

Worshiping God in Likeness
of the Trinity
Not Determined 'in their way'

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Chapter 1 *Confronting the Common*

You must not worship the LORD your God in their way.

Deuteronomy 12:4, 31, NIV¹

How do you think God feels about the corporate worship in his church around the world today? Related, do you ever think about *who* and *what* God receives from you and your fellow worshipers? Do these issues matter to God? Of the above words from God about worship, do you think those words still apply to us today? Or are they merely a brittle ancient historic record, the intent of which has no relevance to our contemporary time?

In both the Old and New Testaments, God says challenging things about worship. If we believe Scripture to compose the relational communication from God that God communicates directly to us, then we need to take his words to heart. If, however, we don't acknowledge that God communicates relationally to us today through Scripture, we are left to our own devices, guessing a lot about God and about worship in particular, and then shaping worship "according to our own desires" (Dt 12:8).

For one thing, judging by the fact that much of contemporary worship today has little *relational clarity* as to who is the one being worshiped, it seems that many worship planners and leaders fall into the latter group of speculators, however inadvertently that may be so. Traditional liturgical worship may have more relational clarity, but it is difficult to discern that much of this worship has any *relational significance* of making intimate relational connection with God, whose presence has revealed himself in the most vulnerable ways for intimate relationship together. Who is being worshiped is reflected by *how* we worship, which raises the critical question of whether or not we worship 'in their way', regardless of our church's style of worship. This study proceeds on the conviction that by and large the global church worships God 'in their way' across the worship spectrum that ranges from the most casual contemporary worship to the most structured liturgical worship, with all their contextual variations and sociocultural diversity.

The Incompatible *Common*

From early on in the covenant relationship between the Holy (Uncommon) God and the Israelites, those relationships frequently involved incompatibility and incongruence between the Uncommon God and the common default ways of the Israelites, leading to much tension and conflict. Central to this conflict was the Israelites' worship of God. Here is what was involved, looking beyond the either-or worship of Yahweh or pagan deities.

¹ Scripture references are from the NRSV unless otherwise noted. Italics indicate my further renderings.

On the one hand, the Holy God initiated the covenant relationship with the Hebrew people to establish them in the relational terms of *wholeness* (*tāmiym*, be whole, Gen 17:1). Wholeness is the significance of biblical peace, namely, the inner-out well-being of persons both individually and corporately in covenant relationship together with God (*shalôm*, see Num 6:24-26). *Shalôm* stands in qualitative contrast to the common inadequate view of peace—for example, peace as the absence of conflict and war—that we get from Greek philosophy.² Christians, notably those who toil in peace and justice efforts, commonly think of peace in this limited sense, which reflects their reduced view of the biblical peace distinguished by God (as in Num 6:24-26). Yet, it is also inadequate to move beyond the mere absence of the negative to a common ‘holistic’ view of peace (and the human person) by merely adding more parts of a person, such as physical and economic needs. The wholeness of *shalôm* is the inner-out emergence of persons and their convergence in the primacy of relationships that have been specifically redeemed from reductionism and reconciled to God and each other in intimate and equalized relationships (to be discussed throughout the study). By its nature, wholeness is the experiential truth that composes the experiential reality of intimate reciprocal relationship with God.

On the other hand of the incompatibility and incongruence between God and his covenant people, God has always had to contend with his people’s development influenced by the context of the *common*, that is, shaped by the general human context (planet earth) and its specific contexts (e.g. religiocultural, sociocultural, family). Indeed, the whole of Scripture deals with this prevailing issue of human shaping in the common’s ordinary context, which is always in contrast to and in conflict with the uncommon context of God distinguished beyond the common. This shaping influence from the human context(s) is called *human contextualization*. And human contextualization’s most sinister yet unavoidable influence on all human persons ever since the primordial garden is the *sin of reductionism*.

Reductionism, which is defined shortly, is the antithesis, the foe if you wish, of wholeness, holiness (uncommonness), and of God himself. For human beings, this reductionism is our lowest *common* denominator, and influences every aspect of human life and relationships, including how we practice church and how we worship God. Underlying this doxology in our theology and practice is our theological anthropology, which is the primary determinant for how we function as persons, yet is usually overlooked. Thus, the consequences of the sin of reductionism on worship escape our awareness because its subtle influence shapes how we function by the default mode of the unredeemed human context; but the consequences are felt nonetheless, as will become increasingly apparent.

Wherever God’s wholeness emerges in the human context (the common’s ordinary context), there the presence of reductionism can always be found to oppose wholeness. It is therefore imperative that we understand and expose reductionism at the outset of this study on worshiping God in God’s likeness, because the serious relational consequences from reductionism are:

- (1) Our person is reduced to less than whole, and accordingly our relationships are less than whole.

² See bibliography for all Hebrew and Greek word study resources.

- (2) Against God’s warning, based on our human-shaped biases we impose our reduced preconceptions and interpretations of God’s Word and end up worshiping a human-shaped God (*our* shaping of God, resulting in diverse versions of God)—however knowingly or unknowingly.
- (3) Based on our shaping of God, we worship God in ways that have little if only relational clarity of God and no relational significance to God; thereby, we end up worshiping God ‘in their way’.

