distinction involving anthropology magnified the dynamic interaction of the relational consequence of reductionism (discussed earlier for Israel) with the relational outcome unfolding for *pleroma* soteriology. Given the clear relational disclosure of God’s righteousness, Paul simply asks of all human ontology and function, “Then what becomes

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<sup>7</sup> E. P. Sanders. *Paul: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 52-58.

of boasting?” (or human pride, *kauchesis*, Rom 3:27). Paul’s polemic is without equivocation: “It is excluded...a person is justified by faith apart from *all human efforts at self-autonomy from human contextualization and their human terms for self-determination and self-justification*” (3:27-28).

Moreover, “if Abraham was justified by *such human effort and terms*, he has something to boast about, but not *in relationship to God*” (Rom 4:2). Paul does not totally discount any benefit of human effort. Yet, this benefit only exists in human contextualization that Paul amplifies. When fair, human contextualization and its terms operate on a quantitative system of exchange (*quid pro quo*) resulting in benefits (“wages”) commensurate with human effort (4:4). The results do not exceed the effort, nor can they be expected beyond an exchange process. God, however, does relationship neither on the basis of an exchange principle nor on any other human terms. Rather, “to one who without *human effort and terms* trusts him who justifies *those in the sin of reductionism*, such faith is reckoned as righteousness” (4:5; cf. Gal 2:16)—just as it truly was for Abraham (4:3, 20-22; cf. Gal 3:6-9). The former process of human effort is a relational consequence of reductionism despite any secondary benefits, while the latter relational process in reciprocal response is the relational outcome to wholeness. Distinguishing the contextual source of these relational dynamics is critical to understanding the functional significance of the theological dynamics constituting the relational outcome of *pleroma* soteriology.

**In God’s relational dynamic to wholeness, what are these dynamics of “trust...justifies...faith...righteousness” (Rom 4:5) for Paul?** God’s communicative action and *phaneroo* of his righteousness are always initiated relational responses of grace to human persons for relationship together, which by their nature necessitate compatible reciprocal relational response to complete the relational connection. God’s relational nature precludes unilateral relationship, yet God’s qualitative being in whole and holy ontology cannot do relationship together reduced to human terms, even by well-meaning adherents of the law (Rom 4:13-16). The only compatible reciprocal relational response is faith (*pistis*, and its cognate verb, *pisteuo*). Yet, the perception of *pistis* as ‘belief’ and *pisteuo* as ‘to believe’ (e.g. in the common translation “Abraham believed,” 4:3) often lacks the relational significance Paul is illuminating in this relational response. Belief and believing may connote acknowledgment of some fact or proposition about God, or may further imply a personal assent of God (even as monotheism, cf. Jas 2:19), neither of which involves the whole of the person believing nor are sufficient therefore to constitute the compatible relational response to God’s righteousness—the whole of who, what and how God is in relationship (cf. Eph 3:17,19). In contrast to this relational process, N.T. Wright would propose “that we use the noun cognate with ‘believer’ [*pisteuo*] to express the status of this confession [i.e. the *Shema*] within the Pauline communities: justification by *belief* [*pistis*], i.e. covenant membership demarcated by that which is believed.” For Wright, the nature of faith to Paul and the heart of his doctrine of justification by faith were about the things believed or believed in “because he is anxious about the boundary-markers of the communities he believes himself called upon to found and nurture.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> N.T. Wright. *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 2-3.

A static view of *pistis* as belief, whatever the truth and conviction of its content, may signify status or membership but it does not constitute relationship—specifically, relationship together on God’s terms. Faith as relational trust is the only compatible reciprocal response that constitutes the vulnerable involvement of the whole person necessary for relational connection with who, what and how God is. This reciprocal relational response from inner out is the depth of Paul’s polemic and desire for Jews to take them beyond merely what they believe to the qualitative-relational nature of faith to be made whole (Rom 10:1, 9-11). Moreover, Paul illuminated to the church at Corinth that even definitive knowledge of a correct belief in monotheism (or the Shema) is insufficient to constitute the relational function of *pistis*, both with God and in relation to others (1 Cor 8:1-6; cf. Jesus’ critique of the church in Ephesus, Rev 2:2-4).

As Paul countered the reductionism at Corinth, his epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction illuminate his depth of involvement in both faith in Christ and following Jesus. If we read Paul’s letters apart from their total context, we can be misinformed about both faith and discipleship. Paul did not specifically use terms like “following Christ” (*akoloutheo*) and being his “disciple” (*mathetes*) but rather focused on “faith in Christ.” Does this mean discipleship was not important or a priority in Paul’s discourse? Certainly not, yet he seems to be taken this way. When Paul discussed the different followers of different personalities (namely, Apollos, Cephas, Christ, Paul, 1 Cor.1:12), he did not use the term *akoloutheo*, yet their attachment to these personalities is usually rendered “follow” in today’s translations (e.g. NIV). The divisive situation in Corinth is informative for us. It is highly likely that Paul avoids using the terms for “follow” and “disciple” because of this kind of situation where people had a tendency to follow “cult-like” personalities, as well as systems of false teachings. Paul wanted to counter these reductionist practices by focusing only on the *person* of Jesus Christ and engaging in the relational response of faith directly *in him*. He never wanted believers to reduce Christ to mere teachings and thereby fragment his person (“is Christ divided?” 1:13); nor did he want “following Christ” to become an association or something they merely do in defining their faith. Faith was always relational for Paul, the reciprocal response of which necessarily involved the whole person for ongoing relational connection with who, what and how God is.

Paul’s epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction were ongoing to distinguish the *pistis* necessary to be *sozo*, that is, to be made whole beyond a truncated soteriology. Even *pistis* as faith, however, can be problematic because, though faith as trust is the necessary reciprocal response for relational connection, it is not sufficient by itself for relationship together with the righteous whole of God. Other theological dynamics by necessity converge with the relational dynamic of faith for the relational outcome of wholeness in relationship together.

Faith, even with belief in the Shema, can become ambiguous in its relational significance or elusive in its relational function, just as Paul ongoingly exposed and confronted (e.g. Gal 3:1-5; 4:8-11; 5:1-6; Col 2:6-12, 16-22). In Paul’s thought and polemic, faith becomes ambiguous in its relational significance when its relational context shifts from God’s to human contextualization; faith becomes elusive in its relational function when its relational process renegotiates God’s terms with human terms, whereby human shaping of relationship together becomes the primary determinant. In the dynamics of *pleroma* soteriology, Paul never ignored the relational consequence of



reductionism and its effects on the relational outcome to wholeness, since Paul himself had been embedded in it until his experiential truth of *pleroma* Christology turned him around on the Damascus road and redefined his faith only in God's relational context and process. Therefore, it is critical to understand the interpretive lens by which Paul perceives faith and interprets its function.

Faith has been perceived in two ways, implying the source of its perspective which may appear complementary but in function are competing, thus important to distinguish.

1. *From God's top-down perspective:* By the qualitative function of God's relational nature, faith in functional likeness is a relational dynamic engaged by the relational trust of the whole person in response back to God's relational initiative of grace from top down in order to constitute the vulnerable involvement necessary to be compatible for relationship together. This is a reciprocal relational process enabled only by God from top down for qualitative function from inner out, therefore by its nature nonnegotiable on only God's qualitative relational terms. Jesus embodied this faith in his relationship with the Father, which was paradigmatic for his followers. In this sense *pisteos Christou* (Rom 3:22; Gal 2:16; 3:22; Phil 3:9) equally involves the faith embodied by Christ from top down ("faith of Christ") that his followers must also relationally exercise for the relational outcome constituted by Christ ("faith in Christ")—who fulfilled this by the faith he embodied from inner out (cf. Lk 23:46). In other words, from God's perspective Christ is not only the object of faith, the Other; the embodied whole of Christ is also the Subject of faith, with whom his followers need to be involved with relational trust for the experiential truth of relationship together 'in Christ'—the relational outcome of *pleroma* soteriology constituted by *pleroma* Christology. Therefore, the 'faith of Christ' is the functional key (the relational Way) definitive for the relational dynamic of faith that is necessary to constitute the reciprocal response for this relational outcome. If Paul indeed had a double meaning of *pisteos Christou* ('faith of Christ' and 'faith in Christ'), it was by design for the relational purpose to integrate the two by necessity for the faith of those in Christ to be defined from top down and to function from inner out.
2. *From human bottom-up perspective:* Faith makes a functional shift (not necessarily theological) from the qualitative inner out to the quantitative outer in. The shift to less qualitative inner out and more quantitative outer in reduces the primacy of faith's relational dynamic and consequently its relational involvement, which emerges from the human shaping of relationship together. This is the relational consequence of reductionism that diminishes both the function of relationship and the ontology of the persons involved. Using this lens, faith becomes more about what we have (e.g. beliefs) and/or do with respect to God (e.g. believe in, cf. Wright). While God is the object or goal of faith, this faith does not engage the embodied whole of Christ as Subject, as a result is not defined by God from top down. This is a bottom-up substitute from human contextualization, which at best is an ontological simulation or epistemological illusion. This faith, then, is the human activity that in relation to God intentionally

or unintentionally shifts the focus from God's terms by essentially renegotiating human terms as the determining factor shaping faith's function from outer in, along with shaping the gospel, its covenant relationship, promise and conclusion. The nature of faith from human bottom-up perspective cannot rise above reduced human ontology or function deeper than outer in, because it is embedded in the very human condition of reductionism that is made whole solely by God's relational action from top down. This relational outcome, of course, emerges only from a compatible reciprocal response of faith as relational trust, which cannot be wholly engaged while the relational consequence of reductionism prevails. The human alternative to this relational faith trusting God is the self-autonomy of human effort seeking to self-determine any meaning and result of faith—or, essentially, relationship with a disembodied God (e.g. a mere belief) shaped by human terms (e.g. merely believing in an Object, cf. Col 2:18-19). Since this faith is neither defined from top down nor functions from inner out, it is subject to ongoing variation of its identity and interpretation of its function, consequently its ambiguity and elusiveness (cf. 1 Cor 4:6-7).

With these two perceptions of faith, Paul's readers need to understand what he means when he refers to faith, as well as the faith he implies even when he does not refer to it (e.g. about works, cf. 1 Cor 3:13; Phil 2:12). Paul actually uses both perspectives, notably in his polemics, to distinguish faith's determining source from God's terms or from human terms and shaping. For example, in general, all Jews had faith, including belief in the Shema. Paul's indictment of reductionist Jews was not about having no faith; at issue was their type of faith. His faith-works antithesis is between these two perspectives of faith, that those engaged in works think they have faith, but do not have the relational significance of faith engaged only on God's terms. Many of Paul's readers who subscribe to the doctrine of justification by faith may be expressing nothing more than a belief for a certainty of what they have or for security of what they do; or their initial faith-response may have been the relational trust from inner out but has since functioned merely from outer in. Moreover, faith is often perceived as a singular act, after which faith becomes what one has or does as a believer, who now has the legal status of being justified by faith. For Paul, this relational outcome was not a doctrine that could be simply claimed by a belief. Such an oversimplification actually obstructs the theological dynamics which are constituted only in the experiential truth of God's relational context by God's relational process in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes. In fact, Paul clearly identified the relational outcome in Christ as the functional significance of only the relational dynamic of faith conjoined with work in its full relational significance: "faith working through love" (Gal 5:6). That is, Paul defines the relational response of faith as ongoing participation in the work (*energeo* in Gk indirect middle voice) of entrusting one's whole person to be vulnerable in the relational involvement of *agape*, not about merely obedience or sacrifice (cf. 1 Thes 1:3).

The biblical norm for faith rooted in Abraham has always been the reciprocal relational response from inner out to God's top-down initiating grace in thematic relational response to the human condition (Gal 3:8-9; Rom 4:16). The response of those rooted in Abraham has to be compatible with the relational terms of the whole of God's relational nature—the definitive terms for relationship together. Anything less and any

substitutes for this faith-response of relational trust by the whole person from inner out are incompatible responses from reductionism, which for Paul always needed epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction for wholeness. These two meanings of faith, therefore, are critical to distinguish in the ongoing tension and conflict between God's relational whole from top down on God's relational terms from inner out and reductionism of that whole from bottom up with terms from outer in. To confuse these faiths or to not distinguish them will give us inadequate, distorted or fragmented understanding of both the whole of Paul's own witness and the whole in his theology—whose personal faith was constituted in the experiential truth of God's relational context and process for the relational outcome of *pleroma* soteriology (cf. Acts 22:14-15).

In the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes, faith as relational trust is the reciprocal relational response compatible for relational connection with the relationally disclosed righteousness of God, the whole of who, what and how God is and can be counted on to be in relationship. As the relational process continues, other necessary theological dynamics converge with this relational dynamic of faith for the relational outcome of wholeness in relationship together.

### ***Pleroma* Soteriology Completed**

Faith as relational trust is necessary but is not sufficient in itself for relationship together with the whole and holy God; other complex theological dynamics are needed to engage the relational process that completes the relational outcome of *pleroma* soteriology.

Faith in the Deliverer/Savior may be sufficient for a truncated soteriology of merely being delivered/saved *from*—as often demonstrated both in Israel's history and an incomplete Christology. Yet, *pleroma* Christology constitutes only *pleroma* soteriology. Paul clarified in his theological forest that the *pleroma* of God relationally disclosed the righteousness of God (cf. Acts 22:14-15) for the gospel of salvation (*soteria*, Rom 1:16-17; 3:21; Eph 1:13). That is, the face of Jesus vulnerably embodied the gospel of the glory of Christ (2 Cor 4:4-6), the gospel of wholeness/peace (Eph 6:15) basic to the whole of Jesus' salvific work (Eph 2:14-18), to complete salvation with the relational outcome necessary for also being saved *to* (Rom 5:1-2, 10-11; Col 1:19-22; Eph 3:6).

If faith rooted in Abraham is insufficient for this completed relational outcome, what is the sufficient meaning of "Abraham believed and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (Rom 4:3)? And what does it mean that he and his offspring were "justified by faith"?

Through his experience, what Abraham "gained" (*heurisko*, discovered, Rom 4:1) in a heuristic process of discovery was not about faith as something he just possessed or exercised isolated to the individual, but about the relational significance of faith as only a function in dynamic reciprocal relationship together with God. As our forefather, Abraham's discovery, by its very nature, must apply to all of us in the same heuristic process. His discovery, however, seems to elude the theological process of some traditions. Since the Reformation, this relational dynamic of faith has been all but lost. Martin Luther has been influential in minimalizing the theological issue to a conflict between 'justification by works' or 'justification by faith', which are perceived often

without an understanding of the sin of reductionism inherent in ‘works’, and very likely without the relational significance of the dynamics involved in either position. Proponents of a so-called Lutheran view of Paul follow their theological forefather, centralizing the doctrine of justification by faith as the heart of Paul’s thought and theology. This imposition on Paul reduces the issue to a question of doctrinal purity on this matter—a question raised which is not necessarily always pointing to the intent of Paul’s polemic about “works prescribed by the law” and “the law of faith” (Rom 3:27-28). Such a claim to this doctrinal purity about faith tends to signify the very *kauchesis* (boasting, pride) Paul challenges, which ironically also defines persons in the similar reductionist way as works by what one has/does. This claim is also in contrast to Abraham’s discovery, which was not self-discovery but the outcome of a relational process. The consequence of this reduction is to skew the issue to be more about the faith we have/do, and thus faith isolated to the individual, and less about our functional involvement (“faith working through *agape*,” Gal 5:6) in relationship together with God and others—thereby reversing the heuristic process of Abraham. For Paul, the inseparable theological and functional issue is only between reductionism and wholeness in relationship with God.

While Abraham could well have “discovered” such doctrine, Paul clarifies that “what was gained by Abraham” was the experiential truth: either persons can attempt to do relationship with God on human terms and be “justified by works,” or they can experience relationship with God on God’s relational terms, the relational dynamic of which is insufficiently explained by the doctrine of justification by faith. In human contextualization, human terms define human effort in a comparative process based on an exchange principle (law) of *quid pro quo*, which is imposed on God to renegotiate God’s relational terms. This reduces God’s relational context and process constituted by God’s relational dynamic of grace from top down in relational response from inner out, and substitutes human shaping from bottom up and human terms from outer in (cf. 1 Cor 4:6-7). What Abraham essentially discovered then was that relationship with God is not by an exchange process of *quid pro quo*. Once again, this heuristic process has less theological focus on our faith and more functional concern with our relationship with God. I contend, therefore, that justification by faith was not the heart of Paul’s thought and theology; rather, justification was one of the complex theological dynamics constituted by God’s relational response of grace to the human condition for the relationship necessary to be whole together.

**How was justification only partially the focus of Paul’s concern and theology, and what then was at the heart of his concern and central to his theology?** The heart of Paul’s concern was not for doctrinal purity; though theological purity was certainly needed in the religious pluralism of the ancient Mediterranean world, it was not sufficient in itself to fulfill Paul’s primary concern (nor Jesus’, cf. Rev 2:2-4). The central and integrating theme of Paul’s thought and theology always focuses on, revolves around and illuminates the experiential truth of intimately knowing the *pleroma* of God in relationship together (examine Paul’s prayers, Eph 1:17-23; 3:13-19). This is further evident in the understanding that the theological Paul emerged not from the historical Paul but from the relational Paul.

The whole of relationship together was Paul’s experiential truth from the Damascus road and his ongoing relational progression since then (as he shared in Phil

3:7-11). In this summary reflection communicated in one of Paul's last letters, he illuminates the necessity yet insufficiency of his relational response of faith, and he integrates it with the righteousness and implied justification both necessary and sufficient for relationship with the whole and holy God. Anything less and any substitutes of these theological dynamics would be reductionism of the relationship necessary to be whole together: "I regard everything *else* as loss...as rubbish in order that I may *grow together with [kerdaino]* Christ and be found [*heurisko*] *intimately* in him (3:8-9). This heuristic process for Paul, as for Abraham and his offspring, is contingent on the convergence of righteousness and justification with the relational means of faith, by which they are received for function sufficient to be whole in relationship together.

Justification (*dikaiosis*) is a difficult term to fully understand in Paul that becomes more ambiguous when perceived as an isolated theological tree apart from the whole of God's relational dynamic constituting Paul's theological forest. On the one hand, justification has a clear judicial sense for Paul that declared persons guiltless from sin and thereby right before God (Rom 4:25; 5:9,18), that is, free from any legal charge (*anenkletos*) and thus without defect or blame (*amomos*, Col 1:22). While this sense of justification may seem to be merely a static condition, for Paul justification must be understood as a relational condition that also inseparably engages a relational dynamic. The dynamic of justification is also integrated with the dynamics of redemption and atonement for sin (Rom 3:24-26; 8:1-4; cf. Eph 1:7); their purpose together, however, if concluded here, would be incomplete in a truncated soteriology of only being saved *from* sin. For justification in particular, the judicial aspect to be saved from sin is not the determinative understanding of this dynamic that Paul focused on in his thought and theology. Based on his experiential truth of the whole gospel, justification is not simply about human persons (individually and collectively) becoming OK or right *before* God. For Paul, on the other hand, the significance of justification is further and more deeply understood only when this dynamic engages the relational process for human persons to be wholly involved in relationship together *with* God, not only *before* God. Emerging from the relational outcome of atonement enacted by Jesus behind the curtain is the removal of the veil for direct involvement in this relationship with God (2 Cor 3:16-18). In other words, according to Paul, to be justified (*dikaioo*) is the relational condition inseparable from its counterpart to be righteous, which is the relational function engaging this relational condition entirely for relationship together; and the conjoint functional significance of *dikaioo*, both justified and righteous, is lost whenever the primacy of relationship is reduced, consequently relegating the individual to a referential condition apart from the functional significance of relationship together, as a justified relational orphan.

The dynamic of justification integrated with redemption and atonement converge in Paul's theological forest for just one purpose. These dynamics point further and deeper to their relational purpose constituted by the whole of God's relational response of grace: reconciliation and wholeness (peace) in relationship together with the whole and holy God (Rom 5:1-2, 10-11; Col 1:19-22). Faith as relational trust in reciprocal response is the only relational means by which to receive and experience the relational outcome of these relational dynamics. In a complex process that Paul does not fully explain—likely because the details are secondary to his primary relational purpose, if not a mystery (cf. Ps 71:15)—the necessary relational response of faith is made sufficient by these

theological dynamics for the outcome of another theological dynamic that is further necessary to make whole all relationship with God. This other theological dynamic is *dikaio syne*, not justification but righteousness—the relational function distinct yet inseparable from the relational condition of justification (Rom 1:17; 3:21-22; 4:3-5; 1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 5:21; Eph 4:24).

Paul always framed his theological discourse in the functional terms of the gospel, the whole gospel embodied by God’s relational dynamic of grace solely for relationship together—thereby signifying the primacy of relationship for the theological Paul gained from the relational Paul. For relationship with the whole and holy God to be indeed good news, specific theological dynamics need to be engaged; and these theological dynamics need to function with relational significance for their relational outcome to be the experiential truth of the whole gospel. As much as Paul theologically clarified and illuminated this gospel, he likewise exposed and confronted anything less and any substitutes from reductionism, accordingly challenging theological assumptions in the process. The sin of reductionism, which is positioned against the whole gospel, diminishes, minimalizes or otherwise reduces these theological dynamics from their relational purpose to function, at best, in only a truncated soteriology of being saved *from* even sin, that is, other than sin of reductionism. The specific theological dynamic that negates reductionism and its counter-relational work is righteousness. In God’s thematic relational action in response to the human condition, the righteousness of God (*sedaqah*) emerges as the definitive relational basis for the hopeful expectation of God’s salvation, as the psalmist testifies (Ps 71:15-16). In Paul’s theological forest of God’s relational dynamic, God’s righteousness relationally embodied by Christ, “the Righteous One” (Acts 7:52; 22:14), is the functional key for the relational outcome of salvation to be complete—specifically to be saved *to* wholeness in relationship together, *pleroma* soteriology.

Relationship with the whole and holy God must by God’s relational nature (*dei*, not by the obligation of *opheilo*) be reciprocal; and the reciprocity should not be confused with or reduced to the moral-ethical deeds of *opheilo* as a substitute for the relational response and ongoing involvement of faith as relational trust (“faith working through *agape*,” Gal 5:6). Yet, also by the very nature of God’s qualitative being, the ontology and function of the persons involved must be likewise compatible for relationship together, which should not be confused with mere piety. Faith as relational trust is the necessary reciprocal response but not sufficient in itself for human ontology and function to be compatible with God’s. Some means is necessary to eliminate the presence and effects of sin as reductionism so that human persons can be compatible with the whole and holy God. The dynamics of justification, redemption, and atonement make our relational dynamic of faith sufficient in ontology and function to be compatible to have relationship together. However, for our ontology and function to be directly involved in the relationship and to compatibly function with God’s ontology and function, they must be also comparable to God’s righteousness (see previous discussion on righteousness in chap 5).

*Dikaio syne* is not about justification and its *dikai*-cognates are not only about God’s justice, being just and justified. That theological function has already been accounted for. Righteousness is a further theological dynamic of how God functions in relationship and can be counted on for that ontology and function. As relationally

disclosed, God's righteousness involves interaction with the dynamic of God's glory illuminated in the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:6). What the *pleroma* of God vulnerably embodied of God's glory was the qualitative being and relational nature of God for the qualitative presence and relational involvement of the whole of God in Face-to-face relationship together; this defines "the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (4:4). What God's glory signifies is the ontology and function of the whole of who, what and how God is, which is who, what and how God's righteousness enacts openly with his own face (not a mask) in relationship together and on this irreducible basis can be counted on for nothing less and no substitutes. In other words, God is righteous (*dikaios*) when God's involvement in relationship is congruent with the whole of God's ontology and function, which by God's very nature is congruent with the glory of God's qualitative being and relational nature. This integral dynamic cannot be separated or the whole of God becomes fragmented into attributes without the depth of their relational function.

Therefore, the relational dynamic of God's righteousness-glory was embodied congruently by the face of Christ, the Righteous One, who not only relationally disclosed God's righteousness but enacted the means for transformation necessary for human ontology and function in relationship: first, to be fully compatible with God's ontology and function (God's face), then to be vulnerably congruent with our ontology and function (our face), and hence to be wholly comparable to God's righteousness. When God experiences our involvement in relationship together as congruent with our ontology and function and thereby can count on us to be that person in face-to-Face relational involvement, then God can account for us to be righteous and our involvement will "be reckoned [*logizomai*] to us" as righteousness (Rom 4:23-24).

Yet, there are important distinctions to understand in the process to righteousness. Faith does not constitute us as righteous or justified; faith is only the relational means to receive this relational outcome constituted by the theological dynamics of God's relational response of grace embodied in the face of the Righteous One (cf. Gal 3:14,18). In face-to-Face relationship together, the face of our righteousness is not faith but the congruence of our ontology and function 'in Christ'. This face of righteousness, both Christ's and ours, must be the relational function of the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes, accordingly by its very nature cannot be anything less or any substitute. The latter is only a mask, not the real *prosopon*, that just signifies playing a role in ancient Greek theatre different from one's whole person—which for Paul also involved not being transparent in relationship together, consequently in effect presenting a pseudo image of oneself (Eph 4:24-25; Col 3:9). This is the functional significance of *hypokrisis* of the reductionists warned against by Jesus (Lk 12:1), the relational consequence of which was demonstrated in Peter's *hypokrisis* exposed by Paul (Gal 2:11-14). Moreover, this is the critical relational significance of Jesus' relational expectation for his followers' righteousness to be clearly distinguished from the reductionists (Mt 5:20). The face of righteousness should neither be mistaken for faith nor confused with all who confess faith.

While *through* the relational means of faith, yet to be distinguished with being *from* faith, this righteousness is the dynamic outcome only of transformation in Christ (cf. 1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 5:21). Just as God's righteousness is congruent with God's whole ontology and function and is congruent with the glory of God's qualitative being and relational nature, our ontology and function need to be transformed to be righteous. This

necessitates transformation from inner out (*metamorphoo*, not *metaschematizo*) that involves the redemptive change of the old ontology and function reduced to outer in for the new ontology in the qualitative image of God and new function in the relational likeness of the whole of God (2 Cor 3:9-11,18; Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:9-10; cf. Jesus' prayer, Jn 17:22-24). This dynamic transformation process, which constitutes us compatible to be involved in relationship together by making us comparable to God in righteousness and congruent with whole ontology and function, is the gospel of wholeness (Eph 2:14-18; 6:15) and its antecedents (Isa 53:5; 54:10; Eze 37:26-27). This is the gospel of the glory of Christ congruently embodied in the face of Christ for Face-to-face-to-Face new covenant relationship together as the new creation (1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; cf. Jn 17:20-21).

Righteousness, both God's and ours, is not a static attribute of an individual as if in a vacuum, or the outcome of what one does (e.g. moral-ethical behavior) as if isolated only to that individual. Rather, righteousness is only how one lives in relationship. Even adherence to the *torah* was insufficient for righteousness, and why Jesus made it clear that his followers' righteousness exceed the righteousness of the reductionists (Mt 5:20). This is the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction from wholeness (*tamiym*, Gen 17:1), which for Paul is critical in the heuristic process shared with Abraham (Rom 4:1; Gal 3:1-9; cf. Col 2:20-21). When the full function of righteousness prevails, theological perception and interpretation deepen and theological anthropology becomes whole. In its reciprocal dynamic, righteousness is always a function of persons in relationship. Therefore, by its nature it must be seen in its relational context, specifically, in relational context with God, which means to function in God's relational context and process. The righteous are not merely morally or ethically right (cf. *tamiym* rendered as "blameless") but those who can be counted on by God to function in relationship together as God's qualitative relational terms expect. Righteousness then, both God's and ours, is the functional basis for hopeful expectation in relationship together, whether it be for salvation (Rom 1:16-17; cf. Ps 71:14-15), the fulfillment of its promise (Rom 4:20-24), or simply for reciprocal relationship together (Eph 4:24; cf. Jn 17:25-26), which includes Jesus praying to his "righteous Father" whom he counted on in relationship together with family love. This is how the dynamic of righteousness is necessary to make whole all reciprocal relationship with God, and why Christ is the functional key to this righteousness for the relational outcome of *pleroma* soteriology.

The above complex theological dynamics converge in Paul's theological forest to be composed together in *pleroma* Christology for the fulfillment of their relational purpose. The *pleroma* of God conclusively embodied the whole of God's thematic relational response to the human condition, and only on this basis completed the relational work necessary for these theological dynamics to constitute human persons solely for the experiential truth of relationship together with the whole and holy God—the relational outcome of *pleroma* soteriology. Any of these theological dynamics apart from *pleroma* Christology becomes fragmented, unable to fulfill its relational purpose even though it may serve a doctrinal purpose. Theological trees can only be fragmentary without their theological forest. This fragmentary condition is the expected result from the referentialization of the Word.

Reflecting further on one theological dynamic in particular perhaps will be helpful. Whenever any theology of justification stops short in function (not necessarily in



its theology) of the primacy of relationship in salvation and does not illuminate the relational involvement necessary for the qualitative function of salvation's relational outcome, it becomes a reductionist substitute of both *pleroma* Christology and *pleroma* soteriology. Such a theology of justification by faith invariably operates with a reduced human ontology and function, which essentially becomes a reduction of God's relational dynamic of grace, and, unintentionally or inadvertently, a theology tending to fall into ontological simulation or epistemological illusion that is in need of the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction of wholeness. We need to ask if a traditional (or Lutheran) reading of Paul centered on justification by faith should be included in these shortcomings. I think it does. The incarnation of Jesus was constituted not only by God's relational dynamic of grace but, equally important, was also constituted in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes, wholeness. For Paul, Jesus wholly embodied the *pleroma* of God (the whole of God's qualitative ontology and relational function) throughout the incarnation to the cross and the resurrection, therefore also constituting the dynamic of wholeness for all life and function in the innermost (Col 1:19-20; 2:9-10). The *pleroma* of God's salvific work relationally involves the whole and holy ontology and qualitative-relational function of God, which vulnerably engages human persons in their reductionism with the theological dynamics necessary to make whole human ontology and function in qualitative-relational likeness of God for the sole purpose of relationship together with the whole and holy God. Such relationship is irreducible from the whole of God and is nonnegotiable to reduced terms and conditions for the holy God. Therefore, any theology engaging Christ without the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes in the primacy of whole relationship together is an incomplete Christology, and any theology involving salvation apart from the dynamic of wholeness in this primacy is a truncated soteriology.

*Pleroma* Christology is a function of the dynamic without any reductionism and the human shaping of relationships. By the irreducible and nonnegotiable nature of this dynamic, *pleroma* soteriology emerges from *pleroma* Christology only in the dynamic of wholeness. However, this dynamic is opposed, both theologically and functionally, by reductionism trying to diminish, minimalize, distort, redefine, reconstruct, or otherwise discount or even ignore God's whole. Understanding this opposition significantly deepens our understanding of sin and also broadens our perception of it as the sin of reductionism. Paul's thought and theology illuminate this understanding, and his conjoint fight for the whole gospel and against reductionism magnify this perception. Yet, Paul's readers will neither recognize nor have this tension and conflict with reductionism apart from the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes. The consequence will always be to make theological assumptions which Paul ongoingly challenged. One influence of reductionism is the limitation of a traditional doctrine of justification. The traditional issue between justification by faith or by works does not adequately frame the problem because, depending on how faith is defined, both can be functions of reductionism. Moreover, the issues tend to be limited to human contextualization (e.g. the Reformation for a traditional view of Paul, or Second Temple Judaism for a new perspective) without engaging God's relational context and process—that which was primary for defining and determining the whole of Paul and the whole critical in his theology. Those issues need further epistemological clarification than conventional biblical theology tends to provide, and they need deeper hermeneutic correction than historical theology can identify. This

need is fulfilled not by a systematic theology but rather by the relational whole in Paul's theological systemic framework and his theological forest—his family responsibility (*oikonomia*) to *pleroo* the communicative word from God to complete the communication of whole knowledge and understanding of God in relationship.

For Paul, the issue of justification is a relational issue that needs to be framed, and thus understood for the relational implications one engages, as either justification in relational response to God's relational initiative, or justification ignoring or renegotiating the terms of God's relational initiative. This relational process implies either justification constituted by relational involvement with God on God's terms, or justification signifying reductionist involvement with God and consequently a function of human terms shaped by human contextualization. While a traditional theology of justification by faith certainly implies a relational response to God's grace, that response can also function in reductionist involvement with God signifying the influence of human contextualization. This easily occurs without the understanding and perception of sin as reductionism, which is a relational consequence of function apart from the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes of God's whole. Therefore, according to Paul's lens, the limitation, contradiction or consequence of a traditional theology of justification by faith is in need of the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction of *tamiym*, which he himself needed to be *sozo*, made whole in the relational outcome of *pleroma* soteriology.

It is the experiential truth of this relational outcome and its ongoing relational involvement together 'already' which is at the heart of Paul's concern and central to his theology (the relational Paul determining the theological Paul). Whole relationship together with the whole and holy God was not a theological construct to be realized in the future. It is the completion of God's thematic relational response of grace to *sozo* the human condition, the relational outcome of which 'already' functions by necessity in the relational progression to 'not yet'—just as the whole of Paul's witness continued to illuminate (Phil 3:12-16). For the whole in Paul's theology, *tamiym*, *sozo* and *shalom* involve a reciprocal relational dynamic, all of which converge entirely in one relational outcome 'already' and relational conclusion 'not yet': whole relationship together in God's relational whole on God's qualitative relational terms—the new creation family.

The complex theological dynamics, which converged in Paul's theological forest to be composed in *pleroma* Christology, fulfill their relational purpose wholly in the theological dynamic of adoption. Integrated with and extending from Jesus' relational message to his followers (Jn 14:18), adoption was not a theological construct for Paul but the experiential truth of the relational outcome of *pleroma* soteriology. Adoption is the relational function of the whole of God's family love constituting persons 'already' into God's family in whole relationship together (Rom 8:15-17; Eph 1:5, 13-14; 2:18-22)—just as Jesus prayed nearing his completion of God's salvific action (Jn 17:21-23). If adoption is not the conclusive relational outcome of these complex theological dynamics, then these dynamics do not fulfill their relational purpose and any presumed salvation resulting from them is not by the *pleroma* of God.

Only *pleroma* soteriology emerges from *pleroma* Christology. Therefore, it is wholly completed by the righteous Son with family love in the relational dynamic of adoption in conjoint function with the Spirit—who is his relational extension of the *pleroma* of God, whom Jesus made definitive (Jn 15:26; 16:13-15) for Paul's experiential

truth (1 Cor 2:9-16) to *pleroo* the embodied word of God as the church (Eph 1:22-23; 3:16-19; 4:12-13).

All these theological dynamics were enacted by the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes in the primacy of relationship. By the definitive terms of wholeness, anything less and any substitutes for Paul were always subject to epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction; he had zero tolerance for reductionism. The theology of wholeness is a basic dynamic in Paul's theological systemic framework and his theological forest. With *pleroma* soteriology completed, further emerging from its relational outcome to overlap and interact deeply with the theological dynamic of wholeness are the dynamics of the theology of belonging and the theology of ontological identity as constituted in the new creation family and embodying the *pleroma* of Christ, the church.

Putting together these aspects of Paul's *synesis* (his whole understanding disclosed in Eph 3:4, cf. Col 1:9; 2:2) makes clear that the whole of his witness and the whole in his theology were deeply rooted in *pleroma* Christology—the integral theology constituted from the relational dynamic of Jesus *into* Paul. This illuminates how the relational Paul emerged from the historical Paul to compose the theological Paul. Functionally and theologically for Paul, the experiential truth of the *pleroma* of God's whole ontology and function by necessity involved *pleroma* soteriology making functional 'already' the relational outcome of being saved to God's new creation family. In the complex theological dynamics of Paul's theological forest and his *pleroma* theology, God's whole family in transformed relationships together is the gospel of the glory of Christ, the gospel of wholeness in the face of Christ's whole ontology and function, the *pleroma* of God (Col 1:19-20; 2:9-10; 3:10-11; cf. 2 Cor 3:18)—all emerging for Paul in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes in the primacy of whole relationship together. Therefore, in Paul's forest the theology of ontological identity emerges only from the theological dynamic of belonging, which together are inseparably integrated and rooted in the theology of wholeness, and thereby in contrast and conflict with reductionism ongoingly.

This wholeness is the primary identity that defined Paul's ontology and determined his function (the historical Paul notwithstanding), and the identity by which all who relationally belong to Christ need to be contextualized to be whole, both as persons individually and collectively. The relational outcome of God's whole family together is the ontological identity of integrally who we are and whose we are. Whose we are is always the determinant of who we are, never the converse or there is reductionism to human shaping and terms. And *what* whose we are determines for who we are is always about family, not about the individual, in the primacy of whole relationship together. Whole persons have been set free by Christ not for self-autonomy but are redeemed for adoption to be whole in whose we are, that is, in likeness of the whole of God (Gal 5:1, 13-14; Eph 4:24-25; Col 3:15; cf. 1 Cor 8:1). Wholeness for the person is contingent on wholeness in relationship together, therefore the whole person is inseparable from and indispensable for God's new creation family—which in Paul's theological forest is the church, "the *pleroma* of Christ who makes all whole in the whole" (Eph 1:23; cf. Rom 12:4-5). This is the only relational outcome from the gospel of wholeness (Eph 2:14-18; 6:15).

The experiential truth of this whole ontological identity—“and you have come to *wholeness* in him” (Col 2:10)—is Paul’s prayer for the church (Eph 3:18-19) and his desires for the church (Col 2:2-3) and his purpose of the church (Eph 4:12-13)—all of which echoes and helps fulfill Jesus’ formative family prayer for his family (Jn 17:20-26), while clearly illuminating the relational dynamic of Jesus *into* Paul. Indeed, in Paul’s *pleroma* theology there is nothing less and no substitutes but the primacy of whole relationship together in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God—the experiential truth of which holds together all human life and function, including the universe, in the innermost, thereby integrally fulfilling the unavoidable question of Goethe’s Faust.

## Chapter 11     **The Primacy of Relationship (Part 2)**

### **in the Trinity and in Likeness in the Church**

**Have put on the new self, which is being renewed specifically  
in the image of its Creator.**

Colossians 3:10, NIV

The human condition involves the human shaping of relationships defined by an ontological deficit of the person and determined by the reduced function of persons. The lack of whole ontology and function is the heart of the human relational condition and need; and the absence of this wholeness prevents their fulfillment and what holds persons together in their innermost.

Consider the analysis of Sherry Turkle, the leading expert on how computers affect us as humans:

The narrative of *Alone Together* describes an arc: we expect more from technology and less from each other. This puts us at the still center of a perfect storm. Overwhelmed, we have been drawn to connections that seem low risk and always at hand: Facebook friends, avatars, IRC chat partners [a channel where you chat with others about a common interest]. If convenience and control continue to be our priorities, we shall be tempted by sociable robots.... At the robotic moment [when the performance of connection seems connection enough], we have to be concerned that the simplification and reduction of relationships is no longer something we complain about. It may become what we expect, even desire.<sup>1</sup>

Turkle describes and forecasts the human shaping of the modern self that has been increasingly embedding the modern person in a condition of qualitative insensitivity and relational unawareness. This loss of both the qualitative and relational signifies neither just a modern condition nor a recent phenomenon of technology. Reduced ontology and function, of course, have embedded and enslaved human persons from the beginning. Yet, virtual relationships can be considered a modern condition and recent phenomenon that compounds our condition down to critical levels of qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness, even in church and the academy.

This magnifies the ontological lie underlying the human condition and its related human identity based on a deficit model as the pervasive alternative (identity deficit), both of which signify reductionism and its counter-relational work. In contrast and conflict with deficit thinking is the good news illuminated by Jesus (e.g. Lk 16:15; 10:21) and Paul (e.g. 1 Cor 4:6-7; 8:1) that directs us back to the inescapable issue in the above of the irreducible primacy and nonnegotiable priority of whole relationship together. The gospel must by its very nature be the good news that redeems the above condition, in all

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<sup>1</sup> Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 295.

its variations, and makes it whole. This good news solely for relationship is the relational response Jesus embodied in whole and that Paul experienced in whole relationship together, thereby constituting Paul's ongoing relational witness of the *pleroma* of God to fight conjointly for the experiential truth of the whole gospel and against any and all reductionism—notably in the theology and function of the church to *pleroo* the Word from God for the church's whole ontology and function in likeness of the whole of God.

To be the good news for whole relationship, it is essential to understand integrally not only *who* came (Jn 1:11; 4:25-26) but *what* has come (Lk 11:20; 17:20-21); and understanding *what* has come directly involves our perceptual-interpretive framework and lens (as implied in “careful observation,” Lk 17:20, NIV, and “search the scriptures,” Jn 5:39). The Who is inseparable from the what (the kingdom and what we are saved *to*); and the what of salvation's good news for relationship is contingent on our understanding the *whole* of the Who to have the experiential truth of who came and what has come. Paul's experiential truth of the whole gospel for relationship is the who and what of Paul's theological and functional focus—signifying the relational dynamic of Jesus *into* Paul. Therefore, in his corpus Paul's focus was on neither the quantitative aspects of the kingdom (why he didn't discuss the kingdom much) nor the disembodied parts of Jesus' teaching (why he refers little to Jesus' sayings). Rather the whole of Paul's witness and the whole in his theology focused on the primacy of the whole of Who came and what has come in the *pleroma* of God's relational context of family and relational process of family love.

This chapter unfolds the integral relational outcome of the theological trajectory and relational path that Jesus vulnerably embodied of the whole of God and extends into Paul.

## **The Primacy Fulfilled in Whole**

Good news for whole relationship is a claim that cannot be made significantly by a mere proclamation, even of the truth. The gospel has significance only as the experiential truth of whole relationship (not fragmentary or virtual) which then cannot be assumed but by its nature be the ongoing primary reality defining persons' lives and determining their function in the innermost. This is the integral relational outcome of the gospel that Jesus wholly embodied throughout the incarnation and enacted on the cross for its experiential truth in whole relationship together, neither assumed nor only for the future.

The theological trajectory fulfilled by Jesus with the cross is inseparable from the relational path that he embodied unmistakably on the cross. Jesus did not become an object merely to be observed on the cross. His whole person as Subject continued to be vulnerably present and relationally involved to constitute the experiential truth of the good news for whole relationship together, as he completed the atonement sacrifice behind the temple curtain to pay the cost for redemption necessary for us to relationally belong to God's family without the veil.

Initially noted previously, the whole of soteriology's relational context and process cohered in Jesus' ultimate discourse on the cross, which intimately communicated and vulnerably consummated God's thematic relational action of grace.

Yet his discourse is less about what he did in sacrifice, and more about his relational involvement in the relational consequence necessary for the relational outcome of the gospel. This discourse is understood as his seven statements conjoined with his actions on the cross, though each of the Gospel narratives provides a different part of the discourse, with Mark and Matthew including only the most important fourth statement to formulate a structure somewhat analogous to an OT chiasm (two halves framing the key point placed between them). Taken together they evidence the thematic relational message of God, and this composite message's theological interpretation constitutes it as the ultimate salvific discourse consummating the whole of God's thematic action for the new covenant relationship together as family. Therefore, no aspect of this discourse can be fully understood separated from the context of the whole, nor can any aspect be reduced and still constitute its relational significance in the whole of God's thematic action.

This was Jesus' discourse on the cross, in which the language of his words and actions communicated with the ultimate relational clarity and significance.

**First Statement:** "*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing*" (Lk 23:34).<sup>2</sup>

In his initial relational words, Jesus clearly established his full relational context with the Father, thus illuminating the source of salvation. His initial action also disclosed the full relational process of grace necessary for salvation: forgiveness (*aphiemi*, to remit sin, dismiss indebtedness toward God, cf. Mt 26:28, also its function in Lk's emphasis on salvation, Lk 5:20-26; 7:47-50; 24:46-47). How Jesus engaged *aphiemi* was less about the situation and full of relational significance, which was constituted only by God's relational response of grace. What was underlying their actions involved their qualitative insensitivity and relational unawareness of their human shaping of covenant relationship, for which they needed forgiveness and redemption.

As they killed Jesus, this destruction was the paradoxical relational process necessary for new relationship with the whole of God (cf. Lk 22:20). That is, it is ironic that *aphiemi* denotes, on the one hand, the forgiveness for their sin and broken relationship with the triune God, which in this moment led to the necessary cost for redemption fulfilled by his atonement sacrifice on the cross (cf. Mk 10:45). On the other hand, *aphiemi* signifies the transformation to the new covenant relationship together constituted by the Spirit, who is Jesus' relational replacement so he would "not leave [*aphiemi*] you orphaned" (Jn 14:18). In other words, Jesus enacted *aphiemi* for relationship together and completely fulfilled the whole of its relational significance by his relational work of grace.

Jesus' discourse was interjected with challenges to his salvific claim (Mt 27:40, Mk 15:29-30), as well as with mocking of his salvific authority and power as the Messiah King (Mt 27:42, Mk 15:31-32, Lk 23:35). Another detractor was one of the criminals executed with Jesus, who demonstrated a prevailing messianic expectation of salvation in existing quantitative situations and circumstances that reshaped covenant relationship (Lk 23:39). His derision was about deliverance from his circumstances, not about relationship

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<sup>2</sup> While some early manuscripts do not include this statement, it is important to include this to establish the relational flow of the discourse.

together; accordingly, he represented a majority position of those with a reductionist reaction to Jesus based on their shaping of relationship together.

The other criminal looked beyond their own circumstances and made a qualitative shift to see Jesus' person (though also as King) and to pursue him in his relational context, despite Jesus' situation (Lk 23:40-42). Thereby, he represented those with the qualitative relational response necessary to receive the vulnerable self-disclosure of the whole of God in Jesus for complete salvation, not a truncated soteriology. He received the following relational response from Jesus.

**Second Statement:** *“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise”* (Lk 23:43).

In the relational clarity of his family love, Jesus clearly made definitive the relational outcome and conclusion for anyone and all who relationally respond to his vulnerable relational work of grace for new covenant relationship together. This relational response necessitates reciprocal vulnerability in engaging Jesus in his relational context and by intimate involvement with him in his relational process, as signified by the second criminal's relational response of trust in Jesus.

The relational conclusion of being “with me in Paradise” should not be reduced. Paradise, despite images and notions, is not about a place, that is, about aspects of *bios*; Jesus' statement here should be compared to his statements with the churches in Ephesus and Laodicea (Rev 2:7; 3:21). Rather, paradise is about sharing together intimately in the ultimate relational context of God, and thus complete involvement in the ultimate relational process of participating in the *zoe* of the Trinity. “With me” is only about relationship together in ultimate communion (“paradise,” cf. Rev 21:1-3,22)—to which Jesus could have added “nothing less and no substitutes,” yet was unequivocally definitive in prefacing his relational statement with “Truly.”

In the next part of his discourse, Jesus points to what he saves us *to*, which the first criminal was predisposed to ignore by reducing salvation merely to being saved from bad situations and circumstances. Completing the atonement sacrifice will remove the veil for the redemption into the whole of God's family.

**Third Statement:** To his mother, *“Woman, here is your son,”* and to the disciple, *“Here is your mother”* (Jn 19:26-27).

With the relational significance of his family love communicated in this relational statement, Jesus gives us a partial entrance into what he saved us to by opening the functional door to salvific life and practice ‘already’.

There are many aspects for us to reflect on here: circumstances, culture, family, Jesus' promise to his disciples (i.e. Mk 10:29-30). All of these factor into this extraordinary interaction, the relational outcome of which cultivates the experiential roots of what he saved us to and the functional roots for the development of his church as family. Building with the persons who truly constituted his family in the primacy of relationship (see Mt 12:47-50), Jesus illuminated the functional significance of being his family and distinguished the experiential truth of the gospel of whole relationship together in what should be understood as a defining interaction, yet is often underemphasized or overlooked.



Apparently, Mary had been a widow for a while. In the Mediterranean world of biblical times, a widow was in a precarious position (like orphans), and so it was for Mary, particularly when her eldest and thus primary son (culturally speaking) was about to die. Their culture called for the eldest son to make provision for parents when they could no longer provide for themselves. The kinship family (by blood and law) had this responsibility. Though a widow, in Mary's case she still had other sons and daughters to care for her (Mk 6:3). Why, then, did Jesus delegate this responsibility to someone outside their immediate family?

Though circumstances, culture and family converge on this scene, they do not each exert the same amount of influence. We cannot let contextual considerations limit our understanding of this defining point in the relational progression of his followers. In relational terms, Jesus was neither fulfilling his duty as the eldest son nor bound by the circumstances. As he had consistently demonstrated throughout the incarnation, Jesus was taking his followers beyond culture and circumstances, even beyond family as we commonly view it, to the primacy of whole relationship together. As the embodied whole of God, his whole life and practice constituted function beyond reductionism, which he expected also of his followers in order to participate in his new covenant family (Mt 5:20).

Jesus' full trinitarian relational context of family and relational process of family love was made evident in his painful condition yet sensitive relational involvement with Mary and John, which should not be reduced by the drama of the moment or the obligation of the situation. The good news of whole relationship together was being composed here in its primacy being fulfilled in whole. Though Jesus was in anguish and those closest to him were deeply distressed, this improbable interaction took place because Jesus vulnerably and integrally embodied the family love of the whole of God. In the most touching moment on the cross, Jesus teaches us what being his family means: how to see each other, how to be involved with each other and how the whole person is affirmed in submitting to him for it.

For Jesus, family involvement was based on *agape* involvement, so being his family cannot be understood from our conventional perceptions of family involvement or by our conditioned feelings of obligation. Despite his circumstances, Jesus focused on Mary and John with the deepest *agape* involvement and affection (*phileo*, cf. Jn 5:20, Dt 7:7): "*Here is your son,*" "*Here is your mother.*" How was he telling them to see each other? How was he saying to be involved with each other? How was the person affirmed in submitting to him?

Jesus gave his followers *new eyes* with which to see other—beyond circumstances, culture, blood and legal ties, social status. He redefined his family to be relationship-specific to his Father (Mt 12:47-50). This is how he wants us to see each other, and how he saw Mary. It seems certain that Mary was not merely Jesus' earthly mother but increasingly his follower. She was not at odds with Jesus (though she certainly must have had mixed feelings) during his earthly ministry, as were his brothers. She was always there *for* him in her role as mother but more importantly she was now there *with* him as one who did the Father's will—thus, as follower, daughter, sister. This was the Mary at the crucifixion.

Just as Jesus didn't merely see Mary as his earthly mother, a widow, a female, he didn't merely see John as a disciple, a special friend. They were his Father's daughter and

son, his sister and brother (cf. Heb 2:11), his family together in the relational progression. And that is how he wants us to be involved with each other, not stopping short at any point on this progression—no matter how well we have been servants together, nor how much we have shared as friends. This deeply touching interaction was Jesus' *agape* relational involvement (not about sacrifice) with and response to *his family*. It was the beautiful outworking of family love in the reciprocal relational process together of *being* family and building it. Nothing less and no substitutes, just as Jesus lived and went to the cross. This is the function of salvific life and practice in the present.

For this definite reason and unequivocal purpose, Jesus' action was just as much for John's benefit as it was for Mary's—both in provision and opportunity. In response to Jesus, John acted beyond being merely a disciple, even a friend, and took Mary into "his own" (*idios*, one's own, denotes special relationship, Jn 19:27). He didn't just take her "into his own home" (NRSV); he embraced Mary as his own mother (or kinship sister). She must have embraced him also as her son (or kinship brother). In response to what each of them let go of in order to follow Jesus, he promised them an even greater family (Mk 10:29-30). True to his words as ever, he partially fulfilled his promise to them. This is the relational outcome 'already' for each person (of whatever distinction or difference) who submits to him to participate in his family. No greater satisfaction of being accepted, no fulfillment of the person's self-worth, no certainty of one's place and belonging can be experienced by the whole person without the relational significance of the whole of his new covenant family.

As the functional key, Jesus' relational action here illuminated the relational involvement of love necessary to be the whole of God's new covenant family distinguished by family love (both *agape* and *phileo*), and this initial experience constituted the roots of his church as family. Moreover, this experiential reality signified the ongoing fulfillment of his covenant promise to his followers (i.e. Mk 10:29-30, which becomes functional 'already' as his church family), and thereby established the experiential truth of the gospel of whole relationship together for all to experience (cf. Jn 17:21-23).

And as the hermeneutical key, Jesus not only used relational language but also his family language to compose his words as the whole of the Word of God embodied vulnerably for this new covenant relationship together, which deepens the understanding of his kingdom from quantitative to qualitative (discussed further in chap. 12). This scenario statement, therefore, must be understood in the whole of his salvific discourse and made definitive for the ontology and function of his church in its ongoing life and practice in likeness.

Keep in mind that his first three relational statements happened while he was dying a physically painful death. Thus, having clearly and vulnerably communicated God's thematic relational action of grace in the first half of his discourse, Jesus continued in the second half to intimately consummate his salvific work for the new covenant relationship together of God's family. The cost for redemption to complete this relational outcome of salvation to the new creation was immeasurable, involving an unfathomable relational consequence. In unsettling contrast to his previous statement as the most touching moment on the cross, his next relational statement is the most heartbreaking—

while also the most important statement disclosing the relational significance on which the whole of God's salvific action hinged.

**Fourth Statement:** "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" (Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34).

Familiarity with these words must not predispose us to minimize Jesus' relational language, and consequently to diminish the depth of relational significance involved here. Such reductionism can only have a further relational consequence of promoting relational distance (however unintentional) from God or of reinforcing the human relational condition "to be apart" (however inadvertent) from the whole of God. Moreover, I suggest, nothing will help us more deeply understand the distinction between the qualitative (e.g. element of *zoe*) and the quantitative (e.g. aspects of *bios*) than this pivotal relational statement by Jesus.

Beyond the prolonged physical pain (nearly in its sixth hour), Jesus' words vulnerably exposed his relational pain—which was initially experienced in the garden of Gethsemane (Mt 26:37-38) in anticipation of this ultimate relational pain. The Son's relationally painful scream not only further expressed his honesty and vulnerableness with his Father, but now even more significantly illuminated the relational wholeness by which their life together is constituted (Jn 10:38; 14:10,11,20; 17:21). Therefore, we are exposed intimately to what is innermost to the *zoe* of God: the whole of the relationship of God.

The whole of the triune God is constitutive of the Trinity's relationships (the relational Whole), while the Trinity's relationships together constitute the whole of God (the ontological One)—apart from which the *zoe* of God does not function. It was the *zoe* of the Trinity, the whole of the relationship of God, which was the issue in Jesus' statement (relational scream).

While Jesus' physical death was necessary for salvation, that quantitative death of *bios* was not his ultimate sacrifice. The ultimate consequence was his "loss" of the qualitative relationship of the whole of God. As a consequence of absorbing our sin, in that inexplicable moment the Son was no longer in the Father nor the Father in him. In this nothing-less-and-no-substitutes action of grace by the whole and holy God, the mystery of the "brokenness" of the relational ontology of the Trinity in effect happened. We can have only some sense of understanding this condition by focusing on the relational reality in distress, not the ontological. With this qualitative focus on Jesus' pain, we become vulnerable participants both (1) in the painful relational consequence involving any degree of the relational condition "to be apart" from the whole of God, and (2) in the fullness of God's ultimate response to redeem us from this condition as well as to reconcile us to the whole of the relationship of God, the *zoe* of the Trinity.

For this wholeness with God to be experienced, however, the relational barriers "to be apart" have to be removed. When the Son screamed out in relational pain, all those barriers had converged on him in his sacrifice behind the curtain to evoke the Father's separation. Speaking relationally, I consider that this was also the moment the Father cried, and the Spirit grieved. This was their relational work of grace; and nothing less and no substitutes could have consummated this relational consequence, which was necessary by its nature to overcome the relational consequence of sin. Furthermore, nothing less and no substitutes can constitute the family love involved in the relational process and

relational outcome to the complete salvation of saved to God's whole family. Therefore, though in a figurative sense the whole of God was broken, nevertheless the relational significance of this paradoxical moment was functionally specific to wholeness, that is, in order that we (necessarily both individually and corporately) will be whole in new relationship together.

Without this depth of God's relational action—composing the depth of the gospel—the veil would not be removed in relationship together, and then the breadth of the human relational condition could not be made whole in its innermost. This inseparable theological trajectory and relational path is how the whole of God indeed “so loved the world that he gave his only Son.” Nicodemus apparently would understand this more deeply from this ultimate salvific discourse than he understood from Jesus' first discourse with him about salvation (see him after Jesus' death, Jn 19:38-39).

If we understand in depth the relational significance of the Son's relational pain from being forsaken by the Father, this goes beyond relational rejection to the deeper relational condition of being apart from the whole of God. In this sense, what is taken away from the wholeness of the Trinity affects the wholeness of each trinitarian person. Not only are they no longer *in* each other but they are not the ontological One and the relational Whole. To be forsaken or to forsake is to be separated from this essential whole. Certainly the mystery of this pivotal moment has no ontological understanding; God never stopped being God. And there is also the paradoxical aspect of the Son declaring he will not forsake us as orphans apart from the whole of God's family (Jn 14:18), who is now himself separated from this whole. Yet, the relational significance of this both signifies the fundamental whole of the Trinity as well as establishes the means for relationship necessary to be whole in likeness of the Trinity. This is the whole of the relationship of God that Jesus not only prayed for his followers to have (Jn 17:20-23), but also paid the cost for the redemptive change necessary for its experiential truth, and further provided his Spirit to help complete the whole ontology and ongoing function in it together as the new creation church family.

As the whole of God's salvific action nears fulfillment, Jesus' qualitative relational involvement remained fully embodied in the historical context of the cross. What transpired necessarily involved his whole person, just as indicated in Hebrew Scripture (Jn 19:24,28,36,37). After the heartbreaking interaction, Jesus made this evident in his next statement.

**Fifth Statement:** “*I am thirsty*” (Jn 19:28).

John's Gospel began with the eternal existence of Jesus the Christ as the Word who was always God (Jn 1:1-2, contrary to Arianism). When the whole of the Word became flesh also, Jesus the Christ became fully human while still fully divine to constitute his whole person (Jn 1:14, contrary to Apollinarianism). In this expanded Christology (beyond the Synoptic Gospels) the evangelist's narrative included this part of Jesus' salvific discourse. With the words in this statement, we are reminded that Jesus' person was also human. Yet, this brings us face to face with his full humanity and the human toll involved in his action necessary for salvation. This “I am” is the counterpart to the other “I am” statements the evangelist developed in this Gospel for a more complete Christology (see Jn 6:35,51; 8:12; 9:5; 10:7,11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1). In integral function, these “I am”

statements distinguish the whole of Jesus' relational work of grace fulfilling God's thematic action for new relationship together.

Jesus' thirst was not merely the dehydration from physical exertion and trauma, but more importantly points to the depletion of his full humanity completely engaged in intense vulnerable involvement. This thirst signified that his relational work of grace was both the divine action of his deity disclosing the whole of God and also the relational involvement of his full humanity; and this conjoint function cannot be diminished in either function without reducing Jesus' whole person for an incomplete Christology. Any reduction of Jesus' whole person has theological and functional implications for soteriology, resulting in reductionism of what Jesus saved us from or saved us to, or both, thus a truncated soteriology. Such reductionism is always consequential for the primacy of whole relationships, whether it is relationship together with God or within Christ's church as family, or both.

In these fourth and fifth statements of his discourse, we are openly exposed to (even confronted by) this functional picture of Jesus' whole divine-human person: He who was vulnerably present, intimately involved in relationship and completely fulfilling the whole of God's thematic relational response of grace to the human relational condition for new relationship together in wholeness, without the constraints of the veil.

Thus, "when Jesus had received the wine, he said...."

**Sixth Statement:** "*It is finished*" (Jn 19:30).

"Finished" (*teleo*, complete, not merely ending it but fulfilling it to its intended conclusion), that is, his relational work for redemption to free us from the old and its relational significance "to be apart" from the whole of God (ultimate death). With these words, his ultimate salvation discourse was being brought to a close. Essentially all had been said and done, except for the concluding chapter in the history of salvation by the whole of God's thematic relational action responding to the human relation condition.

As Jesus completed his redemptive work for the original covenant (cf. Ex 24:8 and Mk 14:24), the transition to *the new* integrally begins. In Luke's Gospel, the evangelist is concerned about a gospel accessible to all, thus he narrated the temple being redefined for the new covenant (Lk 23:44-45). Mark and Matthew's Gospels also included the temple curtain event (Mk 15:38, Mt 27:51), yet they appeared to include this only as part of the narrative detail of events during the crucifixion without pointing to its relational significance (cf. Ex 26:31-33, Heb 10:19-20). Luke apparently changed the order of this event to precede and thereby directly connect with this closing statement in Jesus' salvific discourse—no doubt in further emphasis of Luke's concern for an accessible gospel of whole relationship together for all, which the relational significance of the torn temple curtain constitutes and Jesus' next and last words both point to and will consummate.

**Seventh Statement:** "*Father, into your hands I commend my spirit*" (Lk 23:46).

With his final relational words in this ultimate salvific discourse, Jesus engaged the furthest and deepest in the trinitarian relational context and process, the innermost of the whole of God. This relational cry to his Father contrasted with his earlier scream from

relational pain (fourth statement), yet these cries for relationship were also conjoined in the mystery of the relational dynamic enacting the Trinity's salvific work of grace.

Jesus communicated, "I commend" (*paratithemi*, to entrust, i.e. to relationally entrust) "my spirit" (*pneuma*, signifying the very core of his person), yet his relational language did not constitute a dualism here implying he did not entrust his body; rather, he entrusted his whole person. His last relational words illuminated the submission of his whole person for whole relationship together in the transitional journey to complete the redemptive work of the old and to raise up the new. By his intimate involvement in this vulnerably present and ongoingly involved relational context and process of the Trinity, Jesus was fully constituted in the final salvific action necessary for this ultimate relational conclusion: the resurrection and the birth of the new creation in the new covenant relationship together as family constituted in and by the Trinity, which the Spirit ongoingly transforms from the old to the new 'already' and brings to eschatological completion 'not yet'. With this relational dynamic of the whole of God, the primacy of relationship was fulfilled in whole.

These relational messages also illuminated the whole of God vulnerably present and relationally involved ongoingly both in and for whole relationship together and its relational outcome 'already' in the church to be in likeness. This likeness is problematic whenever the whole of God is not distinguished and therefore is lacking.

## Whole Monotheism

When Jesus said "The Father and I are one" (Jn 10:30), this understandably created major conflict for the Jews who were rooted theologically in the monotheism of the Shema (Dt 6:4). Paul certainly was among those whose monotheism would not allow for any variance from the theological basis of their faith: 'God is one'. Yet Paul was sufficiently open to listen to the response to his query "Who are you?" (Acts 9:5), thereby gaining epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction to receive the experiential truth of the *pleroma* of God. Jesus' response did not convert the object of Paul's faith to the new God beyond monotheism but rather engaged Paul in the relational epistemic process to open the ontological and relational doors to the Subject of the Shema, who was vulnerably present and relationally involved for reciprocal relationship. In referential terms this revelation appears to be incongruent with monotheism and thus incompatible with the Shema, nevertheless in relational terms Paul remained irreducibly congruent with monotheism and nonnegotiablely compatible with the Shema—as improbable as it rightly appears.

Thomas McCall concludes about Second Temple Judaism that it was reliably monotheistic: there is only one God, and this God is *the* Creator and Ruler. Yet "this account of monotheism is not centered on numerical oneness, nor does it obviously dictate that there is at most one divine person."<sup>3</sup> He quotes contemporary Jewish theologian Pinchas Lapide in support:

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas H. McCall, *Which Trinity? Whose Monotheism? Philosophical and Systematic Theologians on the Metaphysics of Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 60.

The Oneness of God, which could be called Israel's only 'dogma,' is neither a mathematical nor a quantitative oneness...the difference between gods and the One God is indeed not some kind of difference in number—a more miserable understanding there could hardly be—but rather a difference in essence. It concerns a definition not of reckoning but of inner content; we are concerned not with arithmetic but rather with the heart of religion, for 'one' is not so much a quantitative concept as a qualitative one.<sup>4</sup>

Lapide's distinction between a quantitative concept and a qualitative one is necessary to make yet insufficient to understand Paul's monotheism.