The same relational tensions and conflicts in worship that took place between Yahweh and the ancient Israelites present themselves in today’s worship gatherings in different outer forms. The relational consequences will become more apparent as we move through this study.

God’s words at the opening of this chapter—“you must not worship the LORD your God in their way”—are a direct challenge to us, a confronting challenge inseparably including our shaping of God that many may want to avoid.³ As we discuss reductionism in this chapter, I pray that readers will, with the help of the Spirit, come to understand a number of related issues that concern corporate worship, issues that get raised in many discussions among worship thinkers, planners and practitioners but are never completely resolved. These include how to deal with performance, preferences about worship styles, liturgical traditions, music differences, diversity among worshipers (i.e. differences based on race, ethnicity, gender, age/generation, class), competition—everything that creates relational distance, tensions and even conflicts among God’s worshipers in the local and global church.

The prevailing approach by worship thinkers to these issues in worship has been notably fragmented, attending to disparate issues, such as promoting multigenerational or multicultural worship to address the generational and diversity gaps with the intent of having a measure of harmony. Yet any harmonious outcomes are often shallow and short-lived, somewhat analogous to the short-lived periods of harmony that mask the enduring problems of racism and sexism in the world. Too often harmony is equated with mere niceness, which has no relational significance compared to the relational involvement of love. We must go deeper to deal with the underlying presence of reductionism that is not yet understood in its depth. In order to sufficiently address this issue, we have to come face to face with the Lord in unprecedented vulnerability of our whole person for the relational involvement necessary for a truly transformed relational outcome.

These issues all point us to our need for redemptive change: to die to reductionism, so that the new can emerge in vulnerableness, in the intimate and equalized relationships together of wholeness as God’s new creation family, that is, who we are as God’s church locally and globally. We will not experience this transformed (not a mere transformative) relational outcome that the gospel of transformation offers unless we

³ For a focused study on the human shaping of God that we all engage in, please see T. Dave Matsuo’s new study on the Trinity, *The Face of the Trinity: The Trinitarian Essential for the Whole of God and Life* (Trinity Study, coming in 2016), online at <http://4X12.org>.

listen better to God’s Word and the embodied Word.⁴ That is, we need to make ourselves vulnerable to having been ignorant or even resistant “all this time,” even as some of us have been dedicated Christians for many decades (cf. Jesus’ poignant words to his disciples, Jn 14:9).

This worship study focuses on these urgent issues so that we can tackle them head on, thus to give the Spirit the opportunity to unfold the transformation in us individually and corporately as the global church, to be and live whole from the inner out. Far from the common approaches embraced by churches and the academy to bring about transformation, in biblical transformation the old (including our worship theology and practice) dies so that the new can emerge (cf. Rom 6:4-5; 2 Cor 5:17) as the new wine (cf. Lk 5:38) and flow in worship gatherings and beyond into the world. Such transformation—that is, redemptive change—will distinguish our God, us as the global church, and our worship far beyond how our worship ‘in their way’ does. This has been God’s desire from the beginning, and it is exciting to anticipate the transformed church whole-ly responding to God in relational terms of God’s likeness and participating in God’s life as the new creation family in transformed worship.

Exposing Reductionism

Before we can expect this transformation to unfold, we have to expose the influence of reductionism in our theology and practice. In reductionism, a person is defined not as an integrated whole but by one or more aspects (parts) of that person, thereby fragmenting and reducing the person’s significance to that part. The part or parts of our person used in that way are mainly quantitative ‘outer’ aspects of what we *do* (e.g. job, education, social and family roles) or *have* (e.g. wealth, status, physical attributes, talents). While the ‘outer’ of what we do/have gets primary focus, the ‘inner’ qualitative function of our heart, notably its function in relationships, is rendered less important, hidden, or even ignored altogether. Thus, with this narrow measure the integrity of our whole person has become fragmented and reduced to those outer criteria. Reductionism has been the default and common mode of all of us humans ever since the primordial garden—who and what we are as persons, and how we function in all of our relationships, foremost with God and notably in worship.⁵

What one does or has are quantitative measures of the person on which we construct our self-image and derive self-worth. Whether in a positive or negative sense, while growing up, you likely defined your person (and were defined by others) by what you did or didn’t do (e.g. how well you did in school, sports, art, music), and/or by what

⁴ For an in-depth study into the gospel of transformation, please see T. Dave Matsuo, *The Gospel of Transformation: Distinguishing the Discipleship and Ecclesiology Integral to Salvation* (Transformation Study, 2015). Online at <http://4X12.org>.

⁵ Theological anthropology is a critical area of human life as God created us to be in his qualitative image and relational likeness, because it influences every aspect of our theology and practice, indeed it shapes the gospel we proclaim. For an urgent and in-depth discussion of our theological anthropology ever since the primordial garden, please read T. Dave Matsuo, *The Person in Complete Context: The Whole of Theological Anthropology Distinguished* (Theological Anthropology Study, 2014), online at <http://4X12.org>.

you had or didn't have (e.g. certain physical attributes, talents). I have written elsewhere about my own journey—that I defined my person by how I did in school, abilities (or lack thereof) in art and music, my female gender, appearance (this last one partly related to being Asian American)—and my need to be made whole in my person. Every one of us has a similar narrative that would be vital to identify and bring before the Lord.