The issue of the Shema involves *what* distinguishes its God and thus *how* this God is distinguished. God is distinguished as 'the only One' entirely from outside the universe, who therefore has no other qualitative kind in the world by which to be compared. 'God is one' means unequivocally 'God is incomparable'. Yet this qualitative distinction of God is insufficient to resolve the issue of the Shema. This exclusive identity is not a concept, quantitative or qualitative—though philosophical theology historically has rendered it as such—but rather the relational outcome of this qualitative God's vulnerable self-disclosure as Subject illuminating the whole of God's direct relational involvement in communicative action to clearly distinguish the relational nature of God. Without God's relational response from outside the universe, the whole of God is not distinguished to us and no one knows of the One who is incomparable. Therefore, the Shema is fragmentary unless both *what* distinguishes its God and *how* this God is distinguished are clearly defined qualitatively and determined relationally. Accordingly, the qualitative and relational whole of this One can neither be reduced to referential terms (even as the Shema) nor negotiated down to human shaping (a numerical One), both of which are contingent on and comparative to what is probable within the universe, and consequently is unable to go beyond self-referencing.

For Paul, "Who are you?" emerged only as the experiential truth of the Subject of the Shema, the One from outside the universe who is incomparable (Col 1:16-17). This was his unmistakable relational experience with the whole of God and his whole understanding of the qualitative triune God in relationship (Col 1:19-20), whose whole ontology and function became known and understood as the Trinity. Though Paul never became a trinitarian, his theology deepened into whole monotheism that distinguished the Father, the Son and the Spirit together indivisibly as the whole of God. For the whole of Paul and the whole in his theology, it was evident that monotheism and trinitarianism were compatible since the monotheism of the Shema was not about the quantity of one but the quality of the whole in relationship.<sup>5</sup>

In contrast and even conflict with any referential terms ascribed to the Shema, and hereby imposed on monotheism, this distinguishing process of *what* and *how* illuminates the language that is both qualitative and thus relational. That is, this is the relational language that the whole of God necessarily used in ongoing communicative action for

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<sup>4</sup> McCall, 60-61.

<sup>5</sup> For Jews, Muslims and other monotheists, who cannot embrace Jesus as divine because that would compromise their monotheism, unfortunately are constrained by a quantitative monotheism which cannot receive the relational revelation of the qualitative whole of God. The consequence is to reduce God from whole monotheism to their referential terms and practice.

self-disclosure only by the One's relational context and process—not by human contextualization in the universe, though disclosed in human contexts—to vulnerably distinguish God's whole presence and involvement. Accordingly, this integrated relational language cannot be reduced to mere quantitative terms in the referential limits of human contextualization—for example, to construct tritheism or to shape modalism, on the one hand, or, on the other, to combat them with propositional truths and doctrinal certainty (including the dogma of the Shema). This relational language is the hermeneutical key Jesus embodied to reveal and know the whole of God, and the functional key for this experiential truth only in relationship together, the qualitative relational nature of which is the theological key for the access of “little children” and not “the wise and learned” (Lk 10:21; cf. Mt 21:15-16).

Whole monotheism is illuminated solely in the qualitative from outside the universe and is distinguished only in the relational by involvement directly with us Face to face in the primacy of whole relationship together. The incomparable God's definitive blessing (Num 6:24-26) is inseparable from the Face in the Shema and indistinguishable from “the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). In Paul's whole monotheism, the improbable is indeed illuminated and distinguished by the experiential truth of “the Father and I are one,” indivisibly together with the Spirit who completes the whole of God's thematic relational response and relational progression (1 Cor 2:9-10; Rom 15:13; Eph 3:20-21). Without whole monotheism the gospel is reduced to a truncated soteriology of deliverance—just saved *from*, notably from this situation or that circumstance—without the good news for whole relationship together. This good news defines the monotheistic shift that transformed (not converted) Paul by his relational involvement with the *pleroma* of God to epistemologically clarify, hermeneutically correct and deepen his monotheism to be whole.

## **The Trinity Distinguished in Relationship**

Understanding the what of salvation's good news for whole relationship together is contingent on understanding the whole of the Who constituting the gospel. If salvation does indeed go further and deeper than just saved *from*, this necessitates an integral relational basis (not referential) for the whole relationship together of what salvation saves *to*—which includes by necessity an ongoing relational base to function in whole relationship together. The whole of God—the ontological One and relational Whole from outside the universe—composes the meaning, significance, purpose and means of whole relationship together, apart from whom relationship together lacks the meaning, significance, purpose and means to be whole, the human relational condition. Understanding the whole of God, the whole of the Who constituting the gospel, provides the integral relational basis and ongoing relational base for whole relationship together. That is, only the Trinity illuminated and distinguished the experiential truth of who came and what has come. Therefore, understanding *what* distinguished the Trinity and *how* the Trinity is distinguished are indispensable for those claiming the gospel and irreplaceable for proclaiming the good news of whole relationship together. This understanding is distinguished in the whole of God's thematic relational action embodied.



Since God's self-disclosures in Jesus are communicated to us specifically for relationship, Jesus' whole life and practice is about how God does relationship. We can understand how God does relationship by following the face of Jesus in his face-to-face interactions. It is the significance of this function of relationship in the trinitarian relational context and process that brings coherence to God's thematic action throughout human history in relational response to the human condition: planned by God before creation and started at creation before the Fall, formalized in the covenant and fulfilled by Jesus the Christ, while currently being brought to eschatological completion by the Spirit. In this complete Christology the whole gospel clearly emerges for the experiential truth of Jesus' full soteriology, the complete significance of which is the relational outcome of whole relationship together with the veil removed.

The most significant relational function in the incarnation of how God does relationship is Jesus vulnerably disclosing his relationship with his Father. Ontologically, they are one and their persons are equally the same (consubstantial, Jn 10:30,38; 14:11,20; 16:15; 17:21), and thus inseparable (never "to be apart" except for one unfathomable experience on the cross, Mt 27:46). As trinitarian persons (not modes of being) in the qualitative significance of the whole of God (not tritheism), they are intimately bonded together in relationship (understood conceptually as perichoresis) and intimately involved with each other in love (Jn 5:20; 14:31; 15:9; 17:24). This is the relationship of God which Jesus functionally distinguishes of the whole of God, the Trinity.

To review Jesus' baptism and transfiguration (transformation), the Father openly said: "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased" (Mt 3:17; 17:5). The term for "to be well pleased" (*eudokeo*) can also be rendered "to delight." As previously noted, to be pleased with a son expresses a common bias about parental approval of what a child has done; on the other hand, to delight in a son deepens the focus on the whole person from inner out, with a deeper expression of what a parent feels in the primacy of relationship together. "Delight" better expresses the qualitative heart of the Father in intimate relationship with the Son focused on his qualitative whole person, and consequently should not be interpreted as the Father's approval of the Son's performance. This distinguishes that the Father delights in the Son and loves him for his whole person, not for what he does even in obedience to the Father. If we are predisposed to parental approval, we will ignore the deeper significance of their relational involvement.

Moreover, it is important to pay attention to their language as they interact. In the Father's expression above, his words to the Son are simple, signifying the relational language of the heart, and therefore intimate. Jesus' language with the Father in the garden called Gethsemane (Mt 26:39,42) and on the cross (Mt 27:46) is painfully simple and disarmingly direct language—words also straight from his heart. There are no platitudes, formal phrases or "sacred terminology" in their interaction—simply communication from the heart, and thereby ongoing communion together in intimacy. Their intimate communion forms the basis for communion at the Lord's table to be in likeness, as the relational outcome of Jesus removing the veil for whole relationship together. Yet, their intimacy can easily be ignored by our relational distance or even be reduced to referential language by a non-relational quantitative perceptual-interpretive framework.

The theological and functional implications of their intimate relationship are critical for our whole knowledge and understanding of God. What is vulnerably disclosed distinguishes the relationship of God without anything less and any substitutes of who, what and how God is. The particular interaction at Gethsemane demonstrates the relational process of family love involved in the Trinity's relationship with each other. Consider again: what had been planned together even before creation and was now being fulfilled by the incarnation, the Son astonishingly did not want to continue; and imagine what the Father feels upon hearing the Son's request. This is a strong contrast to an earlier interaction (see Jn 12:27-28). Despite the unique circumstances, what we need to understand about the Trinity, and thereby function in likeness in our relationships, is why this interaction even happened at all.

Certainly human weakness is involved in this situation but this is not the significance of this interaction. The incarnation was integrally based on the principle of nothing less and no substitutes, and accordingly always functioned in relationship on the basis of nothing less and no substitutes. Why this interaction even happened at all is because by the nature of their relationship in the whole of God such an interaction could happen, was "designed" to happen, therefore was expected to happen—an outworking of God's relational righteousness. That is, what this interaction signifies is the complete openness (implying honesty) and vulnerableness of their whole person (not reduced to roles and performance in the Godhead) with each other in the intimate relational involvement of love as family constituted by their whole relationship together as One. By being completely vulnerable here, Jesus clearly illuminates how they do relationship together to distinguish the relationship of the Trinity. In other words, the trinitarian persons can and need to be their whole person before each other and intimately share with each other anything, so to speak—without the caution, restrictions or limits practiced in human relationships since the primordial garden (cf. before the fall "*they* were both naked and were not ashamed," Gen 2:25). Anything less than and any substitutes of their whole person and these relationships necessary to be the whole of God no longer would constitute the Trinity (as qualitatively distinguished in whole relationship) and therefore becomes a reduction of God.

In addition, the incarnation principle of nothing less and no substitutes not only functionally defined who Jesus is in relationship but also functionally determined whose he is in relationship. The Son did not reduce his person with the Father by becoming overly christocentric. Not only did he openly express his desire to avoid the cross but he clearly expressed his deeper desire "yet not what I want but what you want" (Mt 26:39). The Son's prayer was not about himself, though he openly expressed his person. This was not a matter of the priority of the individual over the whole, which then also includes not merely the individual desires of the Father in his role and function. This only involved the whole of God, the Trinity qua family in the primacy of whole relationship together. There is no aspect or function of individualism in the nature of the Trinity; though each is distinct in their person and unique in their function, they are distinguished entirely in whole relationship as One. As a trinitarian person, the Son illuminated the interdependent (functionally in conflict with independent) relational nature of the Trinity as the whole of God's family. Furthermore, in another interaction the Son also defined how the Spirit never functions independently but only interdependently in the whole of God (Jn 16:13-

15); this points to the Spirit's relational work as not for the individual's agenda but always for the whole of God's family, the church (as illuminated by Paul, 1 Cor 12:7).

The relationship of God necessitates the function of the whole person, yet never centered on oneself and therefore always as a function of relationship in the trinitarian relational context of family and the trinitarian relational process of family love. What emerges from the relational dynamics disclosed between the Father and the Son is that the most significant function of relationship is signified by God's love. Their family love ongoingly constitutes the Trinity's relational oneness (intimate communion) illuminating the ontological triunity of God and distinguishing God's whole ontology and function from outside the universe. As the Father made evident at the Son's baptism and transfiguration, the Trinity's love engages only how they are involved with each other's person. The synergistic (and perichoretic) mystery of this qualitative involvement is so intimate that though three disclosed persons yet they are one Being (the ontological One), though distinct in function yet they are indistinguishably and indivisibly one together—without relational horizontal distance or vertical stratification (the relational Whole). And this relationship of God is disclosed not for our mere information but made accessible for us to experience in whole relationship together in likeness. This reciprocal relational experience is the integral purpose of Jesus' formative family prayer (Jn 17:20-26).

For relationship together in likeness, it is essential to understand the implied nature of *who* the Son and Father are and *what* they are in relationship together. This necessitates further examining two clear overlapping statements Jesus disclosed to define his relationship with the Father: (1) "The Father and I are one" (Jn 10:30; 17:11,22), and (2) "the Father is in me and I am in the Father" (Jn 10:38; 14:10-11,20; 17:21). We need to understand Jesus' definitive declarations both ontologically and relationally, thus expanding on the Greek concept of *perichoresis* in trinitarian theology.<sup>6</sup>

Jesus' first declaration of "The Father and I are one" (*eis eimi*) essentially revealed the dynamic existence (*eimi*, verb of existence) of their persons dwelling in each other together as one (*eis*). *Eis eimi* signifies the ontological oneness of the trinitarian persons in qualitative substance (consubstantial, *homoousios*), the nature of which cannot be differentiated in any of their persons from the whole of the triune God and differentiated in this sense from each other. Each trinitarian person is wholly God and an integral part of the whole of God, implying that each is incomplete without the others (pointing to the depth of pain Jesus shouted on the cross, Mt 27:46). Yet what Jesus disclosed is not the totality of God but only the whole of who and what God is and how God does relationship.

This raises two related theological issues to be aware of in this discussion. The first issue involves either reducing the persons of the Trinity (intentionally or inadvertently) into the whole of God's being such that they lose their uniqueness or personhood, the loss of which becomes susceptible to modalism; or, on the other hand, overstating their uniqueness as persons opens the possibility of shifting into tritheism. The second issue involves reducing the whole of the Trinity (beyond our context in eternity called the immanent Trinity) into the so-called economic Trinity (directly

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<sup>6</sup> For an overview of *perichoresis* in trinitarian theology, see Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity: Global Perspectives* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007).

involved with us in revelation for salvation) so that the transcendent God loses mystery.<sup>7</sup> This is not to imply two different Trinities but to clarify that God's self-revelation is only partial and thus provisional—not total yet whole. Reducing the whole of each trinitarian person or the whole of God's being are consequential not only for our understanding of the triune God but also for understanding what is important about our persons and our relationships together in order to be whole in likeness of who, what and how God is.

In his formative family prayer, Jesus asked the Father that all his followers together may “be one as we are one” (Jn 17:11,21-22). To “be one” (*eis eimi*) is the same ontological oneness among his followers “just as” (*kathos*, in accordance with, have congruity with) God's ontological oneness (*eis eimi*); yet his followers' oneness does not include having ontological oneness *with* the triune God such that either they would be deified or God's being would become all of them (pantheism).

What Jesus prayed for that is included, however, involves his second declaration about his relationship with the Father which overlaps with their ontological oneness (*eis eimi*). “I am in the Father and the Father is in me” (*en eimi*, Jn 14:10-11) further reveals the ongoing existence (*eimi*) of their persons in the presence of and accompanied by (*en*) the other, thereby also signifying their relational oneness constituted by their intimate involvement with each other in full communion—just as their relationship demonstrated at his baptism, in his transfiguration, in the garden of Gethsemane and on the cross, along with the presence and function (*meno*) of the Spirit. This deep intimacy in relationship together (*en eimi*) is conjoined in the ontic qualitative substance of their ontological oneness (*eis eimi*) to constitute the trinitarian persons in the indivisible and interdependent relationships together to be the whole of God, the Trinity qua family. The conjoint interaction of the ontological One and the relational Whole provided further functional understanding of *perichoresis*.

Their ontological and relational oneness uniquely constituted the embodied Word, the only one (*monogenes*) from outside the universe to fully exegete (*exegeomai*) the Father (Jn 1:18)—not to merely inform us of the transcendent and holy God but to vulnerably make known the Father for intimate relationship together as his family, as Jesus prayed (Jn 17:6,26). These relational aspects and functions provide the remaining basis for Jesus' claim that if we see the whole of his person we see the Father.

Whether before or after creation, God's action in relation to us is how God does relationship. This suggests how the triune God is throughout eternity because the righteous God cannot be inconsistent with the revelation of how God does relationship. This does not, however, define or describe the totality of the immanent Trinity, which cannot be reduced to only the economic Trinity—a differentiation which is helpful to maintain to counter reductionism. Definitively, we can only talk of God in relational terms of how the Trinity is with us—both before creation in anticipation of us and after.

Yet, we also need to distinguish that the triune God does relationship in two distinct relational contexts. One context is totally within the Trinity and their relationships together. The other context is the Trinity's relational involvement with us. Both contexts still involve the trinitarian relational context of family, and how God does relationship is consistent for both contexts. Moreover, in both contexts God still functions by the trinitarian relational process of family love. The enactment of family love,

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<sup>7</sup> For a discussion on these distinctions of the Trinity, see Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity: Global Perspectives*.

however, in the latter context requires a different relational process. Understanding the different relational processes is critical for our whole knowledge and understanding of the Trinity and trinitarian uniqueness, and inseparable for whole understanding of how we need to do relationship with the whole of God and with each other together to be whole.

For the whole and holy God to engage in relationship with us involves a very distinct relational process appearing both paradoxical and incompatible, which illuminates what matters most to God and therefore how God does relationships. In ultimate relational response to the human condition “to be apart,” the Father extended his family love to us in the embodied trinitarian person of the Son (Jn 3:16-17). Yet, unlike how the trinitarian persons love each other in the Whole by a “horizontal” relational process between equals, the inherent inequality between Creator and creature necessitates a vertical relational process. This vertical process would appear to preclude the Trinity’s intimate involvement in relational oneness (*en eimi*) as family together to be whole; that is a logical conclusion from interpreting this process apart from the whole relational context and process of God. Additionally critical to this vertical equation, the incompatibility between the holy God and sinful humanity compounds the difference of inequality between us. The perception of God’s ultimate response from a quantitative lens might be that God reached down from the highest stratum of life to the lowest stratum of life to bridge the inequality, which certainly has some descriptive truth to it yet is notably insufficient both for understanding the Trinity and for an outcome beyond this intervention—for what Jesus saves us *to*.

More importantly and significantly, God pursues us from a qualitatively different context (holy, uncommon) in a qualitatively different process (eternal and relational) to engage us for relationship together only on God’s terms in the trinitarian relational context of family and process of family love. That is to say, unlike the Trinity’s “horizontal” involvement of family love, God had to initiate family-love action vertically downward to us in response to our condition “to be apart” in order to reconcile us to come together in relationships *en eimi* the whole of God. The mystery of this response of God’s relational grace can only be understood in a vertical process, which must be distinguished not only from the “horizontal” relational process of how the Trinity loves among themselves, but also from the horizontal process implied in the reductions of the vertical process signified by renegotiating relationship with God on our terms. This subtle renegotiation of terms—functionally, not necessarily theologically—pervades Christian and church practice (cf. the early disciples and the churches in Jesus’ post-ascension discourse). Yet, without God’s family-love initiative downward, there would be no compatible relational basis for God to connect with us or for us to connect with God, both initially and ongoingly.

In this qualitative relational process, the whole and holy God can only love us by a vertical relational process because of the inherent inequality between us. God can only do relationships as God, which Jesus embodied, and never on any other terms, specifically ours, which points to our not having ontological oneness (*eis eimi*) with God. Nevertheless, in spite of God’s obvious distinguished ontology and superior position and authority, in loving us downward the Son came neither to perpetuate nor to expand the quantitative and qualitative differences between us, though his working assumptions never denied the extent of those differences. Nor did he come to condemn us to or bury us in those differences (Jn 3:17). In the qualitative difference of God’s family love, the

whole of Jesus vulnerably disclosed how God does relationship for relationship together to be whole, which the Spirit's relational work extends for us to experience this primacy of relationship further and deeper to completion. It is vital for us to understand the implications of this qualitative relational process engaged by the whole of God (cf. Jesus' footwashing)—both in our relationship with the Trinity and in our relationships together as church, then in our relations with others to embody the good news of whole relationship together.

For the eternal and holy God to be extended to us in family-love action downward required the mystery of some paradoxical sense of “reduction” of God (cf. Jn 17:4-5), suggesting a quantitative-like reduction (not qualitative) of God that appears incompatible to the whole of God. The action of God's family love downward underlies the basis for the functional differences in the Trinity revealed to us in the Scriptures—functional differences present in the Trinity even prior to creation yet differences only about God in relation to us (Jn 3:16, cf. Rom 8:29, Eph 1:4-5, 1 Pet 1:2, 1 Jn 4:9-10). These differences among the trinitarian persons appear to suggest a stratified order of their relationships together. Jesus indicated that “the Father is greater than I” (*meizon*, greater, larger, more, Jn 14:28) only in terms of quantitative distinctions for role and function but not for qualitative distinction of their ontology. There is indeed a stratification of function in the Trinity, yet their different functions only have significance in the relational process of enacting family love downward to us. Their functional differences correspond to the economic Trinity, and Scripture provides no basis for a stratified order of relationships in the immanent Trinity in eternity. In other words, their functional differences are provisional and cannot be used to define the relational ontology of the totality of God. To make that application to the transcendent triune God can only be an assumption, the theory of which says more about ourselves than God. What the embodied whole of the Word of God vulnerably disclosed helps us understand the Trinity sufficiently to preclude such an assumption.

As the Word of God who created all things, the Son embodied the most significant function of subordinating himself to extend family love downward (as Paul highlighted, Phil 2:6-8). This subordinate action of family love is further extended downward by the Spirit as the Son's relational replacement to complete what the Son established (Jn 14:16,18,26). God's initiative downward in the Son, however, must be distinguished from a view that the transcendent God needed an intermediary (i.e. Jesus) to do this for God—a form of Arianism which claims Jesus is less than God in deity, being or substance (*ousia*). Despite any apparent sense of quantitative reduction of God to enact family love downward, the incarnation was the nothing-less-and-no-substitute God revealing how the whole of God does relationship.

The relational context and process of God's focus on human persons (even before creation) and involvement with us (during and after creation) compose the functional differences in the Trinity necessary for God to love us downward. Each of the trinitarian persons has a distinct role in function together as the whole of God to extend family love in response to the human relational condition. Thus it is in this relational context and process that the Trinity's functional differences need to be examined to understand the significance of trinitarian uniqueness. There are two approaches to the Trinity's differences that we can take. One approach is a static and more quantitative descriptive account of their different functions and roles in somewhat fixed relationships. For

example, gender complementarians use this approach to establish the primacy of an authority structure within the Trinity that extends to marriage and usually to church. Meanwhile, many gender egalitarians use the same approach but come to different conclusions about the meaning of the Trinity's functional differences—sometimes even to deny them; the primary focus remains on human leadership and roles also, though who occupies them is open to both genders.

The other approach to the Trinity's differences is more dynamic and qualitative, focusing on the relational process in which their differences occur. While this approach fully accounts for the different functions and roles in the Trinity, the relational significance of those functions involves how each of the trinitarian persons fulfilled a part of the total vertical relational process to love us downward as the whole of God, not as different parts of God. In this qualitative approach, the primary significance shifts from authority (or leadership) and roles to love and relationships. When churches assess their practice in likeness of the Trinity, they need to understand which approach to the Trinity they use. For example, the successful and highly regarded churches in Ephesus and Sardis certainly must have had an abundance of leadership and role performance to generate the quantitative extent of their church practices, yet Jesus' post-ascension discourse exposed their major deficiency in the whole of God's primary function of love and primacy of whole relationship together (Rev 2-3, to be further discussed in chap. 12). And, as Jesus made evident in this discourse, central to a church's assessment is the awareness of the influence of reductionism—the influence that narrows down qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness.

Understanding the relational significance of trinitarian differences requires more than the descriptive accounts of authority and roles. The more dynamic and qualitative approach by necessity goes beyond this to the qualitative whole of persons and relationships and the dynamic process in which they are involved to be whole and not fragmentary. This requires the theological framework that redefines persons not based on what they do (notably in roles) or have (namely authority) but on who and what they are in qualitative significance together, thus understanding relationships as a vulnerable process of the relational involvement in family love (as at Gethsemane) between such whole persons (unreduced by what they do or have) and not as relationships based merely on authority and roles (essentially reductionist distinctions, erased by Jesus' claims with the Father). These qualitative relationships help us understand what is necessary to be whole as constituted in the Trinity, and whereby the church is to live whole in likeness of the Trinity—which requires a compatible theological anthropology.

When relationships are defined and examined merely on the basis of roles, the focus is reduced to the quantitative definition of the person (at the very least by what one does in a role) and a quantitative description of relationships (e.g. a set of roles in a family) according to the performance of those roles. This is usually in a set order for different roles (as in a traditional family) or even mutually coexisting for undifferentiated roles (as in some non-traditional families). Yet this limited focus does not account for the variations which naturally occur in how a person sees a role, performs that role and engages it differently from one situation to another; for example, compare Jesus' initial prayer at Gethsemane of not wanting to go to the cross (Mt 26:39) with what he had clearly asserted in various situations earlier. Nor does this narrowed focus account for the dynamic relational process in which all of this is taking place—the process necessary for

roles to have relational significance; for example, examine Jesus' intimacy with the Father at Gethsemane and assess its significance for his role to die on the cross.

Moreover, when primacy is given to the Father's authority and role to define his person and also to constitute the relationships within the Trinity, this tends to imply two conclusions about the Trinity—if not as theological assumptions, certainly in how we functionally perceive God. The first implication for the Trinity is that everything is about and for primarily the Father (an assumption congruent with patriarchy); the Son and the Spirit are necessary but secondary in function to serve only the Father's desires. While there is some truth to this in terms of role description, the assumed or perceived functional imbalance reduces the ontological oneness (*eis eimi*) of the triune God, the ontological One. Interrelated, this imbalance created a further assumption or inadvertent perception of the Son's and Spirit's roles being "different thus less" (as in identity deficit) than the Father's, thereby operating in stratified relationships preventing the relational oneness (*en eimi*) necessary for the whole of God, the relational Whole. This points to the second implication for the Trinity, that such primacy of the Father also tends to imply a person who exists in relationships together without interdependence and essentially self-sufficient from the other trinitarian persons—similar to the function of individualism in Western families. This unintentional assumption or perception counters the ontological One and relational Whole by reducing the relational ontology of God as constituted in the Trinity, the innermost relational nature which is at the heart of who, what and how the whole of God is.

These two implied conclusions (or variations of them) about the Trinity are problematic for trinitarian theology, notably when integrated with Christology. They also have deeper implications for our practice of how we define persons, how we engage in relationships together and how these become primary for determining the practice of church, and in whose specific likeness our church practice is. While the priority of the Father's authority and role must be accounted for in the revelation available to us, our understanding of trinitarian functional differences deepens when examined in the relational context and process of the whole of God and God's thematic response to the human condition in the vertical process of love. God's self-revelation is about how the whole of God does relationship as the persons of the Trinity in response to us for relationship together in God's whole—the ultimate disclosure and response of which were embodied by the whole of Jesus.

As noted earlier, Jesus clearly disclosed that his purpose and function were for the Father. Their functional differences indicated a definite subordination enacted by Jesus. Even going to the cross was his submission to serve the Father—not us, though we benefit from it—as the ultimate fulfillment of God's family love and the redemptive means for adoption as the Father's very own in his family together. The critical question about Jesus' functional position that we need to answer is what this subordination signifies. Directly related to this is why the Son is designated as "the only One" (*monogenes*, Jn 1:14,18) of God. Does this define fixed roles in a hierarchy or does it signify the relational process of the whole of God loving downward necessitating subordination among the trinitarian persons, in order to make a compatible relational connection with us, and thereby us with God with the relational outcome of belonging to God's family?



A hierarchy is about structure and is static. But authority (*arche*) is not merely what someone possesses, rather it is always exercised over another in relationship, thus it involves a dynamic relational process. Hierarchy and authority conjoined together need to be understood as the dynamics of stratified relationships which involve more than order and includes how relationships are done. Stratified relationships can range from the oppression of power relations at one extreme to degrees of defined separation in relations, or merely to distance in relationships caused by such distinctions and differences, intentionally made or not. How can Paul deconstruct distinctions and differences for those 'in Christ' if the Son himself is permanently defined and determined by them (Gal 3:28), or erase them from the image of God if the ontology of the Trinity is defined by them (Col 3:10-11)? At whatever point in this range of stratified relationships, the relationships together would be less intimate than what is accessible in horizontal relations; this is the significance of Jesus' teaching on leadership in his church family, not reversing a stratified order (Mk 10:42-45), as demonstrated also with his involvement in footwashing. Does a stratified relationship represent the sum of Jesus' relationship with his Father, or do his two earlier declarations about him and his Father define the whole of their relationship?

The ontological One and the relational Whole, which is the Trinity, is what the whole of Jesus embodied in his life and practice throughout the incarnation. Though unique in function by their different roles in the whole of God's thematic relational response to the human condition, what primarily defines their trinitarian persons are not these role distinctions. To define them by their roles is to define the trinitarian persons by what they do, which would be a qualitative reduction of God. This reduction makes role distinctions primary over the only purpose for their functional differences to love us downward, consequently reducing not only the qualitative substance of the Trinity but also the qualitative relational significance of what matters most to God, both as Creator and Savior.

For whole knowledge and understanding of God, role distinctions neither define the trinitarian persons nor determine their relationships together and how they do relationships with each other. God's self-disclosure is about God's relational nature and function only for relationship together. As disclosed of the persons of the Trinity, namely in the narratives of Jesus, the following relational summary can be made: The Father is how God does relationship as family—not about authority and influence; the Son is how God does relationship vulnerably—not about being the obedient subordinate; the Spirit is how God does relationship in the *whole*—not about the helper or mediator. In their functional differences, God is always loving us downward for relationship together—to be whole, God's relational Whole.

The primacy of whole relationship together distinguishes the ontology and function of the Trinity. Anything less and any substitutes of the Trinity give primacy to secondary aspects, however important that aspect may be to the gospel. Therefore, we cannot utilize how each trinitarian person discloses an aspect of how God does relationship in loving downward in order to make reductionist distinctions between them by which to eternally define their persons and determine their relationships. The consequence of such a reductionism of God alters the embodied whole of God's theological trajectory and relational path, with repercussions reverberating to the innermost. This reduces the primacy of the whole of God's desires, purpose and actions

for redemptive reconciliation from our relational condition as well as ongoing tendency “to be apart.” Furthermore, this reduction removes trinitarian uniqueness from the relational context of the eschatological big picture and from its relational process constituted by the primacy of how God does relationship within the Trinity and thereby in relationship to us. The shift from this primacy of the relationship of the Trinity reduces who, what and how God is and thereby can be counted on to be in relationship, that is, reduces the righteousness of God. The gospel then shifts away from this primacy and the experiential truth of whole relationship together to a referential truth of a truncated soteriology. What irreducibly constitutes this nonnegotiable primacy in the Trinity’s ontological One and relational Whole is how they function in their relationships *in* the whole of God *as* the whole of God and *for* the whole of God. This functional-relational oneness of the whole of God is not signified and cannot be constituted by their authority and roles. Primary function in the distinctions of authority and roles would not be sufficient to enable Jesus to say seeing him was seeing the Father.

This primacy of whole relationship together in the Trinity is irreducible to human contextualization and nonnegotiable to human shaping of relationships. The integral relationship of the Trinity is the righteousness of God that Jesus clearly made the primacy for his whole followers to seek first in God’s kingdom-family to distinguish them from reductionism (Mt 6:33, cf. 5:20). The emphasis on authority and roles, however well-meaning, does not give us this primacy for relationships together to be whole as family in our innermost, nor is it sufficient to reconcile us from being apart—even if our relational condition “to be apart” only involves relational distance minimizing intimacy in our relationships. The further relational consequence of this emphasis strongly suggests relational and emotional orphans functioning in church as orphanage—no matter how successful and well-respected church practice is, as clearly exposed in the churches in Ephesus and Sardis by Jesus’ post-ascension discourse for ecclesiology to be whole. Jesus disclosed definitively that this is not the likeness of the Trinity by which his church functions to be whole—at best only an ontological simulation and an epistemological illusion.

As the embodying of the whole of God and God’s thematic relational action, Jesus is the relational and functional keys to the likeness of the Trinity necessary for the experiential truth of his gospel and its relational outcome in the relational significance of his church. His declaration to be in the Father and the Father in him (*en eimi*) was not simply to inform us of the whole of God (*eis eimi*) but to provide the primary means to relationally know and experience the whole of God and relationally belong in God’s family. As we understand this complete Christology, we more fully understand the deeper significance of his designation as “the only One.” This primacy of whole relationship within the Trinity is distinguished only by their intimate communion and family love (Jn 3:35; Mk 1:11, Jn 5:20, Mt 17:5, Jn 14:31). Relationships of intimate communion and family love are both sufficient and necessary to constitute the whole of the triune God (*homoousios*) as well as to define the significance of the trinitarian persons (*hypostasis*) and to determine their integral relationships together (*perichoresis*). This intimate communion of family love is what matters most *to* God because it illuminates what’s innermost *in* God and distinguishes what’s most significant *of* God—not authority, different roles, unique functions. This is the depth of what “the only One” foremost wants us to experience in relationship together *en eimi* with the Trinity, the relational Whole,

and on this irreducible and nonnegotiable basis expects his distinguished followers to live *eis eimi* with each other for the ontological oneness of his church in likeness of the Trinity, the ontological One—in fulfillment of his formative family prayer (Jn 17).

Therefore, our intimate relational involvement of family love signifies both the relational oneness with the Trinity in ongoing communion in the life of the triune God, and the relational and ontological oneness of God's family as church living to be whole in likeness of the relational ontology of the Trinity. This relational oneness is not about a structure of authority and roles, or a context determined by such distinctions, but oneness only from the function of relationships in the intimate relational process of family love. These ongoing dynamic relationships of family love, however, necessitate by its nature the qualitative innermost of God (Mt 5:8) and thus relationships only on God's terms (Jn 14:21; 15:9-10; 17:17-19). Intimate communion with the whole of the triune God cannot be based only on love, because God is holy. This relationship requires compatibility of qualitative substance, and therefore the need for our transformation in order to have intimate relationship with the holy God. God's love downward does not supersede this necessity, only provides for it. Further interrelated, the whole of God's relational work of grace constitutes the redemptive reconciliation for our relationships in his family to be transformed to equalized and intimate relationships together necessary to be God's whole on God's terms.

In creation, God constituted the human person in the image of the qualitative innermost of the whole of God signified by the function of the heart, not in dualism but in wholeness (Gen 2:7). The trinitarian persons and human persons in likeness cannot be separated or reduced from this qualitative substance and still be defined as whole persons. This wholeness signified by the heart is what the Father seeks in worshippers (Jn 4:23-24) to be in his presence to experience him (*horao*, Mt 5:8), and what the Son searches in church practice to be whole (Rev 2:23). This primacy of the heart challenges the level of our qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness and our assumptions of theological anthropology. The qualitative significance of the heart is an integral necessity for the primary definition of the person from inner out, both trinitarian and human, not the secondary definition of what they do (roles) or what they have (authority) from outer in, and therefore is vital for both human ontology and the ontology of the Trinity.

The Cappadocian fathers (between 358-380) formulated the initial doctrine of the Trinity by distinguishing the trinitarian persons (*hypostasis*) from substance (*ousia*) to clarify relationality; but they advanced the person as ontologically more important than substance in order to give priority to the relationality of the triune God—establishing a social trinitarianism—though for the Cappadocians their persons were based on begottenness and spiration. While this significantly countered the prevailing idea of God's essence as unrelated (or nonrelational), complete Christology does not allow reducing the importance of the qualitative substance of God—that is, the innermost of God who functions from inner out in the primacy of the heart. Jesus vulnerably disclosed his person and the substance of his heart interacting together in relationship with the Father to make definitive both as necessary to define the whole of God (the ontological One) and the relationships (threeness) necessary to be whole (the relational Whole).

This lack of understanding the ontological One and relational Whole in trinitarian theology creates a gap in understanding the Trinity and as a result a gap in church practice based on likeness of the Trinity. Complete Christology provides whole

understanding of the qualitative significance of God to more deeply understand the relationality of the Trinity.<sup>8</sup> In trinitarian theology, the predominant explanatory basis for relationality has been the Greek idea of *perichoresis*: the interpenetration of the trinitarian persons in dynamic interrelations with each other. The importance of *perichoresis* is certainly critical for our perceptual-interpretive framework (notably of Western influence) and it may be a conceptually more complete term to define the ontology of the Trinity. But this idea of relationality needs further and deeper understanding because it lacks the functional clarity to be of relational significance both to more deeply know the whole of God and to intimately experience who, what and how God is in relationship together. The Eastern church, rooted in trinitarian theology from the Cappadocians, appears to lack this functional clarity in their ecclesial practice based on the Trinity.<sup>9</sup> If this is accurate, I would explain this as primarily due to the functional absence of the whole person in their relationships together as church—given the reduction of *ousia* inadvertently diminishing the function of the heart and as a result unintentionally minimizing intimacy together. This shape of relationship together would not be the likeness of the Trinity. The whole of Jesus provides this clarity in how he vulnerably functions with his person in relationships throughout the incarnation—signifying his intrusive relational path—for which he holds his church accountable by family love as demonstrated in his post-ascension discourse on ecclesiology for be whole (summarized in Rev 3:19).

Without this clarity to establish relational significance, our Christian life and practice function less relationally specific in involvement with the whole of God—though the intention may be there—and as a result we practice church apart from (lacking involvement in) the relationships necessary to be whole as God’s family constituted in the Trinity, even though the idea may be understood. The lack of functional clarity has further ramifications for how the human person is perceived in the image of God and how our persons together were created in likeness of the Trinity, both of which are necessary for *imago Dei*. And the absence of clarity affects how those persons in God’s image function in relationship together necessary to reflect the Trinity’s likeness, as well as to represent God’s whole and build God’s family. This lack of the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God opens the door to and tends to result in ontological simulations and epistemological illusions of the whole with reductionist substitutes from the human shaping of relationships together. This is not the door that Jesus’ relational and functional keys open, as he told the church in Philadelphia (Rev 3:7), which is why Jesus still knocks on many church doors for relationships together to be made whole—just as he did with the church in Laodicea (Rev 3:19-20).

The need for our fuller and deeper understanding of the Trinity goes beyond to be informed about God, which *perichoresis* merely tends to do. We need this whole understanding (*synesis*) to experience the whole of God for relationship, as the early disciples’ lack with Jesus demonstrated (Jn 14:9). This is the only purpose of God’s self-disclosure vulnerably embodied in the whole of Jesus, making this complete Christology

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<sup>8</sup> For a broader development of this trinitarian theology, see my overlapping study *The Person, the Trinity, the Church: the Call to be Whole and the Lure of Reductionism* (2006), online at <http://www.4X12.org>.

<sup>9</sup> For a modern Eastern view conceptualizing personal being as a communal ontology of the Trinity and the church, see Eastern theologian John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985).

the necessary antecedent for trinitarian theology. In the incarnation, the whole of God ultimately emerges and converges for this relationship together, which Jesus intimately disclosed in functional clarity and experiential truth: to be relationally involved with God as whole persons together in the whole of God's family constituted in and by the Trinity. The whole experience of this relational reality of God's whole without reduction of its relational truth (e.g. to referential truth) has been the integrating theme of the Trinity's relational response to our human condition "to be apart" from the whole ever since the creation of the first human person. Indeed, the whole of God's desires were formulated even before creation to restore us to the whole in the new creation, to be completed by the Spirit in God's eschatological plan concluding with the Son partaking of the last Passover cup at the ultimate table fellowship (cf. Mk 14:25).

As the Son fulfilled his earthly function to vulnerably embody God's family love downward to constitute his whole followers in the whole of God's family, his relational replacement, the Spirit, extends this family love by his cooperative relational work to bring their new creation family to its ultimate relational conclusion. Trinitarian uniqueness emerges and coheres in complete Christology, which establishes the relational significance of the Spirit and his reciprocal relational work to constitute the whole of Paul and the whole in his theology for the whole ontology and function of the church in likeness of the Trinity.

## **The Church in Likeness**

To claim the gospel and the experiential truth of its whole relationship together, and to proclaim the gospel and live its whole relationship together in the world, necessitate integral understanding of *who* came and *what* has come that embody the gospel. The whole ontology and function of the who is inseparable from the what (saved *to*); and the experiential truth of salvation's good news for relationship is contingent on *the integral relational basis* constituted in the whole ontology and function of God and *on the ongoing relational base* constituted by the presence and involvement of the whole of God in order for our ontology and function to be in likeness to embody the relational outcome of the gospel. This integral relational basis and ongoing relational base are illuminated in Jesus' defining prayer that clearly distinguished the whole ontology and function of his family in whole relationship together with and in likeness of the whole of God, the Trinity (Jn 17).

In his formative family prayer, Jesus summarized his relational purpose to disclose (*phaneroo*, not merely *apokalypto*) his Father to us to fulfill the whole of God's thematic relational response for intimate relationship together in the very likeness of their relationship in the ontological One and relational Whole (17:6,21-23,26). His prayer defines for his family this integral relational basis that both (1) distinguishes the experiential truth of the embodied whole of God (for Paul, the *pleroma* of God), "as you have sent me into the world" (v.18, "as," *kathos*, in accordance with, like), disclosing the congruence between the Father and the Son, and, conjointly, that (2) illuminates their whole ontology ("as we are one," v.11,22) and function ("as you, Father, are in me and I am in you," v.21, "as you have loved me," v.23). The who and what of God disclosed is

nothing less than the whole of God; and on this integral relational basis, the ontology and function of his family are defined and determined in likeness (“be one as we,” “as you...in me and I am in you, may they also be,” “as you have sent me...I have sent them”). This is more than a mere analogy that Jesus is praying for, but rather the dynamic outworking of the vulnerable presence of the relationship of God that distinguishes the innermost whole (“the glory,” v.5, “my glory,” v.24) of the triune God.

The church’s ontology and function are distinguished on the relational basis and ongoing relational base of only the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God, the Trinity. As Jesus continued to pray to the Father, this whole relationship together (defined as eternal life, 17:3), theirs and ours together, cannot function while under the influence of the surrounding context “of the world” (*ek*, preposition signifying out of which one is derived or belongs, 17:14,16); that is to say, relationship determined by our terms (even with good intentions) or by reductionist substitutes from the surrounding context, including alternative shaping of relationship together. Jesus made evident the ongoing conflict with reductionism this relationship encounters and pointed to the relational dynamic necessary to live in the whole of relationship together, which Jesus vulnerably embodied in wholly distinguished life and practice to be intimately involved with his followers for their integrally distinguished life and practice—to be “sanctified”(17:19).

In his prayer, Jesus commissioned (*apostello*) his followers for the specific mission “just as” (*kathos*) his Father commissioned him: “As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world” (17:18, cf. 20:21). In Jesus’ paradigm for serving (Jn 12:26, discussed previously), the first priority of the primacy of intimate involvement with him in relationship together is necessary over the work of serving, ministry and mission. For conventional paradigms for mission, sending workers out to the harvest fields becomes the urgent priority dominating our focus, thereby shifting away from the primacy of relationship to disembodiment the commission (however well meaning). Yet, as Jesus made definitive, the call to discipleship is the call to be whole, which, in order not be reduced, involves the need to be sanctified (holy) to distinguish the whole from the common’s function in the surrounding contexts of the world, including those notable harvest fields. This call clearly qualifies “Christ’s commission” for mission and challenges prevailing perceptions of it by defining the following from the relational basis in Jesus’ prayer: *what* to send out, *whom* to send out, *why* and thus *how* to send out.

For the Son’s purpose and function from his Father to be transferred to his followers, the enactment of the commission has to be both sanctified and whole to be compatible (“just as,” *kathos*) with the Father-Son relationship and then the Father-Son-disciples relationship. Jesus’ prayer integrates the call to be whole and his commission in the trinitarian relational context of family and relational process of family love (17:21-23). This clearly established the context of his commission in sanctified life and practice with the whole of God, not the context of “into the world.” When there is congruence in intimate relationship together and compatibility of function in the trinitarian relational context of family and relational process of family love, his followers together (the church as God’s new creation family) are not statically “still in the world” (*en*, remaining in it, 17:11) but now dynamically sent “into the world” (*eis*, motion into) to function whole in likeness of the Father and the Son with the Spirit in further response to make whole the human condition—that is, embodying the good news of whole relationship together,

which is integrated by the ongoing relational base of the Trinity's ontology and function. Therefore, his followers' call to be whole is conjointly his followers *sent to be whole*. This composes the significance of *what* to send out and signifies the importance of *whom* to send out and defines more deeply *why* to send out (with the full soteriology), while providing the relational basis for *how* to function in his commission.

This relational dynamic for involvement in mission (as well as in culture and Christian ethics) is made further definitive in his formative family prayer. While the whole of life together in his relational context and process is uniquely intimate and sanctified, its practice cannot remain private or individual. As he directly related the world (and life and practice in its surrounding contexts) to himself and then to his followers (in relationship together), Jesus prayed using the prepositions "in" (*en*, 17:11,13), "of" (*ek*, vv.14,16), "out of" (*ek*, v.15) and "into" (*eis*, v.18). Each preposition has its own significance that needs to be distinguished in any discussion on the church and its mission.

For Jesus to be "in the world" only described a general surrounding context in which he remained (*en*) temporarily. While *en* also signifies his followers remaining in the world, this functional (not ontological) position is governed by the preposition *ek*. How Jesus functioned while remaining in the surrounding context was determined by the ontological nature of his context of origin (relationship together in the Trinity), not by what prevailed in the surrounding context "of the world" (*ek*, out of which one is derived, belongs to). Likewise, for his whole followers, those also "not of the world" (v.14, "do not belong to this world"), *ek* involves a dynamic movement from being embedded to motion out from within the surrounding context, yet only in terms of the common's function and practice, not going out of the common's context. This dynamic of *ek* signifies going from being defined and determined, for example, by the prevailing culture (or situations and circumstances) in a surrounding context to movement out from within its influence (hence "not of the world")—which certainly necessitates engaging culture.

Yet, the dynamic of *ek* is not a statement or resolve of self-determination "not to be of the world." Rather this dynamic more deeply involves a relational dynamic. Implied in the phrase "not of the world" is the relational process which involves movement not only away from the common's influence but integral movement to the holy (Uncommon) and whole of God. This primary relational movement and involvement signifies both *what* his followers together are and *whose* they are, which necessitates triangulation and reciprocating contextualization to constitute them in this wholeness while remaining "in the world"—just as Jesus was "not of the world" and sanctified himself for his followers to practice "in the world" (17:19).

The ongoing practice of this primary relational involvement is always while "in the world," which the above *ek* phrase does not include since it is limited to a shift only in purpose and function. In the same breath Jesus also prayed for his followers not to be removed "out of the world" (17:15). "Out of" is the same preposition *ek*, which is used differently in this second phrase not for being embedded but for the matter of spatial location. The dynamic of this second *ek* phrase signified the direction of their purpose and function to be relationally involved not away from but directly in the midst of the surrounding context and in the lives of persons in that context. Eliminating this sense of separation (spatially and relationally) also applies to not being removed from relational involvement even while practicing service, ministry and mission by maintaining subtle

relational distance; this certainly includes righteous involvement with others beyond merely Christian ethics so that those persons can count on his followers to be of qualitative significance and their actions to have relational depth in likeness of the Trinity (“so that the world...,” 17:21,23).

Clearly then, Jesus gave his followers no option but to remain (*en*) and to be relationally involved—not the spatial and relational separation of *ek*, “out of the world”—in direct life and practice in the surrounding contexts of the world in likeness (“as,” *kathos*) of his whole ontology and function. Therefore, he distinctly qualified what (who) is to define them and determine how they function in those contexts—*en* is governed by the first *ek*, out from within its influence—with the ongoing relational base for their ontology and function to be in his likeness to embody the relational outcome of the gospel. While this relational dynamic is irreducible and nonnegotiable, there is always the functional alternative to remain “in the world” on ambiguous terms—for example, on the referential level in an ambiguous or shallow identity (cf. Mt 5: 13-16)—which essentially become defined and determined by reductionist substitutes, notably in ontological simulation and epistemological illusion that are indistinguishable from the shaping of relationships in those contexts. In this relational dynamic, understanding the juxtaposition of *en* and *ek* (out of) conjoined with the first use of *ek* (of, belong) is a crucial distinction, the subtle difference of which is commonly blurred by reductionism. Being “not of the world” (first *ek*, “not belong to the world”) goes beyond having a static identity or self-determination status and deeply involves an inseparable functional-theological framework imperative for the ongoing relational base of the trinitarian relational process to define the life and determine the practice of those who remain (*en*) in the surrounding context but emerge beyond (second *ek*, “out of”) the common’s function—indeed, beyond the reductionists, as Jesus made imperative for his whole followers (Mt 5:20).

This interrelated dynamic is the integral relational basis in his prayer for Jesus making imperative his call and his commission in conjoint function. The call to be whole (thus holy, sanctified) emerges in life and practice in the surrounding contexts of the world as *sent to be whole* in likeness (*kathos*) of Jesus sent whole by and in the Father. For this emergence to be unambiguously distinguished and thus clearly distinct from the common’s function in a surrounding context, it is necessary in function for the call to precede the commission because the commission alone is insufficient to fulfill the transfer of the Son’s purpose and function in likeness, without embodying the qualitative relational significance to be whole in the primacy of relationship together constituted by his call.

The sanctified life and practice to be whole, the whole of God’s family in sanctified identity distinguishing “not of the world” (first *ek*), constitutes his commission and signifies the integral relational basis for the whole undertaking of their mission in salvific life and practice to make whole in the surrounding context. To be whole *kathos* the Trinity is the relational basis for his followers to be sent “into the world” (*eis*, 17:18). As *ek* governs *en* with the “motion out from” the world’s influence necessary to constitute their qualitative relational significance to be whole, *eis* now governs “motion (back) into” the surrounding context for embodying the gospel in likeness for their function to make whole to fulfill the transfer of the Son’s purpose and function from his Father to his family. *Ek* and *eis* are not in dialectical tension but operate ongoingly



together in a reflexive interrelated process (with triangulation and reciprocating contextualization) for his followers to grow further and deeper in their integrated call and commission. Therefore, Jesus made definitive: salvific life and practice to make whole emerges from sanctified life and practice to be whole in order to join together in likeness with God's thematic relational response to the human condition "in the world"—the experiential truth of the gospel of whole relationship together.

How his followers live and practice in the surrounding context emerges from who and what they are; that is, what (or who) defines them determines how they function. This defining and determining process necessitates their theological anthropology of who and what they are to be composed on the integral relational basis of the whole of God's ontology and function. The truth of this functional paradigm was embodied by Jesus throughout the incarnation: his full identity integrated with his minority identity in sanctified life and practice, the integral function of which constituted his salvific relational work of grace for the good news of relationship together in God's whole. Jesus prayed to deeply establish his followers in this interrelated process: to be "in the world" and "not of the world," salvific life and practice must by its nature (*dei*) function distinguishably in the minority identity he embodied "in the world," thereby qualitatively distinguishing "not of it"; this minority identity necessarily by its nature is functionally integrated in sanctified life and practice with the full identity of who, what, and how his followers are in relationship together *kathos* the Trinity—therefore relationally congruent and compatible with the whole of God and God's relational action (17:16-19).

Yet, what defines his followers in the surrounding context and determines how they function is constantly being influenced, challenged, even coerced by that context, for example, to be assimilated into its culture, for us today including on the Internet. To the extent that its culture is incompatible with the whole of God and God's relational action, this is the ongoing tension and conflict with reductionism—the common's function and practice contrary to sanctified life and practice. It is essential, then, for his followers to engage culture and to ongoingly practice triangulation and reciprocating contextualization. Reductionism's subtle influence shifts human ontology from inner out to the outer in, thereby redefining the person and how persons function—notably in relationships "to be apart" from the qualitative significance of the whole, God's whole. Under such influence how his followers practice relationships together is compromised, and how they engage in mission is fragmented—namely without the qualitative relational significance to be whole and to make whole. Any lack of qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness has this consequence.

As Jesus prayed, it is imperative for his family's public life and practice that *eis* ("into" as the dynamic integrated with the first *ek*, "not of") is not to be confused with only being *en*, that is, merely to be in the same context, remain in the same space, even merely occupy ministries in surrounding situations and circumstances. *En* only statically describes where we remain, not what, who, why and how we are in that context. *Eis*, however, is not simply dynamic "movement into" a surrounding context, which is the reason "into the world" is not the context for his commission. The *eis* dynamic further signifies active engagement of other persons in deep relational involvement the depths of which is "just as" (*kathos*, indicating congruence) the Father sent his Son in the incarnation (17:18)—that is, in complete likeness of the Trinity. *Kathos* is nonnegotiable. This relational process of embodying invokes God's self-disclosure principle of nothing

less and no substitutes. Accordingly, in the embodying of his followers to live whole, anything less and any substitutes of this depth of direct relational involvement to make whole are reductions of his family's inseparable call and commission and no longer is *kathos* the Trinity. While the commission takes place "in the world," it can only be enacted and fulfilled "into the world"—and not detached "out of the world," (second *ek*)—as salvific life and practice (to make whole) emerging from sanctified life and practice (to be whole) distinguished by "not of the world" (first *ek*) and not from the influence "of the world." Anything other than relational involvement in this integrated *ek-eis* process is less than whole, a substitute of reductionism no longer defined and determined by the integral relational basis and ongoing relational base of the Trinity. Without this basis and base, his family is subject to variable shaping from surrounding contexts, which is why and how Jesus' formative family prayer is defining for his church in likeness.

The Father sent only the whole of God into the world. This good news is not merely the truth of a doctrine of salvation but definitive only as the experiential truth embodied by Jesus in whole for relationship together in the whole of God's family. Salvific life and practice is the relational outcome of what Jesus saved us both from and to (the full soteriology), the experience of which is only in whole relationship together with the embodied whole of God. It is the qualitative relational significance of this whole embodied in Jesus by which he constitutes his followers together to be whole *kathos* the Trinity—as clearly illuminated and distinguished in his prayer. On this irreducible and nonnegotiable basis, the Son sends only the whole of his family to be whole, live whole and make whole—along with his Spirit to complete God's whole. Therefore, his family is not, and cannot be, sent on any mission in the surrounding context without function in their call to be whole; nor can their salvific life and practice make whole *into* (not merely *in*) that context without being holy in life and practice sanctified from the common's influence and function. The integral relational basis and ongoing relational base of the Trinity is incompatible with anything less and any substitutes.

If *what* and *who* we "send out" for mission is anything less than the whole, then *how* we function essentially *misre*-presents the gospel. Most importantly, to send out any substitute for God's whole vitally fragments and reduces these realities: the whole of God, the ontological One, *what* and *whom* he sent, and *why* he sent the relational Whole to be embodied "into the world." For Jesus' mission, and thus ours, any separation of his commission from his call fails to understand (and thereby fully receive) the whole of God's thematic relational response to the human condition "to be apart" from the whole of God; this lack and gap result from substituting the human shaping of God's relational process. This only fragments his church's purpose and function as the whole of God's family in likeness of the Trinity, and therefore reduces the qualitative relational significance of the gospel—fragmenting it namely with an incomplete Christology and reducing it notably by a truncated soteriology. With a reduced ontology and function by the church, what can "the world believe" about "the God who sent" and what does this "let the world know" about "the God who loves for relationship together to be whole"? Whole relationship together is the defining relational outcome for which Jesus asks his Father to embody his followers together as the distinguished family in their likeness (Jn 17:20-23). Their likeness is the righteousness of the whole of God in relationship that Jesus earlier made the primacy for his whole followers in God's kingdom-family to

distinguish them from any and all reductionism (Mt 6:33). Anything less and any substitutes for the church do not distinguish it from the human shaping of relationships together, and consequently cannot be counted on to be of significance both as God's family and for the human relational condition.

Embodying this relational outcome of the gospel was integral to the relational dynamic of Jesus *into* Paul. The image of the whole of God in the face of Christ was innermost for the whole of Paul (Col 3:10) and integrated the whole in his theology (2 Cor 3:18). To be transformed to the qualitative image of the ontological One and to live in the relational likeness of the relational Whole defined the ontology and determined the function of the church for Paul. Therefore, churches must make the critical decision how their practice is to be: either shaped by a framework with the temple curtain still between them and God, or distinguished by the relational context and process in likeness of the Trinity with the veil removed.

The ontology and function of the church in likeness of the Trinity is neither a paradigm (though the trinitarian example does serve as that) nor a limited analogy, that is, if Jesus' defining family prayer is taken seriously, not to mention Paul in whole. But more significantly this reality-in-likeness is the relational outcome of directly experiencing the Trinity (for Paul, the whole of God) in relationship only on God's qualitative relational terms. This ongoing relational process is integral to the ongoing relational base of the Trinity's vulnerable presence and involvement in the function of church as family, particularly as revealed vulnerably by Jesus in the relational progression of following him to the Father and in the reciprocal relational work of the Spirit illuminated by Paul (e.g. Eph 2:22).

We cannot adequately "observe" the Trinity without being relationally addressed by the Trinity at the same time. Keep in focus that God's self-revelation is *how* God does relationship. How the Trinity is revealed, therefore, is how the Trinity relates to us, which is how the trinitarian persons do relationship with each other (though in horizontal relational process discussed earlier). This involvement in the primacy of relationship together may appear limited to the God of revelation, yet we cannot limit the righteousness of God only to revelation without righteousness being the whole of who, what and how God is.

We cannot epistemologically know and ontologically understand the Trinity without engaging the Trinity in how the trinitarian persons do relationship in their context and are doing relationship with us specifically in our context, yet still by their context. It is within their relational context and process that God's self-disclosure is vulnerably given in relational terms and needs to be received in likeness—and not narrowed down to referential terms—thereby directly experienced as an outcome of this relational connection. This consistency with the trinitarian relational context and compatibility with the trinitarian relational process cannot be engaged from the detached observation, for example, of a scientific paradigm, or with the measured involvement and relational distance of a quantitative-analytic framework (even exegetically rigorous) but can only be engaged from the qualitative function of relationship—in the relational epistemic process with the Spirit as demonstrated by Paul (e.g. 1 Cor 2:10-13). Similarly, J. I. Packer defined the process of knowing God as a relationship with emotional involvement, and he challenged as invalid the assumption that the theological task can be

engaged meaningfully with relational detachment.<sup>10</sup> Earlier, Helmut Thielicke made the critical distinction of no longer reading Scripture as a relational “word to me but only as the object of exegetical endeavors.”<sup>11</sup>

This is the relational significance of the deeper epistemology that Jesus made a necessity for Philip and Thomas in order to truly know him and whereby also know the Father (Jn 14:1-9, as discussed earlier)—that is, relationally knowing the Trinity, which is definitive of eternal life (Jn 17:3). This is the relationally-specific process that does not merely see (or observe) but rather is deeply focused on the Subject (as in *theaomai*, Jn 1:14), that does not reduce the person merely to attributes and categories but rather puts the parts of revelation together to comprehend the whole of God (as in *syniemi*, Mk 8:17, that the early disciples lacked, and *synesis*, Col 2:2, that Paul gained).

This relational epistemic process is the outworking of the Trinity’s relational involvement with us. Therefore, to come to know the triune God is neither possible by individual effort nor is the individual’s relationship with God alone sufficient. This process involves the practice of relationship as signified by the Trinity that, when experienced, results in the relational outcome of whole relationship together as the family of God constituted in the Trinity. Thus this integral relational process involves the integration of both the primacy of the qualitative (heart function in intimate relationship with the Trinity) and the primacy of the relational (involvement together in the family relationships of the Trinity). Whole knowledge and understanding of the Trinity as revealed—present and involved with us—is never merely for us to be informed about God but always directly intrudes on our whole person and relationships in the innermost, thereby transforming how we define our person, how we engage relationships and practice church to be whole in likeness.

Consequently the ontology and function of the Trinity cannot be understood in referential formulations of trinitarian theology nor experienced in church doctrine. Along with reducing the whole of God to attributes and the trinitarian persons to categories or roles, these reflect how our understanding (“a reputation of being alive,” Rev 3:1, NIV) and our practice (“have abandoned the love you had at first,” Rev 2:4) become *decontextualized*. That is, they are relationally detached or distant from the relational context and process of the Trinity and need to be recontextualized in the relational nature of the Trinity.

The church is the ultimate practice that must (*dei* by its nature, not from obligation or compulsion) be contextualized in the Trinity’s relational presence and involvement, which Jesus’ defining family prayer and salvific discourse on the cross illuminate as who and what distinguishing the church. Otherwise, the church is susceptible to redefinition. For example, an overemphasis on the metaphor “the body of Christ” for the church—that is, focused on organizational structure, not relational function—can inadvertently decontextualize the church as the family of God constituted in and by the Trinity. Moreover, in another sense, with an incomplete Christology and truncated soteriology a church can unknowingly become too Christocentric, and subsequently not practice the relational progression to the Father vulnerably enacted by the Son and continued by the Spirit in the function of the Trinity constituting the whole of

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<sup>10</sup> As noted by Alister E. McGrath, “Evangelical Theological Method” in *Evangelical Futures*, ed. John G. Stackhouse (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 23.

<sup>11</sup> Helmut Thielicke, *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 33.

God as family. These are consequences of the church becoming shaped by human contextualization, the variable shapes of which Jesus challenged in his post-ascension discourse.

The life of the Trinity transforms the church's life and function. It is this whole life as the family of God that defines the church's existence and composes its practice. Miroslav Volf also contends in apparent referential terms that "the church must speak of the Trinity as its determining reality," and thereby acknowledges the limits of this church-Trinity analogy.<sup>12</sup> Perceived and understood only in referential terms render both the Trinity and the church to reduced ontology and function, without the integral qualitative and relational significance to be whole. Additionally, the church's witness is rendered to a gospel without the depth to respond to the breadth of the human relational condition.

As discussed in the previous section, the different roles and functions expressed in the Trinity do not define their persons, though these reflect the unique (but secondary) distinctions each person exercises to extend family love to us. Each of the trinitarian persons is defined by the same qualitative substance (*homoousios*) which not only defines the equality of their persons (*hypostases*) but is also fundamental to their relationships (*perichoresis*). Thus these unique distinctions also do not determine the primacy of their relationships and how they are involved with each other. They are not involved with each other primarily on the basis of role differences but rather with the essential qualitative significance of their whole persons expressed in the relational involvement of love (both *agape*, Jn 14:31, and *phileo*, Jn 5:20).

This qualitative substance and these intimate relationships of love distinguishing the Trinity are what the churches in Sardis and Ephesus got away from. This issue is not merely a matter of priorities but about the primacy of whole relationship together, without which all other effort (even with good intentions) is insignificant to God and qualitatively meaningless. Given the high activity level of these churches, they likely had well-organized roles to operate so efficiently. This implies how they substituted for what is primary and matters most to God.

The corporate life of a church can be undertaken in either of two contrasting approaches. One approach is from an institutional framework or organizational paradigm. Institutions and most organizations are a function of structure and systemic processes. While the church has organizational properties of structure (namely interdependence) and systems (specifically covariation), the church in wholeness cannot be a function of organizational aspects. Such a framework and mindset tend to predispose or bias us to see and practice church in a limited way—with the substitutes of reductionism. This limitation is particularly critical in the information age and the broad influences of information technology, which Quentin Schultze contends shift our perceptions of the world increasingly through the lenses of measurable norms, means, causes, and effects—that is, a systemic concept (closed systems) of human culture, our image of ourselves and society that persons can objectively observe, measure,

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<sup>12</sup> Miroslav Volf, "Community Formation as an Image of the Triune God: A Congregational Model of Church Order and Life," in Richard N. Longenecker, ed. *Community Formation in the Early Church and in the Church Today* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 223-225.

manipulate, and eventually control.<sup>13</sup> This leaves us susceptible to practice what Schultze calls “*informational promiscuity*: impersonal relationships based on feigned intimacies and lacking moral integrity.”<sup>14</sup> Does this pervade Western church practice today?

The apostolic church was not based on an organizational paradigm even though it reflected organization. At the innermost of the church is *relationship*: a covenant relationship (from the OT) in relational progression to new covenant relationship together (in the NT) constituted in and by the Trinity as the family of God. The church is a function only of these relationships in likeness of the Trinity that hold it together in its innermost, and any structure, system or roles serve only as support functions of the primacy of these transformed relationships. This contrasting and conflicting approach to the corporate life of the church is from the relational dynamic emerging from the relational outcome of direct experience with the Trinity—which referential terms fragment or prevent.

The church’s ontology and function in likeness of the Trinity is the outworking of the family relationships distinguished between the Son and the Father and illuminated by the Spirit. The function of these relationships only becomes relationally significant to God and to each other when it involves the qualitative substance of the whole person (signified by the heart) opened to one another and coming together in the primacy of relationships (constituted by intimacy). The relational significance in likeness to the Trinity emerges when our whole persons function together in the intimate interdependent relationships as God’s family in the relational process of God’s family love. In practice this is the integration of primacy given to the heart and relationship together without the veil, which are defined and determined by God on the relational terms (not referential) self-disclosed in the Trinity for the church’s integral relational basis and ongoing relational base.