With this common mindset and narrow quantitative interpretive lens focused on the secondary criteria of what we do or have—that is, the lens which tells us what to pay attention to and what to ignore—on that distorted basis our persons engage in relationships with others, including God. Likewise, we view and define others by the same fragmented criteria of what they do or have, and engage in relationships on that distorted basis, including with God. To engage with another person with my heart distant or hidden severely limits any depth of relational connection, certainly precluding intimate connection (intimacy defined as hearts vulnerable and coming together). Then we bring this same way of engaging others into our church relationships, subtly affirming the common practice of relationships prevailing in our surrounding context. The consequence of reductionism on the human person is inevitably, if not immediately, on relationships, and we need to recognize reductionism's particular counter-relational work in worship.

As long as we define our person by the outer criteria of what we do and have, our whole person remains relationally at a distance from others, even if we give the appearance of being warm and relationally available. The lack of depth of relational connection with God and other worshipers in church—for example before, during and after worship services—is the prevailing common experience among worshipers, certainly a common experience for visitors and even regular attendees who don't fit the church's main demographic. How would you honestly assess the depth of relational connection your church makes with God and each other in your worship gatherings—not in quantitative terms but in qualitative relational terms?

When the persons leading worship give primacy to secondary criteria of what they do (e.g. lead worship, preach, play a musical instrument well) or have (e.g. talents, spiritual gifts), they try to relate to God by those fragmented parts. This process makes secondary or altogether ignores their inner person—the inner person signified by the qualitative function of the heart. 'What to do' in worship—in this case, play an instrument, sing, even preach—then becomes a substitute offered to God, a substitute for their whole person. And God has long rejected such offerings (cf. Ps 40:6-7; 50:16-17).

Intentionally or unintentionally, when we come before God as reduced persons, we only give something less than the whole person God seeks to be his worshipers, and we merely give any substitute of what we do (e.g. attend worship, observe Christian traditions, serve, even sacrifice) and have (financial or other resources, spiritual gifts). Perhaps the best indicator that we are functioning in reductionism—which thus reflects our lack of wholeness—is the extent to which self-concern preoccupies us more than deeper relational connection. Another related issue is the assumption is that we know God well enough to know what God wants in worship. Whether it is a conscious thought or not, we make the assumption that God is like us such that God primarily wants from his worshipers what we do and have, and that God gives primacy to the secondary criteria, just as we humans do. Accordingly, the better we perform and the more we do for God, the happier God must be with us, and thus wouldn't put us down or reject us; and he may even then bless us.

This perception of God is the common view of God that focuses on what God does for us (e.g. saves and prospers us, does miracles) or has (e.g. superlative attributes rendered in static terms, even as love); and such a narrow focus fails to hear and respond to God's relational communications giving primacy to our whole person for intimate relational connection in worship. This is the crux of Jesus' critique of persons who honor God with lips "but their hearts are far from me" (Mt 15:8-9; Mk 7:6-8). In contrast to and conflict with the common perception of God that is shaped and reduced by human contextualization is the uncommon *holy* God: God who is distinguished beyond comparison with anyone and anything in the universe, God who has vulnerably revealed himself to us for the sole purpose of relationship together (as in God's distinguished [*pālā*] love, Ps 31:21). Our perception and shaping of God is an ongoing problem in the global church, and is a crucial issue throughout this study.

Raising the Lowest *Common* Denominator

From a very young age we are immersed in reductionism prevailing in our human contexts, thereby conformed to the reduced shaping from our family, church culture, broader culture, and society. Increased use of technology certainly thrives on reductionism of our person by reducing us to the *templates* of social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter). Similar templates for worship abound, ranging from PowerPoint graphics to orders of worship for given days in the church calendar year. Yet, even apart from electronic technology, the church has employed templates for centuries, such as the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* and *Common Worship*. The critical issue about worship orders is *how* these templates are used (as references, guidelines, or as hard and fast rules). Because we are always susceptible to giving primacy to 'what to do', we must understand reductionism's influence on worship planning. Worship orders and the issues surrounding them are discussed more fully in chapter three.

Reductionism is *the* universal *common* denominator that sustains the human condition, its fragmentation and distance in relationships occurring at all levels of life. Giving primacy to secondary matter of what we do (e.g. job, roles in church, in worship) and/or have (e.g. skills, training, even spiritual gifts), carries over into our relationships, into church, and into worship. The universal consequences of reductionism are to reduce the wholeness integral to human persons as well as to reinforce and sustain distance in relationships.

Defining one's self from the outer in engages us in the comparative process measured by outer criteria, because we are always evaluating our worth in comparison with someone else in the ongoing self-concern of 'how well I measure up'. Paul directly addressed this comparative process that the Corinthian church was engaged in (see 2 Cor 10:12-13). As common and familiar as the comparative process is to us, we need to realize that it is not a neutral dynamic, because it expresses, reinforces, and sustains reduced human ontology and function in all of us. Further issues in this common reductionist process become clear, as the following excerpt illuminates:

The often subtle shift to redefining the person away from the qualitative significance of the heart increasingly becomes quantitative (things measured in quantified terms for more certainty, or identified primarily by rationality for more

control), increasingly transposes the secondary over the primary, and shapes substitutes for the qualitative significance of persons distinguished in the image and likeness of God. This shift amplifies human consciousness of the parts that compose human distinctions—that is, heightens self-consciousness of what we do and have in order to define (or measure up) ourselves in a comparative process. As this self-consciousness increases, there is a correlated decrease in person-consciousness. Accordingly, as person-consciousness fades, there is a proportional decrease in a person’s qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness. The lack of qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness is a critical condition for the person in the human context, resulting in a self increasingly distant from the heart and in relationships, that is, increasingly “to be apart” and unable to live in ontology and function by the qualitative image and relational likeness of God.⁶

The need to measure up is an inner message that we all know, comparing ourselves—and being compared by others—to family members, schoolmates, teammates, and even media personalities, not to mention Christian role models (as demonstrated by the disciples, Lk 9:46; 22:24). It is the common human experience to compare ourselves to others, envy others for what they do or have, or feel jealous, resentful, or bad when someone seems ‘better’ and we feel ‘less’. Underlying this comparative process is its competitive nature; all of us have engaged in *competition* with another person or persons, where we actively vie for the status to be ‘better than’ someone else. Yet, when we did feel better than another person, there would always be two consequences: one, there would always be someone else who was ‘better than’, so we had to strive to get even better; two, feeling better about our self was always at the cost of someone else’s integrity and worth as a person, who likely felt bad about their self.

The comparative-competitive process is never-ending because we can never feel that we finally measure up (e.g. measure up to how we define God’s expectations of us), though we keep trying. The ongoing effort to measure up also compels putting down other persons in some way, if not overtly then subtly through snobbery, sarcasm, and joking. Such communication is not harmless, but is always counter-relational because it creates relational distance, especially by the one making the joke. Sadly, this common practice is widely accepted as a substitute for loving relational involvement. Paul warns against this type of language in worship gatherings (Eph 5:4; Col 3:8). These are examples of how reductionism plays out in worship ‘in their way’ because of the underlying focus on secondary criteria and the implied reduced human ontology and function from human contexts. This focus also gets transposed onto God without fail.

Many Christians are aware of the comparative-competitive process in themselves but don’t know how to change. The usual approach is to try to *not* compare, try to *not* be competitive, laying down our specific “crowns” (e.g. that thing we do or have that we look to, to feel good about ourselves), only to end up comparing and competing again, to great frustration and discouragement. Sometimes we simply remove ourselves from the situations that bring out our competitiveness as a way to deal with it. I recall a seminary classmate who had earlier worked in commercial art. He left that vocation because, as he put it, “It brought out the worst in me.” Yet the propensity to comparison-competition

⁶ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Person in Complete Context*, 88.

never goes away due to our need for self-worth, and this was palpable in my classmate's demeanor. Further, because our focus is always on outer-in aspects of what we do or have, our concerns inevitably keep revolving around ourselves, no matter how much we profess to serve God and others, including by leading worship. This should not be surprising but rather what should be expected from self-worth based on a comparative process.

Do any of the following secondary concerns sound familiar: Does someone play the guitar better than I do? Do I have a better preaching gift? Did we have a more creative or dynamic worship, a more Spirit-filled worship than another church? Did I look better, or less cool, than so-and-so? Am I witty enough, like pastor X? Does our church have more worship attendees than the church down the street? Should we employ arts in worship as churches X, Y, and Z do? Does our technology measure up?

In this 'better'-'less' dynamic, relationships become stratified vertically, becoming hierarchical, however subtly or benignly that hierarchy may be imposed and presented. Jesus noted this better-less dynamic in the disciples, and confronted them with his deeper relational perspective (Lk 22:24-27). Many churches have a distinct hierarchy between church leadership and the rest of the members, as well as a distinction between worship leaders and the rest of the worshipers. These human-shaped distinctions that subtly fragment churches are commonplace, and go to the heart of what's ailing God's global church and worship today. Stratification based on human-shaped distinctions fragments all relationships—from the personal to the systemic—and is especially egregious among Christians because God definitively gives primacy to persons' hearts over outer distinctions (e.g. 1 Sam 16:7; Ps 147:10-11). This very same dynamic of distinction-making is the basis for distinctions based on race, ethnicity, sex, age, class, tribe, and nation. The obvious outcomes are the divisiveness of racism, sexism, ageism, classism, tribalism, and nationalism. Paul also emphasizes that there is no place among God's people for human-shaped distinction making (Gal 3:27-28; 1 Cor 12:13; Col 3:11), as does James (2:1,9).