Reductionism has been the critical issue for the relational condition “to be apart” since Adam and Eve “knew that they were naked...and made loincloths” to hide their whole persons in the primordial garden (Gen 3:7-8). In likeness, variations of this relational dynamic have shaped the church since its beginning to reinforce or sustain the human relational condition, not to make it whole. Reductionism of and in the church is not a phenomenon unique to modernity, as demonstrated by the early churches in Corinth and likely Galatia (exposed by Paul), and in Ephesus, Thyatira, Sardis and Laodicea (exposed by Jesus in post-ascension). Moreover, reductionism in the epistemic process of understanding and truly knowing God has been most problematic—even a crisis today—that Thomas, Philip and the other disciples experienced (Jn 14:1-10), as discussed earlier. Yet directly in contention with the ongoing issue of reductionism, Jesus vulnerably declared in relational terms that he would not leave his followers as relational or emotional orphans, ontological or epistemological orphans apart experientially from the whole of the Trinity but as whole-intimate members together relationally belonging to God’s family. Given Jesus’ undeniable declaration and defining prayer for his family ‘already’, we need to ongoingly account for this in our practice of church. The integral relational basis and ongoing relational base for the whole ontology and function of the church are unavoidable.

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<sup>13</sup> Quentin J. Schultze, *Habits of the High-Tech Heart: Living Virtuously in the Information Age* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 37-42.

<sup>14</sup> Schultze, 35.

As Christ's followers gather (*ekklesia*), it is the gathering of those who have been called out and together (*ekkletoi*). How the church is to *come together* cannot be shaped in the likeness of individualism, fragmentary relationships of any shape, and thus not even in the likeness of a voluntary association. It must (by its nature, not obligation or compulsion) be in the relational context and process with and in likeness of the Trinity. This relational dynamic is the critical basis by which we need to construct a functionally whole ecclesiology—the ecclesiology that Paul clearly distinguished of the whole and that Jesus illuminated clearly in post-ascension to be whole (both discussed in chap.12), which is contrary to the substitutes of reductionism and thus in conflict with their practice.

The trinitarian relational context and process never allow the relationships in the church to be reduced and become fragmentary by remaining distant, shallow, independent, or selectively involved. The integrity of the Trinity's righteousness is at issue here. The Trinity never does relationships on these terms—terms that reflect and thus reinforce the human relational condition—nor does God accept such relationships from us. In contrast and conflict indeed, the whole of the relationship of God is both relationship specific and relationally significant to the Trinity's interdependent relationships intimately involved in family love; and the gathering of Christ's followers when whole is in this likeness, beyond a paradigm or analogy. The church's ontology and practice must have this relational clarity or the veil has not been removed to illuminate its primacy in whole relationship together, and thereby its depth of the gospel for the breadth of the human relational condition.

The church functions as God's family because of the relational outcome of directly experiencing the Trinity in relationship. The relational work of the whole of the Trinity in each trinitarian person's function to extend family love to us brings us together in the church as the new creation family of God. The Father is able to build transformed relationships with his adopted children as family together because of the Son's vulnerable relational work of redemptive reconciliation. While his relational replacement, the Spirit, lives within each individual daughter or son, the Spirit does not work for the individual's self-autonomy or self-determination but for the whole of God functioning as family in the likeness of the Trinity (cf. 1 Cor 12:7). This is the only relational outcome covenanted by the Father and embodied in whole by the Son in the relational progression of God's family love, which the Spirit brings to complete wholeness in God's eschatological plan for all creation (Col 1:19-20; Rom 8:19-21; Rev 21:1-5)—the integral relational basis and ongoing relational base for the church.

The sum of the Trinity's relational work in family love constitutes the church and its function as God's family. The body of Christ comes together with him and is integrated only for these relationships—to be the whole of God's family (1 Cor 12:12-13; Eph 2:17-22). The church in wholeness cannot be a function of anything less than the primacy of relationships, family relationships, living together by his family love in likeness of the Trinity. Though the Son and Father define and demonstrate what it means to be God's family, the Spirit's relational work is the critical relational means to experiencing this relational reality and whose ongoing reciprocal relational work is indispensable to be whole, live whole and make whole the human condition.

It is these family relationships and family process in which our response both as individuals and together as church needs to be rooted and functionally involved. Yet, any

association of the church to the function of the Trinity—most notably beyond a paradigm and an analogy—likely will challenge most ecclesiologies formulated today. The whole of God’s theological trajectory is improbable and relational path is intrusive.

Moreover, this perception of the church raises various related issues involving theological anthropology and eschatology, in addition to the pneumatology discussed above, while addressing an incomplete Christology (without the complete self-disclosure of God in the face of Christ) and truncated soteriology (without the whole gospel of what Christ also saved us *to*). For these to come together in the church as Trinity, we must consider that this conversation is engaged further within a context in which the influences of modernity are challenged and the challenges of postmodernity provide opportunity for Christ’s followers, as Jesus prayed, to live together just as the Trinity lives “so that the world may believe” (Jn 17:21) and “so that the world may know” (17:23). Specifically then for our immediate concern, the compatibility of our response involves two issues of church practice (among others) needing resolve: the place of the individual and the voluntary association of church membership.

Is the individual a secondary part of the church and does the church function in priority over its individuals? Or is the church a voluntary association of individuals and is the collective of individuals the church? Generally, an Eastern interpretive framework would answer the first set of questions affirmatively while a Western interpretive framework would be in the affirmative to the second set. The Western framework assumes that what underlies the individual are the common notions of freedom and independence. Assuming the position of self-autonomy and self-determination is not an option in an Eastern framework, but is the only viable one in most Western perceptions. These positions coincide with the differences in human thought between the ancient Chinese philosophers and ancient Greek philosophers.<sup>15</sup>

Yet when either perceptual framework of the individual is applied to the biological family (extended or nuclear), there are consequences for the individual and the family whole in both Eastern and Western families. Since the individual is commonly sacrificed in the East, the person tends to be lost in the family without a sense of the deeper identity of *who* one is as a person within the whole. With the aggrandized (idolized) individual in the West, the person also tends to become lost, that is, lost in oneself without a sense of the deeper identity of *what* one is as a person in the primacy of the whole. As a result of the ambiguity or shallowness of who and what the person is, both families experience a less significant family and less complete persons.

Returning to the church as family, we can expect the same results from church practice unless the whole person becomes defined and engages the relationships to be whole, both of which are signified in the Trinity. This requires a new person who is not sacrificed for the economy of the whole (as in Eastern families) nor who is given primacy at the expense of the whole (seen in Western families). The whole person is distinguished in a theological anthropology that includes a deeper understanding of the image and likeness of God (*imago Dei*) that coheres with Christ as the image of God (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15).

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<sup>15</sup> For an expanded discussion on the origins of cultural differences in human thought see Richard E. Nisbet, *The Geography of Thought: How Asians and Westerners Think Differently . . . and Why* (New York: Free Press, 2003).



This is directly consequential for determining the compatibility of our response to the whole of God—on God’s relational terms and not on our referential terms—and thus the nature of our involvement as we practice church.

How the human person is perceived and how that person functions, particularly in relationships, are directly associated with the *imago Dei*. There have been three basic theological formulations or approaches to what constitutes the image of God for all humans. One, it is substantial or structural, that is, consisting of certain attributes or capabilities (like reason) built into the person. Two, it is relational indicating a fundamental relationship between human creature and Creator. Three, it is a goal or destiny for humanity which lies in the eschatological conclusion toward which humans are directed. Each approach by itself lacks the significance of the whole of God. I affirm the *imago Dei* necessarily involves all three aspects (with qualification) within the function of what it means to be whole, which is only constituted by whole persons intimately involved together in the interdependent relationships of the whole of God as family signified in the Trinity and is to be completed at the eschaton.

The whole person is signified by the functional primacy of the heart (not the priority of reason), which is the dynamic qualitative significance God planted into the human person in likeness to the qualitative significance of the whole of God. It is this qualitative significance of heart which God consistently makes most important for the person and pursues in the person throughout the Scriptures. God does not pursue a rationality, intelligence or some attribute or capability ascribed to the *imago Dei*. While such substance certainly correlates to part of the character of God, it is insufficient to be compatible with God for relationship. God wants heart, the innermost of our person—the qualitative significance of the innermost of God’s own likeness which is necessary in order to have intimate relationship with God and involvement together in love. Yet this is not merely an individual relationship God desires but also a corporate relationship in the likeness of the Trinity constituting the primacy of whole relationship together.

In the creation narrative, the *imago Dei* is not just ascribed to an individual but to both human persons, that is, to them together (Gen 1:26, 27). This is an important functional distinction because what God said is “not good” clearly focuses on “to be apart” from the whole of God and the likeness of God’s whole created in human persons as their design and purpose together. This defines the *imago Dei* as directly involving the whole person in the relationships necessary to be whole, which is life together as God’s new creation family. This is the whole in which God created human persons in the Trinity’s image and likeness, and which God has ultimately responded to in Christ for a new creation so we can be whole—God’s desires even before creation that the Spirit is bringing to completion. Therefore, the whole of the *imago Dei* is God’s family as the new creation (humanity) which will be completed in the eschatological conclusion of God’s thematic relational action. Yet God’s desires are not goal oriented but ultimately seek only intimate life together as the whole of family constituted in the Trinity, both ‘already’ and ‘not yet’.

These three aspects of the *imago Dei* converge to compose this image for the human person in coherence with the whole of God understood in the Trinity. This understanding is gained from God’s self-disclosure in Christ as the image of God, who constitutes the *imago Dei* and the person in the whole, as discussed previously. For Paul, the image of God in the face of Christ was not a theological construct but the experiential

truth of the gospel who illuminated the whole of God in direct relationship Face to face (2 Cor 4:4,6)—whom Paul experienced in whole relationship together. The vulnerable presence and relational involvement Paul experienced was nothing less and no substitutes of the *pleroma* of God. Therefore, complete Christology was not optional for Paul but the necessary key to the whole of God, the whole of whom constituted the church's ontology and function in likeness (Col 2:9-10; 3:10).

Just as Paul experienced the whole of God, the principle of nothing less and no substitutes also defines *by what* God does relationship and *how* God does relationships. Since the incarnation is the fulfillment of God's thematic relational response to our relational condition, the nothing-less-and-no-substitutes relational response of the life of Jesus communicates two vital relational messages directly to us. First, the whole of God vulnerably extends the innermost of God to us and is wholly involved with us relationally (the meaning of *agape* love) because of the importance to God of our whole person created in the image of the Trinity. Secondly, the whole of God responds to us intimately with family love not only so we would no longer function relationally "to be apart" and remain as relational orphans, but so that we can integrally understand and experience the relationships necessary to be whole together in the family of God as signified by the whole of the Trinity (not solely Christ). For these family relationships and family process of family love, we were created and are re-created in the image and likeness of the Trinity, just as Jesus distinguished for his family (Jn 17:23) and Paul illuminated for the church (Col 3:10-11; Eph 3:16-19).

Some theologians are now formulating theological anthropology by narrowly focusing on the image of God for humans only as the fulfillment of the new humanity/creation at the eschaton.<sup>16</sup> While this may extend the practice of the church, it lacks functional clarity to be of relational significance to the whole of God, thus is susceptible to reductionism. From the textual convergence of God's self-disclosures, I emphasize that "Christ as the image of God" is what we need to wholly conform to (cf. Rom 8:29) to be the image of God. Complete Christology is irreplaceable for theological anthropology and ecclesiology to be whole. And Christ clearly defined and vulnerably demonstrated to us: (1) how to define the person, and on this basis (2) how to be involved in relationships, and thereby (3) how to function in relationships together as the church, the new creation, the family of God. The image of God involves all three to be whole with the whole of God—whole persons in the relationships necessary to be whole as constituted in the Trinity. The function of the direct revelation of the image of God in the face of Christ is only for relationship—not for the transmission of referential information about God—the relational reality of which we are accountable now to practice and experience.

In God's nothing-less-and-no-substitutes relational response, God communicates directly with us both by what God engages relationships and how God is involved in relationships. Furthermore, as Jesus consistently demonstrated in his interactions with others, this is the only way God does relationships, indicating the righteousness of God that can be expected in relationship, and which cannot be negotiated. Our response, therefore, needs to be compatible with God's way of doing relationships, which is the primacy of God's righteousness made imperative by Jesus for his followers to pursue (Mt

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<sup>16</sup> For a discussion of this project see Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 141-264.

6:33). This necessitates also functioning compatibly with nothing less and no substitutes. Anything other or anything less would not engage the qualitative image and relational likeness of God, the whole of whom Christ reveals fully to us when his image is not reduced by a substitute.<sup>17</sup>

When our Christology is complete, the whole of Christ as the image of the whole of God emerges. When our soteriology is not truncated, Christ as the image of God functions to create the new persons with the veil removed for intimate relationship together as God's family in the likeness of the Trinity—as God planned even before creation (Rom 8:29), prayed for its relational outcome 'already' (Jn17:20-23), and brings to completion at the eschatological conclusion (1 Cor 15:49) through the ongoing process of transformation 'already' by the Spirit (2 Cor 3:18). This new person is made whole by being transformed (*metamorphoo*) qualitatively from the inner out which is a substantive change ontologically distinguished from mere outer changes (*metaschematizo*) having perceptually similar form (for example, "apostles of Christ," "angel of light" and "servants of righteousness" in 2 Cor 11:13-15). And the place of the individual in the process of completing this new creation is a person neither sacrificed nor aggrandized, neither reduced nor lost.

On the basis, therefore, of *by what* and *how* God engages all relationships, the compatible reciprocal response of our whole person functions in the primacy of the intimate relationships of the whole of God as family—for the purpose not "to be alone," not "to be apart," not to be relational orphans, and even more significantly to function in the new creation image and likeness of God. Moreover, the response of these whole persons as the image of God in the new creation determines the relational involvement of whole church ontology and function beyond the limits of church as a voluntary association. We need to understand this more deeply.

Some may perceive 'the church as Trinity' as a metaphor by which to envision the church. For others, 'the church as Trinity' may serve as an organizational paradigm to structure the church and its operation. Either would be an error of reductionism which would result in a reductionist substitute of twofold consequence. The first part of the consequence diminishes the reality of relational involvement by the Trinity who experientially constitutes the church in the trinitarian persons' ongoing relational work (the church's ongoing relational base). The second part of the relational consequence from a reductionist substitute also separates (or distances) the church from functioning in its reciprocal relational work cooperatively with the Trinity to fulfill its purpose of embodying the relational extension of the whole of God's family (the church's integral relational basis).

Just as the whole of God vulnerably responded to our relational condition "to be apart" from the whole and the relationships necessary to be whole, our compatible response back to God can only be the whole of our persons in relationship together in the church as family both signified and ongoingly constituted by the Trinity. In the trinitarian relational context of family and the trinitarian relational process of family love, the persons together as the church become whole in the image and likeness of the whole of

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<sup>17</sup> Consider Peter's image of Christ when he in effect would not let Jesus go to the cross (Mt 16:21, 22) and when he refused to let Jesus wash his feet (Jn 13:6-8). His reductionist images of Christ both prevented him from embracing the whole of God's response and also allowed his whole person to remain in a comfort zone of relational distance.

God. Without this relational context and process for defining who and what persons are and determining how persons together function in the innermost, there are only individuals in voluntary association—individually and collectively incomplete. Theological anthropology and ecclesiology without the Trinity are incomplete; both of these apart from the qualitative relational significance of the whole of the new creation in likeness ‘already’ of the Trinity lack coherence with God’s desires, design, purpose and thematic relational action. All these theological dynamics converge in the whole of God’s thematic relational response to our condition in order for us to be whole in the primacy of relationship together, which is composed entirely by the Trinity.

The wholeness that holds together human persons and the church in their innermost has qualitative meaning and substance solely in relational significance to the whole of God, and therefore to be whole is the experiential reality only in relationship-specific involvement with the Trinity. The theological anthropology and ecclesiology necessary to be whole emerge from this integral trinitarian theology, whose antecedent is the complete Christology. The substitutes of reductionism are the only alternative for both the person and the church—the alternative from which the “successful” churches at Ephesus and Sardis still needed to be redeemed, as do many churches and persons since.

The *pleroma* of God embodied his-their theological trajectory and relational path with the primacy of the qualitative and the relational in order to integrally distinguish the *pleroma* of Christ in the primacy of whole relationship together in their likeness. His church only emerges in their irreducible theological trajectory and nonnegotiable relational path, however improbable and intrusive.

## Chapter 12

## The Kingdom *into* Church

*Seek the primacy of his kingdom and the whole of God's relational righteousness.*

Matthew 6:33

*Who* came and *what* has come remain ambiguous for the gospel if its experiential truth of whole relationship together is not relationally based in the Trinity and, accordingly, the complete Christology of the whole of God. The relational dynamic of Jesus *into* Paul is composed conjointly by the experiential truth of who came (Paul's *pleroma* Christology) and in the experiential reality of what has come (Paul's *pleroma* theology for the church). The whole of Jesus *into* the whole of Paul emerged in the 'what has come' of the kingdom and the 'Who saved *to*'. This experiential reality unfolded into Paul with the emergence of the kingdom *into* the church—the relational outcome 'already' of the gospel's whole relationship together. In other words (relational not referential), the primary relational outcome from the relational dynamic of Jesus *into* Paul was the transition of the kingdom 'already' being distinguished integrally in the church.

For Jesus, the kingdom was the relational realm of his qualitative focus from outside the universe (cf. Jn 18:36) that encompassed the whole of God's whole. Paul had a more localized focus—yet not from human contextualization—on the qualitative kingdom (e.g. Rom 14:17) for the experiential reality of Christ's kingdom in the church as the *pleroma* of Christ, the embodying of the whole of God's whole (Eph 1:23). This transition of the kingdom into church and their convergence by necessity goes through the cross of Christ, the process of which is often misperceived in Paul given his seemingly central focus on the cross.<sup>1</sup> Any issue between the kingdom and the cross emerges from how Jesus and Paul are perceived and whether they are congruent or even compatible. The importance of the kingdom to Paul is not reflected in the amount of attention that he gives to the cross over a quantitative focus on the kingdom. If one integrally understands the meaning and significance of both kingdom and cross, as did Paul, then they are inseparable and thus irreducible and nonnegotiable to the shaping and variations seen in theology and function, both in church and the academy. Understanding the whole of Paul is critical to understanding the whole in Paul, otherwise there is only fragmentary knowledge and understanding of who came and what has come.

Certainly, the kingdom had undergone human shaping, notably as nation-state in Second Temple Judaism, that parallels human shaping of the church—even with good intentions of serving and sharing the gospel—both of which involve the human shaping of relationships, and thus reinforcing or sustaining the human relational condition. The kingdom *into* church both illuminates the qualitative significance and distinguishes the

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<sup>1</sup> N.T. Wright addresses the current split between the kingdom and the cross in both theology and function in "Whence and Whither Historical Jesus Studies in the Life of the Church?" in Nicholas Perrin and Richard B. Hays, eds., *Jesus, Paul and the People of God: A Theological Dialogue with N.T. Wright* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), 137-47.

relational significance of the whole of God's whole emerging from Jesus *into* Paul—in contrast and conflict with the human shaping of relationship together.

## The Qualitative Shape of the Kingdom

Distinguishing and understanding *what* has come—that is, distinguishing it from our human shaping—has been problematic and necessitates the whole knowledge and understanding from complete Christology. An incomplete Christology is insufficient to distinguish the relationship of God from human shaping, which is necessary to delineate the kingdom in other than referential or quantitative terms.

### Its Questions and Approach

What emerges from salvation and being born again (from above), and is synonymous with eternal life and the eschatological hope, is the kingdom of God (or heaven, used by Mt to be indirect in reverence for God for Jewish readers). The primary questions involved in the interpretive issue of the kingdom are inseparable: (1) what is the kingdom that has come? and (2) when does the kingdom emerge? As much as the imminence of the kingdom has been debated, I contend this cannot be adequately answered until the kingdom itself is sufficiently defined and understood. When this is understood, I further emphasize that the question of its imminence becomes secondary—not unimportant, only less significant in the eschatological plan of God's thematic action.

In his hermeneutical discourse defending his salvific work, Jesus exposed a false eschatological hope of those Jews incorrectly embedded in the Scriptures (Jn 5:39-40, noted earlier). This eschatological hope was the life to come, or the kingdom of God's kingship and sovereign rule, which John's Gospel correctly embodied in the full relational context and process of the whole of God. Keeping this hermeneutic in mind, we shift to Luke's Gospel, who was concerned for a kingdom for all peoples.

The term "kingdom of God" is not found in the OT, yet the reality and expectation of God's kingship and sovereign rule as vested in Messiah are embedded in the OT. The issue then and now is how the Scriptures are approached, and thereby how God's kingdom is perceived and responded to.

When some Pharisees questioned Jesus about the coming of the kingdom of God, he could have replied as he did in the above discourse and with Nicodemus: "You study and teach the Scriptures but do you not understand this?" (cf. Jn 3:10) Yet, the clear implication of such a reply came in another response he gave elsewhere: "The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed, nor will they say, 'Look, here it is,' or 'There it is!' For, in fact, the kingdom of God is *within* you" (Lk 17:20-21).

The focus of Jesus' response tends to be on "is within you." Before, however, this can be understood, we need to address the issue Jesus raised about 'observation' (*parateresis*, watching closely), which includes the implication his reply involves. "Careful observation" characterized the rigorous practice of Pharisees observing their

covenant code of behavior, which, more importantly, reflected the lens of their perceptual-interpretive framework operating in their approach to the Scriptures and their eschatological hope—which also reflected their underlying theological anthropology. Jesus implied (as with those in Jn 5:39) that their careful observations through the lens of their perceptual-interpretive framework only focused on the quantitative aspects of the kingdom—which was a process somewhat analogous to the Enlightenment’s scientific method.

Accordingly, the issue Jesus addressed about the kingdom “within you” (*en*) is less about any measured-temporal sense of the kingdom—that is, “among you collectively,” and thus is present (‘already’, realized eschatology), or “within you,” understood as merely an inward (spiritual) nature pointing to the future (‘not yet’, future eschatology). More significantly, I affirm, Jesus addressed the issue between reductionism of the kingdom to mere quantitative terms as opposed to the qualitative integrity of the whole of the kingdom’s relational significance. This is the major issue of the kingdom in its past, present and future—in Israel’s past, in Jesus’ present, in the whole of God’s thematic action in relational progression to the future—which directly involves how the Scriptures are approached, how God’s kingdom is perceived and responded to.

## **Its Whole and Reductionism**

The kingdom of God cannot be reduced to quantitative aspects, though it certainly involves them in secondary ways that can never be made primary to determine God’s kingdom. The kingdom can only be defined in whole by qualitative terms, which vulnerably involves the whole person (signified by the heart), though the whole of the kingdom is not contained merely in the individual person and spiritually within us. Conjoined with this definition, the kingdom can only be determined in function by qualitative relational terms directly involving the relationships together necessary to be whole, the whole of God’s whole in likeness of the Trinity.

This was the qualitative significance that the whole of the Word embodied to disclose vulnerably the whole of God for covenant relationship together in “the kingdom of God has come to you” (Lk 11:20). Luke’s Gospel narrates Jesus’ salvific discourses and work with the emphasis of the kingdom of God for all peoples. A Jewish bias, particularly in a reductionist hermeneutic of their Scriptures, would reduce the whole of the kingdom and preclude access by all, or at the very least stratify the access for others. Thus, it is important in Luke’s narrative accounts to interrelate Jesus’ discourses about approaching the Scriptures conjointly with understanding the relational significance of the kingdom of God that has come (cf. Lk 10:21).

This interrelated focus necessitates revisiting Jesus’ demonstrative joy with the Spirit in praising the Father for “your gracious will” (*eudokia*) in “*disclosing the whole of God and God’s thematic action* to little children,” not to “the wise and the intellectual” (Lk 10:21). Those who represent “little children” are persons vulnerably engaged in qualitative relational involvement with the whole of Jesus—neither distant relationally by engaging a disembodied Word, nor detached relationally by analytically observing the secondary details of the Word and God’s action, as “the wise and learned” were,

incorrectly embedded in the Scriptures. The latter approach includes the referentialization of the embodied whole of the Word. The whole of God's self-disclosure in Jesus involves his relational context and process, in which "little children" relationally respond compatibly for the connection necessary for the relational flow of communication, as Jesus made definitive (Lk 10:22). The referentialization of the Word has been a hermeneutical issue through Israel's history in search of the eschatological hope (10:23-24), and continues to be a hermeneutical issue today in church and academy.

"The wise and the intellectual" (in Lk 10:21) were directly associated with the "careful observation" in Lk 17:20. This evidenced both their reductionist interpretive framework imposed on the Scriptures (and on God's self-disclosure in the Word embodied), and their reductionist perceptual framework narrowing down the kingdom of God to quantitative parameters without the qualitative relational significance of the whole accessible to all "little children." This was earlier summarized in John's Gospel (emphasizing the big picture) with Jesus' disarming words in his hermeneutical discourse of his salvific work: "You search the Scriptures *but you depend on your own perceptual interpretation to signify your eternal life, your membership in the kingdom*" (Jn 5:39).

## The Old and the New

In Matthew's portrait of Jesus as the Messiah, Jesus came to fulfill God's covenant promise and the eschatological hope of Israel as God's people, not as nation-state. Accordingly, Jesus' kingdom of heaven had continuity from the OT (Mt 3:1-3; 4:12-17, cf. 25:34). Yet, there was also a clear qualitative distinction about this kingdom (Mt 5:3,10,20; 7:21; 12:48-50; 18:3; 19:14). While the kingdom of heaven was an extension of the old covenant and the fulfillment of its covenant promise, there arrived also directly with Immanuel—the vulnerably present and intimately involved "God with us"—a new and deeper covenant relationship together that he composed in the kingdom of heaven. In relational terms, Jesus fulfilled both the quantitative terms of the old covenant and its qualitative relational significance, which Jesus vulnerably embodied for the direct experience of this covenant relationship together in its new and deeper relational process. And Jesus appeared to further associate this relational significance with his church (*ekklesia*, gathered body, Mt 16:18-19), which involved building (*oikodomeo*, to build a house, v.18, whose root is *oikos*) his household family (*oikos* and kingdom together in Mt 12:25). Building "with me" is in the trinitarian relational context of family and by the trinitarian relational process of family love to "gather with me" (*synago*, Mt 12:30, the root for synagogue, the counterpart to *ekklesia*) the family of God, both signifying and constituting "the kingdom of God has come to you" (12:28).

Therefore, after Jesus disclosed to his disciples "the secrets of the kingdom of heaven" (*mysterion*, hidden, hard to understand because undivulged, Mt 13:11-51), he made the following definitive for every teacher of the covenant relationship who has been made a functioning disciple (*matheteuo*, rendered inadequately in NRSV as "trained") in the kingdom of heaven: as persons belonging to the household family of God, they openly share the qualitative relational significance of the new covenant relationship together as well as the fulfillment of the old (Mt 13:52). This involves the full soteriology



of both what Jesus saved from and what he saved to—the conjoint function of his relational work of grace only for new covenant relationship together.

Yet, the *mysterion* of the kingdom can remain hidden even though they were vulnerably disclosed by Jesus and made directly accessible even to “little children.” This happens for two important reasons, which Jesus identified at the beginning of the above discourse with his disciples (with the parables of the kingdom directed to the crowds, Mt 13:13). First, Jesus the Messiah and the kingdom of heaven were disclosed only for covenant relationship together, not for the quantitative aspects and functional implications of his kingly rule. The latter become the focus determined by a reductionist perceptual-interpretive framework, which Jesus identified as an ongoing issue in Israel’s history (vv.13-14). Predisposed by reductionism, what they paid attention to and ignored precluded their understanding (*syniemi*, denotes putting the pieces together into a whole) and prevented them from perceiving deeply (*horao*, not merely to see but means to pay attention to a person to recognize their significance, encounter their true nature and to experience them). Furthermore, their whole person had been reduced (signified by “*their heart has grown dull*”) to function without the critical significance of both qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness, thereby biasing what they paid attention to and ignored; this had a direct relational consequence “to be apart” from the whole of God, to which God’s thematic relational work of grace in Jesus would respond if they opened their heart (v.15).

This points to the second important reason the kingdom remains hidden despite Jesus’ vulnerable disclosure and intimate accessibility. Jesus began this discourse saying “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not” (v.11). This was not a selective bias by Jesus showing preferential treatment to some while denying access to others, which he appeared to embed in a system of inequitable distribution (v.12). This was about relationship and its reciprocity, distinguishing the involvement in the relational epistemic process that Jesus made clear (Lk 10:21; cf. Mk 4:24-25). Jesus was pointing to the terms necessary for the nature of the relational process he was defining, and to the relational outcome or consequence of its ongoing experience or lack thereof. “To know” (*ginosko*, experience) was not mere referential information, for example, of propositional truths to quantify in a belief (or theological) system. This was experiential truth which “has been given” (*didomi* in Gk perfect tense, passive voice), hereby illuminating the experiential reality of Jesus’ relational communication of this kingdom knowledge in relational terms “to you” and stressing his ongoing relational process for his disciples to respond back to and be involved with him in for their experience of the truth of new covenant relationship together. This reciprocal relational involvement in his relational process is the nothing-less-and-no-substitute terms necessary for whole knowledge and understanding of the kingdom of heaven—the qualitative relational terms Jesus illuminated, which he affirmed the disciples engaged, however imperfectly, while the others did not (vv.16-17).

These terms for relationship are the terms for adherence that Jesus defined for his disciples (*mathetai*). These terms for adherence to Jesus are inherent in *matheteuo*, not only for teachers of the covenant relationship (in his above definitive statement, 13:52) but for all his followers to have qualitative relational significance in the kingdom of God. Matthew’s Gospel takes *matheteuo* very seriously, given the evangelist’s emphasis on

discipleship.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, Matthew is the only Gospel to record a specific imperative in Jesus' Great Commission, which is "make disciples (*matheteusate*, imperative of *matheteuo*) of all nations" (Mt 28:19).

These are the qualitative relational terms necessary for new covenant relationship together with the whole of God and for the experiential reality of God's kingdom to emerge. Without the function of whole relationship together in Jesus' relational context and process, there is no experiential truth of the kingdom of God, regardless of whether the kingdom is 'already' (present) and/or 'not yet' (future).

## The Problem with Kingly Rule

The ongoing discussion, and pervading difficulty, to define the *what* and *when* of the kingdom appears to suffer from a similar hermeneutical issue that kept the kingdom hidden from Jesus' contemporaries. I submit that the prevailing working definition of the kingdom focused on God's kingly rule becomes an epistemic problem when approached with a similar perceptual-interpretive framework illustrated by those in the above discourse. A primarily quantitative tendency has difficulty understanding the depth of "God reigns" and the qualitative relational significance involved, and consequently tends to reduce it merely to the function of sovereign (kingly) rule. This narrows down the relational ontology of the whole of God and essentially puts constraints on how God functions in that ontology, notably in the incarnation. For example, if the angel's words to Mary about the child she will birth (Lk 1:30-33) are interpreted apart from the qualitative relational significance of Jesus' whole person and his relational context and process, Jesus can only be a king who rules. This constrains the whole of Jesus and God's thematic relational action in a 'quantitative box' without any further and deeper significance. This certainly has relational consequences for receiving the whole of Jesus and responding to "the kingdom of God has come to you."

Moreover, the focus on God's kingly rule reflects a predisposition to see God's rule only on certain terms, tending toward our terms (e.g. see Jn 6:14-15). This predisposition is seen in Israel's history. God's thematic action was epitomized in their redemption from Egypt (Dt 4:32-34). Yet, God's self-disclosure in this redemptive experience was not about showing God's power and rule, but about perceiving (*ra'ah*) the whole of God ("his own presence [*paneh*, face]") and God's ongoing action for relationship together in the covenant of love (4:35-37, cf. 7:8-9). If God's people only focused on a reduced God, that is, on the quantitative aspects of what God did (power and rule), then their focus would always be essentially about "What have you done for me lately?" and not on the whole of God's qualitative being (the ontological One) and relational nature (the relational Whole) and relationship together in the covenant of love. This predisposition characterized their wilderness experience and pervaded their eschatological hope.

The tendency to see God's rule only on such terms is a reductionist consequence from an imbalanced focus on God's kingly rule. The fact is, God already sovereignly

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<sup>2</sup> In his study of the term *mathetes* (disciple), Michael J. Wilkins makes a case for calling Matthew's Gospel a manual on discipleship in *Discipleship in the Ancient World and Matthew's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 126-172.

rules; as expressed in the ancient poet's reflection in Psalm 93, as Creator the Lord already and always reigns—that is a given. God does not have to prove it, though at times does demonstrate it. Even when the disciples asked themselves on the sea of Galilee, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him” (Mk 4:41), his action was not about Jesus proving he reigns, nor a great display of power of the Creator. God simply reigns—a fact which was insufficient to deeply impact those disciples and change their lives in the days ahead with Jesus, which Mark's Gospel critically portrays of the disciples.

It is also insufficient to make God's kingly rule the purpose of the kingdom and of Jesus' salvific work. God's thematic action since creation is not about ruling, and the purpose of incarnation of the Word (the one and only Son) was not to establish a king to rule. This was a discussion Jesus had with Pilate about being a king and his kingdom, which Jesus qualified by his purpose “to testify to the truth” (Jn 18:36-37). John's Gospel provides the overarching picture, to which Jesus testified (*martyreo*, witness as a participant, not mere observer) as of the transcendent and thus of the transcendent God (Jn 3:31-36), intimately making vulnerable the whole of God (*exegeomai*, Jn 1:18). His truth, accordingly only in relational terms and not referential, was for redemption to be in relationship together as family (Jn 8:31-36). As the Truth to the Father (Jn 14:6), Jesus embodied this experiential truth only for this relationship (Jn 1:14, then 12); at that time of his farewell discourse, the disciples still had difficulty integrally understanding the whole of Jesus because they were predisposed by their lingering quantitative perceptual-interpretive framework (Jn 14:4-9). Even though earlier they had shifted from the quantitative to qualitative kingdom, they had yet to distinguish the whole of who came necessary to fully understand the whole of what has come.

When Jesus initiated the Lord's supper for the ultimate table fellowship, he illuminated that the “cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood” (Lk 22:20). The disciples had not yet understood the significance of the new covenant for relationship together in the kingdom, since immediately after the supper was their dispute about which of them was the greatest (Lk 22:24-30, cf. 13:29-30). While Jesus exposed their reductionism and constituted their relationships in the relational whole of his kingdom, the disciples evidenced their need to be changed (cf. Mt 18:1-4)—that is, the process of redemptive change in which the old dies so the new rises. Earlier Jesus pointed to the significance of the *new* with the parable of new wine (Lk 5:33-39). This tends to be used incorrectly to emphasize new forms and practices, but the new is about changed persons experiencing new relationship together (the focus in vv.34-35, discussed in chap. 8) that distinguished the new wine communion together of God's kingdom (Lk 13:29-30).

The process to the new is what Jesus' salvific work saved us to: the kingdom of God, or its equivalence in John's Gospel, eternal life. John's Gospel replaces “kingdom” language with eternal life, possibly in part to avoid any conflicts such language could create with Gentiles, yet more importantly to provide the further and deeper significance of the kingdom in the relational context and process of the whole of Jesus. The kingdom that had come came embodied *in* Jesus, the whole of the Word. As he told Nicodemus, the qualitative relational shape of the whole of God's kingdom was “born from above,” not by human shaping but born new by the Spirit as the new creation in the image of the relational ontology of the whole of God, thereby made whole in new relationship together

in likeness of the Trinity—just as Jesus asked the Father in his formative family prayer (Jn 17). On this basis, the kingdom of God indeed signifies more than God’s kingly rule; and Jesus embodied that significance and constituted the kingdom in the trinitarian relational context of family by the trinitarian relational process of family love for this new covenant relationship together—functioning beyond the quantitative limits of the old to intimate relationship together in the very likeness of the relational ontology (*zoe*) of the Trinity.

Therefore, Jesus’ salvific work and the kingdom must be understood in this further and deeper relational context and process. The whole of God and God’s action are only about relationship, relationship together, covenant relationship together in the whole of God’s whole, which certainly then is only on God’s qualitative relational terms. And if God’s terms for relationship are interpreted only as kingly rule, this would reduce the qualitative relational significance of Jesus’ relational work of grace in *agape* involvement to fulfill God’s thematic relational response to the human condition. Relationship, by the nature of the relational ontology of the Trinity, cannot be decreed, legislated, otherwise imposed, nor can it be unilateral, all of which are assumed in the primacy of kingly rule. In contrast, God’s kingdom is qualitatively defined irreducibly and relationally determined nonnegotiable by the whole relationship of God, and thereby functions in whole relationship together in likeness of the Trinity.

## **Its Qualitative Relational Nature and Function**

Covenant relationship together necessitates reciprocal relational response and involvement, the function of which needs to be compatible with the whole and holy God from outside the universe. This was the significance of the relational process Jesus both initiated in the incarnation with the strategic shift of God’s thematic action, and made his whole person vulnerable for with the tactical shift of his salvific work. Not only had the kingdom of God come, most significantly the transcendent, immanent, whole and holy God was vulnerably present and intimately involved for relationship together. Accordingly, this necessary reciprocal relational response and involvement are reciprocated only on the basis of the *agape* involvement of family love experienced first from the whole of God’s relational work of grace in the functional shift, which constitutes both the whole person and those persons together in the relationships necessary to be whole in likeness of the Trinity. There is no other relational context and process involving the Trinity’s thematic action, and only this relational context and process composes what *is* the kingdom of God that encompasses the whole of God’s whole. That is, the kingdom (‘already’ and ‘not yet’) cannot be separated from the embodied whole of Jesus’ trinitarian relational context and process; the whole of Jesus’ person and actions (in word and deed) illuminated and distinguished the whole relationship of God constituting “the kingdom of God has come to you.”

Until we integrally understand this qualitative relational nature and function of the kingdom, we cannot adequately address the present-future issue of the kingdom; nor can we fully interpret Jesus’ relational words that the kingdom “has come” (*ephthasen*, Lk 11:20) and “has come near” (*engiken*, Mk 1:15). After John was put in prison, Jesus began “proclaiming the good news of God... ‘The kingdom of God has come near;

respond to the good news” (Mk 1:14-15). “Proclaim” (*kerysso*) is also rendered “preach”—conventionally perceived in a role of preaching. We can either disembody Jesus’ relational words about the kingdom to merely referential words (preached), which is the pervasive practice preaching has come to signify involving the referentialization of the Word. Or, we can interpret those words of the kingdom as the embodied whole of the Word in relational language. The former just transmit information about God but the latter communicate the relational messages of God in relationship.

*Engiken* and *ephthasen* have an abstract sense (a reduced sense) if *what* has come near, or has come, involves merely referential words (even if it includes deeds) about the kingdom. Such disembodied words would not likely constitute good news to evoke your response, especially if you expect more than words (even if they speak truth and hope). On the other hand, *engiken* and *ephthasen* have a distinguished whole sense when *what* is the *Who* has come near, and has come, to embody the very kingdom of God itself. *Who*, as Subject and not merely Object, becomes good news indeed, whom persons can receive (not merely hear words) and relationally respond back to (“repent and *trust* in the good news”). Words by themselves are not good news (or bad); embodied words become either the gospel to relationally respond back to, or the threat from “bad” news to relationally react against—both of which are played out in the Gospels’ narratives. With this understanding, then the hermeneutical issue for *engiken* and *ephthasen* becomes whether Jesus’ relational context and process embodying the kingdom has relational significance for the present or only the future.

Furthermore, the epistemic problem of the kingdom involves not only disembodied Jesus’ words but also reducing his person merely to his deeds—both signifying the referentialization of the Word. Jesus’ deeds (or his ministry) were certainly quantified in history, and this historical aspect is valid and necessary. George Ladd aligned the two to render *ephthasen* as a fulfillment of the kingdom of God in history (i.e. in Jesus’ ministry) as well as the kingdom’s full consummation at the end of history (Jesus’ second coming, *parousia*).<sup>3</sup> This makes the kingdom of God both present and future, which is certainly good news. Yet, this perception emerges from a reduction of Jesus’ person to his deeds, and thereby becomes too quantitative and conceptually fragmentary for the kingdom of God. This is insufficient to understand the significance of Jesus’ words, which was relational language, and his actions, which were salvific as God’s thematic relational action—the qualitative relational function of which constitutes the kingdom of God. Both disembodied Jesus’ words and reducing his person to his deeds create an epistemic problem to integrally understand the qualitative relational significance of the whole of Jesus’ salvific action, and therefore the experiential truth of what Jesus saved us to. What Jesus saved us to is to experience the reality of the kingdom of God’s present relational outcome embodied with Jesus in new relationship together, the relational progression of which comes to completion by the Spirit in the relational conclusion at the eschaton.

The shape of the kingdom of God as the whole of God’s whole cannot emerge from reductionism. Reductionism always counters the relationships of the whole, separating or distancing persons in the relationships to be whole—for example, by stratifying relationships in a system of inequality, which Jesus found operating in the temple and throughout the surrounding context. Revisiting the disciples’ dispute about

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<sup>3</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 54-78.

which of them was greatest, Jesus redefined the significance of ruling in relationship together in his kingdom by composing their relationships in unstratified intimate involvement together (Lk 22:24-30); this both pointed them back to the function of “little children” and the need for redemptive change for the new relationship together in God’s kingdom (Mt 18:1-4), and pointed ahead to relationship together with the veil removed (as Paul distinguished, 2 Cor 3:18; Eph 2:14-22). This was the kingdom that Jesus embodied and distinguished for his followers, which was incompatible with reductionism.

Reductionism reshapes the kingdom of God into ontological simulations, and even distorts its shape with epistemological illusions. Consequently, we need to fully understand Jesus’ relational context and process for the *whole* of his kingdom to expose the presence and influence of reductionism. The only shape constituting the kingdom of God emerges from the whole of Jesus embodying the whole relationship of God for new relationship together in likeness, thereby fulfilling God’s thematic relational action in response to the human relational condition “to be apart” from the whole of God’s whole.

The kingdom of God had come near even before the beginning of Jesus’ ministry proclaiming the good news; Luke’s Gospel provides its biographical roots. Mary’s song and Zechariah’s song pointed to him in their summation of God’s thematic action of grace fulfilling the covenant promise of salvation (Lk 1:46-55; 67-79). As Simeon received the child Jesus into his arms, he confirmed that God’s salvation and kingdom for all had come near (Lk 2:28-32), which the prophetess Anna also affirmed upon meeting the child (Lk 2:38). Then, at age twelve, Jesus took action to initiate the function for the kingdom of God that had come near (Lk 2:49).

As Jesus began to proclaim the good news for relationship together with the whole of his person and action, the kingdom of God had come nearer. As he functioned in the trinitarian relational context of family by the trinitarian relational process of family love, and his salvific work relationally progressed, Jesus increasingly gave shape to the kingdom of God until it had come—wholly embodied for new relationship together. This qualitative relational shape is the experiential truth of the kingdom of God accessible to all for compatible relational response to the good news of the embodied whole and holy, transcendent God vulnerably present and intimately involved for the experiential reality of this covenant relationship together.

Indeed, “The kingdom of God has come to you. *Relationally respond* to the good news.” And ongoingly “Seek *the primacy* of his kingdom and *the whole of God’s relational* righteousness” (Mt 6:33).

## **Clarification and Summary Issues**

There are some matters to clarify about the qualitative relational shape of the kingdom and some summary issues to address about its significance.

The kingdom of God still signifies God’s sovereign rule, though as a dynamic rule without involving a material realm, as well as signifies God’s eschatological rule with the *new* realm. In the previous salvific discourse, Jesus clearly identified driving out demons with the kingdom of God (Mt 12:28, Lk 11:20). This was certainly about Christ’s authority and kingly rule. Yet, driving out demons, along with his other healing (cf. Lk

7:20-23), was also part of his deeper salvific relational work to *sozo*, that is, to make whole those apart from the whole. Thus, the function of God's reign with this action was not in relation to those made whole but God's reign over Satan in general, and over Satan's counter-relational work of reductionism in particular. Even though reductionism's struggle with God's whole is ongoing, God's rule prevails—that is a given, which even the demons understood (cf. Mk 1:24, Mt 8:29-31). To give primary focus for the kingdom to God's reign is to reduce the relational significance of those made whole for relationship together as the kingdom of God (cf. the inclusive table fellowship of those made whole in the kingdom of God, Lk 13:29-30).

When the appointed seventy-two followers returned to Jesus joyfully to report that the demons were subjugated to them in his name, Jesus clearly put his authority and rule into this further and deeper perspective: “I have given you authority *to rule* (*exousia*)...over the enemy; nothing will harm (*adikeo*) you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Lk 10:17-20, NIV). Jesus shifted them from the quantitative focus of his kingly rule to the qualitative focus on relationship together, with future relational implications. This was the only purpose of the whole of God's thematic relational action and the significance of God's strategic shift. Salvation and the kingdom of God are not about the primacy of God's rule but about the primacy of belonging to God's kingdom in whole relationship together in the covenant of love. *Adikeo* essentially involves violating, and thereby reducing, the whole of covenant relationship together, against which Jesus' reign over Satan will always prevail (cf. Mt 16:18).

I maintain, therefore, that God's present dynamic reign is relationship-specific to Satan, to rule ongoingly over him and his counter-relational work of reductionism; as such, God's rule is not the primary functional focus of the kingdom with those in covenant relationship together. Though by prevailing over Satan's struggle against God's whole, God's reign is certainly relationally significant ongoingly for those in the kingdom (cf. Mt 16:18). Furthermore, God's present rule continues until God's eschatological rule will conclude Satan's ultimate defeat and the *new* realm (new heaven, new earth, new Jerusalem) for God's people will commence. This, I uphold, is the significance of God's reign and its function in the kingdom, both present and future.

With this focus for the kingdom, we can integrally understand its deeper shape, which foremost involves defining Jesus' person and the whole of God by a deeper significance than merely what they do, namely rule kingly. This helps us understand the direct interrelation between the kingdom and the ontology of the whole of Jesus. Jesus' whole person constitutes his relational involvement in the incarnation to make *whole* the human condition in the trinitarian relational context of family by the trinitarian relational process of family love; his embodied function signified the relational ontology of the whole of God, the Trinity qua family. Therefore, the kingdom of God that has come is the direct relational outcome (experienced in the relational progression of the present) and relational conclusion (completed in the future) of the whole of Jesus' salvific relational presence and involvement, nothing less and no substitutes. This means that the qualitative relational significance of the kingdom of God must (*dei*) by this nature integrally be about being God's whole and also involve the relationships together necessary to be whole in likeness of the Trinity. The kingdom, then, in this specific relational context and process can only be on God's qualitative relational terms, never human terms and

shaping, consequently irreducible and nonnegotiable in the new covenant relationship together.

Matthew's Gospel clearly focused on the kingdom of heaven in continuity with the OT, yet also affirmed its relational process to the new. After Jesus disclosed the significance of the parables of the kingdom to his disciples, only Matthew recorded Jesus' analogy for them as leaders which made necessary the experiential truth of the new of the kingdom (Mt 13:52). The new of the kingdom, however, has its strongest identity in Luke's Gospel (and developed in his second volume, Acts), whose concern for the Gentiles was an accessible gospel signifying the kingdom of God for all. While there is no shortage of kingdom language to maintain continuity with the OT, Luke integrated the kingdom with a feast composed integrally by all people groups to ensure the new (Lk 13:29-30). Thus, it is helpful to connect various accounts of table fellowship in Luke to further understand the qualitative relational significance of the kingdom and its process to the new.

We can start with Jesus' surprising statement to Zacchaeus that he must (*dei*) by the nature of his salvific work have table fellowship at Zacchaeus' house, and thus the relational outcome of that experience (Lk 19:5,9-10). Next, Jesus was anointed by a prostitute during table fellowship at a Pharisee's house to disclose both the *agape* involvement of his salvific work and the reciprocal relational response by a person made whole (*sozo*) having received him (Lk 7:36-50). These narrative accounts evidence the table fellowship of the new wine involving changed persons experiencing new relationship together, persons who were not stuck in, constrained by or satisfied with the old but had embraced the new (Lk 5:34-39, cf. table fellowship with Martha and Mary, Lk 10:38-42). Thus, the new wine table fellowship is a function of the new creation, the relational reality of which was constituted by the experiential truth of the blood of the new covenant (with the veil removed) initiating in the present the pivotal table fellowship for this relational outcome 'already' (Lk 22:20). And this all has the relational conclusion 'not yet' at the ultimate table fellowship of the kingdom of God for all in new covenant relationship together as God's whole without reductionism (Lk 13:29-30).

Each of the canonical Gospels provides its evangelist's unique portrait of Jesus and his shaping of the kingdom of God. Yet, none of them alone is definitive of the whole of Jesus or of the kingdom. Taken together, the whole of God in Jesus wholly emerges and the kingdom becomes definitive in the whole of God's thematic relational action embodied by Jesus for this new relationship together. Integrally understanding this in Jesus is receiving the qualitative presence of the whole of God and the relational involvement of the whole of God as Trinity; and the experiential truth of God's presence and involvement illuminates that artificial and false distinctions are made about "the kingdom of God has come to you." These distinctions have no functional significance to God's intentions in response to the human condition, or to God's desires for relationship together.

An ongoing issue about the kingdom of God is the tension between 'already' and 'not yet' (whether present or future), yet this conversation has been about a quantitative tension, not a qualitative matter. This tension involves the temporal focus of *chronos*: the quantitative perception of time denoting a period measured by the successive passing of moments (or events). Despite various references Jesus made to temporal aspects of the kingdom, he was not focused on *chronos* (cf. his Olivet discourse on end times, Mt



24:36). Having been asked when the kingdom of God would come, he made definitive that it cannot be determined by a quantitative focus (Lk 17:20). Why? Because by its nature, as he embodied, “the kingdom of God is within (or among) you” (Lk 17:21). That is to say, not that the kingdom is spiritual (in the sense of being only subjective and esoteric), but rather the ontology of the kingdom is qualitative; “the kingdom is” (*eimi*, verb of existence, also a copula) conjoined “within you (pl)” as qualitative whole persons and “among you” in qualitative relational significance.

The ontology of the kingdom of God is set forth further in Jesus’ statement distinguishing the kingdom as “little children” in relationship together (Lk 18:16). This cannot be measured in reductionist terms like *chronos* and determined by a quantitative focus, even on the Word. Jesus embodied the kingdom and gave it its qualitative relational shape in *kairos* (qualitative time, season, characterized by the critical importance and decisive influence of something, see Lk 12:56). Though this certainly happened in the history of *chronos*, that is secondary to the primacy of the kingdom’s qualitative relational significance in *kairos*—the experiential truth of which is only for new relationship together with those “little children” who relationally respond back in qualitative compatibility (cf. Lk 10:21, Mt 18:3).

Thus, the experiential reality of relationship together signifies the experiential truth of the kingdom that, I affirm, makes the already-not yet issue rather insignificant and an artificial distinction for the kingdom of God; and such notions serve to diminish the whole of Jesus (*who* came and “the kingdom of God that has come to you” (*what* has come)).

Moreover, the whole of God’s strategic shift in the mystery of the incarnation constituted God’s dwelling from a quantitative sanctuary (mountain, tabernacle, temple, cf. Jn 4:21) directly to the qualitative sanctuary both “within you” and “among you” as whole persons in the relationships necessary to be whole together with God. This was the purpose Jesus vulnerably disclosed to the Samaritan woman that the whole of God seeks new relationship together with persons only “in spirit and truth” (Jn 4:21-24). It is an artificial distinction to separate the kingdom as God’s kingly rule and realm to the future from the present reality of the vulnerable presence and intimate involvement of the whole of God for new relationship together as God’s family. Paul clearly illuminated this experiential truth with the Spirit (1 Cor 3:16) and distinguished this experiential reality in the church (Eph 2:22).

Likewise, it is a false distinction to separate out any notion of the kingdom in the present from the present reality of God’s life and action within and among God’s people. This fragments God into kingly rule and *agape* involvement as family, which includes the affectionate expression of *phileo*. In addition, this reduces the relational ontology of the whole of God and constrains God and God’s action to the quantitative aspects of *bios*, as opposed to the qualitative significance of *zoe*. This then shapes the kingdom differently from the qualitative relational “kingdom of God that has come to you”; furthermore, in this same discourse Jesus made clear his position against reductionism, indicating that the kingdom and family were equivalent (Lk 11:17-26).

What Jesus embodied cannot be limited to *bios*. The life Jesus embodied in whole, and in which he constituted his followers, only has significance in *zoe*—that is, the qualitative relational life of the whole of God, the *zoe* of the Trinity, of whom having whole knowledge and understanding ‘already’ composes eternal life (given Jesus’ prayer,

Jn 17:3,26). The whole of Jesus is the qualitative relational nature of those together born by the Spirit as the new creation. The whole of Jesus' action in the trinitarian relational context of family by the trinitarian relational process of family love is the qualitative relational shape and significance of the new creation. Jesus functioned only for relationship together as his family and ongoingly constituted his followers as God's family, even while on the cross (as discussed in chap. 11). His kingdom cannot be distinguished from his family without fragmenting the whole of God's whole. This signifies "the kingdom of God that has come" not merely as kingly rule but, more importantly, as the function of new relationship together as family. This new relational function is relationship-specific to the whole of relationships Jesus constitutes his followers both in and for: his family, his family in the present as the church, thus the church as God's family in which the whole of God ongoingly dwells in family love (Jn 14:23; 17:26; Eph 2:19-22).

Therefore, it is a false distinction to say that the kingdom of God is God's kingly rule and the church is the fellowship of those who have experienced God's rule, and to maintain the church is not the kingdom.<sup>4</sup> There is no basis to separate them other than the shaping from reductionism, which involves the human shaping of relationships. The kingdom of God is quite humbly this family of "little children" vulnerably enacted to us in love by the whole of Jesus, through whom we become God's very own family in new covenant relationship together—however incomplete in the present, nevertheless in the relational progression with the Son by the Spirit to the Father for the complete whole of God's whole in ultimate communion together. This is the new creation, which in whole ontology and function is the church as family today and the presence of God's kingdom in the world—however imperfect, yet in the reciprocal relational process with the whole of God for redemptive change to perfection.

Understandably, a purpose to separate out the kingdom from the church is to not associate it with imperfection. While this may have human purpose, it has no basis for significance to the whole and holy God. The original creation was made whole in the image and likeness of the relational ontology of the Trinity, yet created with human will and thus the volition "to be apart" from the whole of relationships together—consequently, the human condition. God's relational grace responded to restore the whole of relationship together. In the new creation, human volition remains necessary by the reciprocal nature of relationships together as family by family love, which cannot be decreed, legislated, or otherwise imposed, as can be assumed for kingly rule. Thus, the choice to be whole or "to be apart" is present and will ongoingly remain in tension with reductionism, notably susceptible to its ontological simulations and epistemological illusions in the life and practice of the church.

At the same time, the new creation has been redeemed to relationally belong to the whole of God's family, therefore never to be orphaned but in ongoing reciprocal intimate relational involvement without the veil with the Spirit, who will complete the relational process to the perfection of the whole as family in new relationship together with the whole and holy God. In other words, even in the present ontology and function the new creation goes qualitatively well beyond original creation, human volition notwithstanding; and God's relational grace in the vulnerable involvement of reciprocal relationship indeed is sufficient basis to ongoingly meet its relational needs. It is this

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<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of this notion, see George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 103-117.

qualitative relational shape and significance of the new creation (and the kingdom of God) which will always meet the need in the human condition for wholeness, and thereby will emerge as the light in whatever situation and circumstance “to be apart” it may find itself or may encounter in the world. This is the relational outcome ‘already’ that Jesus illuminates and distinguishes in his defining prayer for his whole family, in likeness of the Trinity (Jn 17).

This challenges our theological and functional assumptions. The theological implication of the above discussion is that our knowledge and understanding of the kingdom of God must by nature cohere with the whole of Jesus and his salvific action in the trinitarian relational context of family by the trinitarian relational process of family love in order for our knowledge and understanding to be whole. The functional implication is that without this coherence, we lack the experiential truth of the kingdom of God on which to base in relational terms (not referential) our integral belonging to God’s whole in the innermost (not merely as a belief), or even the eschatological hope of belonging. This lack tends to leave Christians in the emotional condition (often unknowingly) of, and renders their relational condition to, relational orphans, of which many Christians experience the relational distance, especially as members of churches.

## **The Emergence and Formation of Church**

As we transition from the kingdom to the church, it may appear premature to identify the church in the Gospels and establish ecclesiology in the narrative life of Jesus. Yet, the church in wholeness is rooted in and emerges from only complete Christology. An incomplete Christology is the basis for ecclesiologies shaping the church other than the whole of God’s whole.

When Jesus revealed “I will build my church,” the Greek term he used for church was *ekklesia* (Mt 16:18). The term meant the assembly or gathering of those who were called out (*ekkletoi*). *Ekklesia* also has roots in the OT; it is the term that the Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT) uses for Israel as the covenant community (*qahal*, Dt 9:10)—suggesting Matthew’s Jewish emphasis as the apparent reason why only this Gospel records Jesus’ statement about the church. This embeds the Christian church in the context of God’s dealings with his chosen people and their covenantal relationship (Ex 19:5, Dt 7:6, Heb 8:10, 1 Pet 2:9-10). The NT extends this salvation history as the Father pursues a people for himself in his eschatological plan (Lk 1:17). This was Jesus’ salvific relational action in complete Christology and full soteriology to build his church.

The term *ekklesia* itself appears to have only limited descriptive value for what his church is (its ontology) and does (its function). As far as function is concerned, *ekklesia* is a static term which is not useful to define the church (notably the local church). We need a more dynamic understanding for the church’s ontology and function than merely a gathering. The functional significance of his church emerges when we focus on the process Jesus implied in his statement above, and that he embodied in his life and practice—and made further evident in post-ascension discourse with various churches (discussed later in this chap.).

In Jesus' disclosure "I will build my church," the term for build is *oikodomeo*. This term denotes building a house, derived from its root *oikos* meaning house, home, family, that is, a family living in a house. These terms were conjoined later with their significant cognates illuminated by Paul: *oikeios*, belonging to a certain family (Eph 2:19); *oikodome*, building (Eph 2:21); *oikonomos*, a person who manages a family (1 Cor 4:1). The function of these relational terms points to the relational process of the new creation family of God and building his family together. This provides us with the vital relational context of his church and the dynamic relational process for the function of his church, both of which Jesus vulnerably embodied progressively in his trinitarian context of family by his trinitarian relational process of family love. On this basis, the church as God's family was distinguished by Jesus even before the cross, and was fully constituted by his salvific work during the week of equalization to the cross—the relational work that the Spirit came soon afterward to mature for completion, and that Paul, not Peter, would later distinguish for the church's whole ontology and function. Therefore, ecclesiology is necessarily integrated within a complete Christology to establish the experiential reality of a full soteriology. Any ecclesiology that is not functionally integrated within complete Christology is insufficient and lacks wholeness. This points ahead to Paul's irreplaceable *pleroma* theology for the church to be whole.

It may be argued that church today bears little resemblance to the church which emerged in the first century. The validity or invalidity of this discussion also depends on our perceptions and understanding of the church being built in Jesus' disclosure.

When Jesus cleansed the temple, this was for "my house" (*oikos*) to be a context for communion (notably communication through prayer) together with God "for all peoples" (Mk 11:17). When the curtain was torn to reconstitute the temple, this removed the relational veil between God and his people for a new context and process of relationship together. This context of God's intimate dwelling shifted to the new relational context for God's people to have communion directly in relationship together Face to face without the veil. Relationship together in this new context, however, was only on God's qualitative relational terms—irreducible to human shaping and nonnegotiable to human terms—just as Jesus initially disclosed to the Samaritan woman at the well about God's strategic shift. God's terms ("Listen to my Son") involved following Jesus in relational progression to his Father to belong to his new family, which he redefined as functionally distinguished from his biological family (Mt 12:49-50). It was in his trinitarian relational context of family by his trinitarian relational process of family love that Jesus composed his followers in transformed relationship together as family in the new relational order with no veil. Just as he relationally established Mary and John with each other, becoming family together while he was on the cross, it was this gathering (*ekklesia*) of his followers being "built" together in relationship who formed his church.

The church, which emerged *with* Jesus, is the direct relational outcome of the relational dynamic involved in establishing the new relational order for the human relational condition; they are inseparable. The formation of his church is vitally integrated with Jesus' vulnerable relational work to equalize persons from ontological and identity deficit and intimately involve those persons in the relationship together necessary for the new relational order of wholeness—signified by the new wine communion. If church formation is separated from this relational process, then church is

no longer about his family and becomes subject to human shaping of relationship together. His church as family is a function only of whole relationship together. Yet this relationship has significance only as a function of transformed relationships—that is, redeemed and reconciled relationships together with the veil removed, which Paul illuminated and distinguished for the church. By its nature, these are the relationships together necessary to be whole in likeness of the Trinity, just as Jesus prayed to the Father. Therefore, church formation must (*dei*, not *opheilo*) involve equalizing persons, whose hearts then open to each other and come together in the relationships as family in the new relational order—coming together to be and live whole among themselves, and in integral function to live and make whole in the world.

This is what we need to perceive and understand about his church, and thereby how we need to function to be his church in likeness. Anything less in church formation is insufficient to be whole, the whole of God's whole on God's terms, and becomes merely a substitute from reductionism shaping a different ontology and function of the church. As will be discussed shortly, the influence of reductionism is addressed in Jesus' post-ascension discourse to help us further perceive and more deeply understand the purpose and function of his church and for ecclesiology to be whole. The transition of the kingdom distinguished integrally in the church's ontology and function was decisively illuminated, made definitive and qualitatively and relationally distinguished by Paul with his embodying the theology and hermeneutic of the whole gospel in the ecclesiology of the whole of God's whole.

Before we move into Paul's ecclesiology, it will be helpful to further understand the transition that Paul himself underwent in his life and thought. This understanding emerges in response to the following question.

### **As a Jew and a Christian, what was Paul's understanding of God's people?**

Paul's understanding is directly tied to his theological cognition of who, what and how God is, and his theological assumptions of human ontology and function.

On the one hand, God's people—whether Jews or Christians—were the same for Paul, though, on the other, there was a qualitative and functional difference that needed to be understood and made whole. A Jew was not unclear about the identity of 'who God is'. Most Jews in ancient Israel, however, typically had difficulty with the ontology of 'what God is' and often had problems with the nature of 'how God is'. These ontological and functional issues certainly influenced and shaped, if not constructed, knowledge and understanding not only of God but also of God's people. Whether God's people were the same for Paul or had a difference depended on his theological cognition of God's ontology and function and his directly related theological anthropology, both contingent on where Paul was in his unfolding journey.

Prior to the Damascus road Paul claimed his identity with God's people through membership in Israel as a nation-state. As a nation-state in Paul's day, Israel was dominated by the Roman state and threatened by the Way in its identity as God's people. Jewish identity was based on the identity of their God, rooted in the monotheism of the Shema. The identity of 'who God is' may have been compromised in Israel's history but never redefined. Only the one God prevailed and would save them from their plight. The

issue, however, was not the identity of who the Deliverer is but the insufficiency of both the ontology of the one God and the nature of this God as well as the full significance of God's salvation. Their God, for example, was also the holy God, yet the full significance of God being uncommon was not understood in depth (cf. Eze 22:26). This lack equally signified and constituted a reduced ontology and function from outer in by human terms and shaping, which redefined the qualitative being and renegotiated the relational nature of God and of the ontology and function of God's people in likeness (cf. Moses' lens, Ex 33:15-16). In the process, Israel's identity as God's people shifted to nation-state in a truncated soteriology and away from the covenant people of God being saved to whole relationship together as God's family. Paul had to account for this as a Jew and be ongoingly accountable as a Christian.

Paul received the needed epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction to understand the inner-out significance of God's people (Rom 2:28-29). This further and deeper significance was based on the experiential truth of his whole knowledge and understanding (*synesis*) of the whole of who, what and how God is, that is, Paul's *pleroma* theology as relationally revealed to him face to face in the embodied face of Christ (2 Cor 4:6). His integral understanding of the whole of God and God's relational whole involved his own ontology and function made whole. Having been restored to God's relational context and reconciled in God's relational process, as a Jew now from inner out, Paul turned from identity in a nation-state back to the covenant relationship of God's people; and as a Christian, he experienced the full significance of the relational belonging and ontological identity of God's people (cf. 2 Cor 6:16; Ti 2:14).

Turning away from nation-state, Paul's discourse partially turned to "the kingdom of God" (e.g. Acts 19:8; 20:25; 28:23,31). This focus for some of God's people, however, did not clearly distinguish "the kingdom of God" from nation-state as long as it was still perceived with a quantitative lens from outer in. Paul's discourse about the kingdom was an extension of Jesus' kingdom discourse, who made definitive its qualitative ontology from inner out (Lk 17:20-21) and relational function (Lk 11:20; 18:16-17). Paul extended this qualitative ontology and relational function of the kingdom as God's people (cf. Rom 14:17; 1 Cor 4:20), and he also further distinguished the kingdom and deepened the understanding of God's people in his *pleroma* theology (Col 1:12-13; Eph 1:4-14, 22-23).

In the whole of Paul's theology, and in the relational progression with Christ (the *pleroma* of God) and the Spirit (Christ's relational replacement), God's people became the relational outcome 'already' that emerged in the church (the *pleroma* of Christ). Yet, for Paul the *pleroma* of Christ (Eph 1:23) is not the institution of the church but the embodying of the church in the qualitative ontology from inner out and the relational function of *agape* involvement in the whole relationship together of God's new creation family—integrally in the image of the one God's qualitative ontology (the ontological One) and in the likeness of the whole of God's relational function (the relational Whole). Nothing less and no substitutes of who, what and how God is and God's people are could signify and can constitute their whole ontology and function. More important than as a Jew and a Christian, Paul's experiential truth as the adopted son in the whole and holy God's family was 'who he is' and 'whose he is', in whole relationship together, both intimate and equalized, with his sisters and brothers.

## Paul's Ecclesiology of the Whole

The church, that is, the *pleroma* of Christ, is God's relational context for the convergence of the theological dynamics in Paul's theological forest (Eph 1:22-23), and embodies God's relational context and process for relationally extending these theological-functional dynamics to wholeness (Eph 2:22; 4:12-13). *Pleroma* (fullness, completion) is the wholeness that reflects the development not only in Paul's thought and theology (e.g. Col 1:19) but also in the whole of Paul's person (e.g. Col 2:10; 3:15; Eph 3:19; cf. Phil 2:1-2; 3:12, 15-16). The experiential truth of Paul's development—the whole of Jesus *into* the relational Paul to compose the theological Paul—is questioned or obscured by disputes over the authorship of some of these letters, notably Ephesians.

### Pauline Development

Ephesians emerges in the Pauline corpus without the usual context—no personal greetings and situations noted, with the Ephesian title added later—to understand Paul's purpose, or that he even wrote this text. Yet I conclude for Paul's authorship despite any style and language differences from his undisputed letters, and that Ephesians closely followed his Colossian and Philemon letters. My conclusion of the insufficiency of these disputed details to deny Paul's authorship is based on the depth of its content, which emerges to be an even further development of Paul's thought and theology than Colossians presents. That is, this development is his integrated content based on Paul's claim to have received further revelation (Eph 3:3-4), while in ongoing relationship with Jesus Christ (Gal 1:11-12; Acts 26:16) and in reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit (1 Cor 2:10, 12-13). Paul's depth of development reflected in Ephesians is, to be specific, about his theological forest, which integrated his previous theological dynamics (notably in Romans); and then he extended these dynamics in the ecclesiology necessary for the relational function of the embodied *pleroma* of Christ, the church reconciled in wholeness 'already' by the *pleroma* of God, just as Paul introduced earlier and was developing about God's new creation family (2 Cor 5:17-19; Gal 3:26-28; 6:15-16; Col 1:19-22; 3:10-11,15). It is highly unlikely that any author other than Paul could have formulated this theological integration, and the existence of a Pauline school has not been established to attribute this to one of his students. This is the outcome of Paul's *synesis* (whole knowledge and understanding) of the church that was developing from its earlier beginning in 1 Corinthians (e.g. 10:17-18, 12:13, 27). Paul's readers also need to *syniemi* further than the historical Paul in human contextualization to account for the whole of Paul's person (in the relational Paul) and the whole in his theology (with the theological Paul).

Paul's summary of his theological forest (Eph 1:3-14; cf. Col 1:15-22) illuminates his *synesis* of God's thematic relational action in response to the human condition—the condition that, as noted earlier, neuroscience defines also as the inherent human relational need and problem. Paul's *synesis* is the whole understanding of God's response that becomes the integrating process, framework and theme for the various theological trees (the complex dynamics) in his previous letters (particularly in Romans) that makes

definitive their theological forest. It is within Paul's theological forest that the ecclesiology necessary to be whole, God's relational whole only on God's terms, is relationally embodied and wholly emerges in Ephesians. Without his ecclesiology in wholeness, Paul's *oikonomia* (family relational responsibility) to *pleroo* (complete, make whole) the relational word of God would not have been fulfilled (Col 1:25).

## The Roots of *Ekklesia*

In Ephesians, Paul makes definitive the ecclesiology that by the nature of its roots emerged from antecedents prior to Paul's letters and even predating his studies in Judaism. These antecedents were necessarily integrated into his ecclesiology. Building on our discussion of Jesus above, the first of these antecedents was rooted in OT Israel as the gathering of God's people (*qahal*, Dt 9:10). The Septuagint (the OT Gk translation familiar to Paul, a Roman-citizen Jew) uses *ekklesia* for Israel as the covenant community. This embeds the NT *ekklesia* ("church," e.g. Eph 1:22; Col 1:18) in the context of God's ongoing relational action with his chosen people and their covenant relationship together (Ex 19:5; Dt 7:6-8; Eze 11:19-20). Beyond being a mere historical root and religious heritage, this antecedent is important for understanding the whole of God's thematic relational involvement and the theological dynamics in Paul's theological forest enacted only for whole relationship together as God's family (Eph 1:4-5,14).

The term *ekklesia* itself, though used by Paul in his letters, has only limited descriptive value for the ontology and function of the church. Since *ekklesia* is a static term, it is neither sufficiently significant nor necessarily useful to define the church in whole. The more dynamic understanding for the church's ontology and function than merely a gathering (even as *ekkletoi*) necessarily came from the second antecedent integrated into Paul's ecclesiology: the whole of Jesus, the complete Christology spawning Paul's whole ecclesiology.

The theological and functional significance of Jesus' church emerged when the focus was given to the process Jesus implied in his statement to build his church, which directly involves what he relationally embodied face to face in his life and practice, and which he made further evident in his post-ascension involvement with various churches (Rev 2-3). From Paul's direct relational involvement with Jesus, he understood the experiential truth that Jesus' relational involvement and relational work went further and deeper than a gathering, regardless of a gathering's doctrinal and moral purity, its extensive church activity and its esteemed reputation (as demonstrated by churches in Ephesus and Sardis, Rev 2:2-4; 3:1-2). The relational language used by Jesus with the relational word *oikodomeo* certainly involved a family living in a house, not merely a gathering under the same roof.

Paul later integrated Jesus' relational word and its roots with their significant cognates for the church's ontology and function, with *oikos* as the basis for the church as God's household (1 Tim 3:15): *oikeios*, belonging specifically to God's family (Eph 2:19); *oikodomeo*, building God's family (Eph 2:21; 4:12); *synoikodomeo*, being built together as God's family (*syn* and *oikodomeo*, Eph 2:22); *oikonomos*, led by persons who manage God's family (1 Cor 4:1); and *oikonomia*, for which Paul was given the specific relational responsibility to administrate the relational outcome 'already' of God's family



(Eph 3:2; Col 1:25), that which is in relational progression on an eschatological trajectory to its relational conclusion ‘not yet’ (Eph 1:10).

The relational function of these terms (relational not referential) points to the definitive relational process of the new kinship family of God that Jesus constituted in the incarnation. That is to say, the specific relational connections Jesus made throughout the incarnation to build his family together spawned the embryonic church from which the whole ontology and function of the church emerged. Jesus provided Paul, partly through the Jesus tradition and mostly by direct relationship together along with the Spirit, with the necessary relational context for the relational embodying of his church and the imperative relational process for the relational function of his church. This is the irreducible relational context and nonnegotiable relational process that the whole of Jesus vulnerably embodied progressively in the whole of God’s relational context of family by his whole relational process of family love. Thus, the church as God’s family was made definitive by Jesus even before the cross, and was fully constituted by his salvific relational work; and this relational outcome is what the Spirit, as his relational replacement, will bring to its relational conclusion—and Paul, not Peter, would engage the *oikonomia* to provide the ecclesiology necessary for the whole of God’s family.

Therefore, Paul’s ecclesiology is rooted in what germinated with the whole of Jesus’ person and relational involvement, who relationally embodied the *pleroma* of God in *pleroma* Christology for *pleroma* soteriology. This *pleroma* theological-functional dynamic was first Paul’s experiential truth and then was the key antecedent into which Paul’s ecclesiology is integrated for the church to be the *pleroma* of Christ. Any ecclesiology not rooted and integrated in *pleroma* Christology is insufficient to make functional the relational outcome of *pleroma* soteriology (what Christ saves *to*), and fundamentally lacks wholeness. Such an ecclesiology is shaped by human terms rooted in human contextualization, which at best is only a gathering—an ontological simulation and epistemological illusion of the *ekklesia* Jesus builds. While a mere gathering may have some functional significance for those gathered, it does not have relational significance to the *pleroma* of God and to the inherent human need of those gathered (cf. Jn 14:9; Mt 15:8-9)—thereby reinforcing and sustaining the human relational condition rather than making it whole.

## **Paul’s *Pleroma* Ecclesiology**

The doctrine of the church and church function is either whole or some reduction. This doctrine either defines the extent of what emerges in church life and practice, or limits it. Christ’s *ekklesia* rises up with him to emerge above and beyond a gathering in all of its shapes. The whole ecclesiology that emerges for Paul is not a mere doctrinal truth of this new *ekklesia* but the experiential truth entirely of whole relationship together in God’s whole family on God’s qualitative relational terms. What unfolds in Paul’s ecclesiology?

In going beyond a doctrinal statement, Paul’s ecclesiology does not become a metaphor, an organizational structure or programmatic system for church life and function. Rather, his ecclesiology is the theological-functional dynamic signifying the

embodying of the whole ontology and function of the church in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God. On this relational basis and ongoing relational base, whole ecclesiology signifies the embodying of God's new creation family in the functional significance of its relational outcome 'already' in ongoing relational progression with the Spirit to its relational conclusion 'not yet'. This ecclesiology emerges only from the embodied *pleroma* of God, who constitutes the embodying of the *pleroma* of Christ with the Spirit. For Paul, ecclesiology is rooted in this whole and is the theological dynamic of wholeness, nothing less and no substitutes. Paul's ecclesiology then is always synonymous with *pleroma* ecclesiology. Therefore, the ecclesiology of this new creation is irreducible in the church's ontology, and its shared new covenant is nonnegotiable in the church's function. Anything less and any substitutes in the church are a renegotiated ecclesiology shaped by human terms from human contextualization.

The experiential truth of being whole and its experiential reality of function in whole relationship together are both the theological purpose and functional concern of Paul's ecclesiology. When he made the relational imperative in his Colossians letter to "let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body" (Col 3:15), his concern for the church was to be whole and to function in the wholeness of relationship together. For this purpose of church ontology and function, he wanted this letter to be read also in the church at Laodicea (Col 4:16). One person in particular whom Paul most likely targeted for this relational imperative of wholeness was Philemon, though whether he resided in Colosse or Laodicea is uncertain. Philemon was the slave-owner of Onesimus (4:9), who ran away from Philemon and with whom Paul shared family love and who now belonged to Christ as a son in God's family (4:9; Phlm 16). We will discuss the specific implications of their relationship in the next chapter, but for now it is important to identify his personal letter to Philemon as a key letter for the relational function of the church to be whole in its relationships together as God's new creation family. The Philemon letter is a specific relational context in which wholeness in ecclesiology is made functional.

Though written before Ephesians and closely aligned with Colossians, Philemon reflects what was already developing in Paul's thought for ecclesiology to be whole. Following the course of Colossians' theological dialogue (discourse in relational context) on God's new creation family (Col 3:10-11) and relational imperative of wholeness (3:15), Philemon emerges prior to Ephesians to become a functional bridge to Paul's thought and theology in Ephesians. In this letter vital to the Pauline corpus—both of whose understanding are diminished without their integrated development—Paul clearly illuminates the theological basis specifically for church-leader Philemon's relational function and generally for the whole ontology and function of the church in the ecclesiology of the whole, Paul's *pleroma* ecclesiology.

## **Its Functional Basis**

In spite of its basic need in those who belong to Christ, the experiential truth of a whole ecclesiology is often reduced to, not distinguished from, or even indeed, never realized as other than a doctrinal or propositional truth. While the objective truth is necessary, doctrinal and propositional truths are not sufficient in themselves to constitute

whole ecclesiology. Paul's ecclesiology is not compatible with such theological reductionism, nor is this reductionism an option capable of replacing experiential truth. This reductionism predictably happens apart from the Spirit, as Paul has functionally identified throughout his previous letters (1 Thes 5:19; 1 Cor 12:13; 2 Cor 3:17-18; Gal 5:16,25; Rom 8:9,14,16; Phil 2:1). Conjointly in his dialogue with churches about the church, Paul challenges the assumptions of ecclesiology and its related theological anthropology held by his readers (both past and present).

The functional basis for Paul's ecclesiology is clearly identified as the Spirit's presence and involvement. In Ephesians, Paul integrates and relationally extends the Spirit's relational work. By reciprocal involvement with the Spirit, the Spirit baptizes and raises up those who share in (*koinonia*) Christ's body and blood for the redemptive change necessary to embody the new creation. The new creation is not a theological concept with only theoretical significance; rather, this new creation is the experiential truth of the relational outcome that emerges only from relational participation in Christ's death and resurrection together with the Spirit for the death of reduced human ontology and function and the raising of whole ontology and function (Eph 2:1-10; 4:24; Rom 8:6,11). This participation relationally extends to the Father to involve the whole of God in whole relationship together in order, theologically and functionally together, to embody God's new creation family (2:18-22). The theological dynamics in Paul's theological forest (1:3-14), which are involved in this process of redemptive reconciliation, by necessity transform human persons from being defined and determined by reductionism to be defined and determined by whole ontology and function created in the image and likeness of God—that is, that to which the Spirit raises those in Christ (2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10). This new creation of wholeness involves conjointly and inseparably the whole person and whole persons together to embody the whole ontology and function of God's new creation family—all of whom and which are constituted together by the relational involvement of the Spirit. The collective ontology and function of God's family define and determine its relationships together on the basis of this wholeness. These new and whole relationships together signify the transformed relationships between transformed persons which are necessary to be God's whole family, the *pleroma* of Christ, therefore which are also irreducible for church ontology and nonnegotiable for church function.

The reciprocal relational involvement by and with the Spirit is indispensable to this transformation process to wholeness and whole relationship together, and the person of the Spirit is inseparable from the embodying of the whole ontology and function of God's new creation family. On this determining basis, Paul prays decisively for and makes relationally imperative the church's deeper relational involvement both with the Spirit and with each other together (Eph 1:17-20; 3:16-21; 4:3-6; 5:18b-21). He also identified unmistakably the relational consequence for the Spirit when the church's relationships together function in reductionism (the context of 4:30). In addition, Paul implies that the relational consequence for church ontology and function is to be reduced to persons as *epistemic orphans* without whole knowledge and understanding of who they are and whose they are (contrary to Paul's prayers and Jesus' promise, Jn 15:26; 16:13-15); and thus the deeper relational consequence for the church is to be reduced to a gathering of what are *relational orphans* from inner out despite bearing the family titles from outer in (contrary to Jesus' claim, Jn 14:18). That is, in function such a gathering

has no relational significance both to the whole of God (in Jesus by the Spirit with the Father) and to those gathered, leaving them essentially as orphans (cf. Jn 14:1,27; 16:33).

Jesus' assurance to "not leave you orphaned" is contingent on the reciprocal relational involvement of the Spirit. The Spirit's relational presence and work is certainly assumed by Jesus as his relational replacement and is further illuminated by Paul. The wholeness of relationship together as family promised by Jesus (Jn 14:18-20,23,27) and constituted by the Spirit (1 Cor 12:13; Rom 8:6) is the whole relationships together basic to Paul's ecclesiology and the wholeness he builds by making it the relational imperative for the church (Col 3:15; Gal 5:16,25; 6:16). Yet, as Jesus does, Paul also illuminates the reciprocal relational nature of the Spirit's involvement, which includes exposing the lack or absence of the church's reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit. In Paul's ecclesiology, the relational consequence of function apart from the Spirit is to be rendered orphans, both relationally and epistemologically (cf. Rom 8:12-16).. 'Relational orphan' is a functional condition lacking the experiential truth and reality of relationally belonging to God's family, even while claiming its propositional truth or professing its doctrinal truth. 'Epistemic orphan' is a condition of cognitive and existential homelessness, signifying distance, detachment or separation in God's family, which leaves God's children in ambiguity, confusion or even deeper conflict about who they are and whose they are. Apart from relational involvement with the Spirit, how church members address this inner longing for relational connection or handle the fragmentation of their beliefs/faith directly involves reductionism and substitutes of ontological simulation and epistemological illusion signifying renegotiated ecclesiology. Further discussion of this reductionist dynamic will be helpful for fully understanding the whole in Paul's ecclesiology.

There is a counter-dynamic at work—"beyond what is written"—underlying the condition of epistemic orphans that interacts with the condition of relational orphans in church contexts where distance, detachment or separation exists in their relationships together. This counter-dynamic overlaps in function with those living apart from God's created design and purpose for life in whole relationships together (cf. Gen 2:18), that is, the relational consequence that emerged in the primordial garden that involved both relational and epistemic issues (Gen 3:1-13). The loss of whole relationship together became the prevailing condition for human ontology and function, thereby embedding and enslaving human life in the reality of relationships needing to be whole—the inherent human relational need and problem underlying the human shaping of relationships. Whether it is the general loss of whole relationship together in humanity's family or the lack of whole relationship together in the church as God's family, the consequential condition of relational orphans interacts with the condition of epistemic orphans to create the basis for either human shaping, construction and even reification of alternatives for the inherent human need, which includes alternative forms of church life and practice. Or this interaction creates the basis for acknowledging the inadequacy of human effort and turning to the constituting source of whole relationship together. This response-dynamic is critical for the basis of Paul's ecclesiology, while the counter-dynamic becomes the basis for renegotiated ecclesiology. **How does this response-dynamic work to determine ecclesiology?**

It will be helpful to use the church at Corinth as a working example, since Paul's readers are given an overview of this dynamic in 1 Corinthians. Paul addressed this gathering of fragmented relationships with the epistemological clarification (e.g. 1 Cor 8:1-3) and with the hermeneutic correction of wholeness and the whole relationships together to be God's whole family (e.g. 3:21-22; 10:17; 12:13)—similar to the clarification and correction he experienced from *tamiym*. His focus for their clarification and correction was centered on their learning from his personal example the meaning of "Nothing beyond what is written" (4:6). Assuming Paul is referring to more than his earlier quotes from Isaiah, Jeremiah, Job and the Psalms (1:19,31; 2:9,16; 3:19-20), Paul focuses on the whole OT canon existing during his time. For Paul, however, what is written goes beyond texts and is deeper than mere words, that is, texts and words as the same narrow lens of the referentialization of the Word. The canon Paul focused on are the words of God and thus the relational words from God communicated to his people. God's communicative action is the response-dynamic in question that Paul raises, whose initiating relational involvement Paul further illuminated in the next verse with the rhetorical question "What do you have that you did not receive?" (4:7), and later reinforces with "did the word of God originate with you?" (14:36). Paul focuses his readers on this relational dynamic. He is not raising a propositional truth for their epistemological clarification, nor is he teaching them a doctrinal truth for their hermeneutic correction. Rather his purpose is to illuminate the experiential truth involved in this relational response-dynamic initiated by God's communicative action. That is, Paul's epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction made definitive that it is the experiential truth of what is written that is primary; and this experiential truth is not found in the text alone (i.e. merely as a text) and is not located in mere words, both of which are disconnected from their relational source by the counter-dynamic. Texts and words apart from their relational dynamic are reductionism that has relational consequences characteristic of reductionism's counter-relational work (cf. Jesus' critique, Jn 5:39-40).

Paul's clarification and correction illuminate that what is written are relational words only of God's communication, which by its nature involves a dynamic process of relational interaction: the reciprocal response-dynamic. The reciprocal nature of this relational interaction necessitates involvement in the relational epistemic process with the Spirit to know and understand what the author-God is communicating. An epistemic process with words/texts by themselves, even exegetic words about God, become disembodied, relationally separated from their author, and narrowed down to referential information about God. Consequently, any results at best can be no more than mere words known only as exegesis for propositional truth just *about* God, and simply texts understood only as a conventional biblical theology for doctrinal truth just *about* God, each without any relational significance *of* God and limited to reductionist functional significance only for reader-user. Such results or less signify the following consequence: when 'what is written' is reduced to words without relational significance of God and to reader, as Israel often experienced with Torah (cf. Paul's assessment, Rom 11:7-8; 2 Cor 3:15), the relational consequence is the condition of epistemic orphans, who knowingly or unknowingly are without whole knowledge and understanding of who they are and whose they are. This condition directly involves and affects human ontology and

function, and is consequential for determining their further reduction in relationships together.

Having this whole knowledge and understanding is nothing less than the experiential truth of what is written. This experiential truth is entirely the relational outcome of direct involvement in the relational epistemic process with God by the reciprocal involvement of the Spirit—which is in contrast to engaging a conventional epistemic process revolved around mere human effort, even at exegesis and integrating what is written in a biblical theology (as Paul contrasts, 1 Cor 2:13). Apart from this relational epistemic process with the Spirit, epistemic orphans also become relational orphans. The interaction of these two conditions creates the basis either for disillusionment and even despair, or for dissatisfaction and even desperation, which further creates the basis for human shaping of what is written (e.g. reader-response determination). Consequently, such persons go beyond those words having “lost” their relational significance, in order to find alternatives for relational significance to fulfill their inherent human relational need—whether they are aware of their relational condition or not. Moreover, this orphan-interaction creates the further basis for constructing substitutes whose ontological simulation and epistemological illusion often get reified as the source of fulfillment for the human need and resolution for the human problem. This reification, for example, has happened in mysticism and spirituality practices (cf. Paul’s polemic in 1 Cor 14:1-33).<sup>5</sup> Such human construction and reification are what Paul confronts in his rhetorical question “did the word of God originate with you?” (14:36).

The response-dynamic of God’s communicative act in what is written and the relational consequence of being apart from it are the issues which Paul raises to challenge the ontology and function of his readers. For Paul, however, the most significant consequence of reducing what is written and going beyond it is the emergence of a renegotiated ecclesiology. Epistemic-relational orphans renegotiate the ontology and function of the church as God’s family in the absence of the experiential truth of God’s communicative relational action and involvement (e.g. 1 Cor 11:17-21, 27-30), renegotiating ecclesiology in contrast and conflict with *pleroma* ecclesiology (10:17; 12:13).

It is also insufficient for Paul’s readers merely to acknowledge what is written as God’s communicative act. Paul assumes that affirmation involves the reciprocal relational response necessary for its experiential truth. Without the experiential truth of God’s communicative action, readers are still left functionally in the condition of orphans, epistemic and/or relational orphans. The only recourse is to turn to the source of the word for the experiential truth of its Subject. This critical process of experiential truth necessary to change from orphans to family starts with the reader’s interpretive lens (*phroneo*) and what is perceived of what is written in the word of God. The hermeneutic by which the reader engages the word/text is determinative of what emerges from this epistemic process. Just as Jesus critically distinguished the hermeneutic of “a child” from the hermeneutic of “the wise and learned” (Lk 10:21), the epistemic results are in contrast, if not in conflict.

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<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of the reification of worldviews, religion and ideology, see David K. Naugle, *Worldview: the History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 101-2, 178-80, 185-86, 236-38.

A limited epistemic process of human effort from a quantitative lens dependent on outer-in rationalized interpretation alone invariably separates the object of the text from its Subject's relational context and process. This reduces the ontology of the object-God by fragmenting the whole Object into its components (e.g. laws, promises, teachings, example, etc.) without whole knowledge and understanding of the object-God as communicator-Subject disclosing the whole of God for relationship together. The epistemic result is without the experiential truth of the object-subject God of what is written. This is the unequivocal relational consequence because engaging the Object of the text also as Subject is a function only of relationship.

In contrast, the hermeneutic of "a child" vulnerably engages in a relational epistemic process, not to be confused with subjectivism or fideism. This hermeneutic certainly does not eliminate reason but puts rational interpretation into congruence with its whole relational context and into compatibility with its whole relational process; thus it does not disembodify the relational words by the author that reveal object-God communicated from subject-God in relationship. For Paul, experiential truth must by its nature involve the relational epistemic process in which truth is from beyond the reader as "subject" and is definitively found in the object-God of the text (notably confirmed in quantitative history). The reader cannot define and determine the object of the text without reducing the ontology and function of object-God; and involvement in the relational epistemic process with the Spirit is the conclusive means to disclaim reification by the reader. Yet, this does not complete the relational epistemic process for experiential truth.

It is vital not only to distinguish object-God from subject-reader but equally important to distinguish the subject-God who relationally communicates with subject-reader for relational involvement together in Subject-to-subject, Face-to-face relationship. The reader as person cannot have relational connection with an object but only with the Subject whose reciprocal involvement can be experienced in relationship together. The relational epistemic process is complete with this reciprocal relational connection with the subject-object God through the Spirit, and the integral relational outcome is the experiential truth of the whole of God's ontology and function in relationship together as family. It is this experiential truth of the *pleroma of God* embodied for Face-to-face relationship together without the veil that is the basis, by the Spirit, to further embody the ontology and function of the *pleroma* of Christ and, with the Spirit, to ongoingly compose the whole ontology and function of the church. The experiential reality of nothing less and no substitutes for wholeness is the functional basis for Paul's *pleroma* ecclesiology. Anything less and any substitutes, even in correct exegesis as referential truth or rightly integrated for doctrinal truth, are a renegotiated ecclesiology signifying a reduced ontology and function of a gathering of epistemic and/or relational orphans.

## **Its Ontology and Function of the Church**

Paul previously identified the church as the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27; Col 1:24), yet his later discourse in Ephesians on the church helps to distinguish this as nothing other than a metaphor for an organic structure and system. In Ephesians, however, Paul's *synesis* (e.g. 3:4) provides the theological-functional clarity to

distinguish the body of Christ beyond a metaphor of the church and makes functional the embodying of the church's ontology as the *pleroma* of Christ (1:23; 4:12-13; cf. his prayer, 3:16-19). Christ's wholeness is the peace (cf. *tamiym*) which Paul's epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction have illuminated to the churches throughout his letters (e.g. 1 Cor 7:15b; 14:33; Gal 6:16; Rom 14:19; Col 3:15). In contrast to a Greek emphasis on peace, this is not about the mere absence of conflict for Paul, despite the situations he was addressing in the churches. This peace is the presence of wholeness, even in situations of conflict, that only Jesus gives (Jn 14:27). Moreover, this is the wholeness that those "in me" will have, Jesus declared (Jn 16:33); that is, the relational outcome "in Christ" Paul illuminated by the *koinonia* with Christ's body and blood (1 Cor 10:16-17) and baptism in Christ's death and resurrection through the Spirit (Rom 6:4; 8:11; 1 Cor 12:13)—the wholeness which Paul theologically and functionally clarifies in Ephesians (2:14-17; 4:3-6), and that embodies Jesus' new wine fellowship *into* the church.

In full congruence, then, the whole ontology and function of the *pleroma* of God that Jesus embodied in death and the Spirit raised whole in the resurrection is also participated in by those in Christ through the Spirit. The relational outcome of this communion together also embodies them in the whole ontology and function as the *pleroma* of Christ, in the image and likeness of the whole of God (Eph 4:24; cf. 2 Cor 3:18; Rom 8:29). From the convergence of these complex theological dynamics in Paul's theological forest emerges this reciprocating relational dynamic of embodiment by the Spirit, in which the embodied *pleroma* of God is relationally extended in likeness not by a metaphor but by the integrally distinguished embodying of the *pleroma* of Christ, that is, the embodied wholeness of the ontology and function of the church (1:9-10, 22-23).

**What theological-functional clarity does Paul make definitive for the whole ontology and function of the church?** First of all, that the body of Christ clearly is not a metaphor, a doctrine, a truth-claim or a confession of faith. This is the embodying of the wholeness of the church's ontology and function in likeness of the embodied whole ontology and function in the face of Christ, distinguished in whole relationship together. Thus, embodiment is not theoretical, an ideal or an intention. The embodied church of Christ is the experiential truth of this relational outcome 'already' and its ongoing experiential reality in relational progression to 'not yet', both in reciprocal relationship with the Spirit. Therefore, the church is fully accountable to be whole in its ontology and function now for the primacy of whole relationship together. By its nature in the present, neither epistemic orphans without whole knowledge and understanding of who they are and whose they are, nor relational orphans with distance, detachment or separation in their relationships together can account for the embodying of the *pleroma* of Christ in its primacy of unreduced relationship. For Paul, anything less and any substitutes of whole ontology and function cannot embody *pleroma* ecclesiology, but only constitute a renegotiated ecclesiology of reduced ontology and function. Embodying in likeness of the embodied *pleroma* of God in relationship together is the initial function that Paul makes definitive for the church. This function is not optional for a church's life and practice, nor is it reducible or negotiable. Embodiment in Paul's ecclesiology is the key for the emergence of the church.

What emerges in this embodiment that distinguishes it clearly from all other church life and practice? Embodiment should not be confused with a common



incarnational notion. Just as the incarnation of the *pleroma* of God is constituted in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes, so is embodiment. That is, embodiment is conjointly whole ontology irreducible to human shaping and construction and whole function nonnegotiable to human terms from human contextualization, including of culture and other contextual aspects. To embody the *pleroma* of Christ, by its very nature, is defined and determined by only the combined transformation of ‘who the church is’ to its ontology in the qualitative image of the holy God, and of ‘whose the church is’ to its function in the relational likeness of the whole and holy God. This transformed identity of ‘who and whose the church is’ is the new creation of God’s family, which emerges only by the reciprocal relational presence, involvement and work of the Spirit. Embodying of the church, therefore, is only the new creation; otherwise, its ontology and function cannot be in likeness to the embodied *pleroma* of God, as Paul clearly distinguished (4:23-24; cf. Rom 8:29). This ontology and function can be rendered at best as just an ontological simulation by relational orphans and an epistemological illusion by epistemic orphans; but relational-epistemic orphans in the church neither can constitute nor do they signify the whole ontology and function of the church in the primacy of whole relationship together of *pleroma* ecclesiology.

The transformation to the new creation that is necessary to embody the *pleroma* of Christ involves both individual persons and relationships. In Paul’s theological forest, the theological dynamics of this transformation process are made functional by the Spirit, and thus the transformation of persons and relationships is inseparable from the reciprocal relational involvement of the Spirit. For Paul, the Spirit is simply indispensable for the embodying of the church to emerge in whole ontology and function distinguishing the new creation.

Paul reviews first the transformation of persons to whole ontology and function (Eph 2:1-10). The sin of reductionism prevailed in reduced human ontology and function, to which God’s thematic relational action of grace responded in *agape* involvement for the redemptive change necessary from reduced to whole ontology and function. The process from reductionism to wholeness involves the theological-functional dynamic of equalization, integration and reconciliation, or what I simply call *redemptive reconciliation*.

The redemptive change from *old* to *new* involves freeing human persons from being defined and determined by reductionism. The sin of reductionism reduces human ontology and function to be defined and determined from the outer in, for example, by what persons do and/or have. This fragments human persons and enslaves human integrity, worth and identity to these reductionist criteria, to which are ascribed human distinctions not only fragmenting but stratifying human persons as ‘better or less’. Enslavement to reductionism is redeemed by God, and persons entrenched in better-or-less distinctions are equalized from inner out before God, which frees them from fragmentation to be integrated and made whole in ontology and function. Therefore, transformed persons are equalized persons who have been freed from reductionism. Yet, transformed persons are not just free persons who have been equalized before God but who also have been equalized as persons with each other. The above influence of reductionism on the human person also results in the human shaping of relationships together (cf. Gen 3:1,7-8), most notably fragmenting and stratifying relationships. Thus, the nature of their relationships together necessarily also undergoes redemptive change.

Transformed persons have not only been saved *from* reductionism but they are also irreducibly and nonnegotiablely saved *to* wholeness together. In other words, being equalized from better-or-less distinctions conjointly and inseparably integrates persons to whole ontology and function and then reconciles those transformed persons into equalized relationships in order to transform their relationships together to be whole also—just as Paul previously qualified for redeemed persons (Gal 5:1,13; 6:15-16; cf. 1 Cor 8:1).

Embodying of the *pleroma* of Christ is distinguished only in the process of transformation to the new creation in likeness of God, which necessitates transformed persons relationally involved in transformed relationship together for the church's whole ontology and function. The whole function aspect of this new creation, that Paul identified as the outcome of persons being equalized, is not merely the work of individual persons but also necessitates the collective function of persons together in relationship (Eph 2:10, cf. 1 Cor 12:12-13); this is the function that Paul qualifies as ontology and function in likeness of the whole and holy God (4:24).

As he develops ecclesiology to be whole, Paul illuminates the collective function of the church in order to be whole and distinguished from the common shaping of human contextualization (2:11-22). Transformed persons are equalized persons who are relationally involved in transformed relationships, which clearly necessitate equalized relationships (2:11-13, cf. Col 3:10-11). Paul makes equalized relationships together in the church the relational imperative for the whole function of the church to be compatible and congruent with the wholeness that Christ himself embodied only for the embodying of the church to be whole (*pleroma*) in equalized relationships together (2:14-17, cf. Col 3:15). In the transformation process to the new creation, the relational purpose primary in its theological dynamic of redemption and integration is reconciliation. Without equalized relationships in the church, relationships together are not transformed to whole relationships together with the veil removed between them, consequently they still labor in the fragmentation of persons and relationships defined by stratifying better-or-less distinctions (2:15-16)—distinctions which totally nullify God's relational response of grace in Paul's ecclesiology (2:8-9). God's relational grace that removed the veil demands the loss of human distinctions in order to be in relationship with God as well as the elimination of the influence from distinctions to be in whole relationship with each other. When the relational demands of grace are not responded to, human shaping remains the primary determinant for relationship together in the church.

Without the transformed relationships of equalized relationships, what the church is saved *from* has lost its relational meaning and the functional significance for what it is saved *to*; in addition, the gospel of whole relationship together that Paul made definitive has lost the qualitative relational significance of what the church is saved *to* (3:6). This is the gospel of wholeness/peace (6:15) basic to what Jesus embodied and constitutes for the embodying of the whole church (3:6). Therefore, equalized relationships together are neither optional for church function nor negotiable for its embodiment. The only alternative is reductionism, which fragments church ontology and function by its counter-relational work, notably and inevitably promoting better-or-less distinctions, even under the guise of spiritual gifts and leadership roles (as Paul will clarify, 4:11-16). Such relationships only sustain the human relational condition, not make it whole. This speaks to the depth of Paul's conjoint fight for the gospel and against its reductionism.

Just as embodying of the whole ontology and function of the *pleroma* of Christ should not be confused with a conventional notion of “incarnational,” the transformation of the church’s ontology and function should not be confused with an increasingly common usage of the notion “transformational.” Paul continues on to illuminate the transformed relationships embodying the church’s whole ontology and function, and, as he does, transformed relationships are taken deeper than equalized relationships (2:18-22). Though equalized relationships are necessary to constitute the transformed relationship for the church, they are not sufficient by themselves to complete the transformed relationships involved in the whole relationships together of God’s new creation family.

Transformed relationships are relationships both with God and with each other together as family. While transformed persons are equalized persons before God with the veil removed, they are not in equalized relationship with the whole and holy God. Nevertheless they have a unique relationship with God to participate in God’s life. This unique involvement more deeply signifies the transformed relationships necessary together with God and with each other to be whole as God’s new creation family and the *pleroma* of Christ. Paul initially defines this unique relational involvement as having “access in one Spirit to the Father” (2:18). The term for access (*prosagoge*) was used for an audience granted to someone lesser by high officials and monarchs; it comes from *prosago*, to bring near. This involved not merely an open door but the opportunity to interact with someone greater. Access for Paul goes deeper than this notion. He defines further the nature of this relational involvement with the Father as “access to God in boldness and confidence” (3:12). “Boldness” (*parresia*) involves to speak all that one thinks, feels, that is, with “confidence” (*pepoithesis*, trust). This trust to share one’s person openly with the Father—as Jesus engaged with the Father at Gethsemane and on the cross—points to more vulnerable intimate involvement, not merely having access to the Father. This is the intimate connection that Paul previously defined for those who have been equalized to be relationally involved with Abba as his very own daughters and sons, and the connection that makes functional their relational belonging and ontological identity (Gal 4:4-7; Rom 8:15). Access to the Father, therefore, involves this intimate relationship together in which the whole of God is relationally involved by family love in being family together (Eph 2:4,22); and this intimate reciprocal involvement is reinforced by Paul’s prayer for specifically knowing God in their hearts (1:17-18; 3:16-19)—the communion that holds them together in their innermost.

Just as important as equalized relationships for church ontology and function is this involvement in intimate relationships together with each other. *Together* is not a static condition but the dynamic function of relationship. The transformation of equalized relationships provides the equal opportunity without the distance or separation of stratified relations for whole relationship together to develop, but intimate relationship is the integral function that opens persons to each other from inner out for their hearts to fully come together as the new creation in likeness of the whole of God (4:24-25,32; 5:1-2, 18b-21). Intimate relationships integrally reconcile persons who have had the distance and separation in relationships removed by equalization. Moreover, intimate relationships go deeper than just occupying time, space and activities together, even as equal persons, and take involvement to the depth of *agape* relational involvement in likeness of the *pleroma* of God (3:19; 5:1-2; cf. Col 3:14). *Agape* is not about what to do in relation to

others but how to be relationally involved with others; and *agape* relational involvement goes beyond sacrifice for deeper intimate relationships together—just as Jesus vulnerably disclosed in relationship together with the Father and vulnerably embodied in relationship together with us (Jn 15:9; 17:23,26).

The experiential truth of the ontological identity of God's new creation family depends on the function of these intimate relationships together. There is no alternative or substitute for intimate relationships that can bring persons into whole relationship together to embody God's family in the experiential reality of their relational belonging. For Paul, being *together* is inseparable from relationship and is irreducible from the function of these relationships. This relationally belonging to each other in one body emerges only from the transformation to intimate relationships together. Relational belonging should not be confused with "belonging" to a church-group, nor should ontological identity be mistaken for church-organizational identity. Despite any cohesion of "belonging" and strength of identity in the latter, they are just simulations or illusions of the relational bond constituted only by transformed intimate relationships together (cf. 4:3).

Paul conjoins these intimate relationships together with the necessary equalized relationships in a dynamic interaction to complete the transformed relationships together to embody the whole ontology and function of the church. These conjoint-transformed relationships in wholeness embody "a holy temple...a dwelling place" for the whole of God's intimate relational involvement (2:19-22), which Jesus earlier disclosed (Jn 14:23). In Paul's *pleroma* ecclesiology, the whole ontology and function of the church can be constituted only by transformed persons *agape*-relationally involved in transformed relationships together; and transformed relationships are constituted only by the conjoint function of equalized and intimate relationships together. Therefore, church ontology and function is this new creation in likeness of the whole and holy God, nothing less and no substitutes. And the function of these transformed relationships together, both equalized and intimate, distinguish the church unequivocally as God's new creation family, and thereby those who relationally belong in this definitive ontological identity are clearly distinguished from any other church gathering of relational and epistemic orphans. Most importantly, this relational dynamic and outcome of wholeness emerges entirely by the ongoing reciprocal relational involvement of the Spirit (2:18,22; 4:3-4; cf. Ti 3:5), which is why the Spirit's person is grieved by reduced ontology and function in the church (the context of 4:30).

## **Its Functional Significance**

Embodying the whole ontology and function of the *pleroma* of Christ in transformed relationship together is a relational function only in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes. The wholeness of God defines and determines who the church is and whose the church is. Yet, having this relational clarity of wholeness together is one issue for the church, and living its functional significance in wholeness together is a further issue ongoing in church life and practice. That is, for the church to be whole is one matter, and for the church to live whole as well as make whole is another matter; even so, for Paul these functions are inseparably interrelated in God's new creation

family. This ongoing issue for the church further amplifies the tension and conflict between wholeness and reductionism, which Paul continues to address in his ecclesiology.

As the embodying of the church's whole ontology and function emerges, reductionism and its counter-relational work increasingly seek to exert more indirect and subtle influence to define and determine church life and practice with ontological simulations and epistemological illusions, which Paul illuminated previously to the church at Corinth (2 Cor 11:12-15). In the further theological-functional clarity Paul illuminates in his *pleroma* ecclesiology, the functional significance of the church is never assumed but is a relational imperative ongoing for church life and practice in wholeness together; and this includes assumptions of theological anthropology underlying the church. **What is this functional significance and how does its dynamic work for wholeness?**

When Paul defines the church as being reconciled in one body (Eph 2:16) and as equalized persons relationally belonging to God's family (*oikeios*, 2:19), this *oikodome* (church family not church building) is further defined as being "joined together" (2:21). Paul is providing further theological-functional clarity to his previous dialogue on the church (1 Cor 12:12-31; Rom 12:5). His earlier relational discourse appears to describe an organic or organizational structure of the church whose parts are interrelated and function in interdependence. Paul deepens the understanding of interrelated parts in interdependence by further defining the relational dynamic involved to make this function in wholeness together (4:16).

This *oikodome* is dynamic, not static, and by its dynamic nature necessitates ongoing growth ("building up," *oikodome*) for the embodying of the church's whole ontology and function as the *pleroma* of Christ, as Paul illuminates (4:12-13). The dynamic of *oikodome* both defines the church family in joint interrelations together, and determines how church family interrelations function in the interdependence necessary for embodying wholeness in its ontology and function. In Paul's ecclesiology, *oikodome* is relationship-specific to the church as family, not as a religious group or organization (2:22), and, therefore, the dynamic of *oikodome* is functionally significant in only the depth of its relational involvement together, not to the extent of its working relations (4:15-16,25). This points to two contrasting ways interrelatedness is defined and interdependence is determined. These distinctions are critical to understand and ongoingly are essential to make because each involves a different church ontology and function, with different perceptions of human ontology and function. Not surprisingly for Paul, this difference involves the contrast between wholeness and reductionism.

*Oikodome* is rooted 'in Christ' and thus embodies Christ's wholeness (1:23; 2:21). The dynamic of *oikodome* is a function of the dynamic of wholeness in ontology and function, conjointly of whole persons and whole persons in whole relationship together (i.e. transformed persons in transformed relationships together). Accordingly, the interrelations of *oikodome* are constituted only by whole/transformed persons in whole/transformed relationships together. Reductionism more likely does not blatantly fragment these whole interrelations, for example, as Paul encountered between Jew and Gentile, but more subtly redefines ontology and function for person and church to create distance, detachment or separation in church relations and thereby making relationships together fragmentary. Such fragmentation is effectively accomplished by defining

persons from outer in by what they do/have, creating better-or-less distinctions in stratified relations which prevent deeper relational involvement (cf. 4:2). This is accomplished in a subtle yet insidious way when church leaders and church members define themselves by their roles and/or gifts and relate to each other in the church based on their roles or gifts, all for the work of ministry for building up the church. This dynamic may work for group cohesion or organizational identity in building up a gathering but it signifies a reduced ontology and function for both person and church; it is not the work “created in Christ Jesus” that Paul means for the church (2:10). Such practice is a major misinterpretation of Paul’s ecclesiology, which does not have the relational outcome he defined for whole church interrelations and their function in interdependence (4:11-13).

In Paul’s *pleroma* ecclesiology, the functional significance of church ontology and function emerges as the church lives “created according to the likeness of God” (4:24). The church, for Paul, is the Father’s new creation family embodied in Christ and raised up by the Spirit in the relational likeness of this whole of God, who dwells intimately present and *agape*-relationally involved. If not created and functioning in this likeness, church becomes a gathering from human shaping or construction in likeness of some aspect of human contextualization, which then often reifies its ontological simulations and epistemological illusions as the body of Christ.

Paul was no trinitarian in his theological development, yet his monotheism went beyond the knowledge and understanding of the Shema in Judaism. His experiential truth of Jesus and the Spirit in ongoing relationship together gave him whole knowledge and understanding of the whole of God. The relational and functional significance of Paul’s whole God constituted him as a new creation in God’s family and provided the integral relation basis and ongoing relational base for the church as God’s new creation family to be in the relational likeness of this whole of God whom he himself was experiencing. The church in likeness of the whole of God was not a theological construct in Paul’s ecclesiology, the concept of which has growing interest in modern theology, of course, as the church in likeness of the Trinity.<sup>6</sup> Yet, Paul’s understanding of the church’s likeness emerged from engagement in the relational epistemic process with the whole of God, the *synesis* (whole knowledge and understanding) of which appears to elude many of his readers.

In *pleroma* ecclesiology, church ontology and function in likeness of the whole of God is not a construct but the embodying of the relational dynamic that emerges from whole relational involvement together with both God and each other. The embodying of the interrelations of transformed/whole persons in these transformed/whole relationships is functionally significant only as it emerges in relational likeness to the whole of God’s relationships within the Godhead (cf. Col 2:9-10; 3:10-11). The interrelations within the whole of God between the Father, the Son and the Spirit can best (not totally) be defined as intimate relationship to the depth that, as Jesus disclosed, to see the Son is to see the Father, to know the Son is to know the Father (Jn 14:9; 17:26); and their intimate relationship functions together in the dynamic interaction of interdependence to the

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<sup>6</sup> For example, see John D. Ziziou, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985); Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991); Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

further depth that, as Jesus promised and the Father fulfilled, the Spirit's person will be his relational replacement so that his followers would not be reduced to orphans, but by the Spirit's relational presence and involvement the Father and the Son will be also and they all will be intimately involved together as family (Jn 14:18,23; 15:26; 16:14-15). Paul was further illuminating this intimate interrelationship together in interdependence in his letters, which he develops theologically and functionally in *pleroma* ecclesiology for the embodying of the church's whole ontology and function. In trinitarian theology, this relational dynamic of God is inadequately described as *perichoresis*, tending to be overly conceptual.

The interdependence within the whole of God can only be understood to the extent that God has disclosed his ontology and function. In Paul's theological systemic framework and forest, his experiential truth centered on the function Jesus embodied and on the overlapping and extended function the Spirit enacted, both of which the Father initiated and ongoingly functions to oversee. Paul's relational connection to each of them appears to be in their specific functions, which seem to overlap and interact yet remain unique to each of them. (How this is perceived and interpreted has theological implications or repercussions depending on the interpretive framework of Paul's readers—to be discussed further in the next chapter.)

Interacting functions in themselves, however, do not account for the dynamic of the trinitarian Persons' whole relationship together, which underlies each of their functions and which integrates their uniqueness into the whole they constitute together in the innermost, the whole of God. The ontology and function of God's whole relationship together lives also in interdependence. In this dynamic, any distinctions of their unique functions are rendered secondary to the primacy of relationship together; and such distinctions should not be used to define each of them or to determine their position in the Godhead. As vulnerably disclosed, the Father, the Son and the Spirit are irreducibly defined and inseparably determined only by whole relationship together, and this relational dynamic functions in various involvements in human contexts and with human contextualization to enact, embody and complete the whole of God's thematic relational response to make whole the human condition, that is, to save both *from* reductionism and *to* wholeness together. To highlight their distinctions, for example, by being overly christocentric, simply binitarian, just role-specific or even gender-specific, is to diminish the whole of God's ontology and to fragment the whole of God's function.

Paul understood their whole relationship together as the experiential truth of the whole of God relationally undifferentiated. His *synesis* of this relationally whole God was the theological-functional basis for the church's whole ontology and function to be embodied in likeness (Eph 4:4-6). Anything less or any substitute is neither in relational likeness to the whole of God, nor, therefore, embodies the intimate interrelationships together in interdependence to grow in the wholeness of the *pleroma* of Christ (4:12b-13).

The ontology and function of whole relationships together, either for God or the church, lives in interdependence, which for the church is the relational outcome and ongoing dynamic of transformed persons relationally involved in transformed relationships together. Church interdependence in likeness of the whole of God's interdependence enters a critical condition when it shifts from being a function of transformed/whole relationships together. In an early letter, Paul warned against such a

shift as he described this interdependence for the fragmented church at Corinth (1 Cor 12:12-31). This interdependence of the individual parts involved the connections together that resulted in covariation between the individual parts; moreover, if the parts are properly connected together, the implied result would be synergism in which the whole becomes greater than the sum of its individual parts (12:25-26; cf. Eph 4:16). What Paul points to that constitutes the connection is the relational involvement of *agape* (12:31). In another letter, Paul provided the theological clarification needed to define the transformed relationships together as the basis for church interdependence (Rom 12:3-16). Both of these church scenarios struggled with the influence of reductionism and its counter-relational work affecting their relationships together.

Reductionism, however, is often not as blatant as at the church in Corinth. As noted earlier, it is often more indirect and subtle, for example, involving assimilation into human contexts as existed perhaps in the Roman church (cf. Rom 12:2). The norms prevailing in the surrounding context are in their function mainly how reductionism affects church relationships together in general and church interdependence in particular. For example, when the norm for defining persons is based on what roles they perform and/or resources they have, this determines how relationships function, which affects a church's interrelations together and, subsequently, affects church interdependence. Cultural models of family, social models of group relations, organizational and business models of interdependence, all influence a church's interrelations together and its interdependence by these various shaping of relationships together substituting for the relational likeness of God. Furthermore, norms of individualism and individual freedom foster the independence which strain and weaken church relationships *together* and counter church interdependence, thereby redefining, reshaping and reconstructing what it means to be created in the likeness of God.

Reductionism defines a church and explains church function by the deeds of its individuals and their resources. A church, therefore, becomes the sum of its individuals; church interdependence is thus no longer the relational outcome of relationships together with the Spirit but a byproduct at the mercy of individuals. The shift from top-down and inner-out to bottom-up and outer-in is subtle. In the Western church today, synergism has been replaced by individualism, and church interdependence has been renegotiated to church dependence on the individual's terms—in contrast to Paul's relational imperative for the church (Eph 4:2,15-16; cf. Col 3:10-15). Independence is the reductionist alternative to interdependence and, intentionally or unintentionally, serves as the functional substitute for it, with freedom as its identity marker. This dynamic also operates in non-Western churches in a less obvious variation of the human shaping of relationships together defining church ontology and church function. This was a major issue that Paul was fighting against, making epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction, even in that collective-oriented sociocultural context (e.g. Gal 5:1,13; Rom 12:3; Phil 2:1-4; 1 Cor 4:7; 8:1,9). Even modern neuroscience recognizes that interdependence is the natural state for human persons, and that independence is a political notion, not a scientific one.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> John T. Cacioppo and William Patrick, *loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), 248.



Paul challenged the renegotiated ecclesiology of churches in reduced ontology and function, and also challenged the assumptions of theological anthropology underlying the definition of the person and its determination of relationships together in reductionist terms. Both of these conditions existed in churches apart from, in contrast to, or in conflict with the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God. Paul's challenges to such reductionism are summarized in his response to make relationally specific the functional significance of *pleroma* ecclesiology (Eph 4:14-25). His theological-functional clarity of this functional significance is directly connected to and emerges from his relational discourse on the theological dynamic of church ontology (4:7-13).

For the ontological identity of the church to be of functional significance, it cannot be shaped or constructed by human terms from human contextualization. In Paul's ecclesiology, the church in wholeness is the new creation by the whole of God's relational response of grace ("was given grace") from above top-down, the dynamic of which ("descended...ascended") Christ relationally embodied to make each one of us together to be God's whole ("he might fill all things," *pleroo*, make complete, 4:7-10; cf. 1:23). This is the church in wholeness embodying the *pleroma* of Christ. In God's relational response of grace, Christ also gave the relational means to church leaders for the dynamic embodying of the church (4:11), which Paul previously defined also as part of the Spirit's relational involvement to share different *charisma* from the whole of God (not a fragmented source) for the functional significance of the church body (1 Cor 12:4-11). Paul illuminates this further to make definitive the functional significance of embodying of the church in relational likeness to the whole and holy God.

Church leaders are given the relational means for the purpose "to equip the saints" (*katartismos* from *katartizo*, to put into proper condition, to restore to former condition, make complete, 4:12). This directly points to the dynamic of transformed persons reconciled and relationally involved in transformed relationships together in relational likeness to God, and integrated in interdependence of the various church functions ("work of ministry") necessary for the dynamic embodying (*oikodome*, 4:12) of the church's whole ontology and function of "the *pleroma* of Christ" (4:13). This means unequivocally: For church leaders to be of functional significance, their persons must be defined by the wholeness of the new creation in the qualitative image of God from inner out, not defined by their gifts, resources or the roles and titles they have which reduce their persons to outer in; and for their leadership to be functionally significant as transformed persons, their function must be determined by *agape* relational involvement in transformed relationships together (both equalized and intimate) as God's new creation family in the relational likeness of the whole of God, not determined by the titles and roles they perform (even with sacrifice) that make distinctions, intentionally or unintentionally creating distance and stratification in relationships together. The latter practices by church leaders renegotiate ecclesiology from bottom-up based on a theological anthropology from outer in.

In Paul's *pleroma* ecclesiology, church leaders in reduced ontology and function are not created or living new in the image and likeness of God and, therefore, cannot *katartismos* others in the interdependence necessary to be of functional significance for embodying the church in relational likeness of the whole and holy God. Nor can they proclaim the experiential truth of the gospel of wholeness (Eph 6:15). Only transformed

leaders—whose persons are ongoingly being restored to the image and likeness of God (*anakainoo*, Col 3:10-11; cf. *ananeoomai*, Eph 4:23)—vulnerably involved in transformed relationships together with the Spirit can help make complete the saints—that is, *katarismos* emerges from integral interaction with *anakainoo*. Only whole leaders relationally serve to make complete the saints in the interdependence that is functionally significant for the church's whole function: to dynamically embody (*oikodome*) the *pleroma* of Christ until all those relationally belonging to God's family come to (*katantao*, reach, arrive) be together as one (*henotes*, unity), that is, whole in their relational response of trust in reciprocal relationship together and whole in specifically knowing (*epignosis*) the Son of God in intimate relationship, the relational outcome of which is persons without distinctions (beyond *aner*) who are wholly complete (*teleios*) in the qualitative depth (*helikia*, stature) of the *pleroma* embodied by Christ, therefore who together with the Spirit can embody the *pleroma* of Christ in functional significance of the relational likeness of the whole of God (4:12-13).

Paul is not outlining an ecclesial function of church growth models, missional models or any other ministry techniques of serving for the quantitative expansion of gatherings shaped or constructed by human terms. Paul makes definitive the theological paradigm for the whole function embodying the church's ontology and function of who the church is and whose the church is as God's new creation family in his qualitative image and relational likeness. This paradigm is the theological dynamic of church ontology, whose function is entirely relational and whose whole ontology and function is the functional significance of just transformed persons *agape*-relationally involved in transformed relationships together in interdependence, the definitive paradigm especially for its leaders (discussed further in chap. 13).

It is unequivocal in Paul's *pleroma* ecclesiology that the church in relational likeness of the whole of God is irreplaceable for the functional significance of its ontology and function. For the church's ontology and function to be whole as God's new creation family, it must (*dei not opheilo*) be the functional significance of both transformed relationships reconciled together and intimate interrelations integrated together in interdependence; and both of these are functionally significant only in *agape* relational involvement. Church whole relationships together are reconciled together by Christ with the Spirit, thus are by their nature irreducible; and the integrated relational outcome of church interdependence in relational likeness to the whole of God is nonnegotiable. Interdependent is how God created his new creation family, as well as created the whole human family in relationship together (cf. Gen 2:18) and integrated all of creation (cf. Col 1:20; Rom 8:19-21). Just as modern neuroscience affirms this interdependence and acknowledges the influence of reductionism to counter it, the whole ontology and function of the church embodies the functional significance of this new creation to fulfill the inherent human relational need and to solve the human problem—which neuroscience can merely identify without having good news for its fulfillment and resolution. Yet, the church in renegotiated ecclesiology is also without both the functional significance of the good news of what persons are and its relational significance of what persons can be saved *to*.

## Its Functional Imperatives and Implications

Renegotiated ecclesiology may be considered to be pragmatic by some of Paul's readers, even a necessary reality. On the other hand, *pleroma* ecclesiology may be perceived as "just theological" by his readers, perhaps an ideal not attainable in practice. Many of his readers may even argue that some of Paul's prescriptions for the church (e.g. about women and slaves) appear to be pragmatic ecclesiology, thus that he either contradicted his theology or suspended its ideal. While there seems to be ambiguity in some of his church prescriptions, key to understanding the whole of Paul and the whole in his ecclesiology is the perception of what context Paul is speaking *from*, not the context he is speaking in and to. Renegotiated or pragmatic ecclesiology is based on human contextualization and shaped by human terms. Paul's *pleroma* ecclesiology emerges from God's relational context and process and is defined and determined by God's terms through reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit—terms irreducible by the nature of the whole of God and nonnegotiable by the nature of the holy God. In his prescriptions for the church, Paul is speaking from God's relational context and process. Therefore, Paul's prescriptions need to be seen in the strategic interest and concern of *pleroma* ecclesiology and must not be confused with or reduced to renegotiated ecclesiology for pragmatics. His prescriptions involve a tactical shift advocated by Paul which points to the strategic concerns of God's relational whole on God's terms to fulfill and complete God's thematic relational response to the human condition (women and slaves discussed in chap. 13).

The church is God's new creation family that fulfills the inherent human relational need. The embodiment of church ontology and function can be either reduced ontology and function based on the perception of pragmatics and/or a necessary reality. Or its embodying can be whole ontology and function constituted by being transformed from old to new in the likeness of the whole and holy God. Paul's *pleroma* ecclesiology makes the latter the functional imperative, not an obligatory moral imperative, by the nature of wholeness together being the only solution to the human problem that can fulfill the inherent human relational need. Moreover, by the nature of wholeness, *pleroma* ecclesiology cannot be reduced in its ontology of the church or be renegotiated in its function of the church and still have the functional significance for the human problem and the relational significance for the inherent human need. This is the gospel of wholeness by which the church was constituted and in which it must be congruent for the church to claim ontological identity and relational belonging with the whole of God (Eph 2:14-22; 6:15).

When Paul said "Live as children of light" (Eph 5:8), he gave both a functional imperative and a relational imperative for embodying the church. Here Paul is defining neither an obligation (or duty, *opheilo*) nor a moral-ethical framework, as the context of this verse may suggest (particularly for women and slaves). Rather, Paul is further illuminating what is necessary (*dei*) by the nature of the ontological identity of who the church is and whose the church is—that is, the ontology of the church in wholeness of those relationally belonging in God's new creation family. This is made necessary not by a theological construct of light but by the experiential truth of the Light in reciprocal relational involvement with Christ together with the Spirit, just as Jesus vulnerably disclosed (Jn 8:12) and relationally embodied in the whole ontology and function of his

face (2 Cor 4:6). Paul makes definitive that in face-to-face involvement with Christ in relationship together, “you are light” (Eph 5:8; cf. Mt 5:14) because God “has shone in our hearts” (2 Cor 4:6) to transform our ontology and function into the image and likeness of the whole of God (2 Cor 3:18; 5:17; Col 3:10) and now relationally belong to the family of the Light (1 Thes 5:5). For Paul personally, theologically and functionally, this is the experiential truth of “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor 4:4). On the basis of this experiential truth, therefore, Paul is decisive, that by the nature of the church’s new and whole ontology it is functionally and relationally imperative to “Live as children of *the ontology of the light*,” no longer in the old ontology and function of darkness. Paul is unequivocal because the church’s ontology in whole relationship together is the functional and relational significance of relationally belonging wholly in family ‘already’ as “children of light...not of darkness” in relational progression to ‘not yet’ (1 Thes 5:5, in its context of eschatological concerns).

The imagery of light and darkness is unlike a traditional dualism between good and evil. For Paul, light and darkness involve the dynamic of wholeness in ontology and function and the only alternative, reductionism, which is anything less and any substitute for wholeness. “Darkness” is both an ontological condition and a relational condition, the full significance of which cannot be limited to quantitative conditions or described simply as evil. Darkness-reductionism encompasses the prevailing ontology and function of human contextualization “in which you once lived, following the course of this world” (Eph 2:2), that is, the counterproductive efforts (“unfruitful works”) of reductionism which need to be exposed, confronted and convicted (*elencho*, 5:11). This can only happen when light engages the darkness (5:13-14). Not to live in the ontology as light, however, is to diminish or minimalize the light by the influence of darkness, that is, by reductionism (cf. Mt 5:14-16), for which Paul makes epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction in order to embody the church’s whole ontology and function. The imperatives in Paul’s *pleroma* ecclesiology are for the church to live whole, God’s relational whole on God’s relational terms, in the midst of reductionism surrounding it, and to make whole any reductionism, both within itself and in the world.

Paul illuminates the light in *pleroma* ecclesiology because in Paul’s theological forest the light’s ontology and function emerged from the *pleroma* of God in *pleroma* Christology for *pleroma* soteriology with *pleroma* pneumatology to be embodied whole as the *pleroma* of Christ in *pleroma* ecclesiology. Furthermore, since these theological dynamics of the light in wholeness are clearly distinguished from any reduced ontology and function in darkness, the light’s whole ontology and function in church life and practice becomes more easily recognized in contrast to reductionism in darkness. The light’s contrast, however, presupposes whole ontology and function; otherwise, the church’s light can no longer claim to be different from reductionism, and thereby not be recognizable either within the church or in the world.

“You are light” supposes only an inner-out ontology (2 Cor 4:6; cf. *metamorphoo*, Rom 12:2) that cannot function from outer in to give just the appearance of light (cf. “angel of light” of reduced ontology and function, *metaschematizo*, 2 Cor 11:14). Paul clearly distinguished that the light constituted in these persons’ hearts illuminates the glory of God’s qualitative being and relational nature in the whole ontology and function of Christ’s face, therefore this light can only be whole ontology in likeness of God’s; and that light’s inner-out whole function can be at best only simulated by outer in function

from reductionism, as with “an angel of light” and “ministers of righteousness” (2 Cor 11:14-15). Any outer-in simulations and illusions of light happen when light is disconnected from its source, because light is neither an energy nor ethereal and must not be disembodied from the Light. “In the Lord you are light” Paul said clearly. When Jesus disclosed his embodiment of the light, he also made clear a contingency about light. Those who have his embodied light are determined by “whoever follows me” (Jn 8:12). This is not, however, a discipleship of merely following his teachings or example—which commonly get disembodied from his person—but of following “me, my whole person,” who embodied the *pleroma* of God only for relationship together (Col 1:19-20; 2:9-10). For Jesus’ whole followers, this integrally involved engaging him in the primacy of the relationship together of his kingdom and the righteousness of God constituting the whole relationship of God in its innermost (Mt 6:33). On this integral relational basis, church leaders and any person wanting to serve Christ must first “follow me” in whole relationship together, as Jesus further made imperative in a paradigm for serving (Jn 12:26)—which Peter learned the hard way (Jn 21:22), and Paul points to (Eph 5:10).