These distinctions that we make create and maintain horizontal barriers as well. The distinctions based on the secondary matter of worship styles, music styles, liturgical practices including how to celebrate Communion, are all secondary matter that have little or no relational significance to God. Yet we engage in them, if not insist on them, which leads to horizontal barriers of relational distance. We make these distinctions primary in our worship gatherings, imagining unity with those who worship 'in our way', isolating ourselves from the 'other'. Christian denominations and confessions are guilty of these horizontal relational barriers.

Diametrically opposed to the comparative-competitive process is to make our *self* vulnerable in our innermost, that is, vulnerable to not just others but first to ourselves and God. To be vulnerable with our heart means to be honest about our weakness, inadequacies, about our fear of not measuring up, and most importantly our need for self-worth. This is the fear of failing, of losing, and ultimately of the shame being considered 'less' and then rejected. These fears are part of our human condition ever since the primordial garden.⁷ But vulnerableness of heart can bring us before God to receive his

⁷ For an integral discussion of human consciousness and the relational dynamics that took place in the primordial garden, please see T. Dave Matsuo's *The Person in Complete Context*, 4-7.

relational response of relational grace, in order that we can be *raised* from the lowest common denominator.

Contextualizing Worship ‘in their way’

Before discussing further how we commonly worship ‘in their way’, let’s first examine what God meant by “you shall not worship the LORD your God in their way.” God’s terms for covenant relationship together with the Israelites were made definitive in more detail with the Ten Commandments (the Decalogue) to expand on the summary relational terms given to Abraham; and the twelfth chapter of Deuteronomy presents some of God’s specific terms regarding worship that the Israelites were to follow. (It would be helpful to read Ex 20:1-7 and Dt 12 before continuing.) The context of Deuteronomy 12 is that God was preparing the Israelites to enter the land he promised them. *How* the Israelites were to worship God was also of utmost importance to God, equal to the importance of worshipping the one God and God only.

God’s Relational Terms

The first commandment of the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:2) is not, contrary to common understanding, about having Yahweh as their only God, with no other gods. *That* Yahweh was their one and only God is stated in the previous sentence: “I am the LORD your God,” and this establishes the relational context of the covenant relationship, along with the Shema (Dt 6:4). The first commandment—“You shall have no other gods before [besides] me”—focuses on *how* the Israelites were to respond to Yahweh in their understanding and in their worship. God is establishing a new context for them—a qualitatively and relationally distinguished context—after having freed them from their former context of Egypt, and is further preparing to distinguish them from their soon-to-be immediate socio-religious context of Canaan.

The first commandment (i.e. the first definitive expanded relational term) communicates that because the LORD was their God, they were not to have any other deity “before [*pāneh*] me” (Ex 20:3). *Pāneh* signifies “face,” or “in front of,” and so “before me” means “in my presence.” In the beliefs and ritual practice of the Canaanites and other peoples in the land, they had a divine assembly of deities in their common context that ruled both the supernatural and natural worlds. In this pantheon, one deity was designated the head of the assembly and that deity converged with one or more divine female consorts/partners. Since the Israelites were to take possession of the land in Canaan, they would encounter, if they hadn’t already, this polytheistic context. By prohibiting the juxtaposition and conflation of any of these foreign deities with God, the first commandment banned the Israelites from bringing this worldview into the worship context of their covenant relationship (and worship), definitively to *eliminate the human contextualization of God’s worship*, in order that the integrity of the whole of God would be maintained and that their involvement in covenant relationship would be composed by wholeness in likeness of the LORD their God.

This first commandment herein goes beyond the common interpretation of having only one God, which was the monotheistic reality that God stated just prior: “I am the LORD your God who....” (Ex 20:1). This monotheistic reality about Yahweh is also the relational intent of the beginning of the Shema (Dt 6:4b): “Yhwh our God Yhwh one”⁸ or the more familiar “The LORD is our God, the LORD alone” (NRSV). Implied in distinguishing God in this way is the necessary decontextualizing that the Israelites needed to address in themselves, that is, to understand and choose against the default mode of the common, or what the surrounding nations were doing. In other words, human norms for relationships must not determine how relationship with God is engaged. Yet, we know that the Israelites failed in this critical way when they sought a king “to govern us, like other nations” (1 Sam 8:5). The lure of human contextualization with its reductionism was, and still is, strong, pervasive, and prevailing. In fact, the history of the church unmistakably attests to the triumph of human contextualization up until the present.⁹

After the first commandment eliminates human contextualization of worship of God, the second commandment naturally follows with specifics of how not to be involved with God: “You shall not make for yourself an idol [any image of God], in the form of anything that is in heaven above...on earth beneath, or...in the water under the earth” (Ex 20:4). Here God exposes any attempts by his people to reduce the integral wholeness of who, what, and how God is through (1) making images (idols) of God, which is to shape and reduce the irreducible God according to human terms, (2) worshipping those human-shaped creations of him (i.e. worshipping idols), and (3) trying to manipulate God to act on their behalf based on their terms imposed on God. God made the foregoing definitive because it was the practice of the Canaanites to make images (idols) of their deities, cover these images in gold and silver, clothe them, and ascribe power to them, and in essence try to manipulate them to act on their behalf, summarized as follows:

Images of deity in the ancient Near East were where the deity became present in a special way, to the extent that the cult statue became the god (when the god so favored his worshipers)... As a result of this linkage, spells, incantations and other magical acts could be performed on the image in order to threaten, bind or compel the deity. In contrast, other rites related to the image were intended to aid the deity or care for the deity. The images then represent a worldview, a concept of deity that was not consistent with how Yahweh had revealed himself.¹⁰

Likely not to this extent, nevertheless contrary to God’s relational terms, we do not realize it, but we make images of God all the time. How? We do this by shaping God using our reductionist interpretive lens that focuses on only divine aspects (read

⁸ This interpretation by John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel’s Faith (Vol.2)* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 38.

⁹ For a deep examination of the human context and contextualization, please see T. Dave Matsuo, *The Global Church Engaging the Nature of Sin and the Human Condition: Reflecting, Reinforcing, Sustaining, or Transforming* (Global Church Study, 2016), online at <http://4X12.org>.

¹⁰ John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mak W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary to the Old Testament* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), 95.

fragmented parts) of God, most commonly by the same reductionist terms according to which we define our own person based on the secondary criteria of ‘what we do’ and ‘what we have’. On the one hand, our interpretive lens pays attention to what God did or does (e.g. created, saved us, sacrificed for us, does signs and wonders, answers our requests, provides) or has (e.g. attributes of glory, majesty, strength, omniscience), because this is our default perceptual-interpretive framework and lens from reductionism that fragments our person and God’s accordingly from wholeness.

On the other hand, our interpretive lens generally (sometimes intentionally) ignores God’s relational messages throughout Scripture, which integrally compose his vulnerable presence and intimate relational response of grace to us together with his desire and purpose for us for face-to-face reciprocal relationship together. God made his desires unmistakable in the incarnation of the Son, whose time on earth was embodied by his vulnerable presence and relational involvement with all those he interacted with. This Jesus, however, is not the one we generally celebrate in worship, though we certainly celebrate *a* Jesus—that is, some ideal (idol) of Jesus shaped by our Christian contexts that are commonly shaped by surrounding contexts.

In our practices of worship, it is axiomatic that ‘as our God goes, so goes our worship’. The *common* process of human shaping of God—the *idolization of God*—is the very process from human contextualization that God eliminated in the first commandment, and the image(s) we have constructed are reductionist idols whom we worship, even represented as ideals. I contend with this generalization: that for the most part in the global church, our worship today is ‘in their’ way’ and is relationally compatible only with the God we have shaped, and who thus differs markedly from and is incongruent with the God who revealed himself on his own terms—even though our doctrine of God may appear compatible and congruent with Scripture. Assuming the validity of my contention, or at least its plausibility in our practice, our worship for the most part must be recognized as having incompatibility with the God who has revealed himself in the most vulnerable way imaginable.

The next chapter expands on God as he has revealed and continues to reveal himself, which challenges the God we have ended up shaping by our human terms, the God whom we worship ‘in their way’.

Disembodied Lips

Worshipping God ‘in their way’ may not seem like a bad thing to most of us when it’s all we know, and also appears to be congruent with the God familiar to us. Yet, we need to consider further God’s words from the Old Testament and Jesus’ words from the New Testament that challenge us for our corporate worship today. When Jesus said to some Pharisees, “This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me” (Mt 15:8; Mk 7:6, both originally from the OT, Isa 29:13), he spoke in full congruence with “You must not worship the LORD your God in their way” (Dt 12:4,31, NIV). This NT interaction took place when these Pharisees challenged Jesus and his disciples about their practices of piety (Mt 15:1-20; Mk 7:1-23). And Jesus went straight to the heart of the matter: their worship focused on secondary matters and thereby prioritized outward expressions of their lips, but their “hearts are far from me.” This substitute of and simulation by the person are the defining issue that human contextualization ongoingly

presents to God's worshipers. Where can God find "those who worship in spirit and truth" (Jn 4:24)?

The Pharisees were known to give priority to outward appearance (performance or theater, if you wish, cf. Mt 6:1,5,16), and expected all Jews to follow their practices of piety, such as the emphasis on ceremonial washing before eating. Much of Judaism, and the Pharisees notably so, gave primacy to "the tradition of the elders," which emphasized the outer matter of 'what to do' over the significance of the inner person (signified by the heart involved) in the primacy of relationship together with God and others. These outer-in practices were never God's intention when he originally established the covenant relationship in Moses' time. In this "covenant of love" (*beriyt*, "covenant," *hesed*, "love," Dt 7:12, NIV), God's top priority and purpose was always to enjoy reciprocal relationship together (e.g. Dt 7:9; Lev 26:11-12). Note that covenant relationship with God was and is always *reciprocal*, because God does not participate in one-way relationships, although he can and does at times in some situations.