In other words, Paul’s emphatic message is “you are light” only on the basis of your whole ontology from inner out, signified by the function of your heart following Jesus’ person in relationship together with the whole of God. This defines our righteousness that necessarily determines the integrity of involvement in relationship together with God, whose involvement is determined by God’s righteousness—the way God engages in relationship. For the functional imperative “live as children of light” to be functionally significant, it must by its nature (*dei*), and not by obligation or duty (*opheilo*), be the embodying of whole relationship together as God’s new creation family (the primacy of his kingdom) in likeness of God (as his righteousness in relationship). Moreover, Paul conjoins other imperatives to support this primary one of embodying the whole ontology and function of the church: “discern, distinguish and determine [*dokimazo*] what is pleasing to the Lord” (Eph 5:10); “Be careful then how you live *both within the church and in the surrounding context*...making the most of the time,” that is, *exagorazo*, “redeem from reductionism in these days of opportunity” (*kairos*, not *chronos*, 5:15-16); and most importantly, “be made complete [*pleroo*] with the Spirit” (5:18).

Paul is emphatic with these imperatives in order for the embodying of church ontology and function to be whole, as light in the darkness, in wholeness in the midst of reductionism. He is also decisive because he never underestimates the surrounding influence of reductionism (“the days *exist in the sin of reductionism*,” 5:16), and the persistence of its author (6:16) and its subtle presence within the church (2 Cor 11:14-15). Yet, he is not pontificating about church life and practice and legislating relationships together, nor does he prescribe anything less and any substitutes of what the whole of Jesus relationally embodied for the experiential truth of the whole gospel—the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ’s whole ontology and function (2 Cor 4:4), the gospel of wholeness (Eph 6:15). In his conjoint fight for this gospel and against any and all reductionism, Paul is not apologetic about *pleroma* ecclesiology. The only embodiment the Spirit raises up with the embodied *pleroma* of God is God’s new creation family, the church, the *pleroma* of Christ (Rom 8:11,14-15; Eph 1:23).

Wholeness is not optional in Paul's ecclesiology. Wholeness is the basis for *pleroma* ecclesiology, which is constituted by the embodied *pleroma* of God himself, who "is our wholeness...making wholeness...proclaimed wholeness" (Eph 2:14-18). Therefore, by the nature of God's wholeness, church wholeness is irreducible in its ontology and nonnegotiable in its function. *Pleroma* ecclesiology accounts for, signifies and constitutes nothing less and no substitutes. And for the church to live whole has inescapable implications for church life and practice.

With wholeness no longer being optional for the church and therefore no longer reducible in church life and negotiable in church practice, there emerge further implications for its ontological identity and relational belonging which are vital to understand for church life and practice.

In Ephesians, Paul illuminates *pleroma* ecclesiology. Yet he was not engaging in a conventional theological task but, in contrast, the experiential truth constituting the heart of who the church is and whose the church is as the *pleroma* of Christ. In the either-or dynamic between wholeness and reductionism, there are ongoing valid distinctions to be made and maintained for the church to embody its ontological identity. His theological dynamic of church ontology (4:7-13) is prefaced by this concern (4:1-6). Part of his concern can be understood in the relational terms of the church not experiencing identity loss or even identity theft. Thus, Paul is engaging the church directly in God's relational process of family love (from his earlier prayer, 3:18-19) for the transformed relationships together of 'who the church is' necessary to be 'whose whole family they are': "lead a life *corresponding to [axios]*, *in congruence with*, the *klesis* to which you have been called" (4:1). *Klesis* can mean call or vocation, either of which signifies the identity of the church that needs to be clearly distinguished and ongoingly lived in correspondence, congruence (*axios*).

The implication here is that clarity of the church's ontological identity depends on two dynamics that must be engaged: (1) making the functional distinction of the whole integrity of who and whose the church is in church life together, and (2) maintaining and ongoingly living this relational distinction of wholeness together both within itself and in the surrounding context—"making every effort...in the bond of wholeness...one body and one Spirit...one hope of your *identity [klesis]*, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all" (4:3-6).

Moreover, Paul was relationally involved with churches whose surrounding context was the dominant Greco-Roman world, within the pervading ancient Mediterranean world. The further implication is that making and maintaining the distinction of the church's whole identity in these surrounding conditions necessitates having a *minority identity*. That is, a minority identity signifies persons and persons together ("saints," *hagios*, holy, uncommon, 5:3) who are not distinguished by the ordinary, common, normative practices of the surrounding context, that which Paul has been identifying and detailing as sins of reductionism—which Paul's readers should neither limit to his specifics nor assume are the same for all surrounding contexts. Paul is not focused on moral purity and having a glorified status in an elite position with the notion of saints. A minority identity is *hagios*, uncommon, not common. Therefore, how the church lives in the surrounding context must not be with a bifocal identity (primary identity defined by human contextualization, secondary identity defined by God's context), a hybrid identity (crossbreeding both), or with any form of pluralistic identity in

mutual coexistence without the distinction of its ontological significance, that is, distinguishing its ontological identity. These identities are reductionist substitutes which cannot make and maintain the necessary distinction for the whole integrity of who and whose the church is. This distinguished identity of wholeness is easily lost or “taken” from the church (identity theft) in the *common* of the surrounding context, which is less about the Greco-Roman and ancient Mediterranean worlds and more about reductionism. This does not imply that the church’s ontological identity of wholeness is separated, isolated or disengaged from the surrounding context, but that how the church can be involved in it and maintain its primary identity is a function only of wholeness, which is a function of its relationships together in righteous likeness of God.

If the church does not conjointly make the functional distinction of the whole integrity of its ontological identity and ongoingly live the relational distinction of its wholeness in relationships together, the church no longer embodies the whole ontology and function of God’s new creation family. The relational consequence is various forms of *ekklesia*, shaping gatherings not family, to which epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction are directed for the church’s wholeness within itself and in the surrounding context. The relational consequence of the loss of wholeness is not a conclusion Paul shaped from his own thought. Jesus already made conclusive the consequence for the new creation by mixing the new with the old (Mk 2:21-22; Lk 5:36-38).

The ontological identity of God’s whole and holy family can only by its nature of wholeness be in congruence with its *klesis* (call and commission to be whole) when the church lives whole in the surrounding context in order to make whole in the world. Anything less and any substitutes lack being distinguished for the three critical issues unavoidably involved in all church practice, for which each of its members in the body and members together are accountable, just as Paul himself accounted for in his own life and practice:

1. The integrity and significance of what and whom the church/members present of themselves to others in the surrounding context (e.g. *prepo*, “fitting” our identity, or not, Eph 5:3).
2. The quality of their communication while in their presentation of self to others and the message it communicates to them (e.g. *morologia*, “foolish talk,” 5:4, which includes style and content of broad spectrum of speech essentially without depth of significance, thus reductionist communication with “empty words,” *kenos*, lacking content or hollow, 5:6; also, e.g. *eutrapelia*, “coarse talk,” wittiness that essentially uses one’s speech to draw attention to oneself and promotes one’s knowledge, self-interest or other self-concern [cf. 1 Cor 8:1]; in contrast, e.g. to “thanksgiving” that does not focus on or revolve around oneself but is relationally communicating involvement with others, 5:4).
3. The depth level of relational involvement the church/members engage with their communication while in what/whom they present of themselves to others—a level of involvement, for example, from the outer in without the primacy of inner out involvement in relationships (i.e. *agape* relational involvement of family love),

thereby signifying reduced ontology and function (e.g. *eidololatres*, one submitted, even unintentionally, to outer-in form and appearance, i.e. reductionism, thus church/members who “disregard,” *apeitheia*, disobey God’s relational terms congruent to “the family of Christ and of the whole of God,” 5:5-6), all in contrast to the wholeness about which Paul is decisive to make imperative for the church and its members, “therefore *do not share in and be associated with [symmetochos] the reductionists in the surrounding context*” (5:7).

Paul simply illuminates further the consequence for God’s new creation family of mixing the new with the old that Jesus clearly defined for the new creation already, in which the reductionists perceive “The old is good *or better*” (Lk 5:39). It is unavoidable for the church and its members to give account of their practice in these three critical issues. As Paul continues on to make further imperative, this accountability is necessary both for the embodiment of the church’s whole ontology to be light in the surrounding context and for the church’s ongoing function to be whole in order to “Live as children of light” (5:8ff).

In Paul’s *pleroma* ecclesiology, God’s thematic relational response of grace, *agape* relational involvement and dynamic of wholeness (peace) converge only for this irreducible and nonnegotiable relational outcome: to embody the ontological inner-out depth of church identity in the interrelated, interdependent and integrated function of who the church is together and whose family the church distinguishes, and on this integral relational basis and ongoing relational base to embody ‘already’ the new creation family of transformed persons *agape*-relationally involved in transformed relationships together for the whole ontology and function of the church—in nothing less than likeness of the whole of God. This relational outcome emerged from Paul’s *synesis* of the theological dynamics of the whole of God (Eph 3:2-6)—from his involvement not in a theological task but in his *oikonomia* family responsibility to make complete the whole (*pleroo*) of God’s relational communication for his family (Col 1:25-28). Therefore, there are further implications inescapable for the church’s accountability.

Along with the implications for the church’s ontological identity are conjoined inescapable implications for the functional significance of relationally belonging to the church as God’s new creation family (Eph 2:14-16 in integral function with Col 3:10-11; Gal 3:26-29; 6:15). What unfolds in Paul’s theological development of *pleroma* ecclesiology go further and deeper, indeed well beyond, what many of Paul’s readers merely perceive as moral/ethical imperatives or household codes of collective life in the church while in the surrounding context. Paul’s *pleroma* ecclesiology gets to the heart of the experiential truth of relationally belonging in God’s new creation family, the implications of which the church cannot avoid being accountable for to distinguish its experiential reality. They are simply as follows:

1. Relationally belonging in God’s new creation family is the relational outcome ‘already’ that cannot be set aside or relegated (and thus neglected) to ‘not yet’; therefore the church is accountable now to function in this experiential truth.
2. The experiential truth of this relational outcome also has a reciprocal contingency, which necessitates the experiential reality of the integral convergence of the



relational significance of the church's intimate relationships together and the functional significance of its equalized relationships together—the interaction of which implies that the church cannot have one (significant aspect of relationships together) without the other for the church to embody its whole ontology and function. In other words, transformed relationships together of the new creation can be nothing less than the integral function of intimate and equalized relationships together; and relational belonging in the church as God's new creation family can be nothing less than ongoing *agape* relational involvement in these transformed relationships together.

Therefore, the combined implication of being accountable already for the relational-functional significance of transformed relationships together is for the church to be making whole within itself and living whole in a new relational order of whole relationships together. Which then distinguish the church to make whole the human condition in the world. These definitive relationships are the intimate relationships together in a new order that are without the determinacy of human distinctions from outer in and are equalized from inner out, and thus clearly in contradistinction with the reductionism of human contextualization. The church functioning intimately without human distinctions and as the equalizer may be perceived by Paul's readers as a theological construct, whose ideal transcends pragmatic function in the real world. Without the Spirit that would be the reality. The reality also for pragmatism is a hybrid theology whose ecclesiology and anthropology lack wholeness. Yet, in the relational dynamic of Paul's theological forest the *pleroma* of God relationally embodied nothing less than the whole ontology and function of God in order to embody with the Spirit nothing less than the whole ontology and function of the *pleroma* of Christ, the church, to fulfill God's thematic relational response to make whole the human condition. In this defining relational process of wholeness, the relational embodying of the church is wholly constituted in the qualitative image and the relational likeness of the whole of God—the relational outcome 'already' in fulfillment of Jesus' defining prayer for his family. The experiential truth of this ontological identity for Paul is found in the congruence of the church's identity to nothing less and no substitutes, regardless of its constituency or its situation in the surrounding context. On this integral relational basis and in these whole relational terms, the wholeness of relational belonging in the church is neither optional for church function nor negotiable to other church terms and shaping. The gospel of wholeness has no other relational significance and outcome for those claiming the gospel and for those hearing its proclamation.

Moreover, just as the whole of Paul experienced for himself, it is important to underscore that this relational-functional transformation to a new relational order in the church also requires a redemptive change in the church's perceptual-interpretive framework and lens from outer in to the inner-out framework and lens—the new *phronema* and *phroneo* with the Spirit which Paul made definitive for “*zoe* and wholeness” (Rom 8:5-6)—necessary for the following: for the church to have the sensitivity of quality over quantity in its life and practice, and for the church to have relational awareness in its ontological identity and relational belonging. This relational awareness is dependent on the qualitative sensitivity that is inseparable from relational function in likeness of the whole of God, which Paul clearly distinguishes from

reductionism (Eph 4:14-24). This interaction composes the primacy of the qualitative and the relational in the church's ontology and function that by necessity involves the dynamic of wholeness. Accordingly, the church is accountable for all the imperatives and implications of *pleroma* ecclesiology—accountability which extends to all of Paul's readers, who themselves may require a critical change in interpretive lens to pay attention to the whole of Paul (historical, relational and theological), and a basic change in interpretive framework to understand (*syniemi* for *synesis*) the whole in Paul's theology.

“But now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light.” The clarity of the ontology and function of this identity is clearly distinguished only in the whole relationship together of the church's ontology and function in likeness of the whole of God. The Spirit grieves over anything less and any substitutes—the grief from the vulnerable presence of the ontological One and intimate involvement of the relational Whole—whose sentiment necessitates the relational awareness from qualitative sensitivity for Paul's readers to understand (Eph 4:30). As Jesus' relational replacement, the Spirit extended much greater the relational work of the whole of Jesus *into* Paul (as in Jn 14:12) for Paul to embody with the Spirit the kingdom of the whole of God's whole *into* the church's whole ontology and function in likeness of the *pleroma* of God. God's face unmistakably shined on his family by the face of Christ and is illuminated in the new relationship together of wholeness embodying the church, the *pleroma* of Christ.

### **Jesus' Post-Ascension Discourse for Ecclesiology to be Whole**

The distinguished Face continued to turn to his family not only to bless but necessarily to challenge for the new relationship together in wholeness that distinguished his church. We need to look back into his face.

It is important to understand the experiential truth that in Jesus' claim that seeing him was seeing the Father, he vulnerably disclosed in this twofold ontological and relational reality (ontological One and relational Whole) the importance of both what constitutes God's triune being as well as what matters most to God. God's self-disclosure embodied in Jesus was the who and what of the whole of God, and of how God only does relationships to be Whole. It is in this trinitarian relational context by this trinitarian relational process that the whole of God's thematic action is extended in response to the human condition for relationship together as family in family love. While those who respond back cannot experience ontological oneness (*eis eimi*) with the whole of God, they can have in reciprocal relationship the experiential truth of relational oneness (*en eimi*) together with the Trinity. The experiential truth of *en eimi* with the Trinity is the integral relational basis and ongoing relational base for Jesus' followers to have *eis eimi* with each other together as his church for the ontological oneness to be whole in likeness of the Trinity (*kathos*, in congruence with the Trinity, Jn 17:21-22). The whole of Jesus embodied nothing less than who, what and how the whole of God is in his relational work of grace only for relationship together and to make relationships together whole, God's whole on God's terms. His formative family prayer constitutes his followers together in this qualitative relational significance that matters most to God. Therefore, his church

lives “ontologically one,” *eis eimi* together, *en eimi* the relationships with each other necessary to function to be “relationally whole” in likeness of the relational ontology of the Trinity.

Jesus’ composing for ecclesiology to be whole did not stop with the end of his formal earthly ministry; that was only the prelude. He had other defining interactions specific to his church, which can be considered his post-ascension discourse for the ecclesiology definitive for his church to be whole.

After the Spirit came to his church for its development and completion, the face of Jesus shined on Paul to engage him in relationship for his transformation and called him to be whole to clearly distinguish the church’s wholeness for the experiential truth of the gospel (Acts 9:1-16, Gal 2:11,14). Then Jesus challenged Peter’s perceptual-interpretive framework for making distinctions about persons/peoples, in order to redeem his bias in relationships which created barriers in his church preventing all persons from coming together in transformed relationships as God’s family without the veil (Acts 10:9-36; 15:7-9). In family love Jesus clarified the full significance of his relational work of equalization to establish the function of his church also as equalizer, and thereby the ecclesiology of the whole was being made definitive. Yet, what was formed (and reformed) theologically was not always made functional in practice, which was the reason Paul later had to chasten Peter in family love for him to practice the relationships together necessary to be whole as God’s church family congruent to the truth of the gospel.

Jesus’ post-ascension discourse for ecclesiology continued when his family love exposed reductionism in various church practices to hold them accountable for the integrity necessary to be whole as his church (Rev 2-3). Examining his discourse with these churches will help us fully understand the functional and relational significance of Jesus’ continued involvement in the ecclesiology needed for churches to be whole—God’s relational whole only on God’s qualitative relational terms.

Being whole always involves the issue of reductionism. That is because what prevails in (*en*) any context of the world is reductionism. Jesus calls his followers relationally out of (*ek*) these contexts in order to be whole together as his family, then also relationally sends them back into (*eis*) those surrounding contexts to live whole together as his family and to make whole the human condition (as defined in his formative family prayer, Jn 17). Without the reciprocating dynamic of this *ek-eis* relational involvement (discussed in chap. 11), church practice is functionally based on just *en* (in) the surrounding context and thereby shaped in its influence. This is problematic in function for the ongoing relational involvement with the whole of God and God’s terms to constitute the whole of who we are as church and whose we are.

Without the ongoing function of the reciprocating *ek-eis* relational involvement, there is no engagement of a culture’s life and practice in the surrounding context with the necessary process of reciprocating contextualization. In conjoint function with triangulation, reciprocating contextualization provides the relational process imperative for the qualitatively distinguished identity of a church to function in the surrounding context without being defined or determined by what prevails in that context. That is to say, without this reciprocating relational process in church practice, there is no consistent functional basis to negate the influence of reductionism. This leaves church practice susceptible to subtle embedding in the surrounding context, or engaging in ontological

simulation and epistemological illusion, despite the presence of apparent indicators of important church practices illuminating its identity. This is illustrated in the various churches Jesus addressed, each notable for its own variation of church practice.

We examine Jesus' discourse by starting with the church in Thyatira (Rev 2:18-29), which both establishes the framework of Jesus' discourse and frames our discussion as we also end with this church. Thyatira is a further review from chapter seven.

As noted in part previously, Thyatira's economy emphasized trades (including brass-working) and crafts (cf. Acts 16:14). In the Greco-Roman world of that time, trade guilds organized the various trades and were necessary to belong to if one wanted to pursue a trade (much as unions today). These guilds served various social functions as well, one of which was to meet for common meals dedicated to their patron deities, thus engaging in activities of pagan worship and immorality. For Christians not to belong to a guild and participate would generally mean becoming isolated economically and socially,<sup>8</sup> which may suggest a pragmatic approach to church practice in Thyatira.

In the nature of this surrounding context, Jesus acknowledged this church's extensive "works" (*ergon*, work that defined them, Rev 2:19): "love" (*agape*), "faith" (*pistis*), "service" (*diakonia*, service, ministry that benefits others, especially compassion to the needy), "endurance" (*hypomone*, enduring and not giving in to bad circumstances in contrast to *makrothymia* which is patience with respect to persons), and that their last works were "greater than the first," suggesting not a status quo situation but actually doing more *ergon* than before. Yet, their practice also "tolerated" (*aphiemi*, to let pass, permit, allow, v.20) Jezebel's teaching. What they let pass, permitted or allowed is important to understand in the above context.

Jezebel (probably a byword symbolizing the OT character of Jezebel, cf. 1 Kg 18:19) appears to be a woman (or possibly a group) accepted within this church fellowship. The practice associated with her teaching probably refers to compromise with prevailing activity related to trade guilds prominent in the city which "misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols" (*planao*, deceive, lead astray, 2:20, NIV). What is significant to understand here is not the obvious disparity of this teaching and practice with the desires of God. What is more significant is how these prevailing influences of the surrounding context were absorbed into the practices of this church along with all its other so-called good deeds acknowledged above. This is not simply an issue about syncretism, synthesizing competing ideologies, or even pluralism, but goes beyond merely maintaining doctrinal purity to the deeper issue about participation *en* a surrounding context having the prevailing presence of reductionism and its subsequent influence on their perceptual-interpretive framework. This is the lens which determined what they ignored and paid attention to, thus the lens by which they practiced their deeds in the framework of a hybrid theology. When reductionism is not negated, its influence then affects how those other deeds would be engaged with something less and some substitute for the whole of persons and relationships, thereby raising issues of wholeness, quality and significance.

Thyatira demonstrated a weak view of sin, namely sin as reductionism that was the normative character of their surrounding context and was embedded in its collective order. They also lacked involvement in reciprocating contextualization to distinguish

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<sup>8</sup> For further contextual information for Thyatira and the other churches, see Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000).

their identity in that surrounding context without being determined by it; and any pragmatism in their practice became a euphemism for reductionism that renegotiated their ecclesiology. Their tolerance was essentially about reductionism, consequently they reinforced its counter-relational work and functioned incompatibly to be whole, God's whole on God's terms. The influence of reductionism is usually more subtle than observed in the Thyatira church. This is illustrated increasingly in the other churches Jesus addressed, as we look next at the church in Laodicea (Rev 3:14-22).

Laodicea was a rich city, the wealthiest Phrygian city, ten miles west of Colossae. It was known as a prosperous banking center, for its textile industry and its renowned medical school. Their residents had great pride in their financial wealth, fine clothes and famous eye salve. But Laodicea lacked a natural water supply. Hot water was piped in from hot springs and cold water came from the mountains. Both were lukewarm by the time it reached Laodicea. Since hot water was preferred for bathing and cold for drinking, there were frequent complaints about their water as inconvenient to their exceptionally comfortable lifestyle. This background gives important context for Jesus' discourse and helps us understand further the significance of his concern for ecclesiology to be whole.

To Jesus, how the church in Laodicea functioned was just like their water: lukewarm. Though tepid does suggest that their church practice was "hot" earlier, church life and practice was now comfortable, self-satisfied and complacent, essentially status quo of what prevailed (3:16). Their self-assessment reflected the perceptions of the surrounding city: that they were rich and had everything they needed (3:17a)—relatively speaking, of course, since the comparative process always makes such self-definition provisional. More importantly for those whose self-definition is based on what they do and have, Jesus addressed the illusion of those perceptions and exposed their reductionism (v.17b). They functioned in the epistemological illusion of reductionism, consequently their church practice was without functional substance and relational significance. For Jesus, their lukewarm practice was not only inconvenient but distasteful ("I am about to spit you out of my mouth"), which Laodiceans could readily identify with given their water condition. Moreover, their neither-cold-nor-hot practice was a lie of reductionism implying their fragmentary theological assumptions. First, there is no intermediate condition of church practice between being God's whole as family or not, that defines its existence. Jesus held this church accountable for their integrity—even "cold" was better than a lie—which is how family love functions with its working assumption. Then there was the assumption of their theological anthropology that defined them by what they did and had, which determined their church practice. Both assumptions involve reduced ontology and function.

The Laodicean church practice should be familiar to Western churches, notably in the U.S. Yet, this is not merely about relative affluence and comfortable lifestyles. This is about the first major issue of what defines the person, and how this eventually determines how church practice functions. The surrounding context of Laodicea defined itself by what it did and had. The human person was perceived from the outer in, thereby functionally reducing the importance of the whole person from the inner out signified by the heart. In this quantitative process, both the importance of the whole person and the primary priority of whole relationship together are replaced by secondary areas of interest and concern. Substitutes are made for the functional substance of our heart and for the

quality of our relationships. Substitutes involve any alternative that reduces the qualitative and functional significance of being whole as persons in relationship together. These substitutes from reductionism are what the church in Laodicea accepted (intentionally or inadvertently) from its surrounding context of the Greco-Roman world to determine its church practice, consequently creating the illusion (the epistemological illusion of reductionism) about the well-being of their existing condition. This false sense of self-understanding is ongoingly promoted, reinforced and developed by Satan, who encourages churches with Christian substitutes in ontological simulation (cf. 2 Cor 11:14-15)—which Jesus addressed further in two other churches.

While Jesus exposed the Laodicean church's reductionist substitutes and deconstructed their illusion, he also extended further family love by making his whole person vulnerable to them for the redemptive change imperative in relationship together to be whole (3:18-19). He was clarifying for them that relationship together on God's terms is incompatible with any reductionist practice. As family love always functions, he redefined them to pursue their whole persons from the inner out to be redeemed to come together in transformed relationships. This is signified in Jesus' well-known words which followed—an intimate relational message of family love for his church, usually taken out of this context. The classic image of Jesus knocking at the door (v.20) is a metaphor of these deep desires of the whole of God to have intimate relationship with his family—signifying the new wine communion together. The change they needed, therefore, must (by its nature as signified in the Trinity) be a relational change transforming their practice from a mere gathering without relational belonging (church as orphanage) to whole persons intimately involved in relationships together as family (signified by “open door,” hearts coming together in intimate communion). This metaphor clearly illuminates that redemptive change is *the relational imperative* for his church.

This metaphor is helpful to locate the ongoing involvement of Jesus with his church: pursuing his followers for transformed relationships together as family with the veil removed. We cannot continue to reduce Jesus' intimate relational message of family love for his church in this metaphor by perceiving it only for the individual, as is Christian convention. This metaphor of Jesus' relational work of grace needs to be returned to its full context for use in ecclesiology. Therefore, the significance of Jesus still knocking should not be lost on even the most mature Christian because it is a relational key in Jesus' involvement for ecclesiology to be whole (cf. 3:7-8). This metaphor functionally interacts with the metaphor of church as orphanage to make whole his church.

Any church practice “to be apart” continues to function with the veil. This misrepresents the gospel and is a contradiction of God's desires specifically for the new creation family in likeness of the Trinity, which Jesus constituted earlier with his defining family prayer. Since what integrally reflects the life of the Trinity is church practice only in likeness of the Trinity's relational ontology of intimate interdependent relationships as family, any alternative to the relationship of God's whole always becomes church practice shaped as an orphanage, notably operating as an organization or as a voluntary association (cf. church in Thyatira and trade guilds). This either-or defining process is an ongoing tension for church practice. For churches to address the influence of reductionism, even in pragmatic practice, they need the presence of the whole, God's whole. This is the whole that the relational function of the Trinity ongoingly provides as

the church's integral relational basis and ongoing relational base, by which Jesus knocks on church doors. Therefore, embracing the relational function of the Trinity emerges as the primary issue facing churches to define and determine how they will function both within themselves and in the world.

This relational issue was involved in two other churches Jesus addressed. The next church, the church in Sardis (Rev 3:1-3), had “a *reputation* of being alive” apparently in the prevailing perception, although the city hosted many pagan cults whose practices pervaded the surrounding context. The implication here is that this church lived behind their “reputation” (*onoma*, used as the substitute of what a person actually is). Even with their reputation of being alive, Jesus made no such assumptions about them. Rather he examined how they functioned through the qualitative lens penetrating inner out with family love. Uninfluenced by the surrounding bias, he exposed what existed beneath the outer layer of “being alive”: “you are dead” (*nekros*, the condition of being separated from the sources of life, thus being unaccompanied by something) based on the fact that “I have not found your works *complete* in the sight of God”—that is, incomplete or fragmentary based on God's terms, not as defined by the surrounding context. With the perceptual-interpretive framework Jesus makes definitive here for ecclesiology, their “works” (*ergon*, works denoting what defined them) were not “complete” (*pleroo*, to fill up, make full, complete or whole). In other words, what defined them was not whole. What was missing in their church practice?

Since no explicit sins such as idol worship and sexual immorality were mentioned (as in Thyatira), their incomplete deeds point to something more subtle or lacking. Their activity was perceived as alive, yet likely in the quantitative aspects of *bios*, not the qualitative function of *zoe*. Their reputation signified only a substitute (*onoma*) of the integral identity of who, what and how his church is, consequently lacking the integrity of wholeness. While Jesus' 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 (3:4). This is about relationship and involvement together, which soiled clothes symbolized a barrier to, precluded or maintained with relational distance. Any type of “soiled” clothes—whether stained by blatant sin or dirtied from subtle incomplete work—would have this relational consequence. I conclude this all implies the following: their deeds were not whole because they were substitutes from reductionism; and they were not whole because what defined them was based on reductionist practices; thus how they practiced church was separated or distanced from the relational involvement of God's life, unaccompanied by the vulnerable presence and function of the Trinity, because of their sin of reductionism—in what defined their persons and determined their relationships together, and thereby in how they practiced church.

The issue of not being complete and being whole started back at creation and the purpose to “fill the earth” (Gen 1:28). The Hebrew term for “fill” (*male*) generally denotes completion of something that was unfinished. When God declared “not good for human persons to be apart,” God started with Adam and Eve the relational context and process of the function to be God's family. This was now fulfilled by Jesus—as he declared “I will not leave you as orphans” and sent us the Spirit for completion—in the trinitarian relational context of family by the trinitarian relational process of family love.

This relational context and process were not the primary function of the Sardis church's involvement and ministry, so Jesus critiqued what they "filled their church" with, as he does all churches.

In spite of how well the Sardis church presented itself (its appearance) and how well it was perceived (its image), qualitative substance was lacking. This reflected a shift in how they defined themselves from the inner out to the outer-in aspects and functions (*metaschematizo*). Their lack of deeper qualitative substance exposed the credibility of their reputation as essentially meaningless—though worth an image in comparative reductionists terms—while the validity of their work (apparent service and ministry) was relationally insignificant because they were separated ("to be apart") from the substance primary to wholeness of life. These are severe critiques Jesus made of a church which at least was doing something to earn that reputation of being alive—unlike the Laodicean church's lukewarmness. The choice essentially of style over substance is not unique to the church in Sardis. In fact, the distinction between style (for appearance and image) and substance is blurred in many current church practices. Yet, the credibility gap between what appears to be and what actually exists is not readily apparent to a church and observers, when a church relies on what it does to define itself. Reputation becomes one of those valued indicators of success which many churches depend on for feedback to evaluate their work—or value to validate their position in God's kingdom. Jesus asks, "What are we filling our churches with?" The above is not the dynamic of *pleroo* that distinguishes the *pleroma* of Christ (as Paul illuminated, Eph 1:23).

Family love functions for the integrity of relationship together to be whole, and for accountability for anything less and any substitutes. Thus, Jesus' critiques were 'a critique of hope' in his call to be whole—a functional key in his involvement for ecclesiology to be God's whole. When Jesus confronted them to "wake up," the sense of this two-word combination (*gregoreuo* and *ginomai*, v.2) is to emerge as new, whole persons. This was not about self-determination but redemptive change—the relational imperative. They needed to be transformed in the inner-out aspects and functions (*metamorphoo*) of a person, while being redeemed from the outer-in aspects and functions (*metaschematizo*) that did not give full importance to the qualitative function of the whole person (signified only by the heart). Their outer-in over inner-out way of defining themselves determined what they paid attention to in how they did relationships and how they practiced church—which were not complete but fragmentary and thus without wholeness. This certainly diminished their relationships both with God and with each other, though they were unaware of this condition due to the simulation and illusion of reductionism that critically reduced their qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness; consequently they ignored the lack of qualitative relational substance.

With the lens of repentance by the function of family love, Jesus called them back to what they had "received" (*lambano*, v.3) in relationship from the beginning: his whole person, not just his teachings. As disclosed in John 1:12, *lambano* means to embrace and follow him as person-teacher—that is, be his disciples not as students in the rabbinic tradition but as adherents in relationship together in progression to be whole as God's family, thereby pointing to his formative process in the ecclesiology necessary to be whole. In other words, Jesus called them back to be whole in the qualitative function of relational work inherent in who, what and how the Trinity is, and therefore who his followers are and what his church is: the whole of God's family distinguished by whole



relationship together. For nothing less and no substitutes of this relational reality, they needed to become transformed persons from the inner out who vulnerably engage in the relational work necessary to integrate equalized and intimate relationships together to be his church family in the new relational order.

The rigorous nature of this relational process makes church practice more susceptible to reductionism; church practice accordingly is also tempted to use the easier (also read pragmatic) alternatives of reductionist substitutes—notably with a less vulnerable shaping of relationship together. The lack of primary involvement in this definitive relational work for church practice becomes even more acute with the church in Ephesus (Rev 2:1-4).

Jesus consistently disclosed knowing these different churches’ “works” or deeds (*ergon*, what defined them). The list of the Ephesian church’s deeds is impressive: their “toil” (*kopos*, denotes not so much the actual effort but the weariness experienced from that effort); their “endurance” (*hypomone*, endurance as to things and circumstances, in contrast to patience toward persons; signifies character that does not allow losing to circumstances, cf. church in Thyatira); they maintained the doctrinal purity of the church under trying circumstances and did not tolerate falsehood, unlike the Thyatira church and its hybrid theology; they even suffered repercussions for Christ’s name and yet endured the hardships to remain constant in their faith. This list forms a composite picture describing how they were, what they did and were involved in, which essentially was extremely dedicated in major church work and which can also describe a number of successful churches today.

Jesus knew not merely the information about their deeds but also knew (*oida*) the nature of them, and the extent of their functional significance. It may seem somewhat perplexing that Jesus was not impressed with this church and even felt to the contrary about their church practice: “You have abandoned the love you had at first” (v.4). As noted previously, if this was not Jesus’ own critique, we would easily discount this as a misguided conclusion or uninformed allegation. Yet, his discourse here for the integrity of ecclesiology raised a serious issue of church function, which is crucial to account for in how we practice church ourselves. His critique makes conclusive the very heart of his desires for ecclesiology to be whole.

The term “abandoned” (*aphiemi*) means to forsake, abandon persons, to leave, let go from oneself or let alone—which would include functionally maintaining relational distance even while in close physical proximity or in mutual activity. *Aphiemi* is the same term Jesus used in his promise to “not leave *his followers* orphaned” (Jn 14:18). Connecting these relational messages provides the context and process for the function of ecclesiology to be God’s whole. In the church context at Ephesus this strongly describes not paying attention to the whole person and not giving primary priority to whole relationship together. They worked hard doing things *for* God but the relational process necessary for their functional significance was deemphasized or misplaced in their effort. This often happens as churches develop and the goals of church growth become the priority of church practice. In the process, as the Ephesian church demonstrated, there is a subtle shift in which the *means* become the *end* and its primary purpose for relationship together to be whole is abandoned or made secondary.

As the term *hypomone* for “perseverance” denotes, they were so focused on circumstances and situations such that persons (especially God) unintentionally were

ignored in relationship, inadvertently left in relational distance or emotionally forgotten. Their *hypomone* was in contrast to the Philadelphian church's *hypomone*, which was a reciprocal relational response to Jesus' desire ("you have kept my word") for relationship together (3:8,10). What distinguished them from the Ephesian church was the latter's referentialization of the Word. Enduring "for the sake of my name" (2:3) narrowed down "my name" to "name without my person," that is, apart from relationship together. By "abandoning" their involvement in relationship together (however unintentional or inadvertent), their focus shifted to their persevering character of not giving in to bad circumstances. Thus, their endurance for the sake of "name *with my person*" also stands in contrast to *makrothymia*, which is patience, endurance, longsuffering with respect to persons; the former is about dedication in hard work (characteristic of the Ephesian church) while the latter involves relationship with mercy, grace and family love (cf. Mt 18:21-22, Rom 2:4).

Despite what would usually be defined as significant church practice reflecting sound ecclesiology, there was distance in their relationships leaving them in the condition "to be apart," indicating a well-run orphanage and not ecclesiology of the whole. They did not have the relational involvement of family love, which is the only involvement having relational significance to God (cf. Mary's anointing of Jesus as a priority over ministry to the poor, Mt 26:8-13). This is further evidenced by their reduction of the truth to mere doctrinal purity. They forgot that the Truth was vulnerably disclosed only for relationship together on God's terms, which they were effectively redefining on their terms. Essentially, their referential terms reversed the priority order of Jesus' paradigm for serving (Jn 12:26) that clearly defined the first priority of discipleship as intimate involvement in relationship together, not focused first on the work to be done for serving (*diakoneo*). Consequently, they also compromised their identity as the light, which is rooted in their relationship with the Light (v.5b, cf. Mt 5:14-15); this was also contrary to Paul's relational imperative for the church to "live as children of light" (Eph 5:8). Since they focused primarily on what they did—indicating their theological anthropology in how they defined themselves—they paid attention to related situations and circumstances and less important issues, while ignoring the primacy of relationship together in family love. Functioning with this perceptual-interpretive framework of a reduced theological anthropology resulted in the relational consequences of forsaking their first love that reflected the lack of relational involvement in their church practice and signified their renegotiated ecclesiology.

This was the relational involvement Jesus called them to turn around and get back to for them to be whole: "Repent, and do the *relational* works you did at first" (v.5). Jesus was restoring their misplaced priorities and more deeply made discipleship definitive by further illuminating the relational significance of his paradigm for serving. This involved the first priority of discipleship, which is ongoing vulnerable involvement with Jesus in the relational progression to the whole of God's family—the *formative process* in Jesus' involvement for ecclesiology to be whole. His ecclesiology is the ongoing relational outcome of discipleship in this relational progression to the whole of God; and this by necessity vulnerably engages reciprocal relationship with the Trinity and conjointly is intimately involved in reciprocal relationships together as church family in likeness of the Trinity.

The basic complaint Jesus had against this church is the primary issue facing all churches for defining their ontology and determining how they will function: embracing the whole ontology and relational function of the Trinity, and embodying church practice in likeness of the Trinity's relational ontology, therefore in congruence with and ongoing compatibility to Jesus' defining prayer for his family (Jn 17:20-26). In all that the Ephesian church was doing (which was a lot), they were not directly involved in the relational context and process of the whole of God and did not function in the context of family and process of family love constituted in the Trinity. They demonstrated a direct correlation between the priority we give relationships and the extent to which we are loving, as defined by relational involvement, not as doing something, however dedicated. For Jesus, this correlation is irrefutable for ecclesiology to be whole. Whether Jesus' complaint against this church included both their relationship with God and with each other is not clearly indicated in the text. Yet we can strongly infer that it included all their relationships, because their primary emphasis on their work reflected the three major issues ongoing in life: (1) how they defined themselves, which further determined (2) how they did relationships and thus (3) practiced church. These three major issues are always deeply interrelated, and also in integral interaction with the primary issue of the Trinity, noted above, thereby together they need to be accounted for in ecclesiology in order to be whole.

The practices of both the churches in Ephesus and Sardis were contradictions in function that reflect the subtle influence of reductionism. What they focused on and engaged in were reductionist substitutes for the trinitarian relational context of family and the trinitarian relational process of family love. The relational consequence was to become embedded in ontological simulation and epistemological illusion. Moreover, the relational function of the Trinity cannot be understood in theological propositions nor experienced in church doctrine, even in its purity. By reductionist practice, these churches demonstrated how their practice ("abandoned the love you had at first" 2:4) and their understanding ("a reputation of being alive," 3:1) became *decontextualized* from what was primary, and embedded in human contextualization. In their ironic struggle to remain distinct in a pluralistic Greco-Roman context, the Ephesian church stopped paying attention to the greater context which defined them and distinguished their significance. In their effort to be significant (or popular) in their surrounding context, the Sardis church ignored the primary context which constituted them. That is, they were removed, diminished or deemphasized from the relational context and process of the Trinity and needed to be recontextualized in the relational nature of the Trinity. This is the function of reciprocating contextualization in the *ek-eis* relational involvement that Jesus made imperative to distinguish his family in the ecclesiology to be whole and to make whole. Without this reciprocating relational dynamic, church practice increasingly finds its functional basis only *en* (in) the surrounding context, in which reductionism prevails.

Whatever a church's surrounding context may be, we can expect the prevailing influence of reductionism to affect the whole of church practice. It will, that is, unless there is the ongoing function of the reciprocating *ek-eis* relational involvement to definitively distinguish church purpose and function from beyond merely its position *en* the world. Jesus' church's purpose and function in the primacy of relationship together to be God's whole necessitate nothing less and no substitutes for this whole, as the terms of God's relational grace demand. Without function in the relational terms of grace in

reciprocal relational involvement, reductionism is able to shift grace's demand for nothing less and no substitutes than the whole in church practice to anything less and any substitute (cf. "Did God really say that?"). The shift included: (1) This shift is qualitative, thus cannot be observed in quantitative terms, as the Thyatira church's increased amount of "good deeds" demonstrated and the Laodicean church's wealth, fine clothes and medicine illustrate; (2) This shift is ontological, away from the inner-out whole person, thus cannot be understood by an outer-in ontology of personhood, as evidenced by the Sardis church's inability to understand its true condition; (3) This shift is relational, thus cannot be experienced in any other human activity than the primacy of intimate relationships together, as signified by the unawareness of the Ephesian church's diminished experience in their level of relational involvement together.

As long as our perceptual-interpretive framework is narrowed down, for example, to referentialization, our lens' view of the qualitative, the ontological and the relational will not discern the extent of the surrounding influences reducing the whole of church practice. The relational demands of grace, however, clarify for church function that nothing less and no substitutes to be whole is the only practice which has significance to God. Additionally, the lens of repentance in integral function with a strong view of sin makes no assumptions to diminish addressing sin as reductionism, first and foremost within church practice and then in the surrounding contexts. And Jesus wants "all the churches" to clearly "know that I am he who searches minds and hearts" (Rev 2:23)—that is, examines the qualitative significance of persons from inner out, whom he holds accountable for their integrity to be whole in relationships together as the whole of God's family (2:25; 3:11). In their effort to be relevant (and possibly pragmatic) in the surrounding pluralistic context, the Thyatira church forgot in their many admirable church practices what was necessary to be whole and to make whole (cf. a similar error by the church in Pergamum in a reductionist context, Rev 2:12-15).

It is not sufficient for churches to be a mere presence, or even merely to function, *en* the world; their only significance is to function *ek-eis* (whole relational movement into) the world both to be relationally involved with others as God's whole and, by the nature of this whole function, also to confront all sin as reductionism of the whole. That is, the church's whole ontology and function makes whole the human condition; the church does not reflect, reinforce or sustain it. Jesus communicates directly to us about the whole of ecclesiology in his discourse, and the relational message we need to learn to listen to and receive him in about the Thyatira church is clearly illuminated: to let pass, indifferently permit or inadvertently allow—"tolerate," which the other churches also did more subtly—the influence of reductionism in any form from the surrounding context directly diminishes the wholeness of church practice and minimalizes their relational involvement with God, with each other in the church and with others in the world. For churches to get beyond practice merely *en* the world, they need a different dynamic to define their life and determine their practice.

By searching hearts Jesus communicates clearly to us that church function in its innermost is about being whole, not merely engaging in correct ecclesial practices. And the *eis* relational engagement of church ontology and function *en* the world must by its nature be integrated with the *ek* (movement out of) relational involvement with the whole of God as its defining antecedent in the *ek-eis* dynamic. This reciprocating relational process negates the continuous counter-relational work of Satan and its reductionist

influence (Rev 2:24) by ongoingly engaging, embracing, experiencing and extending God's whole in the qualitative significance of the integrated ontology of both personhood and the church constituted in and by the Trinity, that is, only in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the Trinity.

In his relational discourse Jesus communicates a critical relational message to us that delineates a simple reality of life about the human person and the existing social order—matters we either pay attention to or ignore depending on our working assumptions of humanity and society. Since we do not live in a vacuum or in social isolation, our practice is either shaped by the surrounding context we are *en* (thus embedded) or constituted by what we enter *eis* that context with. In the latter function, for *eis* to define life and determine practice necessitates the *ek* relational involvement to disembed us from a surrounding context in order to transplant us into the whole of God's relational context and process, hereby integrally constituting God's whole for the *eis* relational movement back. This reciprocating relational process signifies the relational demands of grace compatible with the working assumptions with which Jesus came *eis* the world and his assumptions of humanity and the existing social order with which he engaged the world. On this basis, Jesus (as well as Paul) ongoingly challenges both our theological anthropology and our ecclesiology for the only purpose of wholeness.

For our practice both as person and persons together as church, disembedding from the influence of reductionism to transplant into God's whole is the issue we need to understand in relational terms and not in conventional referential terms. Without the function of nothing less and no substitutes, which grace demands for person and church, wholeness is diminished and the whole is minimalized—that is, functionally no longer whole. For church practice to fulfill its divine purpose and function, it must account in its function for being relationally transplanted in the whole of God and God's theological trajectory and relational path for its globalizing commission “sent to be whole” in integral relational function with its “call to be whole and holy” (as Jesus pointed the Thyatira church to, 2:26-29).

Jesus' post-ascension discourse is not merely an addendum for his church; it is what in pre-ascension he vulnerably embodied with nothing less and no substitutes of the whole of God and ongoingly accounted for within the whole of God's intimate response for whole relationship together. After his church had opportunity to establish its practice in his integrated call and commission, his relational message communicated in family love the critique of hope necessary for all churches also to embody in its practice the qualitative relational function to be God's whole in likeness of the Trinity. Now in deeper reciprocal relational responsibility, his church is ongoingly accountable for the whole of God's whole with compatible relational response back. And his post-ascension discourse for ecclesiology is clearly definitive for his church's response to be whole as God's new creation family, and for his church to live and make whole as equalizer for God's new relational order in response to the human condition. His relational communication for ecclesiology composes church function—necessarily by the nature of the church's whole ontology—only in relational congruence with his embodied function as the equalizer in the trinitarian relational context of family by the trinitarian relational process of family, nothing less and no substitutes but the whole of God's whole on God's qualitative relational terms.

This is the integral relational dynamic of the whole of Jesus *into* the whole of Paul to embody the kingdom *into* the church, integrally both to illuminate the experiential truth of the good news of whole relationship together and to distinguish the experiential reality of the gospel's whole relationship together to make whole the human relational condition—even to address this condition as it may be reflected, reinforced or sustained in the different shapes of churches. With their gospel composed in whole, Jesus and Paul necessarily challenge any and all human shaping of the primacy of whole relationship together. Their challenge continues to be urgently necessary because human shaping renders both the gospel and the church without their qualitative and relational significance in the innermost.

With its narrowed-down epistemic field, the referentialization of the Word continues to turn away from the distinguished Face vulnerably present and involved in relationship—with the prevailing relational consequence of church and academy turning to a more probable theological trajectory and a less intrusive relational path. Therefore, the relational message of Jesus for his followers to be whole still communicates unavoidably today to pursue us for our reciprocal relational response: “Seek *the primacy of his kingdom's whole relationship together and its relational basis, the whole of God's relational righteousness.*”

The kingdom *into* church *into*...?

## Chapter 13      **The Relational Outcome ‘Already’: The Church Alive in Wholeness**

**Let the wholeness of Christ rule in your hearts...in the one body.**

Colossians 3:15

***Embody what will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of wholeness.***

Ephesians 6:15

When Jesus prayed for the integral oneness of his family in whole relationship together *with* and *just as* the Trinity, he clearly distinguished this relational outcome ‘already’ in order for the complete purpose “that the world may believe *the experiential truth...*” with the same relational result “so that the world may know *the experiential reality*” of this relational outcome (Jn 17:21-23). The synthesis of Jesus and Paul is further illuminated when Paul essentially echoed Jesus’ formative family prayer (Eph 3:14-19). Their integration signifies the definitive integration of their whole gospel embodied in the church that constitutes the church’s irreducible ontology and its inseparable function in the world. Any missional activity of the church engaged in anything less or any substitute are ontological simulation and epistemological illusion from a reduced ontology and function.

The whole gospel and its integral mission have been problematic for the world to believe and know since their own understanding has been difficult to maintain due to human shaping. For example, the major cause creating the need for contextualization of the gospel in mission was the imposition of Western culture on foreign missions. Though the need to be freed from this biased and distorted view of the gospel certainly has been necessary, the contextualization of the gospel in other human cultures/contexts engages the same underlying reductionist dynamic of Western Christianity—that is, a gospel determined functionally, if not defined theologically, by human contextualization. Accordingly, contextualization in missions further reinforces a gospel also narrowed down by human shaping (albeit of its own variation) that cannot be whole as embodied by Jesus in the trinitarian relational context and process. In contrast and conflict, further embodied with Jesus was Paul, who fought against such reductionism in his ongoing fight for the whole gospel and its integral mission, embodied both by the experiential truth of the whole of God in the face of Christ and by the experiential reality of the relational outcome ‘already’ in the church.

Without reciprocating contextualization in the ongoing relational process of triangulation with the whole of God—the *ek-eis* dynamic of Jesus’ prayer in which God’s context is primary and human context is secondary—we are limited to only our context to define church ontology and determine church function with the gospel and its mission both within the church itself and in the world.

## Distinguished in and to the World

The truth of the incarnation has significance only in relationship as the experiential truth, which Jesus wholly embodied from outside the universe into the surrounding contexts of the world. This relational dynamic in relational terms over referential terms makes functional the theology of God loving the world from top down and sending his Son into the world to love it from inner out. Making John 3:16 an experiential truth was neither a mere evangelistic program nor a gospel composed of referential words; moreover, this was not merely about what Jesus did to signify the propositional truth of salvation. This relational process involved how Jesus lived and functioned in the world because of who he was and whose he was. That is to say, his life and practice unmistakably distinguished God loving the world by being embodied in whole to be vulnerably present and intimately involved with those in it to make them whole in the innermost of relationship together. The referentialization of the Word narrows down Jesus to a more probable theological trajectory and a less intrusive relational path.

The relational significance of God's communicative action in the vulnerably distinguished Face of Jesus was only for the intimate involvement in relationship—Face-to-face relationship together in the whole of God. The Father sent the Son into the world to make it whole (*sozo*, Jn 3:17), that is, in congruence with the relational significance of the whole of Jesus and compatible with the qualitative distinguished whole and holy God.

The process of being *sent* is a relational dynamic involving the irreducible qualitative action of God's communication and the nonnegotiable terms of God's relational work of grace. This dynamic further signifies wholeness: the whole of the Word disclosing the whole of God and fulfilling the whole of God's thematic relational action. The implication of this relational dynamic underlying God's strategic shift is that who and what was sent was nothing less than and no substitute for the whole and holy God, that nothing less and no substitute could be sent to fulfill this relational dynamic and thereby to fulfill God's thematic action. This is the significance of the incarnation, the qualitative function of which Jesus vulnerably embodied to be intimately involved with others, including in culture and ethics along with mission. The referentialization of the Word, however, no longer distinguished his whole person in the world, even if centralized in ethics and mission.

'Relationship together involving the whole person' is the basis for God's thematic relational action since creation (Gen 2:18) and the covenant (Gen 17:1), and disclosed in the qualitative relational significance of the gospel vulnerably embodied by Jesus and integrally extended into Paul. What was the *synesis* Jesus demonstrated at age twelve that captivated Jewish leaders (Lk 2:47) and later was the source of tension and conflict? I affirm it was 'relationship together involving the whole person' that challenged their religious practice (and the *statue quo*) and threatened their basis for defining themselves and determining their function by narrowed-down referential terms of reductionism. Jesus unmistakably made this both definitive in the Sermon on the Mount and evident in the new wine communion, with the lawyer and parable of the Good Samaritan and in the cleansing of the temple. We cannot sufficiently account for God's self-disclosure embodied in Jesus without integrally understanding 'relationship together involving the whole person'. Nor can we adequately receive and respond to the whole of God for the



relational outcome ‘already’ of the gospel’s qualitative relational significance. This wholeness of Jesus is what Paul made the imperative for defining and determining of our whole person (“rule in your hearts,” *brabeuo*, Col 3:15). In contrast and conflict, the human shaping of relationships in the human condition narrows involvement to less and less of the whole person, consequently defining persons and determining relationships in fragmentary terms. The only response to this relational condition that would be significant is to make it whole.

The process of being *sent into the world* is the functional outworking of this relational dynamic. For Jesus, only the ongoing function of his whole person embodied his incarnation into the world; and only the ongoing relational involvement of his whole person fulfilled his purpose and function in the world to make whole. Nothing less and no substitutes would be sufficient either to be whole or to make whole. Thus, how Jesus was in the world—whether in word or deed, his teachings or example—cannot be integrally understood apart from the function of who and what he was. To disengage how Jesus was from the full identity of who and what he embodied in function is to essentially disembody Jesus from both his whole person and his relational source. This has the relational consequence to reduce God’s communication as Subject and renegotiate God’s grace as relational response on Subject’s terms, which creates relational distance with the whole of God’s vulnerable presence and intimate involvement.

“Sent” involves a relationship-specific dynamic, and “sent into the world” involves a relationship-specific function. We need to have whole understanding of these in Jesus’ life and practice in order to understand our place in the world and our function to the world to be “just as” (*kathos*) the Father sent him (Jn 17:18).

As noted previously, of the various images evoked by the incarnation, “intrusive” tends not to be one of them. Yet, Jesus embodied unavoidably the intrusiveness of God in response to the human condition—which was disconcerting for the reductionists and their counter-relational practice—because “the Father has sent me into the world” (Jn 3:17; 5:36; 10:36; 17:18a). The term for “sent” (*apostello*) denotes to send forth on a certain mission, signifying Jesus’ commission by his Father to fulfill his response to the human condition. Accordingly, then, “commission” should not be reduced by disembodying it from its relational source in the relational dynamic of the Father with his Son. That is, the context for his commission should not be confused with “into the world,” which the current missional emphasis on contextualization tends to do. The world is certainly where his salvific work is to be fulfilled but its situations and circumstances do not determine the context for the significance of his commission. The *ek-eis* dynamic is critical to be distinguished both in and to the world.

This interrelated dynamic is the integral relational basis and ongoing relational base that Jesus illuminated in his family prayer, making imperative his call and commission to be whole in conjoint function. How his followers together live and practice in the surrounding context emerge from who and what they are; that is, what (or who) defines them determines how they function. Paul further distinguished that the new creation family is called to “the wholeness of Christ,” which is the imperative for primarily defining and determining them (*brabeuo*, Col 3:15).

These issues needing our response in the surrounding contexts involve human ontology and the social design of humanity, whose created nature necessitate the response from the convergence of our sanctified life and practice (to be whole) and our

salvific life and practice (to make whole). In other words, for us to be involved in the surrounding contexts of the world and to be responsive to others in those contexts, we have to demonstrate in relational terms (not referential) the depth of our person—qualitatively distinguished from inner out—in the function of our identity; only from these distinguished persons emerge practice having relational significance for the whole of God and relational substance for others to experience also in ‘relationship together involving the whole person’ (as Jesus prayed for ‘already’, Jn 17:20-23). Consequently, these issues in the world, for example, related to culture, ethics and mission must be responded to while in the process of addressing ongoingly two imperative issues:

1. The increasing transformation of defining and determining our life and practice by submitting their basis only to the inseparably integrated function of sanctified life and practice to be whole and salvific life and practice to make whole—the submission of which while in the surrounding context further necessitates the ongoing relational process of triangulation and reciprocal contextualization.
2. While involved in this first issue to define and determine our life and practice, also paying attention to and understanding the continuous presence of reductionism, and thus honestly examining any other influences to define and determine our life and practice that thereby reduce our involvement in the above process (1)—notably, for example, by disembodiment of the involvement of our whole person to referential terms or separating his commission from his call to be whole.

These two imperative issues, of course, are in unceasing interaction, which reflects the ongoing tension-conflict between reductionism and God’s whole. How we will live and practice always emerges from who and what we are in function. The critical issue centers on what (or who) will define our identity and, in turn, determine our practice. Thus, the first imperative issue involves the need to examine: our working Christology (incomplete or complete) and practicing soteriology (truncated or full); the whole integrity of our discipleship based on his terms in the Sermon on the Mount, notably our relational involvement with our Father; therefore the unavoidable issues of the significance of the person we present, the integrity and quality of our communication, and the level of relational involvement we have. The second imperative issue involves the need to examine: our working theological anthropology and human ontology (outer in or inner out) for both the person and relationships together, and our specific functional purpose in the created social design of humanity; therefore the inescapable issues of what defines our person functionally (not ideally) and then determines how we actually function in relationships with others—both in his kingdom-church family and in the surrounding context.

The human redefining of God’s whole has been problematic and reflects the human condition since the primordial garden. God’s thematic relational response to the human condition, however, also has been subject historically to human shaping. The patriarchs were clear examples of this. They demonstrated the use of incongruent means to advance the covenant relationship by their human shaping, thereby displaying an ambiguous participation in culture, practicing contradictory ethics and self-determining their “mission.” While staying in Egypt, for his own safety and prosperity, Abraham

instructed Sarah to lie to the Egyptians, saying she was his sister. This led to her becoming part of Pharaoh's harem as his wife (Gen 12:10-16). Isaac acted similarly to protect himself from being killed during their sojourn in Gerar by lying about Rebekah, saying she was his sister; Abimelech correctly admonished him for exposing his wife, Rebekah, to abuse (Gen 26:1-11). Later, Jacob used Esau's hunger as leverage for a calculating acquisition of his birthright (Gen 25:29-34). Then, Jacob schemed to deceive Isaac into conferring his blessing (meant for Esau) onto Jacob (Gen 27:1-29).

What was common in their human shaping is important to God: first, the reduction of the human ontology for the person and for relationships, making the covenant relational process amenable to human shaping; and, then, the relational consequences such efforts of self-autonomy and self-determination have to fragment the relationships necessary to be whole; and therefore to diminish the relational significance of the whole—the whole relationship of God, whose relational work of grace is not amenable to human shaping. God's terms for covenant relationship together were yet to be fully disclosed to the patriarchs, which inexplicably allowed the latitude for this human shaping of God's thematic relational response to make whole in covenant relationship together—inexplicable since *tamiym* was determinative for the relationship, though yet to be fully defined. In addition to God's terms for relationship given later in the law, those qualitative relational terms have been unmistakably made definitive by Jesus in both his whole teaching and in his vulnerably embodied life and practice, and on this basis irreducible by anything less and any substitutes, as well as nonnegotiable to our terms for human shaping. This always brings us back to the issue of what (who) will define our identity and, in turn, determine our practice.

The reality is that reductionism is always positioned against the presence of the whole. While this tension-conflict can be an overt struggle, the genius of its promoter is the subtle counter-relational work operating in ontological simulations and epistemological illusions of the whole. A major sign of reductionism's influence is when our primary focus is on the quantitative aspects of human function for the person and relationships, and then on those secondary or fragmentary aspects of church practice and all related service, ministry and mission. With this focus, Christian life and practice easily get embedded in the ontological simulation and epistemological illusion of reductionist substitutes, evidenced in Jesus' rebuke to the churches at Ephesus, Thyatira, Sardis and Laodicea (discussed in his post-ascension discourse).

One critical human shaping of the church has been notably consequential for its distinguished ontology and function in the world, and thereby for the whole gospel and its integral mission: secondary and false distinctions reducing persons and resulting in stratified relationships that create barriers to full participation in 'relationship together involving the whole person'.

The redemptive changes, which Jesus made the relational imperative for the above churches to undergo, directly involved his relational work of equalizing. What Jesus embodied throughout his sanctified life and practice was vulnerable relational involvement with the devalued, the dispossessed, the discounted and disregarded—that is, with those stigmatized by false distinctions that created barriers for relationships to come together to be whole. This required also being involved with those who benefited from such distinctions in a prevailing collective order, whether sociocultural, economic, political or religious (including the emerging church). These were persons, even

collective orders, that Jesus never avoided and even took initiative to engage (notably Jewish leaders, cleansing the temple). His relational work of family love always involved redemptive reconciliation, and to be redeemed is to be equalized for reconciliation in the relationships necessary to be God's whole. These relationships are necessarily transformed relationships, both equalized and intimate. Relationships are not fully reconciled in coming together intimately until they are first redeemed, thus equalized.

Human communities containing this diversity of distinctions and related misuse of differences (e.g. about gender and age) ongoingly maintain relationships together in some condition "to be apart" as long as this existing order is not changed. When the discussion is about bringing together human diversity, it is misguided to think that persons can be united in relationship together without these distinctions being rendered insignificant, or at least secondary. Those who employ distinctions on others and for themselves knowingly or inadvertently use a *'deficit model'* in human relations: the treatment, however subtle, of others who are different as being essentially *less*. Whatever the distinction or difference, persons are perceived as less because ostensibly they do not measure up to the prevailing standards used in the reductionist process of defining human persons by what they do or have, achieved or acquired—resulting in 'identity deficit' or a sense of 'ontological deficit'. The relational consequences of such perceptions is a stratified relational order embedded in the human relational condition "to be apart" from the whole. Whatever the variation of this human shaping of relationships together, it does not and cannot involve the experiential reality of whole relationships together necessarily composed by whole persons.

This counter-relational process—of distinction making, with the use of a deficit model to stratify relationships, for creating barriers in relationships together reinforcing the human relational condition "to be apart" from God's whole—was made evident by Jesus in his post-ascension discourse, when he encouraged the church in Philadelphia of the experiential truth of his relational work as the equalizer (Rev 3:7-12). Apparently, this relational message was directed to Jewish Christians who had been ostracized from the Jewish community (excluded from the synagogue) because they no longer measured up to the prevailing standard of Judaism (v.9, as the church in Smyrna was, 2:9). Jesus identified himself as the functional and relational keys to God's house prophesied earlier (Isa 22:22), who determines access to relational belonging to God's family (v.7). He fully affirmed the experiential truth that they permanently belonged to God's family ("open door," v.8, cf. metaphor of 3:20, a relational key to Jesus' involvement for ecclesiology to be whole). As the equalizer, Jesus' family love rendered insignificant the distinction imposed on them by the Jews prevailing in that religious order and redeemed them of the barriers to full participation in God's family (v.9b). This equalized them from any ontological and identity deficit to relationally respond back to be reconciled in reciprocating transformed relationships together as God's family in the new relational order with the veil removed. Their response back was not of self-determination ("little strength," *dynamis*, signifying being unable or incapable) or out of obligation (*opheilo*) to a code of the law, but ongoing relational response back to Jesus and his terms for whole relationship together as family: "you have kept my command with *hypomone*" for ongoing reciprocal relationship together (v.10, in contrast to the perseverance of the Ephesian church, 2:3).

By equalizing them in the surrounding context of this prevailing religious order shaping relationship together, Jesus made unequivocal the experiential truth that “I have loved you” with family love to be whole in relationship together as God’s family. As the equalizer, he will also humble those Jews functioning in ontological simulation, who imposed this counter-relational process on them, to know as well that he has loved them as family together—in a dramatic image of equalization (3:9). This dramatic image should be projected back onto his equalizing cleansing of the temple to complete the relational outcome of equalization in the redemptive reconciliation necessary for “my Father’s house” to be for “all nations” without distinctions. In this relational outcome ‘already’ Jesus constituted the Philadelphian communion further and deeper as his church family in the relational progression transplanted within the whole of God’s eschatological plan to the new Jerusalem (3:11-12). In doing so, Jesus’ concern for ecclesiology to be whole is functionally integrated with eschatology in the whole of God’s thematic action.

As those who have been equalized to permanently belong to the whole of God’s family, part of “your crown” (v.11) as the relational outcome of redemptive reconciliation involved their defining commission (in integral function with their call) to live whole and make whole as the church as equalizer. This was the experiential truth of the gospel they were to embody in the experiential reality of its relational outcome ‘already’, not in isolation merely among themselves but embody to the world, just as Jesus embodied from his Father to make whole the human condition (Jn 17:18).

Ironically, the counter-relational process of distinction making and discrimination by Jews to Christian Jews became the same counter-relational process used by various Jewish Christians to make distinctions of Gentile Christians to discriminate against them in the early church. This was Peter’s perceptual-interpretive framework and essentially his contradictory practice in the church until Jesus’ post-ascension discourse with him directly. Then Peter led the discussion in reordering the stratified early church to be the equalizer, though Paul would be the one to make it functional and to compose the ecclesiology of the whole. After Jesus redeemed his bias and reformed his ecclesiology, Peter declared at the Jerusalem church council that God “has made no distinction between them and us” (Acts 15:9). The term *diakrino* denotes to make a distinction, discriminate, and treat differently, which God does not practice in his family. This term and God’s family action help us understand that such distinctions are not neutral without repercussions but rather are integrated in a counter-relational process, which uses those distinctions to discriminate toward those persons by treating them differently, namely as being *less* by the deficit model, and thereby imposing an identity or ontological deficit on them. Peter learned that those distinctions are human constructs, not made by God (cf. Acts 10:14-15).

In this pivotal action for ecclesiology, the early church shifted to emerge as the equalizer. Its defining function for church practice became distinguished: dissolving false human distinctions of human construction and absorbing legitimate human differences from God in order to be and live the whole of God’s family in the new relational order of transformed relationships together integrally equalized and intimate. As Jesus embodied in his equalizing, church function as equalizer by its nature necessitates being both whole and holy, therefore to be qualitatively distinguished from the function of *the common*—specifically in the human shaping from the prevailing function of the surrounding context’s relational order.

The significance of the church being holy involves a functional aspect and a relational aspect for which church practice is accountable not only in distinguished identity but also in sanctified life and practice. Since Jesus redeemed and thus equalized persons in extending to them the whole relationship of his Father as family together, what distinguishes his followers (his family, his church) is to *live equalized*, and, in full congruence with his relational work, *to equalize* by extending this whole family relationship of family love. Jesus made unmistakably evident throughout his sanctified life and practice that his equalization perspective and a reductionist perceptual-interpretive framework are irreconcilable, thus incompatible as a working basis for church practice. Therefore, the functional aspect of being holy involves being freed from the influence of reductionism that explicitly or implicitly defines and/or determines church practice. The related relational aspect of being holy involves the integral practice of church relationships together in likeness of the Trinity, which is distinguished from any and all aspects of the relational condition “to be apart” from the whole, for example, shaped in likeness of orphans in an orphanage. This functional and relational significance of the church being holy interact to shape the process of church qualitative development and growth.

This relational outcome ‘already’ is not an experiential reality without ongoing redemptive change. Otherwise the church struggles to be distinguished within itself in the world, which then certainly limits its significance to the world. This change was illuminated in the whole of Paul’s own life in order to distinguish his theology with the qualitative relational significance necessary for the church’s whole relationship together. Understanding of this emerges in response to the following question.

**As a Jew and a Christian and an adopted son, to what extent did change need to take effect ‘already’ for his theology to be functional?**

It was never sufficient for Paul to change from outer in, either by outward change only, giving the appearance of some inner significance (*metaschematizo*, 2 Cor 11:13-15), or by change just from conforming outwardly to a surrounding context’s normative influence and terms (*syschematizo*, Rom 12:2). What only constituted change for Paul, together as a Jew and a Christian and an adopted son, involved a pivotal relational process which by its nature necessitated his whole person from inner out. The relational outcome of whole relationship together in God’s family can emerge only from this pivotal relational process. In Paul’s theology, the pivotal relational process is made definitive by being “baptized into Christ” for the redemptive change ‘already’ in which the old dies and the new rises with Christ (Rom 6:4-5) by the Spirit (Rom 8:10-11). The old is the reduced human ontology and function entrenched in the sin of reductionism which needs redemption to be integrally both freed and made whole as a person in relationship together (Col 3:9-11). The dynamic of the cross becomes paradigmatic for this ongoing process of the old to die ‘already’ and the reality of the new to rise (cf. Paul’s desire for further intimate relationship with Christ, Phil 3:10-11). This is the irreplaceable dynamic through which the kingdom converges into the new creation family of the church.

The wholeness dynamic of redemptive change is the pivotal process of relational involvement with Christ for the inner-out transformation of the whole person by the

Spirit (*metamorphoo*, 2 Cor 3:18; Rom 12:2), which is necessary for the experiential truth ‘already’ of the relational outcome for relational belonging and ontological identity in God’s new creation family of transformed relationships together, both intimate and equalized (Rom 8:14-17; Gal 3:26-29; 1 Cor 12:13; Col 3:9-11; Eph 4:22-24). Without full and ongoing engagement in redemptive change, there is no reconciliation to these relationships together—though possibly in appearance from outer in, but not inner out. The inseparable dynamic of redemptive reconciliation is indispensable for relationship with the whole and holy God and for all relationships together to be whole in God’s likeness.

This relational outcome entirely from redemptive reconciliation was the experiential truth of Paul, from inner out as a Jew and a Christian and an adopted son. Therefore, redemptive change is nonnegotiable and its pivotal relational process of baptism into Christ is irreducible in Paul’s *pleroma* theology. And Paul’s readers need to understand ‘already’ that nothing less and no substitutes are of functional significance both for the whole of Paul’s person and the whole in his theology.

## The Church Alive in Wholeness

Implied in previous chapters, the theological dynamics within Paul’s theological systemic framework converged in his theological forest and were integrated with further theological dynamics with just one relational purpose for wholly one relational outcome and condition: to constitute God’s new creation family, whose relational outcome emerges already in the embodied *pleroma* of Christ, the church, and whose relational conclusion completes the church’s eschatological trajectory. Paul remains focused primarily on the relational outcome ‘already’, perceiving its context within the time of qualitative *kairos* and not of quantitative *chronos*, thus his imperative for the church to be free to live in the present (Eph 5:15-16). Any dialogue with churches that Paul makes about the relational conclusion ‘not yet’ and the end times is always in the context of ‘already’, therefore the not yet emerges inseparably from the already (e.g. 1 Thes 5; Gal 5:5-6; Col 3:14).

For the church to be free to live in *kairos* and not be determined by *chronos* is no spiritualized paradigm shift but involves redemptive change. In Paul’s relational imperative above, “making the most of *kairos*” (*exagorazo*) implies being redeemed from not only determination by *chronos* but also its underlying influence, “because the days are evil” (Eph 5:16)—that is, they prevail with the sin of reductionism and its ongoing efforts against wholeness and God’s relational whole, as Paul clearly illuminates the source (Eph 6:16). What Paul illuminates points to issues ongoing for the church to live wholly embodied in the relational outcome now.

Through the course of his letters, Paul has been focused on the gospel more than theology. This same gospel unfolds as God’s thematic relational response of grace to make whole the human condition, which Paul identifies as “the gospel of God” (Rom 15:16), “the gospel of the glory of Christ” (2 Cor 4:4), and lastly as “the gospel of wholeness” (Eph 6:15). Consistently, passionately and ongoingly, Paul has fought for this gospel and against reductionism. His integrated fight turned to the church and is now

fully engaged in and inseparable from the church's life and practice; yet this still involves the whole gospel and its integral mission. Specifically, Paul's fight within the church directly involves the three crucial interrelated issues that frame the ongoing tension and conflict between wholeness and reductionism, and that are inescapable:

1. The interpretive lens we use to perceive the person (from inner out or outer in) determines in function how we actually (not ideally) define ourselves and others.
2. Then, how we engage in relationships is generally determined by how we have defined ourselves and others with that interpretive lens; and in reflexive interrelated influence, how our relationships are experienced can also determine further how we see and define ourselves—notably experienced in a comparative process using a deficit model.
3. Therefore, how these two issues become the actual primary inputs which influence, define, even determine how we really see church and engage in relationships together at church, in our gatherings in church.

The first two issues involve theological assumptions of the human person (our working theological anthropology), the reduced ontology and function of which Paul challenges. These issues extend to Christ (thus, of assumptions of Christology and soteriology) in whose image and likeness the church is the new creation. The third issue signifies also the extent to which Paul challenges their theological assumptions of pneumatology and ecclesiology.

These three crucial issues further interact with the three critical issues involved in all practice for the church and its members, which are unavoidable:

1. The integrity and significance of what and whom the church/members present of themselves to others, both within the church and in the surrounding context.
2. The quality of their communication while presenting themselves to others and the message it communicates to them.
3. The depth level of relational involvement the church/members engage through their communication by what and whom they present of themselves to others.

These six issues together are ongoing in the primacy of 'relationship together involving the whole person', which Paul continues to address with the church and to challenge within churches in order for the church to live in wholeness 'already'.

This section completes the whole in Paul's theology that embodies the kingdom's whole relationship together *into* the church distinguished in and to the world. His fight against reductionism continues to be as strong as ever. His fight for the gospel of wholeness—vulnerably embodied by the *pleroma* of God—becomes his fight for the church embodied to be alive in wholeness, irreducibly alive in Christ's likeness as the *pleroma* of Christ. For Paul, the good news for the inherent human relational need is further embodied by the church's whole ontology and function.



## The Church on the Offensive

The church in wholeness ‘already’ is neither passive nor in a defensive mode. The new creation of whole persons integrally involved in whole relationships together is by its nature dynamic and alive. Any condition of apparent homeostasis in the embodied church should not be confused with maintaining the status quo; the latter essentially is a deteriorating condition in a church (cf. the church in Laodicea, Rev 3:14-17). The dynamic in the church alive involves ongoingly distinguishing the church’s ontology and living the church’s function in wholeness while in the surrounding context of reductionism. The church’s whole ontology and function are ongoingly distinguished only in the relational context and process of the whole of God, which cannot be engaged passively or without reciprocal relational involvement.

Paul’s closing relational imperative for the church, “be strong,” stated in the Greek passive voice (Eph 6:10), appears to put the church in a passive position and a defensive mode with the armor of God (6:11-18). Yet, by combining the passive voice with the middle voice (indicating direct involvement of subject), Paul is further illuminating the church’s reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit, and thereby with the whole of God. This direct involvement with the Spirit is integral for the church’s whole ontology and function in the midst of reductionism, while not ignoring reductionism’s presence or underestimating its influence. This reciprocal relationship together does not render the church passive and on the defensive but rather embodies the church in the dynamic position to be on the offensive, alive in the experiential truth and reality of wholeness (6:15). In its ontological identity as light, the church does not just resist reductionism but also exposes, rebukes, refutes and shows its fault (*elencho*, Eph 5:11-14) in order to extend God’s family love to the human condition with the gospel of wholeness. This embodies the intrusive nature of Jesus embodying the gospel in his relational path. Paul assumes the offensive enactment of this whole function of the church, in which he personally engages in reciprocal relationship together with them (6:19-20; cf. 2 Cor 5:18-20).

Paul also assumes that the whole ontology and function of the church is in likeness of the *pleroma* of God. The whole of God’s thematic relational response to make whole the human condition was embodied and fulfilled by Christ. The truth of this gospel was not a proposition or doctrinal truth to Paul but only the experiential truth of the embodied *pleroma* of God in whole relationship together—Paul’s definitive basis for exposing, rebuking, refuting and convicting Peter in his reductionism (Gal 2:11-14). The evidence of the experiential truth of the gospel’s whole relationship together embodied by Christ is now embodied and extended by the church in likeness. Therefore, the experiential truth of the gospel of wholeness is already wholly embodied in the church to live whole together as God’s new creation family and to extend God’s family in the world to make whole the human condition. Pointing to his own past updated, Paul earlier reflected on this relational dynamic for those made whole and their call and commission to share the experiential truth of the whole gospel: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news” (Rom 10:14-15; Isa 52:7). The functional significance of this gospel of wholeness is unequivocal when embodied in the church’s whole ontology and function, which is the basis for Paul’s relational imperative for the church in wholeness

(Col 3:15) and its relational significance ‘already’ as God’s new creation family (Gal 6:15).

The nature of the church family as dynamic and alive in the new creation is distinguished only by the function of relationship—that is, whole relationships together, the function of transformed persons relationally involved in transformed relationships together. How deeply a church is distinguished by this function of relationship is the relational outcome of its reciprocal relational involvement together with the Spirit, starting foremost by the vulnerable involvement of its leadership.

## **Leadership in the New Creation**

How is a minister of righteousness distinguished from other “ministers of righteousness” (e.g. 2 Cor 11:15)? Not by their gifts, resources, role-performance or any other outer-in measure (as in *metaschematizo*, 11:13-15). Based on outer-in perception and assessment, Paul said the *telos* (end, goal or limit) of ministers will be determined by the workings of how they define themselves and thereby determine their function, specifically in how they do relationships and lead in church (“Their end will match their deeds.”). In other words, Paul makes the theological anthropology of church leaders a basic issue in church leadership and a basic antecedent needing to be congruent from inner out for leading the new creation church family (cf. Phil 2:1-5; 1 Cor 12:12-13). This builds on Jesus’ new relational order for leaders (Mk 10:42-43) and points to what in churches is always primary to Jesus (Rev 2:23).

Theological anthropology congruent with the gospel of wholeness is a function only of its experiential truth, not mere doctrinal or propositional truth. Given that the church now embodies this gospel of wholeness, the church’s ontology and function must be an outworking of its theological anthropology that is congruent with the experiential truth and reality of wholeness. Anything less or any substitutes in the church—for example, leadership defined and determined from outer-in—fragments the wholeness of God’s new creation to the various shaping of reduced ontology and function; the new creation then becomes indistinguishable from reductionism (cf. “ministers of righteousness”), no longer growing in the functional significance of the gospel of wholeness both to experience within its own life and to extend to the world. This is how reductionism functions in an outer-in dynamic contrary to the inner out of the new creation, signifying a subtle shift in theological anthropology of how persons are defined and thereby determined.

Paul’s theological anthropology is definitive discourse precisely on the experiential truth of whole ontology and function, invariable in definition yet growing in wholeness, in which Paul’s own person functions to integrate the whole of his witness—both within the church (e.g. 2 Cor 12:7-10) and to the world (cf. Acts 27:23-25)—and the whole in his theology (e.g. Phil 3:7-9). On the basis of the integrity of his whole person presented to others, Paul engaged others with the quality of his communication (e.g. honest and loving, Eph 4:15, 25) that relationally involved himself with others for the depth of whole relationship together congruent with God’s new creation family (e.g. 2 Cor 12:14-15). Persons congruent with the new creation are being transformed to live

from inner out in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10-11; 2 Cor 3:18).

This theological anthropology of whole ontology and function for the person and persons together as church is nonnegotiable for Paul (1 Cor 4:6). The new creation is not open to be defined and determined by human terms and shaping (Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:9-10; 2 Cor 5:16-17). Only the wholeness of Christ *brabeuo* for the whole person and church (Col 3:15). Just as Paul holds himself accountable for his wholeness (cf. 1 Cor 15:9-10), he firmly holds church leaders accountable for theirs because, for all of them, their wholeness is inseparable from the embodying of the church in whole ontology and function (Col 3:15; Eph 2:14-15; cf. 1 Cor 3:21-23). The new creation functions only in the inner-out dynamic in the qualitative image and relational likeness of God, the transformation which emerges from *anakainoo* (restored to being new again in one's original condition, Col 3:10) and *ananeo* (being made new from inner out, Eph 4:23). The responsibility for engagement in this process of transformation is reciprocal. On the one hand, all persons being transformed by the Spirit are responsible for their involvement. On the other, church leaders are further responsible for what they share and teach (as Paul implies, Eph 4:20-22) since their definitive purpose and function is the *katartismos* (from *katartizo*, to restore to former condition for complete qualification) of church members to embody the whole ontology and function of God's new creation family (Eph 4:12-13). Paul assumes for church leaders in their purpose and function in *katartismos* that their own persons have been and continue to be *anakainoo* and *ananeo*. If their ontology and function are not whole, then their theological anthropology has shifted to a reduced ontology and function incongruent with the new creation, and consequently they no longer have functional significance for the embodying of God's new creation family and the experiential truth of the gospel of wholeness, much less to assume a leadership function. Church leaders (including in the academy) need to understand that *katartismos* has functional significance only in dynamic interaction with their *anakainoo* and *ananeo*, and that this ongoing interaction is requisite for their ministry to be integral for embodying the church as the *pleroma* of Christ, the whole of God's new creation family. On no other basis can ministers of righteousness be distinguished.

In Paul's *pleroma* ecclesiology, church leadership in the new creation is a new creation of those who are defined and determined by whole ontology and function, not by their roles and resources. Thus, these persons are in reciprocal relationship with the Spirit for the ongoing involvement together necessary to build (*oikodome*) God's new creation family in embodied whole (*pleroma*) ontology and function, which integrally involves their own person with persons together in transformed relationships. With this leadership the church is alive and grows in wholeness to maturity (*teleios*) as the *pleroma* of Christ (Eph 4:12-13). Therefore, Paul both expects this wholeness in church leaders and holds them accountable to be transformed persons *agape*-relationally involved in transformed relationships together conjointly equalized and intimate (Eph 4:14-16; Gal 5:6; 6:15). This expectation and accountability of church leaders was demonstrated earlier by Paul with Peter and Barnabas (Gal 2:13-14), and is demonstrated further with Titus, Timothy and Philemon.

Titus and Timothy were Paul's partners and coworkers in church leadership among various churches (1 Thes 3:2; 2 Cor 8:23; Rom 16:21). The depth of their

relationship together as church leaders is expressed in Paul's so-called Pastoral Epistles (1 & 2 Tim, Ti). Paul's authorship of these letters is debated in Pauline scholarship because of questions involving them: lack of general knowledge of these letters prior to the second century along with the rest of Paul's letters; terms and expressions not found in his undisputed letters; theological terms and concepts from undisputed letters either missing or used differently in the Pastorals; form of church order in Pastorals not found in undisputed letters; difficulty placing Pastorals into Paul's known career; and they point to a softer, domesticated and somewhat idealized Paul. The sum of these questions suggests that the Pastorals appear to be the work of someone other than Paul (e.g. pseudonymous, final form by a secretary, his fragments compiled after his death). There are lingering questions unanswered about the Pastorals as representative of Paul himself.<sup>1</sup>

I propose another alternative for the Pastorals: these letters are a compilation of Paul's personal thoughts, advice and written notes communicated directly to Timothy and Titus, who formed them with the Spirit into a personal letter for some edifying purpose (not for nostalgic reasons) after Paul's death, while contextualizing Paul in the church of this later period, thus accounting for apparent further development of church order and giving only the appearance of a softer Paul in his communication with these church leaders. Though Timothy and Titus may not have understood the full edifying purpose of compiling a letter from Paul to each of them respectively, their reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit for this cooperative effort points to God's complete purpose for canonical inclusion. On this basis, I assume Paul's unintended authorship of the form of these letters yet his full responsibility of their content for church leadership, which in their canonical inclusion are representative wholly of Paul and not mere Pauline fragments. This is not to say that Timothy and Titus constructed Paul's thought, nor added their own shape to the Pauline corpus. They merely compiled what was from and of Paul—neither to idealize nor to give tribute to Paul—in cooperation with the Spirit in order to fulfill Paul's *oikonomia* to *pleroo* the whole of God's desires and thematic action to make whole the human condition in relationship together as God's new creation family.

For this relational purpose, what has become known as the Pastoral Epistles perhaps is better understood as Paul's Album of Family Love—which is more than pastoral but further and deeper involves Family Letters for the whole relationship together necessary to be God's whole family only on God's qualitative relational terms. And in this relational purpose for church leadership, Titus needed for accountability just a condensed summary from Paul, while Timothy necessitated greater input and feedback from Paul in family love.

Though not very much is known about Titus (he is absent from Acts), he became a key member of Paul's team (2 Cor 2:13; 8:23), notably in mission to Corinth (2 Cor 7:6-15; 8:6-23), now to Crete (Ti 1:5), and later to Dalmatia (2 Tim 4:10). Paul appeared to have confidence in Titus to address the difficulties in these situations (Ti 1:5,13; 2:15). In a sense, it can be said that Titus became Paul's troubleshooter for churches to function in *pleroma* ecclesiology. This personal letter then needs to be understood for the edifying purpose for all church leaders to engage their responsibility for church ontology and function to be God's new creation family together.

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<sup>1</sup> For a summary of this discussion, see Arland J. Hultgren, "The Pastoral Epistles" in James D.G. Dunn, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to St. Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 141-155.

Paul's personal communication reminds Titus what is expected of him and for what he is accountable as a church leader, which extends to all church leaders. This is focused for Titus (and for Timothy) on the necessity of "sound doctrine/teaching" (*hygianino*, sound, healthy, from *hygies*, sound, whole, Ti 1:9; 2:1; 1 Tim 6:3; 2 Tim 1:13; 4:3). As Paul made clear to Timothy, this is about the whole teaching congruent with the experiential truth of the whole gospel that was relationally entrusted to Paul (1 Tim 1:10b-11). What Paul illuminated to center their focus as church leaders cannot be reduced to a static notion of "sound doctrine," which would be a reduction of the whole gospel, thereby reducing the experiential truth of the gospel's functional and relational significance in wholeness. The functional consequence would be a different gospel under the veneer of "sound doctrine" and the relational consequence would involve a renegotiated ecclesiology. It is this tension and conflict with reductionism of God's relational whole that must be fully understood in these personal letters for them to constitute being from and of Paul. Only this whole understanding and accountability by church leaders extends Paul's fight for the experiential truth of the gospel of wholeness, which by necessity defines and determines their *katartismos* of the church to embody the whole of God's new creation family.

The Titus communication stresses similar aspects as in 1 and 2 Timothy, yet without the personal challenges, charges and even "pushing" Paul used with Timothy (1 Tim 1:18; 4:6, 11-16; 6:11-14; 2 Tim 1:6-8, 13-14; 2:1-7; 4:1-2, 5). Even though I assume their compilation of Paul's communication (oral and written) with each of them for their respective letters, this is not to suggest that Titus selectively left out those elements in his shorter account. Rather it illuminates that Timothy was less firm and decisive than Titus and thus needed more exhorting from Paul to be distinguished in whole ontology and function, not reverting back to reduced ontology and function—that is, in what he presented of himself to others, in the quality of his communication and in the depth level of his relational involvement (the three unavoidable issues for all practice noted above). Paul, however, is not focused on Timothy becoming more assertive in his role as church leader, nor more dynamic with his gifts. Paul focuses Timothy only on living in his wholeness. The Greek Titus, even among Jews, seemed to more readily live in his whole ontology and function (e.g. 2 Cor 7:6,13; 8:6,16-17; 12:18; Ti 1:5), and likely was encouraged that Paul did not define him by external identity markers even on religious terms (Gal 2:3).

In these Family Letters, Paul is not suggesting a certain type of personality to be effective church leaders. Paul's nonnegotiable expectation of church leadership is unequivocally for wholeness in ontology and function and accountability as transformed persons *agape*-relationally involved in transformed relationships together. His expectation and accountability are based on defining the person, engaging in relationships and practicing church (the three inescapable issues noted above) only in the new creation image and likeness of the whole of God—just as Paul made imperative for Timothy (1 Tim 4:12,15-16). Therefore, whether leaders are "stronger" like Titus or "weaker" like Timothy, Paul holds all accountable in family love for nothing less and no substitutes—which included himself in all that he is, or isn't (2 Cor 12:9).

Paul's expectation and accountability of church leaders to be transformed persons relationally involved in transformed relationships together is even more clearly distinguished with Philemon. In his personal letter to Philemon, Paul identifies him as a

beloved church leader in partnership with him and Timothy (Phlm 1,17). Philemon leads a house church in his own house (v.2), in which Paul indicates Philemon's role as a benefactor and points to the deeper function of the church as family beyond a mere gathering (vv. 5,7,9-10). The prevailing sociocultural role of benefactor combined with a leadership relational function in the church as family creates tension and conflict, even incompatibility, if the basis for the benefactor (i.e. outer-in distinction of reductionism) becomes the defining measure of the leader and thereby the determining influence for the function of the church. By implication, Paul addresses a potential problematic ecclesiology that redefines the relational dynamic of an embodied family. Whenever a part(s) in the church body, even if that person is a benefactor providing for the physical existence of a house church, determines the whole of God's family, then reductionism has taken effect, shaping the whole by the terms of a part(s)—becoming a gathering of reduced ontology and function in renegotiated ecclesiology.

Paul writes to Philemon to take him further and deeper into the relational whole of God's new creation family only on God's relational terms, as a direct extension of his purpose for the Colossian letter (read also in the church at Laodicea). Therefore, the Philemon letter needs to be read, interpreted and understood by the qualitative *phroneo* from the whole *phronema* Paul established in Colossians for the *synesis* necessary for the *pleroma* of God, who constituted the embodying of the wholeness of the church. Paul was developing, yet had not fully articulated, *pleroma* ecclesiology. In this process for Paul, Philemon is a key letter for church ontology and function to be the relational whole of God's new creation family, and it becomes a functional bridge to Ephesians. In the Pauline corpus, Paul makes definitive in Ephesians the theological basis for Philemon's relational function as a transformed person *agape*-relationally involved in transformed relationships together to embody the church's whole ontology and function as family.

For Philemon, as both benefactor of this house church and slave owner of Onesimus, the process of involvement in transformed relationships necessarily both equalized and intimate is not a simple transformation, and likely a threatening engagement to make himself vulnerable to. This required from Philemon nothing less than 'relationship together involving the whole person'. It is important to understand that Paul does not simply articulate to Philemon the expectation and accountability of church leadership. Because Paul writes from the whole of God's relational context of family by the relational process of God's family love (vv.9-10), Paul engages Philemon as a whole person (not merely as a benefactor or church leader) in a family dialogue within the very transformed relationships that he wants Philemon to experience further and deeper (vv.8,14). These are the distinguished relationships both equalized and intimate which constitute God's new creation to be whole persons in whole relationship together in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, these whole church relationships are not reduced by the false distinctions of persons from outer-in function in relationships fragmented by vertical separation and/or horizontal distance. Whole church relational involvement together in family love is the relational and functional basis both for Philemon as a transformed church leader and for the church he leads to embody the transformed relationships together necessary as God's new creation family (vv.15-16). How does this relational outcome happen?

## The Church in Love

Philemon's challenge as a new creation was to function as a person being transformed from inner out, thus to be vulnerable in his whole person without defining himself by the roles he had and performed and without engaging relationships on that basis. Equally challenging for Philemon was to define Onesimus as a person without those distinctions who is also being transformed from inner out on the same basis, whereby to see each other as whole persons vulnerably from inner out—in other words, 'relationship together involving the whole person'. On this basis, inseparably in integral function, Philemon's further challenge was to vulnerably engage Onesimus from inner out to be relationally involved together in family love as equalized and intimate brothers; and for this new relationship together to be the relational basis for their church family would necessitate Philemon to restructure his own household operation ("business") as a slave owner in order to embody God's new creation family. These challenges illuminate the tension and conflict between wholeness and reductionism, and the interrelated crucial issues of how we define ourselves and do relationships on that basis, and thus practice church on the same basis.

Certainly, there is a human cost for Philemon to meet these challenges and engage in the relational work of equalizing. There is also a cost for engaging in intimate relationships but the cost is less obvious. It is important to understand a vital distinction about *agape* in this matter because Paul challenges (*parakaleo*) Philemon "on the basis of *agape*" (v.9). Paul is not calling upon Philemon for sacrificial action. There is indeed a human cost for equalizing relational work—first to be equalized within one's own person and then to equalize all persons in relationships—which is similar to the divine cost of the embodied *pleroma* of God (cf. Phil 2:6-8; Col 1:19-20). This cost involves ongoingly giving up the benefits or letting go of the burdens from all elements of reductionist human distinctions that reduce persons to the outer in and fragment relationships in vertical stratification and/or horizontal distance; by comparison the cost of human shaping is immeasurable. The person then presented without reductionist distinctions involves submitting one's whole person (as is, without the benefit or burden of those distinctions) to be vulnerably involved from inner out in relationships with others, therefore beyond the comfort or security of keeping distance in relationships. This vulnerability opens the functional door to the heart to engage the depth of *agape*, not as sacrifice but as intimate relational involvement together as family (Col 3:11,14-15; Gal 5:6; cf. 2 Cor 12:15; Rev 3:20). This is Jesus' relational path that must compose the ontology and function of his followers and church.

*Agape* family love was initiated by God's thematic relational response of grace to the human condition. In this relational process of family love, God pursued persons like Paul, Philemon and even Onesimus, embraced them as they are from inner out, paid the cost to take them into his family and made them whole together as his very own sons and daughters (as Paul clarified, Gal 4:4-6). This irreducible relational process, irreplaceable relational action, and nonnegotiable relational involvement constitute the family love embodied by the *pleroma* of God to equalize and reconcile persons intimately together in God's new creation family (as Paul made definitive, Col 1:19-22; 2:9-10; 3:10-11; Eph 2:4-5, 14-22).

This is the *agape* by which Paul engages Philemon and into which he takes Philemon deeper. Family love is the depth of *agape* that changes incurring the above cost from the notion of a sacrifice, tending to signify a compelled obligation (*ananke*, “something forced,” Phlm 14). Rather family love emerges from a transformed heart by choice, freely and uncompelled (*hekousios*), which is how Paul encouraged Philemon to function. Paul is making this rigorous relational process of family love functional for Philemon, and all church leaders and members living in reductionist distinctions, in order to live as whole persons in whole relationship together, the embodying of God’s new creation family. On the relational-functional basis of family love, Philemon would give up a slave to gain a brother (“you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave but...a beloved brother,” vv.15-16), give up a household shaped by the surrounding context to gain whole family together (“but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord,” v.16). As Paul signified in his opening and closing greeting (vv.3,25), by the whole of God’s relational process of family love, he takes Philemon further and deeper into the importance of his whole person from inner out involved in the primacy of relationship together to be whole in the experiential truth of God’s family ‘already’, so that “your faith may become more effective when you *specifically understand* [*epignosis*] all the good that we may do for Christ” (v.6). This good was not about serving in mission but about deep involvement in relational family love together for the experiential reality of the gospel’s relational outcome ‘already’. On this basis alone, the church and its ministry emerge in qualitative relational significance.

Paul made unequivocal to Philemon, all church leaders and the entire church that the embodied church becomes alive only in family love to be wholly the new creation in relational likeness to the whole of God (Col 3:14-15). This is the relational purpose of Paul’s prayer for the church to specifically know from the Spirit God’s family love from inner out in order to wholly embody the *pleroma* of Christ (Eph 1:17; 3:14-19). Moreover, as Paul clarified for Timothy, this relational process of family love necessitates the whole person (*pneuma* and *soma* together) to embody the *agape* relational involvement for whole relationship together, by which Timothy would engage in reciprocal relationship with the Spirit (2 Tim 1:7,13-14; cf. Rom 8:14-15). This depth of *agape* is not engaged merely by the quantity of deeds one does or resources one gives, even in great sacrifice. *Agape* family love is a function only of relational involvement from inner out. This relational function emerges only from persons (and notably church leaders) being restored to new again (*anakainoo*, Col 3:10) and being made new from inner out (*ananeoo*, Eph 4:23) to prepare and be prepared (*katartismos*) to embody the *pleroma* of Christ, and on this qualitative relational basis to live and make whole (Eph 4:12-16).

Since family love is involvement of the whole person in reciprocal relationship together conjointly with each other and with the Spirit, another important necessity in this integral relational process is to submit one’s person to one another (*hypotasso*, Eph 5:21). Paul does not make this an imperative because as a participle (*hypotassomenoi*) it directly defines the relational means by which his prior relational imperatives for the church are engaged (Eph 5:1-2,8,15,18b). *Hypotasso* makes definitive both the relational nature of the new creation and the relational primacy of God’s new creation family before the individual, thus its priority over individual self-autonomy, self-determination or self-justification. *Hypotasso* becomes a reductionist act when taken out of the relational



context of Paul's imperatives and engaged apart from the relational process of family love.

Family love in relational likeness of the whole of God is neither optional nor negotiable in Paul's *pleroma* ecclesiology. "Be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in *agape*, as Christ loved us" are relational imperatives for the new creation church family, which by their very nature necessitate being submitted to one another based on experiencing the love from Christ's submission. *Hypotasso* has been interpreted with a reductionist lens of human distinctions to mean to render obedience, be submissive, be subordinated, with implications of becoming objectified or reduced in ontology and function—notably for women and slaves as Paul's prescriptions for them appear to suggest. Moreover, this interpretation has application only for certain persons to submit, not all. In interaction with his relational imperatives, however, Paul uses *hypotasso* as every person's initiation of a voluntary relational action and should not be confused with a compulsory act of obedience or subordination to, for example, someone with authority, power or more status as defined by human distinctions. Paul's relational dynamic of submitting one's whole person to one another is a function only of family love extended to one another in relational likeness of Christ's family love for us. This reciprocal relational involvement of family love signifies the whole person giving primacy to the relationships together of God's relational whole over an individual's self-interests and self-concerns (cf. 1 Cor 10:23-24, 31-33; Eph 4:14,19)—yet without sacrificing the whole person's significance in the family, for example, as experienced often in collective contexts and some human families. Personhood is constituted from inner out in wholeness with the relational means of submitting one's person, not by highlighting it from outer in. The underlying issue illuminated here is theological anthropology and its ontology and function.

Paul's interpretive lens for 'submitting' is not from human contextualization but from the whole of God's relational context of family and relational process of family love vulnerably embodied by Jesus' whole person, in *pleroma* Christology for *pleroma* soteriology 'already' to embody the *pleroma* of Christ (Eph 1:22-23). Therefore, in clear contradistinction to any self-centeredness of self-autonomy, any self-interests of self-determination, and any self-concerns of self-justification—all from the influence of reductionism and its counter-relational work fragmenting relationships together (as Paul clarified earlier, Gal 5:13)—Paul makes conclusive this vital relational dynamic for relationships together to function whole in relational likeness to God: submitting our whole person to one another in family love while in intimate relational response to Christ, who submitted his whole person to the Father in order to relationally embody the whole of God's family love for us to be equalized and intimately made whole together in God's new creation family.

This relational whole *in* family love is what Christ saved us *to* 'already' to constitute the whole ontology and function of who the church is and whose the church is (Eph 2:4-5, 14-22). What emerges from this relational whole in ontology and function *with* family love is the new relational order integrally signifying and further constituting transformed persons *agape*-relationally involved in transformed relationships together (Eph 4:15-16, 23-25). This is the new relational order with its essential relational process of family love that Paul identified previously (Gal 5:6) and distinguished integrally in

*pleroma* ecclesiology for the new creation church to be embodied alive in wholeness (Eph 2:15b; 4:2-6; cf. Gal 6:15).

Unequivocally for Paul, the church alive in wholeness is the church in love, family love, *agape* family love in relational likeness to the whole of God. Yet, family love should not be idealized, nor should it be rendered to a “kingdom ethic.” Family love is vulnerable relational work, made difficult in the midst of counter-relational work from human shaping of relationships together. As Paul has made unmistakable to various church leaders and churches, engagement in family love is a relational process continuously subjected to human terms and shaping. Consequently, just as leadership in the new creation faces ongoing tension and conflict with reductionism, the church as the new creation family is ongoingly challenged to be defined and determined by wholeness or reductionism, by the new or the old, by *pleroma* ecclesiology or renegotiated ecclesiology. What emerges from the church and its leadership signifies either the gospel of wholeness or a different gospel, which Paul defined as no gospel for the inherent human need and problem (Gal 1:6-7). And it warrants ongoing emphasis that the new creation church family should not be confused with a gathering of relational-epistemic orphans, no matter how much sacrifice has been made for gathering.

## **The Church in the New Relational Order**

A theological assumption Paul makes through the whole in his theology is that the new creation is ‘already’, even though not yet totally completed (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; Rom 6:4; Col 3:10; Eph 2:15b; 4:23-24). To embrace this assumption with Paul is to be accountable for its functional significance and implications both for the person and persons together as church, and for their witness and mission in the world—all of which assumes wholeness.

Directly as a result of the new creation ‘already’ for Paul, the outcome emerges of having a qualitative new *phroneo* (mindset and lens) from a whole new *phronema* (framework for thought, Rom 8:2,5-6; cf. 12:2). It is from this whole interpretive framework with its qualitative lens that life is perceived in the innermost of qualitative *zoe* (not the limits of quantitative *bios*), and that peace is understood with the presence of wholeness (not the absence of conflict). Paul clearly distinguishes that this new interpretive framework with the Spirit is “life and peace” (v.6), and its interpretive lens determines the qualitative depth level of life discerned and its wholeness realized inner out.

This new interpretive framework is critical for Paul in his discourse about peace throughout his letters and is essential for his readers to know and understand the whole in his theology. When Paul addressed the church at Corinth in their disputes, he illuminated “God is a God not of disorder but of peace” (1 Cor 14:33). This may appear to illuminate the obvious but that depends on our interpretive framework. The term for disorder (*akatastasia*) involves being without a fixed or settled condition. Since Paul added that their church life and practice should be “in order” (*taxis*, v.40), that is, according to a set of guiding principles or an established framework, there are various conditions of church life and practice that would appear sufficient to establish order in the church—even by maintaining tradition or the status quo (cf. Jesus’ interpretive lens, Mt 15:8-9). If Paul

understood peace as just the absence of conflict, then these various church conditions (including the status quo) would qualify as sufficient ecclesial order.

A deeper tension and conflict emerge because this is not the peace of God that Paul illuminates. As urgent as disorder may be in some churches and around the world, Paul is deeply focused both on the quantitative of *bios* and the qualitative of *zoe*, with *zoe* always primary; and the absence of conflict does not adequately address the existing disorder, nor does it fulfill the order needed for the human condition, the inherent human relational need and problem neuroscience reminds us about. The juxtaposition of disorder (*akatastasia*) with Paul's peace reveals a critical distinction: Paul's use of *akatastasia* is not merely about being in a fixed or settled condition of *taxis*—for example, according to a set of guiding principles—but that this condition of *akatastasia* is a function of fragmentation, that is, practice that fragments the whole; and that God is not a God of reductionism but the God of wholeness, who therefore does not fragment but who makes whole (cf. Jesus' practice of peace, Mt 10:34). Moreover, what Paul further illuminates for his readers is that any ecclesial order (even with an established framework) without wholeness has no significance to God—as Paul further clarified later for the new creation church (Col 3:15; Eph 4:3).

Paul's *synesis* of peace emerged with the Spirit in a new *phronema* with a new *phroneo* that deepened his focus. His *synesis* of wholeness included the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction from *tamiym* (cf. Gen 17:1), which helped him to integrally understand God's establishing the new relationship (*siym*) of wholeness (*shalom*) in God's definitive blessing of his family (Num 6:24-26), and to relationally receive the wholeness that only Jesus gives (Jn 14:27) to embody the gospel of wholeness for the human condition (Eph 6:15). What Paul illuminated above about God and peace and extends in relational discourse throughout his letters made definitive this wholeness: the whole ontology and function of God, the whole of God's thematic relational response to make whole the human condition, the new creation of human ontology and function in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God, and the embodying of the whole ontology and function of the church as God's new creation family—the relational outcome of wholeness 'already' in the midst of reductionism.

While Paul assumes the new creation 'already' and its relational outcome with the Spirit to embody the church's whole ontology and function as God's new creation family, he never assumes the church will live whole in its new relational order, and thereby make whole in the surrounding context of reductionism. To live in wholeness is the continuous challenge for the church because its ontology and function are ongoingly challenged by and susceptible to reductionism. The tension and conflict between wholeness and reductionism is ongoing with deep repercussions, which is why Paul settles for nothing less and no substitutes in his *pleroma* theology.

In Paul's *pleroma* ecclesiology, for the church to live in wholeness is for the church to be ongoingly involved relationally with the Spirit for its embodying together "in the bond of wholeness" (Eph 4:3). This bond (*syndesmos*) is the whole relationships binding the church together from inner out as one interdependent body, which Jesus embodied for transformed relationships together both equalized and intimate (Eph 2:14-22). For the church to live in wholeness as God's new creation family is to be deeply involved together in this new relational order of equalized and intimate relationships. This is what holds together the church in its innermost; and apart from these relationships

together with the Spirit, there is just a fragmentary condition of the church. When Paul illuminated “God is not a God of fragmentation but the God of wholeness,” he also made unequivocal that this new church relational order is neither optional nor negotiable. The challenge for Paul’s readers, then, becomes both about his assumption of the new creation ‘already’ and if God’s new creation family is truly the church. Paul’s *pleroma* ecclesiology clearly defines these as inseparable and irreducible. Reductionism would renegotiate church order as sufficient alternative, perhaps even with its reification as the peace of God with irenic identity markers.

In Paul’s ongoing fight for the gospel, wholeness is a theological given for the truth of the gospel, just as Peter, Barnabas and other church leaders experienced this truth from Paul (Gal 2:11-14). They learned a difficult lesson about the experiential truth of the gospel (distinguished from only having a referential or doctrinal truth) that whole relationships together are a theological imperative for the functional significance of the gospel. The polemic Paul framed around the issue between the works of the law and faith is more deeply focused on the underlying conflict between reductionism and wholeness, either reduced ontology and function or whole ontology and function (Gal 2:19-21). Even though some of Paul’s readers may not affirm the relational outcome of the gospel until ‘not yet’ for whole persons and persons together in whole relationship, they still must account for the persons and persons together now in the image and likeness of God. Past, present and future, God is not a God of fragmentation but the God of wholeness. Even now, therefore, human terms and shaping of church life and practice are not sufficient to be of significance to God—despite the certainty of a church’s guiding principles and the long-established tradition of its framework. Reductionism is never an option or substitute for the whole of God and God’s relational whole embodied in the face of Christ, who has “shined on you and been gracious to you...and established the new relationship of wholeness.” This peace—from the God of peace embodied by the *pleroma* of God for the gospel of peace to fulfill the inherent human relational need and resolve the persistent human problem—must be accounted for by the church now. Doctrine alone is insufficient to account for this peace, tradition has been inadequate, and missional, servant, incarnational, inclusive and postmodern models for church are ambiguous. If the church is not directly dealing with the human shaping of relationships together, then the church is not addressing the human relational condition, both within itself and in the world. In the midst of reductionism, Paul is still exhorting his readers to “*embody whatever is necessary to live the gospel of wholeness*” (Eph 6:15).

Within the reductionism-wholeness issue is the tension between the already and the not yet, both of which Paul engaged in his relational discourse with the church at Philippi in what is likely one of his last prison letters. Paul raised some interrelated conditional (or factually implied) statements about their experiential truth of relationship with God in the present (Phil 2:1). They evoke reflection on the existence of the following: encouragement being in relationship with Christ, intimately experiencing his family love, having reciprocal relational involvement ongoingly together with the Spirit, and being affected in one’s persons from inner out. From Paul’s interpretive lens (*phroneo*), if these exist (or since they exist), then this defines their new mindset and interpretive lens (*phroneo* in likeness, 2:2,5) to determine their reciprocal involvement in relationships together, first based on their experiential truth of the whole of God and thereby in relational likeness to this whole of God (2:2-4). This new *phroneo* is not the

result of human effort but emerges from a transformed *phronema* constituted by the experiential reality of relationship together with the whole of God. With this new interpretive lens, the person perceives oneself wholly from the inner out and others in the same way, and is involved in relationships together on this basis (involving the first two inescapable issues), which is congruent with their experience of relational involvement from God and in likeness of how God engages relationships.

The *agape* relational involvement Paul defines is not about sacrificial love but family love, which submits one's whole person from inner out to one another in equalized and intimate relationships signifying whole relationship together—just as the whole of God functions together and is relationally involved with us. Paul defines conclusively that in the midst of reductionism, this is the church order in which “the wholeness of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard *your persons from inner out* in Christ *from reductionism*” (Phil 4:7) and by which “the God of wholeness will be *relationally involved* with you” (4:9).

For Paul, God indeed is not a God of fragmentation but the God of wholeness, and therefore nothing less and no substitutes of the person and persons together in the new relational order are functionally significant for all of the following: to reciprocally involve the whole of God (Eph 2:17-22), to constitute God's relational whole as family in his relational likeness (Col 3:10-11,15), and to embody the ontological identity and relational belonging that are necessary to fulfill the inherent human relational need and resolve the human problem existing both in the world and even within churches (Eph 3:6,10-12; 4:13-16). In *pleroma* ecclesiology, the church in whole ontology and function signifies only transformed persons *agape*-relationally involved in transformed relationships together integrally equalized and intimate, composing the new relational order for the embodied church alive in wholeness in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole and holy God (Eph 4:23-25)—who is not a God of reductionism promoting ontological simulations and epistemological illusions. The relational messages to churches by Jesus in post-ascension illuminate only this whole of God.

## **The Church as Equalizer from the Inner Out**

The relational outcome and order from the theological dynamics integrated in Paul's *pleroma* theology are distinguished clearly in the church only to the extent of their functional significance in church life and practice (Eph 5:8-14). Yet, functional significance is not as variable as many churches perceive. Paul's *pleroma* ecclesiology should not be confused with an elective-type referendum for local churches to define and determine their own life and practice according to contextualization in their surrounding settings; this would also be contrary to *kathos* in Jesus' defining family prayer. Such shaping results in a garden-variety of churches occupied in church building(s), the process of which is both distinct from the growth of God's family and indistinguishable from church by human terms.

Paul's conjoint fight for the truth of the whole gospel (the theme in Gal) extended to the gospel of wholeness and shifted into the church (the theme in Eph). For Paul's readers to fully understand what Paul fights for and against in Ephesians, we need to

understand what he fights for and against in Galatians. The dynamic for both in which Paul is engaged signifies the development of the whole in his theology.

Paul's emergence from the Damascus road was the relational outcome of his experiential truth of the gospel—the good news for whole relationship together. The truth of this gospel is clearly illuminated by Paul in Galatians, which is less theological discourse about doctrinal purity and more relational dialogue about function together for wholeness (cf. Gal 2:12-13 and 6:16). The alternative to this gospel is labeled “a different gospel” by Paul (1:6). The subtlety of a different gospel becomes apparent only as the whole gospel is distinguished next to it (Gal 1:7,11-12), and the correct interpretive lens is used to pay attention to this crucial distinction and to ignore other human-shaped distinctions (3:1-3; 5:25-26). The issue of one's interpretive lens is again critical to Paul's polemic for determining what is defined as primary and significant in comparison to what is secondary and insignificant. Paul identifies unmistakably what the interpretive lens of a different gospel is focused on: “to make a good showing in the flesh” (6:12), “to make a good impression outwardly” (NIV). The term *euprosopeo* (from *euprosopos*, pleasing in appearance) is focused on the person from outer in, whose function may be misleading (even unintentionally or unknowingly), as Peter's and Barnabas' was in their *hypokrisis* (i.e. outward identity inconsistent with inward), or whose function may be specious as was the function of some Christian Jews (6:13).

Paul exposes the use of an outer-in interpretive lens to define the nature and function of a different gospel, the bias of which determines a greater importance of quantitative significance over qualitative significance. Any emphasis on the outer in is problematic for the gospel because its practice can even unknowingly give just the appearance (as in *metaschematizo*) of the gospel without its qualitative relational significance. Intentional or not, this becomes a reductionist gospel shaped by human terms and engaged by human effort rather than the whole gospel constituted by God's thematic relational response of grace. This is the ongoing conflict between faith (or church) from below and faith (and the church) from above—an antinomy basic to relations between human persons and God (Gal 6:14). The former is focused on human distinctions from outer in with its quantitative interpretive lens, while the latter embraces whole persons from inner out with its qualitative new interpretive lens (5:6; 6:15). Ontology and function in wholeness also encompasses “the Israel of God,” which is not about faith based on human distinction (e.g. the notion of the God of Israel with its identity markers) with its comparative human effort (e.g. observing the torah) but is only God's relational grace constituting the whole of God's new creation family (6:16), as Paul later clarified theologically (Rom 2:28-29).

Paul illuminated in Galatians the experiential truth of this whole gospel that distinguishes it from any ontological simulations and epistemological illusions from reductionism. The qualitative new interpretive lens, which is needed to pay close attention to this critical distinction while putting other human-shaped distinctions into deeper focus, is a key for Paul in his fight. This strongly indicates that Galatians needs to be the lens by which to read Paul's letters and his theology in general, and Ephesians and his ecclesiology in particular. As Paul's twofold fight shifted into the church, his readers need to use this qualitative new interpretive lens to understand the functional whole of his ecclesiology for the church to be embodied alive in wholeness as the equalizer from inner out.

When Paul declares that “neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything” (Gal 6:15), the term for “anything” (*tis*) means having significance—which applies to all human distinctions identified earlier (3:28). That is, Paul makes conclusive that all human-shaped distinctions exist (*eimi*, verb of existence) without having significance. For Paul, life and practice in human distinctions is a reduced ontology and function that has no ontologically significant existence, only the new creation exists in the significance of whole ontology and function. Any life and practice shaped by human terms and based on human constructs from human contextualization have no ontological reality and thus no significance, but are only an ontological simulation and epistemological illusion from reductionism. Paul makes further definitive that the only life and practice with ontological and functional significance is “faith functioning in reciprocal relational response of trust of one’s whole person both to be vulnerably involved with the person of Christ Jesus and to be *agape* relationally involved in family love with others for whole relationship together” (5:6). This relational dynamic integrally distinguishes the irreducible value and significance (*ischyo*, “counts for”) of the relationships together of God’s new creation family. Paul can be definitive because he was not engaged by Jesus according to Paul’s own human-shaped distinction; rather, Jesus intimately embraced Paul in family love and equalized him from inner out to relationally belong in God’s family. This was his experiential truth of the whole gospel, the relational outcome of which is now embodied in the whole ontology and function of the church. It is with this lens from Galatians that Paul’s *pleroma* ecclesiology emerges to complete the ontological and functional significance of the new creation church as equalizer from the inner out.

The human-shaped distinctions Paul has identified (Gal 3:28; 5:6; 6:15; Col 3:11) always need to be perceived and addressed within the ongoing tension and conflict between wholeness and reductionism. Paul’s purpose was not to eliminate all distinctions in the church but to neutralize the influence of such distinctions as primary for defining and determining life and practice. The fact of human differences and the reality of any valid distinctions are only secondary for Paul (1 Cor 12:12-13; Rom 12:3-5), and any meaning and significance given to them beyond being secondary fragment human ontology, function and relationships together in the church (e.g. 1 Cor 1:12-13; 3:4-5, 21-23; 4:6-7). Yet, it seems only natural to ascribe value to human differences, which is exactly Paul’s polemic addressing the need for redemptive change (1 Cor 3:3-4).

Human differences evoke different responses from persons depending on their interpretive lens. When Paul argues “who sees anything different in you?” (*diakrino*, 1 Cor 4:7), he points to both *who* sees and *what* is seen as different. Who and what are interrelated in a reflexive dynamic: ‘what is seen’ is determined by a person’s interpretive lens, and in reflexive interaction ‘who sees’ also becomes determined by the nature of what is seen. The issue is between outer in and inner out (as Paul clarified later, 2 Cor 5:12). Whoever sees from outer in perceives outer-in differences as primary by which both others and they are defined and relationships together are determined. Whoever sees from inner out perceives any differences as only secondary, which thus neither define others and themselves nor determine their relationships together. Paul is confident in his polemic that any differences used “to treat persons differently by making distinctions” (*diakrino*) are the terms of human constructs—which either create further value differences from those differences, or boast about differences as their own when in fact they were only given to them by God. These comparative values construct a ‘deficit

model', which is used for differential treatment of others who are different as being essentially less (*diakrino*). The critical issue with *diakrino* then is the human shaping of relationships together signifying the human condition. Paul knows from his own relational involvement with God (Phil 3:4-9) that *diakrino* is of no significance to God and contrary to how God functions, and thus is in conflict with the integral basis determining the church's life and practice (as Peter testified, Acts 15:9).

Therefore, *diakrino* has no place or function in the new creation church embodied in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God. **What is the functional significance of the church without *diakrino*?**

When Paul integrally defined the relational process of equalizing persons, he illuminated the human condition of persons in human distinctions valued as less (Eph 2:11-12). This involved the human shaping of relationships together that resulted in relational separation or distance ("far off," *macros*, 2:13, cf. Isa 57:19). There was a relational condition "to be apart" from God's relational whole—that could include those in church gatherings—who were pursued in family love by Christ to be equalized and made whole together in God's family (2:13-22). The contrast between the relational condition "to be apart" and made whole together parallels the relational condition of the temple prior to Jesus' final entry into Jerusalem and after those closing days. God's house had been stratified in the relational condition "to be apart" that denied access to persons of certain distinctions; this relational condition, after Jesus' redemptive cleansing, was made whole as "a house of prayer for all nations" (Mk 11:15-17; cf. Isa 56:3-8). By his relational process of family love equalizing persons to be made whole together, Jesus shifted the temple from the outer in to its deeper significance inner out (1 Cor 3:16), in which the whole of God is intimately present and relationally involved to embody the church as God's whole family together (Eph 2:18-22; Rom 8:9,14; cf. Jn 14:23; 17:21-23,26).

There is a direct correlation between treating persons differently by making distinctions (*diakrino*) and who has equal access and intimate involvement in the church. The relational process of family love equalizing persons is an inner-out dynamic incompatible with *diakrino*, because treating persons differently by making distinctions is an outer-in dynamic which limits access and creates barriers to intimate relationships together for those having the distinction of being less. The threat of vulnerability to closer relationships is also a major motivation for maintaining such distinctions in church, including the academy. Paul makes unequivocal that these are limits and barriers that Jesus redeemed for persons to be equalized and reconciled together without human-shaped distinctions in order to be made whole in God's family (Eph 2:14-16). For the church to have limits on accessibility based on distinctions, and barriers to intimate involvement due to distinctions, even unintentionally out of tradition or from the influence of culture, is to fragment God's relational whole and to be reduced in ontology and function. This often subtle church practice renders Christ's salvific work of wholeness incomplete and thereby lacking of its relational significance to fulfill the inherent human relational need and resolve the human relational problem "to be apart."

Making distinctions and treating persons differently are inseparable because human-shaped distinctions are rooted in a comparative process of more-or-less value, which engages relationships accordingly by treating persons differently (cf. Paul's polemic, 2 Cor 10-12). The primacy of 'relationship together involving the whole person'



is replaced by relationships shaped by human distinctions. Intentional or not, this is the dynamic that, for example, church leaders promote by emphasizing roles and gifts, and church members reinforce by treating leadership and themselves based on roles and gifts (e.g. 1 Cor 1:12; 3:5-7). In this dynamic, how well persons measure up to those expectations determines their position and influence in church. This often well-intentioned mutual engagement functionally (not theologically) limits those in a deficit position from full access in a church, which obviously creates vertical barriers to intimate relationships together. Further, since this dynamic is an outer-in process of engagement, there is also ongoing horizontal distance precluding intimate involvement together. The threat Jesus created with ‘relationship together involving the whole person’ is to this relational condition. This apparently acceptable relational distance in churches makes for a comfortable arrangement with minimal accountability, that is, for a gathering of relational-epistemic orphans, but not for God’s new creation family “in the bond of wholeness” (Eph 4:3). The contrast for Paul is between the counter-relational nature of outer-in function shaped by human terms and the relational nature of inner-out function in likeness of God.

In Paul’s *pleroma* ecclesiology, the bond of wholeness with the Spirit is embodied inner-out function of whole persons who relationally submit to one another in family love to be intimately involved in relationships together without the limits, barriers or comforts of human-shaped distinctions. This relational process of equalizing from inner out needs to be distinguished in the experiential truth of church ontology and function, and not remain in doctrinal truth or as a doctrinal statement of intention, or else its experiential reality will be elusive. This experiential truth happens only when the church is made whole by reciprocal relationship with the Spirit in the functional significance of four key dynamics. These key dynamics constitute the church to be embodied alive in wholeness in the qualitative image of God and to live ongoingly in whole relationship together in the relational likeness of the whole of God.

Two of these keys for the church necessitate structural and contextual dynamics and the other two involve imperatives for individual and relational dynamics. In each dynamic, redemptive changes are necessary to go from a mere gathering of individuals to the new creation church family—changes which overlap and interact with the other key dynamics.

**First Key Dynamic:** *the structural dynamic of access.* While access can be perceived from outer in as a static condition of a church structured with merely an “open-door policy,” access from the inner out of God’s relational context and process of family is dynamic and includes relational involvement—implied, for example, in Jesus’ transformation of the temple for prayer accessible by all. When Paul made Christ’s salvific work of wholeness conclusive for the church, all persons without distinctions “have access in one Spirit to the Father” (Eph 2:18) for relational involvement together “in boldness and confidence” (3:12) as persons who have been equalized for intimate relationships together as God’s family (2:19-22; cf. Gal 4:4-7). Access, therefore, is the structural dynamic of the church without *diakrino*, which is congruent with Christ’s relational work of wholeness (Eph 2:14-17) and is in relational likeness to God (Acts 15:9; Col 3:10-11).

The issue of access is deeply rooted in human history. Peter himself struggled with his interpretive framework (*phronema*) and lens (*phroneo*) shaped by his tradition, whose *diakrino* denied access to those of Gentile distinction. Even after Jesus changed his theology (Acts 10:9-16), Peter struggled to change from the practice of his tradition because of his emotional investment and likely perception of losing something related to the privilege, prestige and power of having access. Human-shaped distinctions signify having advantage in comparative relations, the absence of which precludes that advantage. After the primordial garden, the human relational condition “to be apart” became an intentional goal of human effort to secure advantage and maintain self-preservation—the ‘survival of the fittest’ syndrome masked even by religious faith. The specific resources for this relational advantage may vary from one historical context to another (cf. even the works of the law and justification by faith). Yet, privilege, prestige and power are the basic underlying issues over which these relational struggles of inequality are engaged—whether the context is family, social, economic, political or even within or among churches. Any aspects of privilege, prestige and power are advantages (and benefits) that many persons are reluctant to share, much less give up, if the perception (unreal or not) means for them to be in a position of *less*. The control of this distribution is threatened by equal access.

Human-shaped distinctions create and maintain advantage, which certainly fragments relationships together. By their very nature human distinctions are an outer-in dynamic emerging from reduced ontology and function, which in itself already diminishes, minimalizes and fragments God’s relational whole. Access, however, is an inner-out dynamic signifying the relational dynamic and qualitative involvement of grace. That is, the functional significance of access is for all persons to be defined from inner out and not to be treated differently from outer in, in order to have the relational opportunity to be involved with God for their redemption from the human struggle of reductionism, and thereby to be equalized and intimately reconciled together to fulfill their inherent human relational need in God’s relational whole (as Paul clarifies in his polemic, Gal 3:26-29). Equal access does not threaten personhood and wholeness for the church, but is a necessary key dynamic for their qualitative development wholly from inner out. Therefore, for a church to engage the necessary redemptive change that makes functionally significant ‘access without *diakrino*’ is relationally specific to what wholly embodies church life and practice for the ongoing relational involvement with persons who are different, in order for them also to receive equally and experience intimately the ontological identity and relational belonging to the whole of God’s new creation family.

This structural dynamic flows directly to the contextual dynamic.

**Second Key Dynamic:** *the contextual dynamic of reconciliation absorbing human differences and valid distinctions.* This is not a contradiction of the church without *diakrino*, but the acknowledgement of the fact of differences in human makeup and the reality of valid distinctions given by God, without the church engaging in *diakrino*. The ancient Mediterranean world of Paul’s time was a diversity of both human differences and human-shaped distinctions. Yet, prior to its diaspora due to persecution (Acts 8), the early church community was a mostly homogeneous group who limited others who were different from access to be included in their house churches, table fellowships and community identity (e.g., Acts 6:1). Despite a missional program to the surrounding

diversity, church practice had yet to relationally involve the reconciliation dynamic of family love to take in those persons and absorb (not dissolve) their differences. This purposeful relational involvement necessitates a major contextual change in the church, especially for a homogeneous gathering. Paul was pivotal in bringing such redemptive change to the church (e.g. 1 Cor 11:17-22; Gal 2:1-10).

Paul delineates a twofold reconciliation dynamic constituted by God's relational process of family love. On the one hand, family love dissolves human-shaped distinctions and eliminates *diakrino*. Equally important, on the other hand, family love absorbs most human differences into the primacy of relationships together, but not dissolving or assimilating those differences into a dominant framework (Rom 12:4-5). The twofold nature of this reconciliation dynamic of family love is the functional significance of Paul's integrated fight against reductionism and for wholeness (1 Cor 12:12-13). Yet, in order to be God's relational whole, it is not adequate to include persons of difference for the purpose of diversity (e.g. to have a multicultural church). The relational process of family love extends relational involvement to those who are different, takes in and vulnerably embraces them in their difference to integrally relationally belong to the church family. This is the dynamic made essential by Paul for the church's "unity of the Spirit in the bond of wholeness" (Eph 4:3,16).

This reconciliation dynamic signifies the contextual change necessary for the church to be ongoingly involved in the relational process of absorbing human differences into the church without dissolving or assimilating those differences. This involves, therefore, its willingness to change to adjust to differences and even to adopt some differences, all of which are only compatible with God's relational whole and congruent with God's relational terms. Redemptive change also involves the reflexive interaction between these contextual and structural dynamics.

In addition, just as Peter was chastened by Christ in his interpretive framework and theology, and humbled by Paul, making this contextual change functional in the church may require us to humbly accept the limitations of our current interpretive framework (*phronema*) and lens (*phroneo*) to understand the significance of differences to the whole of God as well as of those in the whole and holy God. It also requires us to honestly account for any outer-in bias necessitating a whole *phronema* and a qualitative *phroneo* (as Paul delineated, Eph 4:22-25). This humility and honesty are essential for the church's contextual dynamic of reconciliation to be of functional significance to absorb human differences into church life and practice as family together (cf. Eph 4:2).

The importance of these structural and contextual dynamics for the church to be whole as the equalizer from inner out also directly involve the other two key dynamics. These are dynamics for the individual person and our relationships. The four dynamics strongly interact together in reflexive relationship that suggests no set order of their development and function. Yet, there is a clear flow to each pair of dynamics—for example, there has to be access before differences can be absorbed—while in crucial and practical ways the latter pair will determine the extent and significance of the former's function.

**Third Key Dynamic:** *the person's inner-out response of freedom, faith and love to others' differences.* When a person is faced with differences in others, there is invariably

some degree of tension for that person, with awareness of it or not. The tension signifies the engagement of our provincial context or ‘our little world’ we live in—that which is constructed from the limitations of the person’s perceptual-interpretive framework, which is why humbly accepting its limits and honestly accounting for our bias are needed for the reconciliation dynamic to be whole together. What does a person(s) do with those differences in that relational context? The structural and contextual dynamics can be invoked, yet their functional significance interacts with and will ultimately be determined by the individual person’s response.

The person’s response will emerge either from outer in or inner out. What differences we pay attention to and ignore from our interpretive lens are critical to understand for the following ongoing interrelated issues: first, what we depend on to define our person and maintain our identity; then, on this basis, how we engage relationships in these diverse conditions; and, thus, based on these two issues what level of relationship we engage in within the church. These are inescapable issues which each person must address as an individual and be accountable for, on the one hand, while the church community must account for these in practice on the other.

Paul demonstrated the person’s inner-out response to others’ differences that is necessary both to be a whole person and to be involved in whole relationship together. In his fight for the gospel, Paul is also always fighting against reductionism. One aspect of the relational outcome of the gospel is the freedom that comes from being redeemed. Yet, for Paul the whole of the gospel is not a truncated soteriology but the whole relational outcome of *pleroma* soteriology. He composes Christian freedom in the relational context of God’s relational whole so that the relational purpose of Christian freedom and its functional significance would not be diminished, minimalized or abused in reductionism (Gal 5:1,13; 1 Cor 8:9). From this interpretive framework and lens, Paul highlights his own liberty and the nature of his relational response to others’ differences (1 Cor 9:19-23). He deeply engaged the relational dynamic of family love in the process of submitting his whole person to those persons, simply declaring “I have become all things to all people” (v.22). Clearly, by his statement Paul is not illustrating what to do with the tension in those situations created by human differences and how to handle those differences. Further clarification is needed, however, since his apparent posture can be perceived in different ways, either negatively or positively.

Given his freedom, Paul was neither obligated nor coerced to function in what appears to be an absence of self-identity. His response also seems to contradict his relational imperative to “Live as children of light” (Eph 5:8). Yet, in terms of the three unavoidable issues for all practice (noted above), the person Paul presented to others of difference was not a variable personality who has no clear sense of his real identity (e.g. as light). Nor was Paul communicating to them a message of assimilating to their terms, and to try to fit into their level of relationship or even masquerade in the context of their differences. Contrary to these reductionist practices, Paul engaged in practices of wholeness. Since Paul did not define his person in quantitative terms from the outer in, he was free to exercise who he was from inner out and to decisively present his whole person to others even in the context of any and all of their differences. He communicated to them a confidence and trust in the whole person he was from inner out, the integrity of which would not be compromised by involvement with them in their difference and could be counted on by them to be that whole person in his face-to-face involvement with them.

His involvement with them went deeper than the level of their differences and freely responded in the relational trust with the Spirit to submit his whole person to them in their differences for the relational involvement of family love needed for the relational purpose “that I might by all means save some” (v.22). Paul submits his whole person to them in family love not for the mere outcome of a truncated soteriology of only being saved *from* but for the relational outcome of also being saved *to* gained from “the *whole* gospel so that I may share in its blessings *of whole relationship together as family*” (v.23).