Jesus' critique of the Pharisees' worship practices tells us both what God desires and rejects from his worshipers. God rejects worship in which worshipers give primacy to the outer aspects of what they and others do in worship, because by doing so, worshipers' "hearts are far from me." These substitutes and simulations demonstrate distant hearts, uninvolved hearts that are ignored, hidden and unavailable for intimate relational connection together for reciprocal relationship, demonstrating reductionism's counter-relational effect. The issues for the Pharisees wasn't about *not* worshipping, but revolved around what they were doing instead to compose *how* they were worshipping. They were 'worshipping' from outer in, giving simply the outer appearance of worshipping ('what to do' here means 'doing the right thing') while withholding their hearts. In other words, worship was an end in itself, without having any relational significance. Their mouths moved and worship-y words came out, but they were not relationally involved with God with their whole person from inner out. These Pharisees worshiped 'in their way', determined by the priorities from human contextualization of 'what to do' and 'what to have'. Their lips were, in relational terms, fragmented from the relational function of their whole person (notably their hearts) and, thus, disembodied—which should not be confused with being more spiritual but signifies only a fragmented person in reduced function.

'Disembodied lips' became the relational substitutes they gave to God, yet a God also shaped by their bias. 'Disembodied lips' is an apt metaphor for how worshipers function in reductionism, the person who defines their self by what they do (e.g. performing actions called 'worship') and engages in relationships on that basis—thus to paraphrase Jesus' critique: "these people honor me *with disembodied lips*". Jesus' church today worships with disembodied lips as the prevailing norm, which is evident by the pervasive substitutes and simulations occupying (likely preoccupying) our worship services.

This is not hyperbole about the state of worship; it represents the state of who and what we present of ourselves to God, and how we function in relationships together. 'Lips without heart' is God's relational critique that is relevant today, exposing what takes place in too much corporate worship. Even though we sing God's praises, belt out dynamic hymns and praises to honor him, and work hard each week to ensure excellence in all that we bring to God, without the qualitative involvement of our hearts from our

innermost that is vulnerably involved relationally directly with God, then our worship isn't reciprocally compatible with God's whole person who is vulnerably embodied in relational response to us; nor is it relationally congruent to make the necessary relational connection with God for our worship to be of relational significance to him. And merely talking and singing about the importance of relationship as Jesus' followers and intimacy in worship never compose our whole person presented to God for reciprocal relational connection. As such, we do not worship in likeness of God, but 'in their way'.

By not coming before God in the vulnerableness of our whole person(s) presented to God as our compatible response of worship communicated in relational terms, we demonstrate that we don't understand what it means to be the worshipers the Father seeks. Those are the worshipers, as Jesus revealed to the Samaritan woman at the well, who are compatible with God ("God is spirit...must worship in spirit," Jn 4:23-24)—that is, with the vulnerableness of honest hearts in God's likeness. The worshipers whom Jesus distinguished and whom the Father seeks are distinguished only from inner out, whereby the whole person is embodied (1) directly before God face to face behind the curtain (cf. Heb 10:19-22; 2 Cor 4:6), and (2) intimately together, having had the 'veil of relational barriers' removed (cf. 2 Cor 3:16-18). As the Samaritan woman experienced by amazing love, in relational terms the worship relationship cannot be embodied new by embodying distinctions from outer in (such as her gender and ethnicity)—even if these distinctions have been long revered or are widely esteemed today.

Therefore, whenever our involvement in worship doesn't make the vulnerable relational connection with God (as Mary, Martha's sister, did, Jn 12:1-7; Mt 26:6-13; Mk 14:3-9; cf. Lk 7:36-50) that is congruent with how God engages in relationship (notably within the Trinity as Jesus vulnerably revealed in the incarnation), then who and what we bring to worship aren't those who worship in spirit and truth (vulnerable honesty of heart). It is critical indeed for our practice to embrace the full reality that 'who and what we give is who and what we get in relationship with God' (as in Mk 4:24). More than likely we aren't even aware of all these relational implications, even those of us who see ourselves as 'relational', because we have become desensitized to the qualitative in ourselves and subtly unaware of our relational nature, and increasingly distracted from our relational responsibility as God's worshipers—the consequences of reduced ontology and function of our own person.

Consider all the worship practices you are aware of, the different ways worship is planned and led. Consider your own participation, whether you lead worship or sit in the pews/chairs. What is the implication that you give your attention more to what persons are doing, how they look, how well they sing, preach, or get laughs from the congregation? What does it mean that your church gives priority to the skillfulness of performances of worship leaders, choirs, and the like, to the extent that you hire professional musicians? Or that a few off-notes completely distract you from your own worship? Or perhaps that your church is seeking a worship leader who has an advanced degree in leading worship?

These examples are ways that we worship 'in their way'. What they all have in common is giving primacy to the secondary (i.e. the prevailing 'common' in human contextualization), and making what is primary to God (i.e. whole persons and relationships together) secondary, even if only in practice and not in theory.

The underlying issue—both for us today and for the ancient Israelites—is about how we see the person, define the person, and on that basis do relationships—that is, this issue is about our *theological anthropology*. Who and what we are as persons is our *ontology*, and how we live, including how we engage in relationships, is our *function*. Ontology and function comprise our theological anthropology, namely how we see ourselves and function vis-à-vis the image and likeness of God.