In the face of others’ differences, Paul neither distanced himself from them in the province of ‘his little world’ nor did he try to control them to assimilate and fit into his world and the comforts of his framework. In contrast, he acted in the relational trust of faith to venture out of his old world and beyond the limitations that any old interpretive framework imposes on personhood and relationships in order to illuminate the wholeness of God in the midst of reductionism. In this relational process, he also illuminated the relational need of the person and persons together as church to have contextual sensitivity and responsiveness to others’ differences, without reducing their own ontological identity of who and whose they are. Clearly, Paul demonstrated the necessary response of the whole person from inner out to those differences in order to engage those persons in the reconciliation dynamic of family love for their experience in the relational whole of God’s family. Yet, Paul’s response also demonstrated the needed changes within the individual person involving redemptive change (old “worlds,” frameworks and practices dying and the new rising). This process addresses in oneself any outer-in ontology and function needing to be transformed from inner out (*metamorphoo*, as Paul delineated, Rom 12:2-3). This transformation from outer in to inner out not only frees the relational process for the new creation but directly leads to its embodiment. Redemptive change must antecede and prevail in the relational process leading to reconciliation to the whole of God’s new creation family.

In the freedom of the person’s inner-out response to submit one’s whole person to others in family love, the act of submitting becomes a reductionism-issue when it is obligated or coerced apart from freedom. Freedom itself, however, becomes reductionist when it is only the means for self-autonomy, self-determination or self-justification, which are the substitutes from reductionism. Paul clarified that God never redeems us to be free for this end (Gal 5:1,13; cf. 1 Cor 7:35). God frees us from reductionism to be whole (1 Cor 10:23-24). Redemption by Christ and what he saves *from* are inseparable from reconciliation and what he saves *to*. The integral function of redemptive reconciliation is the whole (nonnegotiable) relational process of the whole (untruncated) relational outcome of the whole (unfragmented) gospel. Therefore, it is crucial for our understanding of the inseparable functions of personhood and human relationships, both within the church and in the world, to understand that deeply implicit in the wholeness of Christian freedom is being redeemed from those matters causing distance, barriers and separation in relationships—specifically in the relational condition “to be apart” from whole relationship together, which if not responded to from inner out leaves the inherent human relational need unfulfilled even within churches.

In this dynamic for personhood, for example, can women or slaves submit their persons without falling into reduced ontology and function? Paul’s prescriptions and directives for them can be taken or applied in the negative if separated from the function

of relationships in wholeness together from the inner out (discussed shortly). Personhood is an inner-out function of the individual person always in relationship with other persons (different or not), never in isolation regardless of the extent of freedom the individual person has. Therefore, whether women and slaves are those responded to in their difference or are the persons responding without being defined by their difference, the focus for Paul always centers on wholeness for persons in relationship together in the qualitative image and relational likeness of God.

Paul's exercise of freedom in submitting his whole person to others in family love was constituted by the convergence of the theological dynamics of *pleroma* Christology in *pleroma* soteriology with *pleroma* pneumatology for *pleroma* ecclesiology to be involved in the relationships together necessary to embody the church as equalizer from inner out. This is what Paul condenses in the gospel of wholeness vulnerably embodied in the face of Christ, which has the relational outcome 'already' of only whole persons *agape*-relationally involved in whole relationships together.

The integral function of whole persons and whole relationships together is deeply integrated, the interaction of which must by their nature emerge from inner out. For the person and persons together as church to have the functional significance of being equalized in intimate relationships, their ontology and function need to be whole from inner out—nothing less and no substitutes for the person and for relationships together. This inner-out process leads us from the key dynamic for the individual to its interaction with the key dynamic for relationships.

**Fourth Key Dynamic:** *relationships engaged vulnerably with others (different or not) by deepening involvement from inner out.* The dynamic engaged within individual persons extends to their relationships. What Paul defined as his whole person's inner-out response—"I have become all things to all people"—also defines his relational involvement with them by making his whole person vulnerable from inner out—"I have made my person vulnerable to all human differences for the inner-out relational involvement with all persons." This decision to engage relationships vulnerably must be a free choice made with relational trust and in family love because there are risks and consequences for such involvement. On the one hand, the consequences revolve around one's person being rejected or rendered insignificant. The risks, on the other hand, are twofold, which involves either losing something (e.g. the stability of 'our little world', the certainty of our interpretive framework, the reliability of how we do relationships) or being challenged to change (e.g. the state of one's world, the focus of one's interpretive lens and mindset, one's established way of doing relationships). The dynamic of 'losing something-challenged to change' is an ongoing issue in all relationships, and the extent of the risks depends on their perception from outer in or from inner out. For Paul, this is always the tension between reductionism and wholeness, that is, between relationships fragmented by limited involvement from outer in and relationships made whole by deepening involvement from inner out. Regardless of the consequences, Paul took responsibility for living whole in relationships for the inner-out involvement necessary to make relationships whole together, because the twofold risks were not of significance in wholeness but only in reductionism (cf. his personal assessment, Phil 3:7-9; also his challenge to Philemon).

Later, Paul appeared to qualify the extent of his vulnerable involvement in relationships by stating “I try to please everyone in everything” (1 Cor 10:33). The implication of this could be simply to do whatever others want, thereby pleasing all and not offending anyone (10:32). Paul would not be vulnerable in relationships with this kind of involvement. *Aresko* means to please, make one inclined to, or to be content with. This may involve doing either what others *want* or what they *need*. Paul is not trying to look good before others for his own benefit (*symphoros*, 10:33). Rather he vulnerably engages them with the relational involvement from inner out that they need (not necessarily want) for all their benefit “so that they may be saved *to whole relationship together in God’s family*.” In his statement, Paul does not qualify the *extent* of his vulnerable involvement in relationship with others by safely giving them what they want. He qualifies only the *depth* of his vulnerable involvement by lovingly giving them what they need to be whole, even if they reject his whole person or try to render his whole function as insignificant (cf. 2 Cor 12:15).

This deepening relational involvement from inner out to vulnerably engage others in relationship with one’s whole person certainly necessitates redemptive change from our prevailing ways of doing relationships, including from a normative church interpretive lens of what is paid attention to and ignored in church gatherings and relationships together. If the vulnerability of family love is to be engaged, whether by the individual person or persons together as church, the concern cannot be about the issue of losing something. The focus on such risks will be constraining, if not controlling, and render both person and church to reduced ontology and function, hereby exposing the greater risk of being challenged to change and their need for it. Faith as relational trust with the Spirit is critical for freeing us to determine what is primary to embrace in church life and practice and what we need to relinquish control over “for the unity of the Spirit in the bond of wholeness” (Eph 4:3; Gal 5:16,25). The bond of wholeness by its nature requires change in us: individual, relational, structural and contextual changes. With these redemptive changes for person and church, the integral function of redemptive reconciliation can emerge in family love for vulnerable engagement of others (different or not) in relationships together from inner out.

The dynamic flow of these four key dynamics is the dynamic of wholeness composing the experiential truth of the church’s ontology and function as equalizer from inner out. In ongoing tension and conflict with the church in the bond of wholeness is reductionism seeking to influence every level of the church—individuals, relationships, its structure and context. For Paul, this is the given battle ongoingly extended into the church, against which reductionism must be exposed, confronted and made whole by redemptive change at every level of the church. While Paul presupposes the need for redemptive change given the pervasive influence of reductionism, he never assumes the redemptive-change outcome of the new emerging without the reciprocal relational involvement of the Spirit (2 Cor 3:17-18; Gal 5:16; 6:8; Rom 8:6; Eph 3:16). The reciprocal nature of the Spirit’s relational involvement makes change an open question. These redemptive changes at all levels of the church certainly do not occur smoothly or in linear order, as Paul’s dealings with Peter and Philemon demonstrate. The interaction between the four key dynamics frequently influences how the functional significance of one key dynamic may be contingent on the redemptive change made necessary by

another key dynamic. Both Peter and Philemon could not practice church-without-*diakrino* or reconciliation absorbing differences until they were free in their own persons to be vulnerable from inner out with others, notably in Jew-Gentile relations and with slaves.

The relational outcome ‘already’ of the church as equalizer, however, becomes problematic in Paul’s own corpus if his position on slaves and women is not clarified. Whole understanding of Paul is needed on these matters, which can be gained from discussion of the following questions.

**Given Paul’s emphasis on the relational outcome ‘already’ of God’s relational response to the human condition, how is Paul’s discourse on slaves congruent with this relational outcome, and his directives for them compatible with its function in transformed relationships together?**

As we discuss slaves in this question, and women in the next question, the issue of freedom and its determinative dynamic of redemption are basic to both. In Paul’s *pleroma* theology, part of the outcome of redemption is to be free, but it cannot end here or the outcome becomes fragmentary and reduced in human ontology and function. The full outcome of redemption is a relational outcome. Redemption in Christ is not about just being set free and Christian freedom is not the freedom to be free—that is, for self-autonomy, self-determination, or even a variation of self-justification. We are redeemed to be made whole in ontology and function for the primacy of relationship together with the whole of God and with God’s whole family, which is the relationship that the Creator originally created in God’s likeness and that the whole of God redemptively reconciles in the new creation.

Paul’s relational discourse on slaves (and women) is from this framework within this context, by which his theological dialogue must be interpreted and understood. Otherwise, his readers are left with only the human contexts of Paul’s situations to frame his dialogue with slaves, and as a result will go no further and deeper into his framework in the context of relationship with God, the primary context into which Paul contextualizes these theological issues and their human shaping.

There are two levels of slavery for Paul:

1. Slavery embedded in social conditions, thus from outer in (cf. 1 Tim 6:1).
2. Slavery embodied in the human condition, thus from inner out (cf. Rom 6:6).

These two levels interact between them, with the first emerging from the second and the first confirming or reinforcing the second. Paul always contextualizes level one in the workings of level two. Therefore, Paul always gives greater priority to level two over the first, because two underlies one and is necessary to be redeemed in order for level one to have full redemption. Yet, in what appears contrary to his directives for slaves in level one, Paul neither ignores this level nor accepts it due to its underlying condition in the sin of reductionism.

Paul addressed all sin of reductionism (slavery in both levels, cf. Phlm) while he was focused on being whole, God’s relational whole on God’s relational terms. This integral dynamic is critical to Paul’s discourse. Redemption is neither an end in itself for



slaves nor sufficient to deal with the sin of reductionism in the human condition involved in slavery. Paul is unequivocal that we are not redeemed just to be free but for whole relationships together (Gal 5:1, 13-14; cf. 1 Cor 8:9-13). Relationships together necessitate a process of reconciliation to be in conjoint function with redemption for the redemptive reconciliation required for relationships together to be whole on God's qualitative relational terms from inner out, not shaped by human terms from outer in (cf. Rom 14:13-19). Paul neither pursues redemption over reconciliation nor does he sacrifice reconciliation for the sake of redemption since there cannot be wholeness for slaves and their relationships without this reconciliation.

When Paul directs slaves in the social conditions of slavery, who are also part of the church, to submit to their masters (Col 3:22-24; Eph 6:5-7; 1 Tim 6:1-2; Tit 2:9-10; cf. for masters, Col 4:1; Eph 6:9), he did not define an obligation (or duty, *opheilo*) or an ethical framework for slaves to conform to. Paul is focused on slaves being whole and the relational outcome of whole relationship together for slaves; this was always primary for Paul. That is, he calls for their congruity from inner out with the ontological identity of both who they are and whose they are, without outer-in distinctions defining their persons. And he takes them further and deeper into their whole function on God's qualitative relational terms to live whole together and even to make whole in the world, without outer-in terms and circumstances in the surrounding context determining their primary life and function. Paul's implied message to slaves is that freedom does not guarantee their whole ontology and function, nor does being a social-level slave preclude it.

Since Paul defines the ontological identity of God's new creation family without outer-in distinctions like "slave or free" (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11), and did not determine its function by situations and circumstances, he did not give those matters priority over being God's relational whole. Therefore, as discussed above about Philemon and Onesimus, Paul's primary focus was not on the social conditions of slavery but on the primacy of a slave's redemptive outcome of relational belonging and ontological identity in God's family, and on the redemptive reconciliation of slavery's human condition necessary for persons like Philemon and Onesimus to be equalized brothers in this family. This process of equalization certainly then will have direct relational implications for the social level of slavery, but even more important for Paul was his intended purpose for social-level slaves in whole ontology and function to plant the seeds, cultivate and even grow whole relationships together, first within the church and then in the surrounding context.

**Equally important, if not more, how are Paul's new creation view of women and his prescriptions for them in agreement, and how are his directives compatible for the relational outcome of God's new creation family?**

The above discussion on slaves extends in direct application to women. I have purposefully placed this discussion on the church as equalizer for last, but not since women have traditionally occupied last place. Rather because, in my opinion, women signify the most consistent and widespread presence of reduced human ontology and function in the history of human contextualization, this condition is unavoidable for all persons to address for our wholeness. Theological discourse and pronouncements have

not significantly changed the embodiment of this human condition and its human shaping of relationships, perhaps due to ignoring its enslavement. Paul has been placed at the center of this human divide that fragments the church and renders God's family "to be apart" from being whole in likeness of the relational whole of God—a condition existing knowingly or unknowingly, intentionally or unintentionally. As long as this condition of reduced human ontology and function continues, the relational outcome 'already' will not be our experiential truth and reality until 'not yet'. Any significant change will require challenging the referentialization of the communicative word from God that Paul was responsible to *pleroo* for the church's wholeness—his family *oikonomia* signifying the *pleroma* of God into Paul (Col 1:25).

Paul would dispute how his relational discourse on women has been interpreted; he would expose and confront the reductionism underlying such interpretation and application for the reduced ontology and function of women—for example, by both complementarians and egalitarians. Yet, his prescriptions and directives for women will have to be clarified in order for Paul to be vindicated, his theological anthropology affirmed and his *pleroma* ecclesiology in transformed relationships together to be the experiential truth 'already'.

The issue of Christian freedom continues in Paul's relational discourse, which he always frames, defines and determines by the dynamic of redemption and baptism into Christ. Just as Paul defined for slaves, the importance of women having freedom is never about self-autonomy and self-determination or self-justification, but only to be whole in ontology and function, not yoked to reduced ontology and function (Gal 5:1). This also applies to men, and any other classification of persons. The issues of freedom and of wholeness are critically interrelated for Paul; and, as was discussed earlier for slaves, having freedom is no guarantee of whole ontology and function. The dynamic of redemption and baptism into Christ is the functional bridge between freedom and wholeness. Paul makes this link definitive.

From the interpretive lens of his theological framework, Paul's definitive view of women is that "there is no longer male and female" (Gal 3:28). His perception could be taken as contrary to the reality of creation, yet Paul is not implying that there are no physical and biological differences between the genders, and thus that no distinctions should be seen. Paul's view is this definitive declaration: In the dynamic of baptism into Christ, the redemptive outcome is the human ontology freed from being defined and the human function freed from being determined by the gender differences of any kind shaped or constructed by human terms, whether in the surrounding context or even within churches. These human differences are used to create distinctions which reduce the whole human ontology and function of those baptized into Christ's death and raised with him by the Spirit in the whole image and likeness of creator God (Col 3:10-11; 2 Cor 3:18).

As Paul clearly distinguishes, the person emerging from baptism is a new creation, whose ontology and function from inner out cannot be defined and determined by any differences and distinctions from outer in, not even by one's gifts or role in the church. This transformation from inner out in the redemptive change to whole human ontology and function also integrally involves reconciliation to the whole of God in God's family, which is constituted in the process of redemptive reconciliation to the transformed relationships together both intimate and equalized (Eph 2:14-22). As with

slaves, Paul's concern for women is their whole ontology and function and the relational outcome of whole relationship together, of which women are an integral part and of whose function women are the key. Yet, it has been difficult for Paul's readers (both women and men) to reconcile his decisive view of women with his prescriptions and directives for them.

In his relational discourse, Paul continues to integrate Christian freedom with redemption, which is inseparably conjoined with reconciliation. Also in his theological dialogue, Paul integrates the redemptive-reconciliation dynamic with the creation narrative for the redemptive outcome in the image and likeness of God. His convergence is made deeply in his main directives for women, and this convergence must be accounted for to understand where Paul is coming from in his relational discourse. Reviewing hermeneutic factors in interpreting Paul, though he speaks *in* a human context involving women and speaks *to* their human context, Paul is not speaking *from* a human context. His prescriptions and directives for women are contextualized beyond those human contexts to his involvement directly in God's relational context and process. These directives emerged *in* human contexts, along with his letters, but were composed *from* the further and deeper context of the whole of God—which is the significance of Paul's convergence I will attempt to account for in this limited discussion.

There are two main directives representative of Paul's relational discourse with women and his theological discourse in relational terms (not referential) for all persons: 1 Corinthians 11:3-16 and 1 Timothy 2:8-15.

### **1 Corinthians 11:3-16**

This section of Paul's letter must be read in the full context of his letter. From the beginning Paul was dealing with the reductionist practices fragmenting this church (1:10-15). While confronting these persons in family love throughout the letter, in fairness to them and for their encouragement Paul puts their context into a larger picture of God's people (10:1-11) and their practices into the deeper process of the dynamic of redemption and baptism into Christ (10:16-17). This exposed the sin of reductionism common not only in Israel's history but the history of humankind ("common to everyone," 10:13). Despite its normative character and structural nature, human contextualization and its common practices are incompatible with God's (10:21); therefore, Christian freedom must function on God's relational terms, not human terms (10:23-24, 31-33).

On this basis, Paul's further relational discourse with women continues, with its convergence with the creation narrative. Earlier in his letter, Paul had defined conclusively for this fragmented church: "Nothing beyond what is written,' so that none of you will be puffed up in favor of one against another" (4:6). The comparative dynamic Paul magnifies here is the natural relational consequence of reduced human ontology and function defined from outer in and determined by human terms, that is, beyond God's qualitative relational terms revealed in God's communicative word written in Scripture. In this section on women, Paul restores the focus to what is written in the creation narrative in order to illuminate the relational outcome from the dynamic of redemption and baptism into Christ (1 Cor 10:16-17; 12:13). If the creation narrative does not converge with this dynamic in the intended focus of Paul's interpretive lens,

then the relational outcome will be different for Paul's readers, and neither compatible with his relational discourse nor congruent with his theological dialogue.

Paul's focus can be misleading due to the explicit aspects he highlights in the creation narrative, namely, chronological or functional order and quantitative significance. Yet, Paul's focus remained on God's communicative action in the words written, without disembodied those relational words in the narrative, which would be essentially to go beyond what is written, notably by narrowing it down through referentialization.

In chronological and functional order, Christ participated in the creation of all things and its whole, as Paul later made definitive in the cosmology of his theological systemic framework (Col 1:16-17). Thus, "Christ is the head [*kephale*, principal or first] of every *created* man" (1 Cor 11:3). The embodied Christ also became the *kephale* "over all things for the church" (Eph 1:22) and the first to complete the dynamic of redemptive reconciliation as its functional key (Col 1:18). Whether Paul combines the embodied Christ with creator Christ as the *kephale* of man is not clear in 1 Cor 11:3. The creator Christ certainly has the qualitative significance of the embodied Christ, conversely, yet highlighting the chronological-functional order has a different emphasis in this context. This quantitative difference is confirmed by "the head of Christ" is God. Since the Creator (the Father and the Son with the Spirit) precedes the creation, creator Christ is obviously first in order before Adam. It follows that Adam came first in the creation narrative before Eve, thus this husband (or man, *aner*) was created before his wife (or woman, *gyne*). This is only a quantitative significance Paul is highlighting. If Christ later became God, then there would be a qualitative significance to "God is the head of Christ." Christ as the embodied *pleroma* of God was neither less than God nor subordinate to God, yet in functional order the Son followed and fulfilled what the Father initiated (e.g. Jn 6:38-39; Acts 13:32-33).

The quantitative significance of this chronological-functional order has been misinterpreted by a different lens than Paul's and misused apart from his intended purpose by concerns for the sake of self-autonomy, self-determination, and even self-justification efforts—which have reduced human ontology and function and fragment relationships together. Paul expands on the quantitative significance with application to prayer and whether the head should have a covering or not (11:4-7). The quantitative significance of head coverings during prayer is connected by Paul to the chronological-functional order in creation. While such practice is actually secondary (11:16), Paul uses it to illustrate an underlying issue. Apparently, for a man to cover his head was to void or deny that Christ is the head, who created man in the image and glory of God (11:7). For a woman to be uncovered implies her independence from the creative order, implying her self-determination, of which in Paul's view she needed to be purified (11:6; cf. Lev 14:8) because she was created from the qualitative substance of the first human person in the same image and glory of God (11:7). Her glory cannot be reduced to being "the glory of man" but is nothing less and no substitutes of the man's glory, that is, in the same image and glory of God. This differentiation of glory is critical for understanding the basis used for defining gender ontology and, more likely, for determining gender function in reductionism or wholeness. Yet, it would also be helpful for women to have for themselves a clear basis (*exousia*) for distinguishing their whole ontology and

function to fully understand their position and purpose in the created order (as angels needed, 11:10).

A further differentiation is also critical to Paul's relational discourse. The glory of God tended to be referentialized for a more quantitative focus in Hebrew Scripture and quantitative significance for Israel. The focus and significance of God's glory deepened to its full qualitative and relational depth in the vulnerably revealed face of Christ (2 Cor 4:6). This qualitative and relational depth is the glory Paul experienced from Christ and the full significance of glory he alludes to. It is this glory in Paul's *pleroma* theology which is basic to whole ontology and function, both of God and of human persons. Yet, its qualitative relational significance is fragmented or lost with the referentialization of the embodied Word.

When Paul restates the chronological order of human creation (11:8) and its functional order (11:9; cf. Gen 2:18), he is shifting from its outer-in quantitative significance to point to the inner-out qualitative significance of creation: the primacy of whole relationship together (in contrast, "to be apart" as in creation narrative above) constituted by the whole human ontology and function created in the image and likeness of God (11:11-12; cf. Gen 1:26-27; 2:25). In this shift, Paul also engages the dynamic of redemptive reconciliation to converge with the creation narrative. The other quantitative matters are secondary, even if they appear the natural condition (*physis*, 11:14-15); therefore, they should not define and determine human ontology and function, both for women and men (11:16). To use secondary matters as the basis is to reduce all persons' ontology and function, and thereby to go beyond what is written by substituting outer-in practices of ontological simulation and epistemological illusion from reductionism—that is, ontology and function shaped from outer in by human terms, not God's qualitative relational terms from inner out. The relational consequence is to diminish the primacy of relationships, minimalize their function, and fragment relationships together, all of which can only be restored in the process of redemptive reconciliation to the transformed relationships together of the new creation (cf. 2 Cor 5:16-18).

This is the ontological and functional condition Paul addressed and the purpose of his relational discourse with the church at Corinth to fight integrally against their reductionism and for God's relational whole—which Paul addressed conclusively in the remainder of his letter (11:17ff), notably with the summary declaration: "for God is a God not of *fragmentation* but of *wholeness*" (14:33). When Paul adds to this declaration further relational discourse for women, somewhat parenthetically, his only concern is for this wholeness of human and church ontology and function (14:34-35). Paul is not seeking the conformity of women to a behavioral code of silence but rather their congruity to the whole ontology and function in the image and glory of God. Therefore, what Paul does not give permission to for women in the church is for them to define their persons by what they do ("to speak") and have (knowledge, position or status) because this would reduce their ontology and function, thereby diminishing the church's ontology and function. Certainly, this applies to men equally, whom Paul has been addressing throughout this letter.

How persons define themselves is a major issue basic to how persons engage in relationships, and on this basis how these persons in these relationships then constitute church—the three inescapable issues for those in Christ. The whole of Paul and the

whole in his theology challenge the assumptions and theological basis persons have in these three crucial issues. In his family communication with Timothy, Paul extends his relational discourse for women to provide further clarity to this process to wholeness.

### **1 Timothy 2:8-15**

The letters to Timothy and Titus have been perceived to depict a less intense, more domesticated Paul, with a more generalized focus of faith and an emphasis on the virtue of “godliness” (*eusebeia*, piety toward God, 1 Tim 2:2; 3:16; 4:7,8; 6:3,5,6,11; 2 Tim 3:5; Ti 1:1; cf. 1 Tim 5:4). This milder image and emphasis not found in his undisputed letters are part of the basis for disputing Paul’s authorship of these letters. His relational discourse for women, I contend, helps “restore” the intensity of Paul in his integral fight, not for having a mere faith and mere virtue, but for wholeness and against reductionism.

In his loving encouragement of Timothy to engage in this fight (1 Tim 1:18), he reminds Timothy that the primary purpose and outcome (*telos*) of his proclamation (*parangelia*) for the church is not purity of doctrine and conformity of belief but is only relational: persons in whole ontology from inner out who are *agape*-relationally involved by the vulnerable relational response of trust (1:3-5). Paul’s intensity of meaning should not be confused with quantitative density, thereby not understanding the quality of Paul’s intensity in the absence of any quantitative density in his words. The faith and love focused on by Paul (v.5) were first Paul’s experiential truth of vulnerable relationship face to face with Christ (1:12-14). Paul’s intensity of meaning is critical for his readers to embrace in order to understand where Paul is coming from. On the basis of his “*relational faith and experiential truth*” (2:7), Paul’s whole function establishes the context of his communication with Timothy and his relational discourse for women.

Paul’s deep desire and concern for persons are for their whole ontology and function and for their whole relationships together. This outcome can emerge only with these persons transformed from inner out, thus redeemed from life and practice, both individually and collectively as church, that are defined and determined from outer in. He pursues them intensely with family love for their congruence with this wholeness.

Paul begins this section with the practice of worship, with the focus first on men (2:8). Based on where Paul is coming from, his deep desire is for men to move beyond any negativity they have from situations and circumstances—not letting that define and determine them (cf. Eph 4:26-27)—and to openly participate in worship, not merely observing or being detached (cf. *abad*, work from the creation narrative, also rendered as worship to highlight this relational work). Yet, participation was not about being more demonstrative by lifting up their hands outwardly. “Holy hands” signified an inner out action of personal involvement, not as an end in itself but lifted up in relational response to God. This personal relational involvement with God was Paul’s deep desire for men to engage further and experience deeper, because the only alternative is a reductionist practice even if the hands were lifted. Paul’s focus for men is the focus by which his similar desires for women need to be seen.

Paul’s concern for women’s practice in worship may initially appear to be a reverse emphasis than for men, less visible and more in the background as observers (2:9-10). Paul’s focus, however, went deeper than outward appearance and further than the common church practice of “good works.” This involved the first critical issue in all

practice about the integrity of the person presented to others, which is directly integrated with how that person defines herself. In other words, Paul's concern is about women who focus on the outer in to define themselves by what they have and do. Defined on this basis, women depend on drawing attention to their appearance and other outer-in aspects of themselves.

The issue for Paul was not about dressing modestly and decently, with appropriateness. Again, Paul was not seeking the conformity of women to a behavioral code. While modesty is not the issue, highlighting one's self to draw attention to what one has and does is only part of the issue. When Paul added "suitable" or "with propriety" (NIV) to the matter of dress and later added "modesty," "propriety" (NIV) to the matter of teaching and authority over men (2:15), the same term use for these, *sophrosyne*, is more clearly rendered "sound mindset." That is, Paul was qualifying these matters by pointing to the necessary interpretive lens (*phroneo*) to distinguish reductionist practice from wholeness—the new interpretive framework (*phronema*) and lens (*phroneo*) from the dynamic of redemption and baptism into Christ (Rom 8:5-6). The underlying issue for Paul, therefore, is whole human ontology and function, or the only alternative of reduced human ontology and function. Paul's initial focus on men clearly indicates that this issue equally applies to men.

How a person defines one's self interacts with the presentation of self, which further extends in interaction with how the person engages relationships. The person's interpretive framework with its lens is critical to this process. Paul's alternative to outer-in function for women is "good works" (2:10), yet this can be perceived still as being defined by what a woman does. With Paul's lens, however, good works must always be defined by and determined from the primary relational work of relational involvement with God from inner out—the ongoing vulnerable relational response of trust in relationship together. This is also the lens and focus of the process of learning for women. Paul appears to constrain and conform women to keeping quiet (*hesychia*) as objects in the learning process. Rather, *hesychia* signifies ceasing from one's human effort—specifically engaged in defining one's self and notably to fill oneself with more referential knowledge to further define one's self with what one has (cf. 1 Cor 8:1)—and, with Paul's lens, to submit one's person from inner out for vulnerable involvement in the relational epistemic process with God (further qualifying 1 Cor 14:35). Certainly, this learning process equally applies to men (cf. 1 Cor 2:13; Gal 1:11-12).

His next words to Timothy about women also appear incongruent with God's relational whole created in relational likeness to the whole of God: "no women to teach or to have authority" (1 Tim 2:12). Yet the lens and focus of the relational epistemic process continued to apply in Paul's directive for women. Information and knowledge about God gained from a conventional epistemic process from outer in do not have the depth of significance to teach in the church, that is, teach to God's relational whole on the basis of God's qualitative relational terms. Such referential information and knowledge may have functional significance to define those human persons by what they have but have no relational significance to God and qualitative significance for God's family. The term for authority (*authenteo*) denotes one acting by her own authority or power, which in this context is based on the human effort to define one's self further by the possession of more information and knowledge, even if about God. Therefore, Paul will not allow such women of reduced ontology and function to assume leadership in

God's family. Moreover, he would not advocate for Christian freedom for women to be the means for their self-autonomy and self-determination, because the consequence, at best, would be some form of ontological simulation and epistemological illusion, that is, only reduced ontology and function. He turns to the creation narrative to support this position (2:13-14).

By repeating the chronological order of creation, Paul was not ascribing functional significance to man to establish male priority in the created order. Paul was affirming the whole significance of the human person created in the image and glory of God, just as he affirmed in his previous directive to women (1 Cor 11:7). Yet, Paul appears to define their function differently by blaming Eve for the dysfunction in the primordial garden, as if Adam did not engage in it also and was an innocent bystander. What Paul highlights was not Eve's person but the effort of Eve's self-autonomy to gain more knowledge for self-determination, perhaps even self-justification—human effort based on outer-in terms in reduced ontology and function—which she certainly engaged first, followed by the willful engagement of Adam (cf. Gen 3:2-7). Paul uses the chronological order in the creation narrative to magnify, on the one hand, the qualitative and relational significance of the human person's ontology and function and, on the other, the functional and relational consequences of engagement in the sin of reductionism with reduced ontology and function.

At this point Paul converges the creation narrative with the dynamic of redemptive reconciliation and integrates them into the relational outcome of baptism into Christ (1 Tim 2:15). In Paul's *pleroma* soteriology, *sozo* (saved) is conjointly deliverance and being made whole. Curiously, Paul declares that women "will be saved through childbearing," which appears to be a human effort at self-determination and justification, limited to certain women. With Paul's lens, he highlights an aspect from the creation narrative, whose quantitative significance is only a secondary function in God's whole plan (cf. Gen 1:28), to magnify the qualitative significance of the primary function of whole relationship together, both with God and with persons in the image and likeness of God (cf. 2:18)—which childbearing certainly supports in function but does not displace as the primary function. Therefore, with Paul's convergence and in his *pleroma* theology, women will be saved *from* any reduced ontology and function and saved *to* wholeness and whole relationship together. That is, women are *sozo* while they engage in secondary functions—as identified initially in the creative narrative by childbearing, but not limited solely to this secondary function—based not on the extent of their secondary functions but entirely on ongoing involvement in the relational contingency ("if they continue in," Gk active voice, subjunctive mood) of what is primary: the vulnerable relational response of trust ("faith") and the vulnerable relational involvement with others in family love ("agape") only on God's qualitative relational terms from inner out ("holiness") with a sound mindset ("*sophrosyne*"), the new *phronema*-framework and *phroneo*-lens from the dynamic of baptism into Christ and redemptive reconciliation. Women's ontology and function pivot on this contingency. Any shift from this primacy to secondary functions reduces their ontology and function.

The faith in Paul's relational contingency is not the generalized faith of what the church has and proclaims but the specific function only of reciprocal relationship. The vulnerable relational response of trust signifies the ongoing primary relational work that constitutes the "good works" of Paul's alternative to outer-in function for women, and



from which all secondary functions need to emerge to be whole from inner out. Moreover, the *agape* in Paul's relational contingency is also reflexively contingent on faith. To be *agape*-relationally involved with others must be integrated with and emerge from the vulnerable relational response of trust; without this, *agape* becomes a more self-oriented effort at sacrifice, focused on what that person does—for example, about others' needs, situations or circumstances—without the relational significance of opening one's person to other persons and focusing on involvement with them in relationship. Paul was decisive that any works without the primacy of relational work are not the outworking of the whole person created in “the image and glory of God” (1 Cor 11:7).

Of course, everything that Paul has directed to women is also necessarily directed to men in Paul's *pleroma* theology, except perhaps for childbearing. Paul sees both of them beyond their situations and circumstances and defines them as persons from inner out. Yet, I wonder if an ‘unexpected difference’ has emerged in the church, which no one has, or perhaps wants to, seriously address. Whole ontology and function for persons of both genders are defined and determined only as transformed persons from inner out relationally involved in transformed relationships together, both intimate and equalized—the relational outcome ‘already’ in Paul's *pleroma* ecclesiology, which Jesus intrusively embodied with ‘relationship together involving the whole person’. This relational outcome of the experiential truth of the gospel has been problematic in church history as far back as Peter (cf. the churches in Rev 2:2-4; 3:1-2, 15-17), and which continues to grieve the Spirit. What Jesus embodied intrusively underlies, I affirm, the basis for Mary (Martha's sister) still not being central to the preaching of the gospel and its relational outcome in the church, as Jesus clearly distinguished for their experiential truth (Mk 14:9; Mt 26:13). While the situations and circumstances in the church have certainly varied, the underlying issue of reductionism (and its shaping of relationships) in church ontology and function has remained the common problem—which may be pointing to an emerging solution needing our attention.

Since Paul was occupied with fragmentation in churches, I doubt if he had any initial awareness of this ‘unexpected difference’ in his early experience with churches. But if the difference between Jesus' relationships with women compared with men during his earthly life has any further significance for the church, it supports what I present without apology: Women who are emerging in whole ontology and function are the relational key for the whole function of this relational outcome ‘already’ and the persons most likely to be vulnerable from inner out in order to lead other persons in this qualitative relational process to wholeness in church ontology and function. Qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness are integral for the church and indispensable for church leadership.

The Creator made no inner out distinction between male and female, as Adam and Eve experienced in whole relationship together (Gen 2:25), in contrast to their experience in reduced ontology and function (Gen 3:7). The extent of a person's engagement in reductionism is the key. In Paul's *pleroma* theology, the righteous are not those who simply possess faith—a common theological notion. The righteous are those in ongoing congruence with their whole ontology and function in relationship with God, whom God can count on to be those persons in their vulnerable relational response of trust. Whom God can count on to be vulnerable in relationship with their whole person is

the question at issue; which persons will step forward to be accountable with God and to act from inner out on the challenge in transformed relationships together, irreplaceably both intimate and equalized, as the new creation church family is the question before us all. No human distinctions in Paul's lens have any qualitative significance for persons baptized into Christ (Gal 3:27-29), only the primary relational work of trust making persons vulnerable to be *agape*-relationally involved with others in and for God's new creation family 'already' (Gal 5:6; 6:15)—nothing less and no substitutes.

Along with acknowledging an 'unexpected difference' emerging in the church, there is an even more important acknowledgement that needs to happen both in the church and academy. This involves the understanding that the referentialization of the embodied Word provides a hermeneutical basis to narrow down, disembody and thereby blunt the intrusiveness of Jesus embodying 'relationship together involving the whole person'. This then conveniently establishes a rationale, intentionally or unintentionally, for retreating from engaging the Word—not only in his intrusive relational path but also his improbable theological trajectory—and his church family in whole relationship together vulnerably equalized and intimate—without the veil and the distinctions based on what we do (no matter how valued by churches) and have (no matter how esteemed by the academy).

The church embodied as equalizer from inner out is the embodied church alive in wholeness. The church in wholeness is the relational outcome only of redemptive change with the Spirit. Redemptive change distinguishes the church from reduced ontology and function in a renegotiated ecclesiology. Redemptive change also signifies that the church is different from all that prevails around it or pervades its surrounding context. Therefore, on the basis of its clarity and depth, the church embodies intrusively with Jesus the gospel of whole relationship together. This is the relational outcome that emerges from the *ek-eis* dynamic of Jesus' family prayer, engaging the process of reciprocating contextualization with triangulation. Extended with and by Paul, the dynamics of his *pleroma* theology compose the integral relational basis and ongoing relational base for the church to emerge 'already' in *pleroma* ecclesiology as the whole of God's relational whole with the relationships together necessary to fulfill the prevailing inherent human relational need and to solve the pervading human relational problem—that is, if the church is *different*.

## **The Church in Its Own Difference**

When Paul illuminated theological clarity for the gospel of God's relational whole without human distinctions, he integrated Israel's relational position with the Gentiles' relational position in God's thematic relational response of grace to the human condition (Rom 11:11-24). God's salvific action was initiated through Israel on the collective level ("firstfruits," v.16) and now extends to Gentiles—the relational dynamic also involving Jesus *into* Paul. The deeply interrelated relational position of Jews and of Gentiles is in complex interaction to render them without distinction in their relational condition, which signifies undeniably the whole of God's thematic response of grace. What Paul makes definitive is that in terms of each other's relational position, one is not the cause of the other's; neither is one at the exclusion of the other, nor marginalizes or is better than the

other. These theological dynamics emerge in the relational context and process of God's relational involvement of grace, the relational source and relational outcome of which Paul illuminated conclusively as holy: "if the root is holy, then the branches also are holy" (v.16). This is no mere theological proposition or doctrinal truth Paul makes for the church's heritage and pronouncement.

There is a dynamic functional interaction illuminated by Paul that integrally both deconstructs human-shaped distinctions and differences in God's relational whole, and constitutes the *difference* distinguishing God's relational whole. Paul identifies this dynamic for the church as the functional significance of "holy" (Col 1:22; Eph 2:21; Rom 12:1; 2 Tim 2:21). The ontological identity of the church is rooted in the relational source of who the church is and whose the church is (cf. Joshua's confusion about Israel's identity, Josh 7:10-13). This integrated identity emerges with the embodying of the church's whole ontology and function, whose relational outcome to be whole is also distinguished by its relational source clearly as holy. In Paul's *pleroma* theology, the embodied church alive in wholeness with a new relational order is functionally significant only when distinguished as holy. The dynamic of being holy engages a reciprocal process of deep relational involvement in the whole of God's relational context and process (2 Cor 6:17-18)—which involves the ongoing process of reciprocating contextualization and triangulation. It is unattainable for the church to be distinguished whole from inner out apart from this ongoing reciprocal involvement, as Paul prayed for the church in *pleroma* ecclesiology (Eph 1:17-23; 3:14-19) and as Jesus prayed for his whole and holy family (Jn 17:17-23).

Forming and maintaining clearly distinguished church identity is not the outcome of identity markers from outer-in theological propositions but from inner-out theological function, not with possessing doctrinal truth but with the experiential truth of the whole gospel, and thus not with the limited significance of what the church is saved *from* but with the full significance of what it also is saved *to*. What distinguishes the church's identity, therefore, is not what it has and/or does from outer in but only its wholeness from inner out—its imperative determinant (*brabeuo*, Col 3:15). Yet, wholeness from inner out must be further distinguished uniquely (and likely impractically) from the competing source of outer in. This contrast emerges when the church's whole ontology and function is distinguished solely in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole and holy God—the church's relational source and outcome.

The church's relational outcome in wholeness is whole persons *agape*-relationally involved vulnerably in whole relationships together, which are both equalized and intimate. This relational outcome is defined and determined by the church's relational source, which Paul illuminated with the church's "call to be holy" (1 Cor 1:2; 2 Tim 1:9; Eph 1:4). The term for holy (*hagios*; cf. sanctify, *hagiazō*) means to be separated from ordinary or common usage and devoted to God; this is the functional significance that Paul makes a contingency for the church to be whole in likeness of its relational source. Paul's call (echoing Jesus' prayer) signifies 'already' for the church to be different from the surrounding context, that is, clearly distinguished from the sin of reductionism in human contextualization (Rom 11:16; 12:1-2; Eph 5:3; Col 1:22)—most notably distinguished from the human shaping of relationships together. This difference is not distinguished by mere moral purity and ethical perfection but to be whole in relationship together (Eph 1:4; 2:21; Ti 1:8). Therefore, Paul's call to be holy is inseparable from the

call to be different, a difference which is irreducibly integrated with being distinguished whole from inner out and nonnegotiable in the shape of its relationship together (as he clarified in Rom 12:1-5).

For the church to be clearly distinguished in its wholeness, the functional significance of its life and practice must be distinct from reductionism; accordingly in its wholeness the church must ongoingly expose the ontological simulation and epistemological illusion from reductionism and reconcile reductionism's counter-relational work. While the church can absorb valid human differences, its ontology and function cannot mirror any differences that diminish its own difference. In its vulnerable engagement in the reconciling dynamic of family love, the church embodies a new relational order that equalizes all persons intimately from inner out to be whole in relationship together, to live this whole as God's new creation family and thereby to make whole the human relational condition "to be apart" resulting from its human shaping of relationships. In other words, the church in wholeness cannot mirror existing relational orders of human shaping or it would no longer be or live whole, and consequently render itself functionally insignificant to make whole, both within itself and in the world. A church, for example, may have multicultural aspects in its life and practice, but the church in wholeness cannot be defined or determined by them or it becomes shaped from outer in by human terms from human contextualization, that is, by reductionism. As Paul made unequivocal, the new creation church is distinguished by its difference from the common in the common's sociocultural and racial-ethnic categories, socioeconomic emphases and gender characteristics, whose comparative values are all embedded in human contextualization signifying the reductionism of the common and its human shaping of relationships together (1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:27-28; 6:15; Col 3:10-11).

Paul's call for the church to be holy, therefore, is for the church to live in its own difference from the sin of reductionism in all its forms. The church embodied in its own difference is not in a separatist, exclusionary life and practice, but is to be distinguished as whole in the midst of reductionism, and on this integral basis to expose, confront and make whole all reductionism. This necessitates for the church both a further understanding of sin and a deeper means to deal with it.

Being holy and sanctified is a relational process with the Spirit (Rom 15:16) that engages an inner-out dynamic. This inner-out dynamic to be holy does not stay 'inner' (or "spiritual") because the Spirit's involvement always integrates *pneuma* and *soma*, inner and out, for wholeness of the persons and persons together (1 Thes 4:3-4; 5:19,23). This inner-out relational process with the Spirit to be holy and thus whole also composes the inner-out lens necessary to further understand the sin of reductionism (as *phroneo* and *phronema* in Rom 8:5-6).

Sin or reductionism also does not stay 'inner' of the person and is not limited to the individual. Nor is the 'outer' of sin limited to individuals in relationships, though these are the main aspects of sin Paul addresses in the situations in his letters. With Philemon as a slave owner, Paul points to the further presence and influence of the sin of reductionism that even this church leader and church needed to address. Paul understood that paying attention to or ignoring reductionism, its counter-relational work and its substitutes is directly correlated to our lens (*phroneo*) and its perception of sin. Our lens reveals assumptions we make about the human person and the collective order of persons together. This involves our view of the nature of humanity and the nature of the social

order (or society). For example, if we assume the goodness of humankind and/or the existing order of life, there is no need for redemptive change—which was a question Philemon and Peter (as noted in Acts 10) needed to answer. Yet, even assuming these levels of sinfulness assures neither a need for redemptive change nor the extent of such change, a lack which Peter later demonstrated and Paul exposed (noted in Gal 2). The change perceived to be needed is contingent on the strength and adequacy of our view of sin.

Paul's fight for the gospel of wholeness, now extended into the church, is ongoingly also fighting against reductionism. This was an assumed inseparable fight for Paul because any reductionism of God's relational whole on God's qualitative relational terms to human terms and shaping from human contextualization engages the dynamic process of sin. Paul never assumes the absence of reductionism, even when its presence is not always clear, because its absence would not be reality. Nor does he ignore any form of reductionism, since reductionism as sin is incompatible with being holy and thus incongruent with being whole. All sin as reductionism needs to be redeemed, which is why Paul appealed to Philemon and confronted Peter with family love. Paul demonstrates in relational dialogue, not theological discourse in referential terms, the strength and adequacy of his view of sin, and this is nonnegotiable in order for the embodied church to live in its difference and to be alive in wholeness.

It is helpful for our integral understanding of the presence and influence of sin to realize two factors strongly influencing our ongoing working perceptions of sin. One factor is contextual and the other is structural, and their presence also indirectly interacts with the contextual and structural dynamics of the church as equalizer from inner out to influence a shift to outer in.

The contextual factor is the increasing normative character of sin as reductionism. We need to realize that the growing frequency and extent of any negative behavior or practice create conditions for redefining those very behaviors more favorably, which was Paul's ongoing effort to help distinguish (e.g. 2 Cor 2:17; 4:2; 5:12; Eph 4:17-20; 5:10-11). As Paul implied, our perceptions of what is unacceptable are being redefined continuously. That is to say, what we pay attention to or ignore through our perceptual-interpretive lens to identify sin shifts in acuity and awareness in a surrounding context's normative practice of sin—particularly when our focus shifts from inner out to outer in. Most notable is a diminishing qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness. When reductionism is the norm, it is a decisive difference to live whole since wholeness would be clearly in the minority. In that context, the church in wholeness is subject to pressure, both from without and within, not to be different but to fit in (cf. Paul's polemic, 2 Cor 6:14-18; Col 2:20-23).

The other factor that subtly yet pervasively influences a weak position on sin is a structural one. Being a structural factor, its effects on our understanding of, and subsequent dealing with, sin is much less obvious than the conventional moral and spiritual issues. Paul seemed to address only the latter issues of sin, yet there are contextual and structural factors that were underlying his situations. Whether in a collective context of Paul's Mediterranean world or in an individualistic context of the modern Western world, it is important to understand that human life does not merely operate under the total control and influence of the individual person or even persons together. This further involves the social design and construction of ongoing human life,

whose operations are found on the collective and more systemic level of everyday life. This was what Paul indirectly points Philemon to in the issues with his slave Onesimus.

Whether Philemon changed or not, it is in this broader area of human life that our understanding of sin as reductionism must be further developed. Sin can no longer be seen merely as the outworking of the individual(s) alone. In its historical development, contextually and structurally, sin can also be found in the operations of institutions (even churches), systems and structures of a social order, and today in modernity's global community. In its more developed stages, sin as reductionism is not only manifested as the norm at this structural level but rooted in those very institutions, systems or structures such that they can operate quite apart from the control of the individual(s), or even the latter's moral character. This is particularly true, for example, when the very infrastructure of a society obscures moral issues and legitimates such systemic operations. Reductionism of the human person and its counter-relational work of fragmenting relationships together (e.g. by stratification or segregation) have underlain the human relational condition and created ontological simulations and epistemological illusions to mask its reductionist operation, thereby precluding the fulfillment of the inherent human relational need and preventing the resolution of the human relational problem.

The contextual factor is the *normative character* of sin, and the structural factor is the *collective nature* of sin. Their increasing presence in our midst as reductionism strongly influences our working perceptions of sin. Just as a weak view of sin ignores the normative character of sin, an inadequate perception of sin fails to pay attention to and address its broader relational issues in operation on a collective level. Yet, sin is a dynamic relational process always in specific relational context with God, which involves the whole relational order of life God constituted for all of creation (cf. Col 1:20). Sin as reductionism is a violation of this relationship with the whole of God that also has relational consequences in God's whole design and purpose for creation (cf. Rom 8:19-21). Therefore, sin also goes beyond its effects on the individual and has social consequences, as well as social influences. Our understanding of sin as reductionism must be broadened to include these macro-level human factors and human contexts that establish the complexity of the human relational problem.

Even at the early stages of the church, Paul was at the heart of this fight against reductionism, calling for redemptive change to distinguish the church as integrally holy and whole. This distinguishing process is essential for the structural dynamic of the church to be accessible for all persons without *diakrino* (differential treatment) and the church's contextual dynamic of reconciliation to absorb valid human differences in whole relationship together both equalized and intimate. Moreover, this fight against reductionism was not Paul's human effort but the relational means to deal with sin as reductionism that he received in reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit (Gal 5:16-17,25; Rom 8:5-6; Eph 4:3).

In *pleroma* ecclesiology, the Spirit constitutes access and ongoing involvement with the Father as Jesus' relational replacement for relationship together as family—the integral relational basis and ongoing relational base for the church (Eph 2:18,22). Reciprocal relationship with the Spirit embodies the church's life and practice in the whole of God's relational context and process from the already to the not yet (Eph 1:17; 3:16-17; Rom 8:25-27), which is necessary to embody the church alive in “the bond of

wholeness” (Eph 4:3). Given the ongoing tension and conflict between wholeness and reductionism, the Spirit’s reciprocal involvement is indispensable for the church to decisively deal with sin as reductionism in all its forms, and on this basis be clearly distinguished in its difference as holy and whole in the midst of reductionism (Gal 5:16-18, 22-26). **How is this relational process made functionally significant for the church, notably given the normative character and collective nature of reductionism?**

When Paul addressed Philemon about his slave, Onesimus, he appealed to him on the basis of the family love experienced by both of them (Phlm 9). This family love centered Philemon’s focus on the whole of God’s relational context and process, in which he experienced God’s involvement in whole relationship together. While Paul centered Philemon’s focus on God in the relational process of family love, on the one hand, he also widens Philemon’s focus to include Onesimus on the other hand (v.10). These separate but interrelated relational connections formed for Philemon what has been defined previously as the triangulation process (cf. to navigation). Faced with each on corresponding sides of him, Philemon needed to decide which one would determine his response: the wholeness of God in family love or the reductionism surrounding the status of Onesimus.

Paul’s relational imperative for the church to “Live by the Spirit” (Gal 5:16) is vital both to be whole together (Eph 4:3) and to ongoingly live whole in the midst of reductionism (Gal 5:25; Rom 8:6). And Paul understood deeply that pressure and conflict from reductionism always intensify in the presence and function of the whole. The Spirit involves us with the whole of God in the triangulation process for God to define and determine the specific relational response needed to engage a person, situation or issue embedded in reductionism, and be clearly distinguished as different and whole. Triangulation with reciprocating contextualization serves to give clarity to the ontological identity and function of both person and church in order to live whole and thereby make whole all encounters with reductionism. Without involvement in the triangulation process with the Spirit, the influence of the normative character and collective nature of reductionism subtly diminishes, minimalizes and fragments person and church, and often renders them to ontological simulations and epistemological illusions.

In Paul’s *pleroma* ecclesiology, the *pleroma* of Christ embodies in likeness what Jesus, the *pleroma* of God, vulnerably embodied in the context of the common without being contextualized by reductionism. The embodied church alive in wholeness is contextualized only in the whole of God’s relational context and process embodied by Jesus. Just as Jesus engaged various aspects (e.g. culture, institutions, social order) of human contextualization without being reduced by them (as Paul delineated, Phil 2:6-8; 2 Cor 8:9), he also contextualized those aspects in his primary context of the whole of God and in his context’s relational process of family love. In this contextualizing process—a process involving deconstruction and reconstruction—Jesus unequivocally distinguished his wholeness from the common in order to make them whole (Eph 2:14-16). This dynamic interaction with human contextualization by the whole of God’s relational context and process composes what further distinguishes the church by the process of reciprocating contextualization. Engaging in reciprocating contextualization helps person and church maintain the focus on the relational source of their ontological identity, and this is irreplaceable for distinguishing what and who defines them in the midst of

reductionism, particularly in its normative character and collective nature. This dynamic was clearly demonstrated by Jesus when he was tempted by reductionism (Lk 4:1-13), and that had emerged even as a boy of twelve (Lk 2:49). Moreover, this dynamic was implicit in Jesus' teaching, which in function prevents his teachings and examples from being disembodied from his whole person. Paul also learned to distinguish what and who defines him while dealing with reductionism as it influenced his own life (Phil 3:4-8; 2 Cor 11:21-12:1,7-9). Without engagement in reciprocating contextualization, person and church are more susceptible to reductionism, thus often unknowingly rendered to reduced ontology and function and determined in a renegotiated ecclesiology.

This process of reciprocating contextualization is what Paul also illuminated for Philemon to engage in order for his person and house church to be redeemed from the influence of human contextualization, with the relational outcome to be distinguished in their difference as holy and whole in relationship together. As Paul implied for Philemon, it is vital for person and church to engage with the Spirit in the dynamic of reciprocating contextualization, and to understand this involvement as a relational process in necessary integral function with triangulation. The urgency was twofold for Paul. This integrated relational process is necessary to be qualitatively distinguished from inner out in the common's surrounding context of reductionism in order not to be defined or determined by the common's function from outer in. In reciprocal involvement with the Spirit, triangulation and reciprocal contextualization function integrally in relational interaction to compose church life and practice to be "sanctified whole" (*holotelos*) and ongoingly "maintain your whole [*holokleros*] person blameless" (*amemptos*, i.e. whole, cf. *tamiym*) before and with "the God of wholeness" (1 Thes 5:23; cf. Gen 17:1). In this reciprocal relational process, the church is ongoingly engaged in its own difference as holy, and therefore ongoingly involved, in its own difference as whole.

Since Paul's emphasis throughout his letters was on function more than theology, he engaged in direct relational dialogue over conventional theological discourse (i.e. in referential terms) in order for his readers to understand in relational terms (not referential) the experiential truth of God's thematic relational response to the human condition. All his theology converged for this thematic relational purpose and emerged in just this integral relational outcome. For the whole of Paul and the whole in his theology, this is the definitive relational outcome 'already' that clearly embodies the church alive in wholeness to fulfill its uncommon relational purpose in the midst of the common, just as Christ embodied (and prayed for this family, Jn 17:15-23). With whole ontology and function clearly distinguished from inner out, person and church together live in "the bond of wholeness" (Eph 4:3) ongoingly in the relational imperative for God's family, "let the wholeness of Christ *be the primary determinant* in your hearts...in the one body" (Col 3:15). On this relational basis alone, they submit their whole person to "*embody* what will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of wholeness" (Eph 6:15), and thereby be vulnerably involved in the midst of reductionism to relationally engage persons in the human relational condition without differential treatment in family love, and to reconcile them to equalized and intimate relationships together in the whole of God's new creation family (Gal 5:6; 6:15; Col 3:11; cf. Eph 2:15-16). Nothing less and no substitutes for Paul constitute and distinguish person and church together to be holy and whole; anything less and any substitutes do not have functional significance from inner out. Therefore, the



*pleroma* of Christ must by the very nature of its relational source embody this difference ‘already’ in the image and likeness of the *pleroma* of God (Eph 1:23; 4:24; Col 2:10; 3:10-11).

Only the convergence, interaction and coherence of these theological, relational and functional dynamics “will make you ready to *live* the gospel of wholeness” (Eph 6:15) in the relational outcome ‘already’ of what the whole of God saves us *to*: God’s new creation family embodying the church alive integrally both in whole relationship together to fulfill the inherent human relational need and in the new relational order to redemptively reconcile the pervasive human relational problem. Nothing less composes the depth of the gospel necessary to respond without substitutes to the breadth of the human condition.

This is the *pleroma* theology of Paul, which signified his *synesis* from the Spirit and constituted his relationally-specific *oikonomia* with the Spirit to *pleroo* the communicative word from God for the whole ontology and function of the church in likeness of the *pleroma* of God. With the whole in his theology, Paul challenged the theological assumptions of his readers, even their theological cognition. In this relational process, the whole of Paul continues to challenge his readers for the functional significance of this whole relational outcome—ongoingly holding us accountable for the already while encouraging us to the not yet.

## **Holy Communion in Whole**

The contrast and conflict of the church in whole relationship together necessarily emerge when its communion ‘already’ is distinguished from the human shaping of relationships together. When we are developing our relationships in church contrary to shaping apart from the whole, and thus to be distinguished from relationships in general in the surrounding context, we need to engage a relational process distinguished from the surrounding context’s relational order and process. That is, church relations need to engage the relational process of redemption and reconciliation imperative for these relationships to be the transformed relationships integrated together to be God’s whole, and which integrally compose the new wine communion. To participate in and have an equalized share in new life together as family in likeness only of the Trinity is likewise the *holy communion* that—by its nature constituted by Jesus and the Spirit and extended into Paul—is the relational outcome only from the equalization of redemption and the intimacy of reconciliation in family love. For persons to partake of the whole of Jesus’ life and to participate in his church in the relationships together of God’s whole involves the reciprocal relational response of nothing less and no substitutes—the only response compatible and congruent with his relational response of grace, as Peter experienced in his footwashing. The primacy of this holy communion is the intrusive ‘relationship together involving the whole person’.

Accordingly and nonnegotiable, the church as equalizer cannot be relationally involved with the human diversity in the surrounding contexts of the world without first absorbing the valid human differences within its own family life by ongoing involvement in transformed relationships (equalized and intimate) together. To extend God’s response of family love to the human relational condition, church function must be whole to make

whole. Churches lack wholeness to fulfill its purpose as equalizer as long as its own members remain functionally apart in some aspect of this relational condition—even if unintentional or inadvertent. The equalizing of redemption and the intimacy of reconciliation are intentional relational practices for his church, and on the basis of this qualitative relational process his church dissolves false human distinctions and absorbs legitimate human differences to be the whole of his family in the new relational order.

Yet, the church as equalizer cannot be narrowed down to what to do in the life of the church and developing more ministries for church growth and missions, as made evident by the churches in Jesus' post-ascension discourse for ecclesiology to be whole. This distinguished communion still only involves relationships and how to be involved in relationship together by family love. In his function as equalizer, Jesus' working priorities were not about goals to fulfill in a divine mission because his whole purpose was a function of relationship: its origin, its initiation, its enactment, its fulfillment, its outcome and conclusion. The embodied church who integrally follows Jesus as equalizer has purpose only in relationship and always functions involved in his primacy of relationships: for their condition "to be apart," their redemption, their healing, their reconciliation, their restoration and transformation. To "listen to my Son" and to be "just as *the Father* sent me" is to be on the same theological trajectory and relational path.

Just as Jesus made redemptive change the relational imperative for the churches in his post-ascension discourse, the function of church as equalizer requires such change for churches today; otherwise, we will emulate their reductionist practices. While this may not require the theological reform undergone by the church council at Jerusalem, it does indeed call for the functional shift the early church undertook in church practice to transform their relationships together. This functional shift involves our approach to church life, church growth and missions. The trinitarian relational context of family and relational process of family love establish the working priorities necessary to build the relationships for his church to be whole as family in likeness—not of any type of family or any form of community, including those of the first-century Mediterranean world, though there was secondary association to its patrilineal kinship group.<sup>2</sup> His church as family is in likeness only of the Trinity qua family. The functional integrity of the trinitarian relational context and process cannot be diminished or minimized in any aspect of church practice—most notably starting with its gathering at Holy Communion—in order for relationships together to have the ongoing relational outcome to be whole in church life and to live whole in church growth, and on this qualitative relational basis to make whole in church mission. Anything less and any substitutes are irreconcilable to his church as family and incompatible for his church family as equalizer; these alternatives are just rendered by a variation of the human shaping of relationships together.

The defining call and commission to wholeness for his followers—since each of them has been equalized to be God's new creation family together—compose his qualitative relational terms for function in the new relational order as equalizer. "Just as" (*kathos*) the Son received from the Father, his inseparable call and commission integrally embody the qualitative relational significance of his church to be whole in transformed relationships together in likeness of the Trinity. The experiential truth of the whole of

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<sup>2</sup> Joseph H. Hellerman describes this as a correlation in *The Ancient Church as Family* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001).

Jesus' call, commission and relationship was extended into Paul to embody the kingdom's whole of God's whole into the church's whole ontology and function for the relationally (not referentially) distinguished significance of his gospel to make whole the human relational condition.

The new creation church as equalizer by its distinguished nature both vulnerably and intrusively embodies his good news for relationship together with the working assumptions of both redemption and reconciliation (Gal 4:4-5). Therefore, its ontology and function integrally embodies the complete Christology of the whole of Jesus and the full soteriology of his salvific relational work—the *pleroma* theology and hermeneutic of this gospel that Paul embodied in whole for the church. The *pleroma* of who, what and how Jesus embodied, and the *pleroma* of whom he saves, what he saves them to and how he saves them, this is the whole of God's whole that the church as equalizer embodies in its holy communion in the innermost. The distinguished practice of this holy communion in whole fulfills Jesus' formative prayer for his family—with the whole of God, within its relationship together, and for the world to believe as the experiential truth in relational terms and to know as the experiential reality only in the relational outcome 'already'.

The already is 'already' and the not yet is 'not yet'. These two converge by the Spirit with the church's relational progression following the *pleroma* of God in his theological trajectory and relational path. In this ongoing relational process, the human shaping of relationships together waits for the experiential reality of the good news of whole relationship together to be alive in the church 'already', just as "the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the *new family* of God" (Rom 8:19).



## Chapter 14      Held Together in the Innermost:

### Theological and Functional Implications for the Church and Academy

Let the word of Christ dwell in you *wholly*....

Colossians 3:16

Faust's question "What holds the universe together in its innermost?" had a spiritual focus for Goethe. Yet, the spiritual realm is an insufficient context to know and understand the answer. A narrowed search for the answer in referential terms also is both inadequate and misleading that cannot go beyond self-referencing, as physicist Stephen Hawking correctly concluded. Referentialization and spiritualization are unable to account for the irreducible primacy of the qualitative and the relational that is integral for the whole knowledge and understanding both sufficient and necessary to answer this question within the context of the universe and in the depth of the innermost. And such an answer involves inevitably addressing the human condition.

With the development (both positive and negative) of globalization and media technology, and findings from neuroscience research, it is unlikely that humankind has ever had more awareness of its relational condition than today. Yet, to the extent that this awareness exists, it tends to lack sensitivity to the qualitative and thereby, in fact, lacks the significance of relational awareness. Qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness are requisite for the primacy of the qualitative and relational that is integral to what holds us together. To the extent that Jesus' followers in both church and academy have this sensitivity and awareness, they will have the whole knowledge and understanding to address this question and respond with significance to the human relational condition, notably in the human shaping of relationships together. The ongoing issue, of course, is to what extent we currently have the qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness necessary for the integrated primacy of the qualitative and relational in our own life and practice. Though we can rightly critique, for example, the quantitative limits of neuroscience research, at the same time neuroscience indirectly critiques the limits often assumed for both the human person and persons in relationship by the church and theological communities.

Antecedent to our response to Faust's question, therefore, most importantly we need to respond to God's questions currently directed to us: "Where are you?" "What are you doing *here*?" "Why are you...? The *pleroma* of God and Paul continue to challenge our assumptions in the innermost; and the relational dynamic of the embodied Word *into* Paul and his kingdom *into* church holds us accountable ongoingly for nothing less and no substitutes of their whole relationship in our life and practice. "Don't you *know* me yet?"

## The Word in the Innermost

From the beginning, this study has assumed that “The unfolding of your *relational* words gives light” (Ps 119:130). I have affirmed that God’s communicative word has indeed given us Light, but only as long as it is not the referentialization of the Word. The embodied Word’s inseparable theological trajectory and relational path are not compatible with referentialization. More importantly than having only sent Light, his vulnerable presence and relational involvement transform our ontology and function to be light in likeness of the Light of God (Mt 5:14; Eph 5:8). This Light constitutes the innermost of God and permeates the innermost of the universe to the heart of human persons to illuminate clearly and distinguish unmistakably *what*, *who* and *how* holds us together in our innermost. In Paul’s cosmology, he introduced this relational dynamic of the *pleroma* of God with “in him all things hold together” (Col 1:15-17), which extends in Paul’s *pleroma* ecclesiology to be the integral relational basis for the church, “the *pleroma* of him who *makes whole* all in all” (Eph 1:23).

The words unfolding *from* God cannot be known as the object of mere observation no matter how diligent the study, as Jesus exposed (Jn 5:39); therefore, his relational words are not understood in referential terms no matter how wise and learned, as Jesus illuminated (Lk 10:21). *What* unfolded is a theological question involving hermeneutics, which explains why even prevailing theological teachers cannot assume to understand, as Jesus disclosed (Jn 3:10-13). That is, *how* it unfolded is a hermeneutical question involving theology. The integral interaction between theology and hermeneutics is critical to understanding *who* came and *what* has come. This is who and what Jesus embodied in whole and extended further *into* Paul.

From the beginning the Word emerged from the innermost of God and improbably intruded from outside the universe to illuminate what is innermost for human persons in response to the human condition (Jn 1:1-5). As the unfolding of God’s communicative word of definitive blessing (Num 6:24-26), the distinguished Face shined on us to bring change (*siym*) for new relationship together in wholeness (*shalom*) with his vulnerable presence and relational involvement. Nothing less than the whole of the Word, the *pleroma* of God, in the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:6) was embodied in the innermost to compose ‘relationship together involving the whole person’. This is “the word of Christ” that Paul made the relational imperative to “dwell in you” (*enoikeo*, Col 3:16), denoting to indwell us, inhabit by special presence (as in Rom 8:11; 2 Cor 6:16).

For the word of Christ to indwell us wholly and inhabit by special presence raises three critical issues that are integral for our knowledge and understanding of the unfolded Word in the innermost:

1. The hermeneutic used to know *how* the Word unfolded to understand *what* unfolded.
2. The qualitative level of engagement in the theological process.
3. The relational level of involvement in the epistemic process.

These issues overlap and interact for either the relational outcome with the unfolded Word that Paul made imperative, or something less and some substitute.

The hermeneutical question emerges as the initial issue but this matter will soon be indistinguishable from the other issues. Underlying the horizons of reader and author-text in hermeneutics is the lens from theological anthropology that either allows for the improbable Word to speak for himself, or that narrows down the Word to better explain it with more certainty in probable terms. The latter involves the referentialization of the Word.

In referential terms, the person becomes redefined (intentionally or inadvertently) from inner out to outer in to have a better grasp of what is happening—for example, as observed in neuroscience research. With this hermeneutical lens and its interpretive framework, God is on a different theological trajectory merely as the Object to be observed and of faith, and these referential words “of” God are unfolded to transmit information about God, which then can be aggregated for greater explanation and certainty theologically. In contrast and conflict with referential terms and its quantitative shift, a theological anthropology that has not shifted to outer in perceives the person in whole, and this opens the hermeneutic lens to perceive the qualitative and the relational. The qualitative relational terms of God’s face unfolds in the theological trajectory as Subject beyond a mere Object in order to enact the relational path to be involved in reciprocal relationship together Face to face. What we know and understand of the whole of God (not fragments about God) is distinguished only in the relational epistemic process emerging from our involvement in reciprocal relationship with Subject-Face. In this relational epistemic process, God does not unilaterally impose knowledge of himself on us, nor do we unilaterally self-determine that relational knowledge of God—though much referential knowledge about God has been self-determined (cf. Ecc 12:12). This reciprocal process illuminates how the hermeneutic used interacts with and already becomes indistinguishable from the qualitative and relational issues.

The distinguished Face’s theological trajectory and relational path emerged from the whole of God’s definitive blessing and converged irreducibly and nonnegotiable in the intimate communion of whole relationship together. *Who* came and *what* has come cannot be experienced in the innermost on referential terms. The unfolding of the Word from God illuminating the innermost is only the relational Word, solely in relational language just for ‘relationship together involving the whole person’, the referentialization of whom deconstructs the whole of the Word, redefines the language and reshapes the relationship—all narrowed down to human contextualization and renegotiated to human terms.

The idea of referentialization of the Word may come across as blatant and contrary when in fact its operation is most often subtle and the default prevailing interpretive lens of the Word. When the Father made it the relational imperative to “listen to my Son” (Mt 17:5) and Paul clearly distinguished “Nothing beyond what is written” (1 Cor 4:6, cf. Ecc 12:12), the words emphatically focused on were relational words in relational language that embodied the Word in whole for relationship together. However, the prevailing alternative in the church and academy to this compatible reciprocal relational response to the Word—while eluding the Father’s imperative and avoiding Paul’s injunction—is a narrowing down of their words and thus the referentialization of the Word. This alternative lens points back to repeating a critical acknowledgement (noted in the previous chap.) that is important for the church and academy to make in their approach to the Word because most often prevailing interpretations have not gone to

the innermost of the Word unfolded, and have both veered off Jesus' theological trajectory and steered away from his relational path. This involves addressing the implicit practice whereby the referentialization of the embodied Word provides a hermeneutical basis to narrow down, disembody and thereby blunt the intrusiveness of Jesus embodying 'relationship together involving the whole person'. This practice thus conveniently establishes a rationale, intentionally or unintentionally, for retreating from both qualitative engagement of the Word and relational involvement with his church family in whole relationship together vulnerably equalized and intimate—face-to-face relationship without both the veil and the distinctions based on what we do (no matter how valued by the church) and have (no matter how esteemed by the academy).

Paul's relational imperative for the relational word of Christ to indwell our innermost is inseparable from and contingent on his relational imperative to "let the wholeness of Christ rule in your hearts" (Col 3:15): *brabeuo*, preside, direct, govern, be predominant, that is, Christ's wholeness be what is primary to define and determine us from inner out, our whole person and our relationships together involving the whole person. Without this primary determination, the word of Christ is known and understood without his qualitative and relational significance that are necessary to indwell qualitatively and inhabit relationally by special presence in our innermost. Paul's relational imperatives, therefore, are neither inseparable nor negotiable, and to diminish or ignore them signifies not knowing *how* the Word unfolded and not understanding *what* unfolded, and thereby to distort the unfolded Word and to misrepresent his gospel of new relationship together in wholeness.

The hermeneutical question of how the Word unfolded antecedes the theological question of what unfolded. Yet, the integral interaction between hermeneutics and theology composes our understanding of *who* came and *what* has come. This leads us to the second critical issue, the qualitative level of engagement in the theological process.

The qualitative issue involves the whole person from inner out, signified by the primary function of the heart. This becomes a major issue when the level of engagement not only in the theological process but in life turns from the primacy of the heart. Any existing divide between theology and function is a gap created by the turn away from the heart more than by anything else. This turn from the heart was given major impetus by the Enlightenment and its modernist framework. But the modernist framework merely provided a rationalized basis for what predated in the shift from the primacy of the qualitative to the quantitative using a lens from theological anthropology that defined ontology from inner out to outer in and determined function accordingly based on what we do in secondary terms. Whether this shift can be localized in the hemispheres of the brain for left hemisphere dominance (as McGilchrist contends, discussed earlier), its reality is a prevailing function that predated Jesus (Isa 29:13; Jer 12:2; Eze 33:31).

Later, Jesus clearly distinguished for all the churches the primacy of the heart in their ontology and function (Rev 2:23). This primacy is *what* unfolded and *what* has come that distinguishes the innermost of God. The roots of this primacy go back to creation, in which the human heart was implanted with eternity ('*olam*, Ecc 3:11)—not about a quantitative element or chronological sense but a qualitative depth from the innermost of God that is fulfilled, completed and made whole (*pleroo*) by the *pleroma* of God (Col 2:9-10) in eternal life (Jn 3:16). Eternal life is composed in the innermost only by the Word unfolded, but this notion has been narrowly shaped in referential terms such



that, for example, classical theism has viewed God as everlasting in time, and philosophical theology has disputed God's changeability implied in time and views God as timeless (cf. Jn 3:31-32). Time, however, can refer to either the quantity of *chronos* or the quality of *kairos*, and life as either quantitative *bios* or qualitative *zoe*. The eternal of eternal life in relational terms is not either-or but both-and—both *chronos* and *kairos* in the endless season of opportunity (timeless) to know God (Jn 17:3) by participating in the *zoe* of God through the *bios* of Jesus for intimate relationship together in God's family (Jn 3:16; 6:68). The qualitative of *kairos* and *zoe* is primary over the quantitative of *chronos* and *bios* while also inseparable from its secondary counterpart, which as both-and, not either-or, constitute integrally the whole of God who came and the whole in God that has come, and hereby the wholeness from and with God in relationship together. This primacy, however, must not be displaced by the secondary or this wholeness will be fragmented.

If John 3:16 is basic to our belief system, then we need to understand who brought it and what he brought. Eternal life as either-or is neither eternal nor life signifying the whole ontology and function of God embodied by the Son for new relationship together in wholeness. As either-or, the truth of the gospel has been reduced and salvation has been truncated; and the consequence leaves both without the outcome of wholeness in human ontology and function that is innermost by necessity to the nature of the whole gospel and *pleroma* soteriology. Eternal life composed by the Word unfolded is whole knowledge and understanding of the Trinity in relationship together, as clearly illuminated in the Son's prayer (Jn 17:3). This relational outcome 'already' is the whole ontology and function of the church family in likeness of the Trinity, who holds them together as one in their innermost (Jn 17:20-26). The turn from the heart is to turn away from both the innermost of God and the distinguished Face who brought change for new relationship together in wholeness.

The loss of the primacy of the heart and the absence of the heart's engagement create an insurmountable gap with the innermost of God to know and understand the qualitative whole of *who* came and *what* has come. The primacy of the qualitative in the innermost of God unfolds to illuminate unmistakably that 'relationship together involving the whole person' is irreducible and nonnegotiable for God, and thus is irreplaceable for direct engagement with God even though perhaps temporarily evaded. The primacy of the qualitative's engagement integrally interacts with the third critical issue, the relational level of involvement in the epistemic process. The ongoing interaction of the primacy of the qualitative with the primacy of the relational is integral to knowing and understanding who came and what has come.

The relational issue centers on 'relationship together involving the whole person' and therefore converges inseparably with the qualitative issue. While the qualitative issue involves the turn away from the heart, the relational issue involves a turning to the human shaping of relationships. The Word unfolded and *how* the Word unfolded cannot be reduced to only the Object revealed for mere observation in a conventional epistemic process, notably shaped by modernity. Such a hermeneutic and theological approach to the Word disembodies the Subject unfolded, whose distinguished presence is involved in relationship. How the Word unfolded was as Subject only in relationship, and this conjointly signifies the primacy of the relational and necessitates the relational epistemic process to know and understand the *pleroma* of God who came and the *pleroma* of Christ

that has come. Without this relational level of involvement in the epistemic process, all that remains is the Object to be observed through a quantitative lens on referential terms; and such observation, as Jesus clarified, is unable to perceive the qualitative in the innermost of God and the relational in the whole of God. The referentialization of the Word engages a fragmentary process characterized by human shaping of relationships that reduces the relational level of involvement to a distant or detached condition, whether in the epistemic process or in life. Underlying this process is a theological anthropology of reduced ontology and function. This underlying issue was Paul's deepest concern for the church family when he declared "Has Christ been divided?" (1 Cor 1:13), and was the focus of Jesus' post-ascension critiques of churches turning away from the primacy of the qualitative and relational.

Certainly, the relational and qualitative issues place the church and academy in a likely awkward position of having to choose between understanding the Word unfolded from inner out and grasping the Word evidenced from outer in, that is, choosing the improbable over the probable. Accessibility is not the issue in this decision but vulnerability—being vulnerable to and in the innermost. Enlightenment theologians, and those who followed using a foundationalist theological method (namely, neo-evangelicals), turned to the secondary to construct a perceived certainty of basic beliefs (first principles) within the boundaries of quantitative reasoning (or the parameters of a scientific paradigm). This so-called objective engagement was expected to result in the unbiased truth, but it only engaged the Object of faith in narrowed down referential terms, consequently disembodied the Subject present and involved in relational terms. Postmodernity rightly challenges modernism's assumptions and practices and contends that any notion of knowledge is not disembodied, therefore must be situated to understand its human shaping. However, while postmodernism's contextualizing has a qualitative focus, it is limited. It lacks involvement in a clear relational process distinguishing its epistemology, thereby essentially reducing the source of knowledge to its relative human shaping—which has its own biases and limitations, however embodied, which then puts all knowledge in doubt and any claims of it under suspicion.

In contrast and conflict, Jesus distinguishes his followers as those knowing the truth (Jn 8:32). Jesus was not referencing truth as a static external entity of knowledge waiting to be known. The Truth was embodied to function not as an Object to be observed but as the Subject in relationship. Therefore, the knowledge, meaning and understanding of the Truth cannot be disengaged, separated or disembodied from the distinguished relational context and process by which the Truth is shared and received. With this qualitative engagement and relational involvement, the outcome of this relational epistemic process is clearly "the truth will make you free." That is, the whole of God's self-disclosure embodied by the Truth will take us beyond the limits as in modernist and postmodernist thinking to the whole knowledge constituting the deeper epistemology from outside the boundaries of the universe that illuminates the innermost of the whole of God. For modernists this is improbable; it doesn't happen. For postmodernists (rejecting metanarrative) this is impossible; it can't happen. For his distinguished followers, the Truth is the experiential reality of the qualitative relational significance of the good news of the whole of God who came and the whole of God's whole that came in relationship together—"by the *embodied Truth* of God...the kingdom of God has come *to you*" (Lk 11:20).

Accordingly, the relational outcome from this Truth necessitates by its nature in the innermost the full soteriology. A relational outcome limited to saved *from* is a half-truth just in referential terms that by itself cannot be the experiential truth and reality in relational terms. The nature of the Truth in relational terms necessitates integrally being saved *to* whole relationship together. In the primacy of the qualitative and the relational, being saved from sin as reductionism involves the integral salvific action to be made whole (*sozo*) in the innermost. This alone is the relational outcome ‘already’ of who came and what has come, and who and what holds us together in our innermost (Eph 1:22-23).

When Paul clearly distinguished the *pleroma* of God who came as “in him all things hold together” (Col 1:17), this has significance in the innermost just within the primacy of the qualitative and relational; and this has significance for our ontology and function in the innermost only when who came and what has come emerge from the qualitative and relational’s primacy. Therefore, turning away from the heart and turning to the human shaping of relationships are consequential decisions that reflect, reinforce and sustain the human condition in its innermost. These are consequences that the church and academy must account for in their own practice. For related accounting, both critical issues of the qualitative and the relational directly involve three inescapable issues and three unavoidable issues.

Three inescapable issues for our ontology and function needing accountability:

1. How we define the person in general and our person in particular (Mt 18:1-4; Rom 2:28-29; Rev 2:23; Gal 6:15).
2. How this definition becomes our framework for defining relationships and our lens for determining how we engage relationships (Lk 10:41-42; 1 Cor 4:6-7; 2 Cor 5:16; 10:12; Gal 5:6).
3. How this defining and determining process underlies our ontology and function of the church and its ongoing practice. (Mt 15:8-9; Jn 13:8; Eph 2:19; Col 3:10-11,15; Jn 17:21-23).

These inescapable issues are present ongoingly, knowingly or unknowingly, and operate with or without qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness. They decisively address our theological anthropology and consistently challenge our assumptions of ontology and function. Furthermore, they are interrelated to and in interaction with the following.

Three unavoidable issues for all practice, necessary to account for in all moments:

1. The integrity of our person presented to others (Mt 5:20; 6:1; Gal 6:15).
  2. The qualitative integrity of our communication in the presentation process with others and how integral our communication is to the relationship (Mt 5:37; Col 3:9).
  3. The depth level of involvement engaged in the relationship (Mt 5:48; Gal 5:6).
- These unavoidable issues point to God’s relational righteousness, whose presence and involvement can be counted on to be who, what and how God is in relationship together, and who expects reciprocal relational response in compatible righteousness to be who, what and how we are (Eph 4:24; cf. 2 Tim 3:16). This is unavoidable in relationship together and is accountable for nothing less and no substitutes in whole relationship together, as Jesus clearly made his family accountable for in relational terms (Mt 5:20).

The whole of God who came and the whole of God's whole relationship together that has come are at issue here in the innermost. Though this whole is clearly present and continuously active—as evidenced in Jesus' family prayer and Paul's echo of it—both Jesus and Paul never assumed the function of wholeness in the church family, given the ceaseless challenge from reductionism. These critical, inescapable and unavoidable issues address to what extent the Word unfolds for us in the innermost, and thus to what extent there is wholeness in our theology and practice.

As signified in the relational dynamic of Jesus *into* Paul, the Word unfolded whole in the innermost for Paul—the word of Christ indwelling him wholly. And thereby the kingdom's whole of God's whole relationship together unfolds *into* the church. Both Jesus and *into* Paul embodied the theology and hermeneutic of nothing less and no substitutes. They hold us accountable for compatible relational response and congruent ontology and function.

### **Integrally Embodying the Whole Theology and Hermeneutic**

The turn from the primacy of the qualitative and the relational is the innermost alternative (i.e. to the innermost, not for the innermost) from reductionism and its counter-relational work; this defined Paul up to the Damascus road and currently finds expression in ontological simulation and epistemological illusion in the church and academy. Wholeness in theology and practice has eluded us, if not evaded by us, because reductionism has not been adequately countered. Paul's integral fight for the gospel of wholeness illuminates the reductionism needing to be countered, negated, redeemed and made whole. The intensity of Paul's fight against reductionism has not received the attention in Pauline scholarship that it warrants. Perhaps this neglect is due to a perception of Paul's notion of reductionism itself. This raises a question that will help us further understand the integral basis for the relational dynamic of Jesus *into* Paul and his kingdom *into* the church.

### **Is reductionism a straw man in Paul's polemic which becomes reified as his discourse unfolds?**

Partly, the answer depends on understanding Paul's relational language. Mostly, the answer will not be apparent if Paul is just seen within human contextualization, because there is no wholeness present in the historical Paul to illuminate God's whole needed to identify this reductionism. Reductionism functions only to counter wholeness, thus the function of the whole is necessary to clearly expose the reality of reductionism. The unequivocal existence of reductionism has an ontological source but its primary presence appears in functions (individual and collective) as the alternative of anything less and any substitutes to God's whole. The appearance of reductionism in human function is indistinguishable, particularly in the human shaping of relationships, without the presence of whole function. Even the contrast between reduced function and whole function is obscure when our interpretive lens does not pay attention to or ignores the difference. This lens becomes part of the issue in answering this question for Paul's readers.

In a sense, this question would be like asking the historical Paul if he existed prior to the Damascus road since that's when the reality of reductionism had specific existence in his ontology and function. That period of his life had less to do with Judaism and the law and was more about his practice of it. Paul could not and did not deny the reality of his faith-practice. After the Damascus road, reductionism was not a straw man for Paul to justify a new faith and practice. Rather reductionism signified the condition of his faith-practice—in contrast to the significance of Abraham's faith—from which he necessarily was redeemed and was ongoingly transformed in order to be made whole in the ontology and function of God's new creation family. If anything, reductionism was promoted by those who shaped and constructed alternative practices in the church to this wholeness, which was the nature and focus of Paul's polemic.

Paul's conjoint fight for the gospel of God's thematic relational response signified the acutely real presence of reductionism and its influence to shape and construct alternatives to, or otherwise fragment, God's relational whole—a condition pervading and prevailing even in churches then, and in church and the academy today. Reductionism was never its reification in Paul's polemic but unmistakably the ontological simulations and epistemological illusions engendered by its ontological source, the author and propagator of *metaschematizo* and deception, as Paul made definitive and exposed (2 Cor 11:13-15; cf. Jn 8:44; Lk 12:1). The source and its reduced ontology and function must be accounted for—which Peter and Barnabas learned the hard way (Gal 2:13)—and its influence and alternatives must be exposed, refuted and redeemed by the reciprocal involvement of all of Paul's readers. Otherwise the relational consequence is to be rendered to reductionist practice themselves, whether in the church or academy, individually or collectively, even unintentionally or unknowingly, as Barnabas appeared to function with Peter (noted above).

The question about reductionism then becomes for Paul's readers: **On what basis do we ignore or not pay attention to the reality of reductionism and its prevailing presence and pervasive influence on human life**, evident even to observations in modern science noted previously? Part of this answer involves the strength and adequacy of our view of sin, notably in its normative character and collective nature.

In Paul's *pleroma* theology, he is focused on a full view of sin, not limited to moral and ethical issues. This focus is necessary in order to engage not only the qualitative holy God but also the relational whole of God. Paul never assumes in theological discourse that illuminating the whole of God and the whole gospel are without struggle, the struggle due solely to the sin of reductionism and its source (cf. Col 1:28-2:8). Based on the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction from *tamiym* and Abraham's faith, Paul understood the deeper significance of Satan's seduction in the primordial garden to redefine human ontology and function from inner out to outer in. This redefinition was attempted unsuccessfully with Jesus in his temptation to reduce Jesus' ontology and function. What Paul gained from the narratives of others' lives and his own life was a full view of sin, the strength and adequacy of which is necessary to expose and establish the ongoing presence and influence of reductionism in counter-relational tension and conflict with the wholeness of the whole and holy God. Without this lens of sin, Paul's readers have inadequate relational connection with the definitive basis for understanding the alternatives used for ontology and function, both for God and humans, which signify and constitute anything less and

any substitutes of God's whole and the gospel of wholeness. The relational consequence from this epistemic gap would be, functionally, a different gospel than Paul's experiential truth, and, theologically, an incomplete Christology, a truncated soteriology, an immature pneumatology and a renegotiated ecclesiology—that is, reductionism of the *pleroma* of God, which reduces Paul's function to *pleroo* the word of God and illuminate *pleroma* theology for the church's whole ontology and function. That is the nature of reductionism, reified not by Paul but by its ontological source, for whom all of Paul's readers must account.

Paul's discourse is nonnegotiable in holding his readers accountable for God's whole. He understood fully that the only alternative functionally and theologically is to be rendered to human terms, shaping, construction and fragmentation from reductionism. Perhaps this is the current state in which many church leaders have become embedded and Pauline scholarship has struggled.

The theology in question involves a specific hermeneutic. Whole (*pleroma*) theology is contingent on the *pleroma* of God relationally unfolded and thus is anteceded by the whole hermeneutic. This whole hermeneutic was the relational process Paul experienced in the innermost for the relational outcome of his *pleroma* theology. This relational process of transformation converged with Christ to take us beyond the limits ("set you free," Rom 8:2, cf. Jn 8:32) of human thinking, shaping and construction. Paul clearly distinguished this transformation to the new creation from the old (former, prevailing, common) with the outcome of the *phronema* and *phroneo* in "life and peace" (Rom 8:5-6). As noted above, the primacy of life (*zoe*) is qualitative, not quantitative *bios*—which is not unimportant but still secondary to *zoe*. Emphases of *bios* apart from the primacy of *zoe* are narrowed down and become fragmentary. Wholeness (the innermost of peace) is intrinsic to *zoe*, and integrally together "life and peace" compose the new and whole *phronema* (interpretive framework) and *phroneo* (its interpretive lens). This is the interpretive framework and lens necessary to know the *pleroma* of God who came and to understand the *pleroma* of Christ that has come, the who and what holding us together in the innermost to embody *into* us this wholeness.

Paul made theologically conclusive and functionally definitive that the irreducible and nonnegotiable outcome for those baptized with Christ is whole *zoe* (Rom 6:4; Gal 3:27-28). This transformation process illuminates whole *zoe* as that which is "born from above" and not by human determination and shaping within the referential limits of human contextualization. Nicodemus lacked the interpretive framework and lens to understand both theologically and functionally the relational process to the new creation in eternal life (Jn 3:3-10)—the eternal life Jesus clearly disclosed as definitive of the primacy of the qualitative and distinguished by the primacy of the relational in "knowing, *understanding and experiencing* the whole of God" in relationship together (Jn 17:3). The lack that Nicodemus demonstrated exists today, creating an epistemological, theological and functional gap in our cognition, knowledge, understanding and experience of the innermost of who came and what has come, and thereby a gap in the experiential reality of who and what holding us together in our innermost. In contrast and conflict with referential terms and language, Jesus' and Paul's relational terms and language integrally embody the primacy of the qualitative and the relational necessary to compose the whole theology and hermeneutic of the gospel. While relational terms and

language are irreplaceable for this composition, antecedent to this whole theology and hermeneutic is the whole *phronema* and *phroneo*.

Nicodemus' lack in his interpretive framework and lens and the gap it created in the innermost are further illustrated in the key narrative of the transfiguration. This experience was discussed previously from Matthew's Gospel but we need to look at Luke's account for its further theological and functional significance—a detail that Luke included perhaps in concern for a gospel for all nations. In this key experience, Luke includes the detail of “the two men who *stood with him*” (*synistemi*, Lk 9:32). This *synistemi* connection illuminates in function what Paul illuminated theologically in his cosmology that “in him all things *synistemi*” (“hold together,” Col 1:17). When we look beyond the spatial proximity of Luke's account and go deeper into the relational dynamic unfolded in this key experience, we are made vulnerable to an initial knowledge and understanding of who and what holds us together in our innermost. Here again, accessibility is not the issue but vulnerability to the qualitative relational whole of God's self-disclosure unfolding. Peter lacked the interpretive framework and lens to see the whole of who unfolded and what was unfolding. In the gap of referential terms, he narrowed down his experience of *synistemi* to three separate tents to fragment God's whole held together in the innermost and to construct his own shaping of relationships together (“one for you, one for...,” 9:33). Does this speak to our fragmentary approach to church practice and theological education, and to how we shape relationships in those contexts? The Father's response illuminated the qualitative whole interpretive framework and lens necessary for the reciprocal relational response when he made it imperative: “Listen to him *who unfolds my relational words for what is unfolding in response to your relational condition*” (9:35).

Peter's lack in response to the qualitative relational *synistemi* of the Word is mirrored today in the church and academy in the gap of our qualitative insensitivity and relational unawareness to being held together in our innermost, despite the quantity of referential information and knowledge about who came and what has come. What this demonstrated of Peter and demonstrates for us involves the crucial hermeneutic issue that integrally converges with the other two crucial issues of our qualitative level of engagement and relational level of involvement (all discussed earlier). How significantly these three crucial issues are attended to directly emerge from the experiential truth and reality of our baptism with Christ, that is, the “life and peace” of our *phronema* and *phroneo*. It is critical to distinguish our working interpretive framework and lens. In a referential framework, God is on a different theological trajectory that just transmits referential information about the Object of faith. With a referential lens, God's relational path is not given primary attention or is ignored. In the qualitative whole *phronema* and *phroneo*, God's face is present in the theological trajectory as Subject, with vulnerable involvement in his relational path, therefore necessitating our reciprocal relational response to know and understand God Face to face. As Subject, accessibility is never the issue for knowing and understanding the Word unfolded in the innermost, just vulnerability to the *pleroma* of God's intrusive ‘relationship together involving the whole person’.

Luke's fuller account of the transfiguration signifies the whole of God in whole relationship together that holds us together in the innermost. This initial *synistemi* connection in function was illuminated further by Paul in *pleroma* ecclesiology to

embody the whole theology and hermeneutic of the *pleroma* of Christ (Eph 1:23; 4:15-16, cf. Col 2:19). Peter's response to this *synistemi* connection further extended to Jesus' footwashing and into his early theology, hermeneutic and practice for the developing church (Acts 11:8,17; Gal 2:11-14)—all of which exposed the interaction of his hermeneutic, qualitative level of engagement and relational level of involvement. We either continue to respond as Peter—for example, from outer in, in referential terms or on the basis of tradition—or we respond reciprocally in the qualitative relational significance compatible to and congruent with the whole of God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement.

Along with Paul and the Spirit, Jesus continues in post-ascension discourse to challenge our theological anthropology and its ontology and function to define persons and determine relationships and practice in the church. The Father's imperative for us to listen carefully and pay attention to what you hear from the Son (cf. Lk 8:18; Mk 4:24) has further significance for Jesus' post-ascension relational messages to his churches for their whole ontology and function. As Jesus countered reduced ontology and function, his messages are clearly to be paid attention to without option: "Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches"; and for those who are reciprocally involved with him to fight against reductionism ("whoever conquers"), the relational outcome is wholeness in the innermost together (Rev 2:7,11,17,26-29; 3:5-6, 12-13, 21-22). His vital relational messages for wholeness imply questions for us today:

- Have we made secondary our relational involvement of love (not about doing things for people), notably with the whole of God?
- Do we, as church, think we're functioning well based on a reputation built by the amount of what we do and have?
- Does the underlying influence on the nature of our dedication and service emerge more from human contextualization to reduce our ontology and function in the innermost, and to shape a hybrid theology and church?
- In spite of, perhaps, the higher status of our resources, is our condition as church in reality no more than the status quo, and thus lacking wholeness?
- Do we have any sense of the qualitative knocking by Jesus at the heart of our whole person for the primacy of new wine communion together? That is, do we hear the relational words unfolding of the *who* came and *what* has come that holds us together in whole relationship in the innermost?

What we hear from the relational Word unfolding obviously depends on how well we listen—just as evidenced in the relational process of all communication. Listener-reader response has been an ongoing issue with the relational Word ever since the challenge was raised in the primordial garden "Did God *really* say that?"—or its more recent variation "Is that *what* God intended or meant?" The initial challenge, and subsequent challenges, to the relational Word from God established the basis for a different interpretive framework and lens ("saw that the tree was good...a delight to the eyes") that narrowed down the epistemic field to pursue the human effort of self-determination ("to be desired to make one wise," Gen 3:6), and thereby to shape the relational Word and relationship together on one's own terms ("You shall not...nor shall you," 3:3). This shift in interpretive framework and lens into conjoint function with self-



determination and human shaping of relationship together has been on a parallel course with the relational Word unfolding and has prevailed in listener-reader response, even in the church and academy.

The ancient poet addressed these issues by communicating the relational message of the Word: “Be still, and know that I am God” (Ps 46:10). The significance of “be still” (*raphah*) in this relational message is “cease and desist”—not merely to be quiet and beyond just to stop striving—that is, to cease the human effort of self-determination and desist from the human shaping of relationship together, in order to change our interpretive framework and lens to the primacy of the qualitative and relational necessary to know the whole of God vulnerably unfolded in relationship together. The pursuit of self-determination certainly engages various things “to be desired to make one wise.” For example, to be wise and learned has occupied our efforts with developing our minds and establishing its comparative status but most likely at the expense of the primacy of the heart and relationships, and thereby a loss of wholeness in theology and practice. Any preoccupation in the secondary always has consequences for the primary (cf. Lk 10:41-42; Jn 21:20-22). This leads us back to the question raised in chapter seven: To what extent does Christian theology reflect and is thus shaped by the relational Word unfolded in Scripture in the innermost of the primary—not the referential words in Scripture shaped in the secondary by reader-response—and, therefore, can truly be definitive in the relational terms of *theology* and not the self-referencing of *egology*? The latter does not and cannot embody the whole theology and hermeneutic of the relational Word unfolded in the innermost; it only reshapes the Word without desisting, in ceaseless discourse in contrast and even conflict with the Light and Truth unfolded from the Word (cf. Eccl 12:11-12; Ps 43:3).

When Paul made imperative for “the word of Christ” to indwell us and inhabit by his distinguished presence (Col 3:16), Paul’s only focus of this word was on the Subject who unfolded as the *pleroma* of God, and whose theological trajectory from the beginning has held all things together and whose relational path has vulnerably involved holding us all together in whole relationship in the innermost (Col 1:17-20). This alone for Paul was the Word who unfolded and what had come. Paul understood well, however, the human shaping of the Word and relationships together in secondary terms (Col 2:8,16-19; cf. 1 Cor 4:6-7), which could not indwell us in the qualitative level of the innermost or inhabit us at the relational level by the special presence of Subject-Word. Our *phronema* and *phroneo* will determine the Word that Paul makes imperative. For this reason, Paul conjoined integrally this imperative with the previous imperative for the wholeness of Christ to be the sole determinant in our innermost (Col 3:15). In a reduced interpretive framework and lens, the word of Christ is narrowed down to referential terms and language that, at best, can dwell only in our minds because it lacks the innermost of God to indwell in our hearts. With the qualitative whole *phronema* and *phroneo*, the word of Christ unfolds in relational terms with relational language to communicate, intrude, transform and hold us together in the innermost. This primacy of the qualitative and relational that is unfolded in whole by the relational Word from God is fragmented, submerged or lost with an interpretive framework and lens focused on referential words, disembodied texts and even an inerrant Word—all of which emerge in epistemological illusions of theological explanation and certainty and ontological simulations for function and practice.

When we cease the effort of self-determination and desist from shaping relationships together, we can go further and deeper than the referential limits of *suggestion* to the experiential truth and reality of knowing God in Face-to-face relationship. A referential interpretive framework and lens cannot digest, or even perceive, the ‘Black Swan’ of whole theology. When the epistemic field of the Word is narrowed down, all we can say about the words in the Bible is that they suggest this, suggest God said that, suggesting God meant this or intended that, I suggest. To ‘suggest’ does not involve and thus should not be confused with the natural epistemic humility that is the relational outcome of involvement with God in the relational epistemic process. The discourse of suggest, on the one hand, is necessary when we indeed cannot and hereby should not say more—though many, if not most, ‘suggests’ do imply and mean to say more. On the other hand, as a rule, to suggest about the Word is to imply and mean to say that the words of God in the innermost have not unfolded in the relational process of communication in the context of relationship—whereby implying that God does not speak for himself and must be spoken for, thus rendering the Spirit’s presence and relational work as without significance. God illuminated through the ancient poet that his Word unfolded embodies Light and Truth for knowing and understanding the whole of God to those vulnerable in relationship together (Ps 119:130, cf. 43:3). To suggest anything less and any substitutes is an epistemological illusion from reduced *phronema* and *phroneo* that masks the effort of self-determination and the shaping of relationship together.

Until we cease our self-determination and desist from shaping relationships together, we cannot significantly address the human condition but in fact will reflect, reinforce or sustain it, both within the church and in the academy. Then there is no basis to refute the modernist’s claim for the improbable that doesn’t happen and the post-modernist’s charge for the impossible that can’t happen.

Luke’s transfiguration scenario illuminates our perceptual-interpretive framework and its underlying theological anthropology engaged in the three inescapable issues of (1) defining the person (2) determining relationships on this basis and thereby (3) practicing church. In the definitive blessing of God’s family love unfolding the face of Light and Truth, the involvement of God’s relational righteousness exposes our sin of reductionism (“unrighteousness,” Rom 3:5) to clearly distinguish the whole of God’s whole, innermost to ontology and function. This intrusion is either blocked by reprioritizing qualitative engagement with self-determination and by redefining relational involvement with human shaping, or it is responded to by vulnerable engagement of its primacy of the qualitative and involvement of its primacy of the relational. The vulnerable response to this intrusion composed the relational outcome ‘already’ of Jesus *into* Paul, which Paul embodied in the theology and hermeneutic of the gospel of wholeness in relationship together for the church in likeness of the whole of God—the integral relational basis and ongoing relational base holding the church together in its innermost. Yet, there was no vulnerable response for Jesus *into* Paul without *tamiym*’s epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction of Paul’s faith and his reduced *phronema* and *phroneo*.

Likewise, Jesus *into* Paul *into* the kingdom *into* the church and then *into* us—that is, those embodying the whole theology and hermeneutic of the gospel—by its nature necessitates our epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction. Our vulnerable response to the Word unfolded intrusively in ‘relationship together involving the whole

person' is the issue, not accessibility (Eph 3:12). For us to embody this whole theology and hermeneutic qualitatively engages the integral theological and functional relational involvement with the whole of God in the innermost in order to vulnerably experience the truth of the gospel of wholeness and the reality of its whole relationship together, and thereby be able to distinguish clearly its qualitative and relational significance against any and all reductionism and its counter-relational work—most urgently the self-determination and shaping of relationships in the church and academy. Jesus continues to be involved in the relational dynamic to extend the *pleroma* of God *into* his whole followers to embody together integrally the experiential truth of his good news and the experiential reality of his whole relationship together in order to be whole, live whole and make whole in likeness of the Trinity (cf. Mt 12:30)—just as (*kathos*) the Father *into* the Son and Jesus *into* Paul illuminated and distinguished the whole of God's whole only on God's qualitative relational terms for the world to believe and know (as he prayed, Jn 17:21-23).

Embodying includes the secondary of quantitative *bios* but most significantly involves the primary of qualitative *zoe* in the innermost. The former by itself does not embody the whole theology and hermeneutic of the Word and thus can only transmit referential information about it, which is not the qualitative relational significance the world needs to fulfill the human relational condition. With the primacy of qualitative *zoe*, the whole theology and hermeneutic of the relational Word unfolded is integrally embodied in the innermost and only on this basis communicates relationally the whole of God who came in response to the human condition and the whole of God's whole relationship together that has come to hold us together in our innermost. Nothing less and no substitutes can embody and communicate the Word of God unfolded in the primacy of the qualitative and the relational.

## Communicating the Word

In his Colossians communication, Paul integrated participles with his summary relational imperatives—be determined from inner out by Christ's wholeness and be indwelled wholly by Christ's word—in support of (complementary and instrumental uses of the participles) these imperatives to distinguish the purpose of their relational outcome 'already' for function together in the primacy of the qualitative and relational: teaching, admonishing and singing (Col 3:16). Based on the experiential truth of the word of Christ and the experiential reality of Christ's wholeness in our innermost together in one body, Paul integrates support functions: teaching nothing less and no substitutes of the Word unfolded in whole and his new relationship together in wholeness; admonishing (*noutheteo*), to warn and alert each other of any and all reductionism and its counter-relational work fragmenting this wholeness; and, equally important, integrally practicing from inner out the primacy of qualitative engagement and relational involvement signified by qualitative relational singing-communicating ongoingly in whole relationship with God, including with each other (cf. Eph 5:19). This wholeness in life and practice, including in theology, is the defining purpose and the determining dynamic for God's family that the Word integrally embodied and communicated.

In a relational message of deconstruction, Jesus critically distinguished this purpose and dynamic of wholeness for his kingdom-family: “whoever does not gather with me scatters” (Mt 12:30). To gather (*synago*) is not merely to gather (as in most of the churches in Jesus’ post-ascension critique) but to lead together and bring together with him in the whole of God’s whole relationship. To scatter (*skorpizo*) should not be buffered by the view of scattering and dispersing in a positive way into the world, or simply going home after having gathered, but denotes here to dissipate, waste what is whole or the opportunity and means to be whole. The either-or of Jesus’ words must not be reduced to suggest hyperbole but the relational words clearly communicating the whole of *who* came and *what* has come (12:28), while necessarily deconstructing the ontological simulations and epistemological illusions of the who and what holding together his kingdom-family in the innermost: “Whoever does not gather with me *in new relationship together in wholeness, then scatters by reshaping relationship together and thereby dissipating, wasting and fragmenting God’s whole.*”

This either-or tension and conflict between wholeness and reductionism emerge in the communication of *who* came and *what* has come, as Jesus further illuminated with “good” being whole ontology and function, and “evil” being reduced ontology and function (Mt 12:33-37). Underlying the communication of the Word is this ongoing either-or dynamic between wholeness and reductionism. Communicating the Word unfolded in relational terms was Paul’s defining family responsibility for the church, his *oikonomia* to *pleroo* the word of God (Col 1:25). Our communication of the Word does not have the same canonical significance that Paul had to complete the words unfolding from God. Nevertheless, the nature of our communication (as in the second unavoidable issue for practice discussed earlier in this chap.) does have the same responsibility of canonical integrity to be complete and function whole in the communication of God’s Word in the innermost. Anything less is fragmentary and does not gather together with Christ in wholeness but scatters—the critical either-or issue between wholeness and reductionism that is not only unavoidable for our practice (as in the three issues to account for ongoingly) but also inescapable for our ontology and function (as in the three inescapable issues needing accountability).

The proclamation (preaching and teaching) of the gospel is contingent on both the experiential truth of *who* is claimed and the experiential reality of *what* is claimed in the innermost. Otherwise, the who and what have been narrowed down to referential information, which then is transmitted about a gospel without the qualitative relational significance of *who* came and *what* has come. Paul would not consider this so-called gospel a gospel at all (Gal 1:6-7). In other words, any form of reductionism is not an option in the communication of the Word.

Communication is the innermost means of relational connection between persons, whether divine or human. This communication takes place on different levels ranging from explicitly physical to implicitly spiritual and is expressed in various forms of verbal and nonverbal messages. What is common to all communication—indeed the key—is a shared language by which relational connection takes place on the basis of the different levels and various forms of expression. Obviously, different languages in the world make communication difficult, for example, between regions and cultures, but do not necessarily preclude relational connection. Even with a shared language, however, relational connection is commonly evident to be problematic.

A major part of the problem in relational connection is that the prevailing concept of language is referential, which only composes the content aspect of messages communicated between persons. The clarity-opaqueness and integrity-deception of the message-word content are critical for relational connection. This content is basic to communication yet insufficient by itself as the innermost means of relational connection between persons. Conjoined with the content aspect is the relational aspect of messages integral to communication. These relational messages qualify the message-word content to provide deeper meaning to the words by a speaker or author. As discussed previously with Jesus' relational connection with persons, these three specific relational messages (usually implied) express (1) what the speaker is saying or feeling about one's own person, (2) what the speaker is saying or feeling about the other person(s), and (3) what the speaker is saying or feeling about their relationship together. The deeper meaning from these relational messages is indispensable for establishing the full context of the word-content by the speaker in order to have whole understanding for significant relational connection. While relational messages neither make unnecessary the clarity and integrity of the word-content nor guarantee the relational connection, they provide the innermost means necessary for communication to make relational connection between persons. Is this not the purpose and function for communicating the Word?

When the shared language in communication is referential language, only the word-content aspect of messages is the focus of attention and hereby what is primary. This has been problematic for language theory,<sup>1</sup> and more importantly problematic both for listening to the innermost means of communication by the Word unfolded in relational language, and for communicating this relational Word in his relational language. The Father's relational imperative to "Listen to my Son" is not and cannot be reduced to referential language because this only transmits narrowed-down information about word-content without paying attention to the primacy of relational connection. The lack of clarity and integrity of referential language both prevent relational connection and turn the hermeneutical circle into a vicious cycle of listener-reader response shaping of both the content and any relationship between speaker-listener. The Father illuminated only the relational language of the Son that communicates the innermost means of relational connection to compose the whole of who and what holds us in relationship together in the innermost. This is the only language that the Father made imperative to listen to, and the only messages of Christ that Paul made imperative to indwell us and inhabit by his vulnerable presence and intimate involvement. When we share in this relational language with its primacy of qualitative engagement and relational involvement, then we can claim to have received the communication of the whole Word unfolded in the innermost (notably his three relational messages) for relational connection together, and on this qualitative relational basis can proclaim the innermost means to communicate the Word in whole for the relational connection with others to be whole, live whole and make whole in likeness of the Trinity—within the church, in the academy and even in the world.

Integral also to the clarity and integrity of communication for relational connection is the depth of communication. In his illumination of the integral framework

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<sup>1</sup> For a limited discussion on the issues of language and reading Scripture, see Gregory J. Laughery, "Language at the Frontiers of Language," in Craig Bartholomew, Colin Greene and Karl Möller, eds., *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 171-94.

for church leaders and his unfolding of the relational dynamic for the growth of the church, Paul adds the qualifier: “speaking the truth in love” (Eph 4:15). The referential truth does not require the qualitative relational significance of *agape* but only the explanatory certainty of the information (or doctrine) transmitted. Communicating the experiential truth necessitates the deeper means for the experiential reality of relational connection in whole relationship together as family (4:16). This deeper means integral to communication is love. Communicating in love involves *agape*-relational involvement; this depth level is not expressed without the primacy of qualitative engagement. This vulnerability has no substitute and can indeed be threatening and intrusive, yet signifies for communication the innermost means to relational connection. A shared language, even communicated with clarity and integrity, cannot ensure significant relational connection without the relational depth of love. Even when language is not shared, significant relational connection is made with the vulnerable relational involvement of love. Therefore, our language, on the one hand, as referential language is insufficient and thus unimportant for the communication of the Word for relational connection. On the other hand, our language as relational language composing the depth of our involvement is necessary and irreplaceable for communicating the relational Word unfolded in the innermost for the connection to new relationship together in wholeness without the fragmenting presence of the veil.

## **Wholeness in Theological Education**

Based on the experiential truth and reality of the new wine ‘already’ (discussed in chap. 8), a valid question is raised about theological education today: Has it become an old wineskin that constrains the flow of the new wine and reduces the new wine of its qualitative and relational significance?

It is unlikely that Jesus and Paul would survive in the prevailing framework of education today in churches and the academy. Though both of them taught in the temple-synagogue contexts, they were in ongoing conflict in those contexts. Their conflict was not with the faith they had in common, but with the prevailing *phronema* and *phroneo* and with a reduced ontology and function. In the primacy of “*zoe* and wholeness” (Rom 8:5-6), therefore, Jesus and Paul intruded on those engaged in self-determination and shaping of relationships, and they would also intrude on and likely threaten theological education today. For Jesus and Paul, even well-meaning intentions in those contexts are insufficient to compose theological education, and inadequate to clearly distinguish its function and ongoingly sustain its practice—as evidenced in the churches Jesus critiqued in post-ascension (Rev 2-3).

The divide between theology and function and the increasing fragmentation of theological education into multiple theological disciplines are normative for the academy today, lacking a sense of the whole even when stated intentions seek coherence. Theology and function were inseparable for Paul, with function the priority from which his theology emerged. Function without theology does not determine whole function. Theology without function cannot constitute whole ontology. For Paul, wholeness in theology, ontology and function are determined only by the primacy of the relational Word both indwelling and inhabiting us from inner out with his qualitative presence and

relational involvement (Col 2:9-10; 3:16). Anything less than the innermost and any substitute for it in theological education would no longer have the wholeness of Christ as its primary determinant (Col 3:15), nor would it have the whole of God holding it, the church and the universe together in the innermost (Col 1:17; Eph 1:23; cf. Lk 9:32). Any loss of *synistemi* and lack of wholeness raise the basic question of what is at the core of theological education, which the academy can no longer assume to be valid.

The core of what holds together the human person, the church and theological education depends on one's interpretive framework and lens. That is, 'core' may either be merely the center (what is central to) of a person's, church's, theological education's perspective/position, or be the innermost of what holds all else together in the whole. The latter necessitates the primacy of the qualitative and the relational. Therefore, to go from what is merely at the center of theological education to its innermost exposes the need for decontextualization and deconstruction of two primary issues facing theological education in the church and academy today:

1. The explicit primary issue is the referentialization of the Word, which is the influence of human contextualization—from distant past, recent past, present or perhaps from left-hemisphere brain dominance—resulting in narrowing down the epistemic field of the Word for the purpose of (further) explanation and certainty on the basis of more probable referential terms; this requires decontextualization in order to return to the whole Word unfolded in the primacy of the qualitative and relational, while deconstructing any epistemological illusions of the Word shaped by listener-reader response.
2. The implicit primary issue is one's theological anthropology with a reduced ontology and function that converges with human contextualization to promote both a turn from the heart in efforts of self-determination and a turn to human shaping of relationships—all of which reflect, reinforce or sustain the human relational condition—thereby reducing the primacy of the qualitative and relational; this requires the 'cease and desist' (Ps 46:10) by deconstructing both the efforts of self-determination (notably of the Word) and the shaping of relationships (notably with the Word), while conjointly decontextualizing any prevailing influences of reductionism present from human contexts in order to restore the *phronema* and *phroneo* of "zoe and wholeness."

When the core of theological education makes this shift from merely what is its center to the innermost of what holds theological education together to be whole, it can address the innermost composition of its core. This exposes a further relational issue facing theological education, particularly in the academy and accordingly in churches. Most problematic in the academy has been a growing (even established) lack of "paying attention to how you listen *to the Word*" (Lk 8:18) and an increasing (even self-sustaining) inability to "pay attention to what you hear *from the Word*" (Mk 4:24)—each disregarding the Father's relational imperative. In any discussion of the Word it is important to distinguish between 'what is heard' and 'what is seen'. Modern perspective (or worldview) gives priority to sight over sound. Yet sound is more basic than sight. In anthropological study, most traditional societies regarded sound as more important than sight, and those societies tended to be more personal and relational. The Father's

imperative to “Listen...” gives priority to sound over sight because sound is more qualitative than sight and can account for that which is not seen and for mystery. The significance of the Word is both qualitative and relational, therefore the written Word needs to point to the sound of the communicated words from God’s mouth. But if the sight of the Word has primacy over the words from God’s mouth, then the Word becomes disembodied and thereby disconnected from the qualitative relational significance of the whole of God’s self-disclosure for the sole purpose of whole relationship together and knowing God intimately, not merely having referential information about God.

This relational problem in the academy has been consequential in the decrease of qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness—in both theology and function for persons, while in the academy, the church or in the world—that has rendered interpreting the Word to a hermeneutical vicious cycle of human contextualization and shaping, consequently reducing the composition of theological education in its core and at its edges to self-referencing. Its edges include attributing the human shaping of ministry and mission to what God is doing in the world. The self-determining efforts and shaping engaged in self-referencing is further evident in the identity of the academy’s various institutions, whose primary identity highlights its self-referencing—centered on the primacy of what *it* does and has (cf. 1 Cor 4:7)—and not the qualitative relational significance of the Word unfolded *from* and *by* the whole of God (1 Cor 2:9-10; 4:6).

Jesus keeps knocking at the door of the academy to intrude on its self-determination and its shaping of relationships with ‘relationship together involving the whole person’ to get to the innermost to hold the academy in whole relationship together. For this innermost core to emerge in theological education, there is needed not a mere central truth centered on doctrine but rather solely the primacy of the qualitative embodying the primacy of new relationship together in wholeness—the relational outcome ‘already’ of the whole of God’s definitive blessing. From the beginning of his theological trajectory to the current relational progression of his relational path, we need to listen to the *pleroma* of God whose wholeness composes the core of theological education with nothing less and no substitutes. Theological education is unable to address the functional and tactical issues (challenges, needs, opportunities), much less strategic ones, facing it within the academy, the church and in the world, until it has whole understanding of the strategic, tactical and functional shifts of the whole of God’s theological trajectory and relational path. Without this understanding, it is inevitable to become preoccupied with the secondary over the primacy embodied by the Word in whole.

When the core of theological education returns to the Word unfolded in whole (cf. Rev 2:4-5), it is face to Face with the relational Word who, by the nature of the Word, must be taught in his relational language with relational words by his relational process. Teaching in only his relational terms and not referential terms challenges the prevailing pedagogy in higher education. Therefore, theological education also needs to turn to Jesus for how to teach its innermost core.

The most consequential non-issue issue in theological education involves its Christology, which routinely separates Jesus’ teachings from his whole person, leaving only disembodied teachings. By its nature, the incarnation cannot be reduced to redefine Jesus merely by what he taught or only by what he did, although a theological anthropology of reduced ontology and function assumes it can and consequently does



that. The incarnation embodied the whole of Jesus' person, as the whole of God, for the relationships together necessary to be God's whole as family. Contrary to prevailing views of discipleship, both in the ancient Mediterranean world and the modern world, Jesus did not merely embody teachings to follow, examples to emulate, even principles to embody, and subsequently for followers to teach. Accordingly, current theological students must be in contrast to rabbinic students in the past, which also necessitates a qualitative relational difference in theological teachers. The whole of Jesus, composing in complete Christology and full soteriology at the heart of theological education, vulnerably embodied only the whole of God and God's relational response for whole relationship together with the veil removed, the embodying of which was qualitatively distinguished in the trinitarian relational context of family by the trinitarian relational process of family love. Anything less and any substitutes for the whole of Jesus disembodies him and fragments his purpose and his function, and thereby always engages reductionism of the whole he embodied—God's relational whole on God's qualitative relational terms.

The whole embodied by Jesus was clearly distinguished both in *what* he taught and *how* he taught. Jesus' approach to teaching *the whole* was not about revealing (*apokalypto*) key knowledge and critical information in referential terms because the relational content (qualifying word-content) distinguishing God's whole involved only the whole person in relationship. What this involved for Jesus is vital for us to understand both to more deeply experience his embodied whole and to further extend God's whole to others within the church and in the world, the antecedent of which emerges from the quality of theological education and not its quantity. Jesus' pedagogical approach to teaching and learning, integrated into the relational progression of discipleship in his theological trajectory and relational path, not only needs to inform and reform theological education in the academy and Christian education in the church but also to transform them.

### **The Three “AREs” of Jesus’ Pedagogy:**

When Jesus told the Father that he disclosed him to the disciples (Jn 17:6), he used *phaneroo*, which refers to those to whom the revelation is made, and not *apokalypto*, which refers only to the object revealed. This is not an artificial distinction to make but a critical one to distinguish God's revelation as Subject engaged in relationship in contrast to only the Object to be observed. *Phaneroo* signifies the necessary context and process of his disclosure of the whole of God and God's whole, whose relational content would not be sufficient to understand merely as *apokalypto* of the Object observed in referential terms. How did Jesus constitute this key context and process to fully disclose this wholeness?

John's Gospel provides the initial overview of Jesus' pedagogy, which is the functionally integral framework for the qualitative significance of his disclosures. In the narrative of a wedding at Cana attended by Jesus and his disciples (discussed earlier), Jesus used this situation to teach his disciples about himself (Jn 2:1-11). This initially evidenced the three dynamic dimensions basic to his approach to pedagogy.

As a guest, Jesus participated in the sociocultural context of the wedding (an event lasting days). In response to his mother's request, Jesus appeared reluctant yet involved himself even further than as guest. In what seems like an uneventful account of

Jesus' first miracle unrelated to his function and purpose, John's Gospel also provides us with the bigger picture illuminated in his introduction (Jn 1:14). John's is the only Gospel to record this interaction, and the evangelist uses it to establish a pattern for Jesus' ministry. The miracle was ostensibly about the wine but its significance was to teach his disciples. Both what and how he taught is vital for the wholeness of theological education.

When Jesus responded to his mother and got further involved, he made the whole of his person *accessible* to his disciples. Jesus was not just approachable but vulnerably accessible. This involved more than the quantitative notions of accessible language or words in teaching, or of making accessible one's resources. This deeply involved making directly accessible the whole of his person and the qualitative significance of who, what and how he was. In this social context Jesus did not merely reveal (*apokalypto*) his resources but most important vulnerably disclosed (*phaneroo*) his functional glory to his disciples, not a mere theological glory lacking functional significance (2:11, cf. 2 Cor 4:6). The first aspect of his glory that Jesus made accessible to them was God's being, the innermost of God signified by the primacy of the heart. It was Jesus' heart, composing his whole person, whom he made accessible to them. The whole person, composed by the function of the heart, distinguishes clearly the depth level of significance necessary to be *accessible* in Jesus' pedagogy. Anything less and any substitutes are inadequate for this accessible-level to teach the whole further and deeper than referential terms. A turn from the heart is consequential for the qualitative engagement needed to be accessible. It is incongruent to be helping others understand wholeness while one is not functioning to be whole in the process. Therefore, *Accessible (A)* is the first dynamic dimension in Jesus' pedagogy necessary by its nature to be whole in order to teach the whole.

*Phaneroo* illuminates the irreplaceable context and process for making his whole person accessible. The miracle, self-disclosure, being accessible, all are not ends in themselves but in Jesus' purpose and function (even in this apparent secondary situation) are always and only for relationship. More specifically then, *phaneroo* distinguishes the integral *relational* context and process involved in his teaching. When Jesus disclosed his glory, he did not end with making accessible God's being, the heart of God. The second aspect of his glory involved God's nature, God's intimate relational nature, witnessed initially between the trinitarian persons during his baptism and later at the transfiguration. In this teaching moment, Jesus disclosed his whole person to his disciples for relationship together, thereby disclosing the intimate relational nature of God—that is, his functional glory, in his heart and relational nature, communicating in the innermost to make relational connection with their human ontology as whole persons created in the image of the heart of God for relationships together in likeness of the relational nature of the Trinity (as in Jn 1:14). This also provides further understanding of the relational context and process of God's thematic relational response to the human condition and what is involved in that connection, which integrally composes the innermost core of theological education.

In this seemingly insignificant social context, Jesus qualitatively engaged and relationally involved his whole person with his disciples in the most significant human function: the primacy of whole relationship together. As he made his whole person accessible in this relational context and process, his disciples responded back to his glory by relationally "putting their trust in him" (2:11). Their response was not merely to a

miracle, or placing their belief in his teaching, example or resources—in other words, a mere response to the Object observed. The context of his teaching was *relational* in the process of making accessible his person to their person, thus deeply connecting with the heart of their person and evoking a compatible relational response to be whole in relationship together Subject to subject, Face to face, heart to heart. This relational process also illuminates the intrusive relational path of Jesus' 'relationship together involving the whole person', which anticipates his improbable theological trajectory to remove the veil for intimate relationship with God. If his teaching content were only cognitive, this qualitative relational connection would not have been made. Anything less and any substitute from Jesus would not have composed the relational context and process necessary to qualitatively engage and relationally involve his whole person for relationship together to be whole, consequently not fulfilling God's thematic action in relational response to the human relational condition. Therefore, *Relational (R)* is the second dynamic dimension in Jesus' pedagogy necessary by its nature to live whole in relationships in order to teach the whole, only God's relational whole.

When Jesus turned water into wine in this secondary social situation, he did not diminish the significance of his miracle or his glory. His disclosure was made not merely to impart knowledge and information about him for the disciples to assimilate. His disclosure was made in this experiential situation (albeit secondary) for his disciples to experience him living whole in this and any life context, not in social isolation or a conceptual vacuum that a theology divided from function signifies. For Jesus, for example, merely giving a lecture/sermon would not constitute teaching—nor would listening to such constitute learning. That is to say, his teaching was *experiential* for their whole person (signified by heart function) to experience in relationship. For this experience to be a reality in relationship, the whole person must be vulnerably involved. When Jesus made his heart accessible to be relational with his disciples, he also disclosed the third aspect of his glory involving God's presence, God's vulnerable presence. In the strategic shift of God's thematic relational action, the whole of Jesus embodied God's vulnerable presence for intimate involvement in relationship together, therefore disclosing God's glory for his followers to experience and relationally respond back to "put their trust in him." The embodied Truth is experiential truth vulnerably present and involved for the experiential reality of this relationship together. If this is not the qualitative relational significance of the gospel at the heart of theological education, its core is not in the innermost.

Human experience is variable and relative. For experience to be whole, however, it needs to involve whole persons accessible to each other in relationship by vulnerable involvement together. For this relational dynamic to be a functional reality, it must be the relational outcome of Jesus' theological trajectory that removed the veil in relationship together. This was Jesus' purpose in his teaching and his pedagogical approach, which also was intrusive with 'relationship together involving the whole person'. This was *who*, *what*, and *how* Jesus was ongoingly in his glory: *who*, as his whole person signified by the qualitative function of his heart; *what*, only by his intimate relational nature; and thus *how*, with vulnerable involvement only for relationship together to be God's whole. The reality of relationally knowing (not referential knowledge about) the whole of God and relationally participating in God's whole only emerges as experiential truth. Jesus' teaching remains incomplete, and our learning is also not complete, unless it is

*experiential*. Therefore, to complete the three-dimensional approach, *Experiential (E)* is the third dynamic dimension in Jesus' pedagogy necessary by its nature to integrate the other two dimensions of *Accessible* and *Relational* for the qualitative depth of the whole in order to teach the experiential truth of the whole for its experiential reality in new relationship together in wholeness.

The three *AREs* of Jesus' pedagogy form a definitive three-dimensional paradigm to be whole and to live whole in order to teach the experiential truth of the whole. That is, this three-dimensional paradigm is to teach the whole as God's relational whole on God's qualitative relational terms, just as Jesus vulnerably embodied, relationally disclosed and intimately involved his whole person with other persons. From this overview, Jesus ongoingly demonstrated his three-dimensional pedagogical approach. This was evidenced notably in three examples which went against the norm in religious, cultural and social practice.

When Jesus was approached unceremoniously by a prostitute, he made his person accessible to her person even in the context of her perceived overtures (Lk 7:36-50). In the process he vulnerably involved his whole person with hers for relationship in intimate love. Jesus used these intimate moments to teach her the experiential truth of God's grace, to affirm to her the experiential reality of her forgiveness, and to have her experience being made whole (*sozo*), God's whole. In another situation, Jesus took the initiative to make his whole person accessible to a Samaritan woman (Jn 4:1-42). He increasingly involved his person vulnerably with hers for relationship with the whole of God. By this experiential relational process, he made God's heart accessible to her and taught her what God desires most: the whole person in intimate communion together. This provided her both the relational basis to be made whole in God's family and the experiential truth that God's whole is for all nations and persons without distinctions. The third example overlaps two situations. The first involved Jesus' calling of Levi (Mt 9:9-13) and the second was his call to Zacchaeus (Lk 19:1-10). Jesus initiated making his person accessible to both tax collectors for relationship. Moreover he involved his person vulnerably with them by participating in table fellowship together (a gathering of great significance in their time). In this experiential process, Jesus taught them what it means to be made whole, and constituted them in the experiential truth that they have been redemptively reconciled to belong to the whole of God's family, without any veil between them.

Jesus' pedagogy contrasted with the prevailing teaching practices in the ancient Mediterranean world and conflicts with any reductionist teaching approaches, notably in the modern Western world with its primary focus on referential knowledge and rationalized understanding through the narrowed-down quantitative lens from reductionism—further exposing a theological anthropology of reduced ontology and function. The learning process of Jesus' pedagogy necessarily involves whole knowledge and understanding (*synesis*), which engages the primacy of the qualitative and the relational for the outcome of whole ontology and function. Therefore, Jesus' teaching of God's whole involves redemptive change and transformation to the *new*—not only for the whole person to experience as an individual but most importantly to experience in relationship together to be the whole of God's family. God's relational whole on only God's qualitative relational terms is this new creation family—the new wine communion with no veil—relationally progressing to its ultimate relational communion together,

which Jesus made imperative to be taught after he discussed a series of parables about the kingdom of God and the last things (Mt 13:52). Anything less and any substitutes of this new in whole constrain the flow of the new wine and reduce the planting, cultivating, growth and taste of the new wine in its full qualitative relational significance.

John's Gospel gives us this big picture from the beginning, in which Jesus ongoingly functioned in his theological trajectory yet remaining vulnerably involved in his relational path for intimate relationship together. The whole of Jesus' teaching only had significance in this definitive relational progression for this relational outcome 'already' and relational conclusion 'not yet'. And this is how any teaching of the whole of God's family needs to be theologically and functionally contextualized—and all the "trees" of life put into the "forest" of God's thematic relational action for the eschatological big picture and the ultimate relational communion together, just as Paul composed in his theological forest and systemic framework. For Jesus, and Jesus *into* Paul, the only embodying of theology that has qualitative relational significance is nothing less and no substitutes for the whole. To embody God's whole, therefore, any theological enterprise by necessity functions in the *pleroma* of God's improbable theological trajectory and intrusive relational path; and this trajectory and path involve irreplaceably the primacy of the qualitative and relational needed to be God's new family together in wholeness with no veil—the fulfillment of God's definitive blessing that embodies *siym* for *shalom*.

Both Jesus and Paul intrude on theological education today to challenge integrally *what* composes its core and *how* it teaches this core. In teaching God's relational whole, its engagement must involve the three *AREs* of Jesus' pedagogy to be compatible with the trinitarian relational context of family and to be congruent with the trinitarian relational process of family love that compose the new creation family. At the heart of this relational context and process is 'relationship together involving the whole persons', and this clearly involves being accountable for our whole ontology and function with the veil removed. The new wine is composed by and is contained in only this whole ontology and function.

Wholeness is not optional for the academy and the church. Anything less and any substitutes will be insufficient to be whole and to live whole in order to teach the whole of God's whole. These alternatives impede the relational dynamic of the kingdom *into* church and preclude our theology and function from being in likeness of the whole of God, whereby our practice reflects, reinforces or sustains the human condition. Addressing the likes of Faust's question requires inevitably to address the breadth of the human condition—even as it exists in the academy and the church—and to respond intrusively with the depth of the gospel of wholeness. This is what Jesus in post-ascension holds his church and the academy accountable for—God's relational whole on God's qualitative relational terms, the *who* came and the *what* has come that holds us together in our innermost.

“Where are you?” “What are you doing here?” “Don't you *know* me yet?” “Why are you...?”

Jesus *into* Paul *into*...!



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