The matter of disembodied lips, however, is not a lips-versus-heart duality, nor is the issue the ‘doing vs. being’ duality that some Christians talk about. Priority is often given to ‘being’, notably in some spiritual disciplines, whereas persons who are focused on social justice activism give priority to ‘doing’. That is reductionist thinking. Nor is the issue about merely expressing emotions to God during worship, the stronger the better—although emotions are an integral expression of one’s heart. This latter view needs to understand more fully about wholeness of the person. The person is whole who gives primacy to both the heart (the qualitative inner) and relationships together over the fragmentary parts of what ones does or has (the quantitative outer). Wholeness of the human person involves the inseparable integration of the inner and outer, from the inner out and never from outer in. The direction from outer in does not go very far *in* because of a quantitative focus, whereas the dynamic of inner out neither excludes nor avoids the outer since it embraces all of the persons. And wholeness is the integral experience composed only in the intimate relational connection of vulnerable hearts coming together.

God doesn’t give primacy to what we do, even in service to him; God does not define us by the skills of what we do or the gifts (even spiritual) we have that we bring into the relationship (Ps 147:10-11). God has always given priority to his people’s inner-out involvement in relationships together, that is, in reciprocal relationship together. Any particular act in worship or in ministry (e.g. playing the piano, feeding the homeless) is always secondary. Jesus makes this order of priority clear when he says to any would-be disciple, “Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also” (Jn 12:26). The emphasis is on “follow me,” contingent on which “serves me” stands. Jesus herein establishes the primacy of relationship together as his priority for his disciples, even to have priority over serving (cf. Mt 26:6-13). Only relationship together is the primary significance of discipleship, which is not well understood by the global church, notably in the West.

This relational primacy is not about ‘being’ vs. ‘doing’ because ‘being’ denotes a static existence and fails to understand the dynamic and ongoing reciprocal relationship together. As an added comment about this false duality, it is often incorrectly applied to Mary and Martha, that Mary enjoyed ‘being’ as she sat at Jesus’ feet while Martha was ‘doing’ the meal preparations in the kitchen (Lk 10:38-42). The issue here was that Mary responded in wholeness to Jesus in reciprocal relationship, which involved taking certain risks to go beyond human contextual constraints, while Martha remained constrained within the limits of her human context.

An illuminating example of giving primacy to ‘what to do’ (a sacred rite) from OT times is when God had instituted circumcision with Abraham (Gen 17:10) as a sign of the covenant relationship between them. This sign was practiced throughout Israel’s history into NT Judaism (Second Temple) as well. Genital circumcision, however, was only a secondary sign of the primacy of persons’ heart-response in relational involvement of trust and obedience to God in the ‘covenant of love’ (Dt 7:12-13 NIV).

“Circumcise...your heart...do not be stubborn [stiff-necked, inflexible, hardened] any longer” (Dt 10:16) specifies the necessary relational response of persons’ hearts. In Judaism, circumcision became separated from the inner-out function of persons, and by NT times, it had come to serve as a national identity marker (along with the Sabbath and dietary laws) with no relational significance to God, which Paul came to understand in his own experience.

Paul definitively drew the distinction between outer-in and inner-out circumcision (see Rom 2:28-29), and relativized circumcision altogether to what is primary: “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love” (Gal 5:6). To make this emphatic, he restated what is primary to God—“neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything.” In this way Paul boasted “in Christ Jesus” as one transformed, a “new creation” and made whole (6:15-16).

Genital circumcision or uncircumcision do not determine a person’s heart and relational involvement with God. Circumcision is only a secondary matter to God, like other rituals of piety, including many of our worship practices, along with *how* we commonly approach Communion—the practices of our disembodied lips. The reason we are so susceptible to treating secondary matters as primary is because we are still defined by the quantitative outer aspects of what we do or have. We have yet to be redeemed from this sin of reductionism; we have yet to die to this default mode from the human context (the world in general and our surrounding contexts in particular). And when we die to the sin of reductionism, to its fragmentation of our persons, and to all its counter-relational influences, then we can emerge new, as the new creation that Paul boasted about. That will be a much longed-for new day indeed, yet not so much about the not-yet future as to emerge in the already-present.

The ancient historical context and the specifics of God’s warning (i.e. the secondary practices) are so different from conditions in our modern world that they are entirely alien to us when seen in referential terms (e.g. Dt 12:31). However, once we perceive beyond the actual practices, and as we listen deeply to God’s words in relational terms, which are only relational language (not referential language), what comes into focus are the deeper relational issues that God challenged the Israelites with, the issues that mattered most to God. Understood in only relational terms, these are the very same issues and dynamics that persist for us today. We are constantly warned and challenged not to also worship God ‘in their way’, but we have become rather deaf to God’s relational language, and end up focusing on such actual practices instead—and assume also that God is pleased.

And important underlying question to our discussion above and below should be ongoingly raise in our thinking: Are God’s relational terms for relationship together and thus for worship negotiable?

Counter-Relational Performance

In human cultural contexts, performance gives primacy to what performers are doing before an audience. There can be educational value in performances, but by and large performances are offered for entertainment, amusement, and the performers benefit from the attention, fame and reputation, not to mention making money. Performers focus

on the outer aspects of how well they do what they do, often to give an audience what the audience wants, and the audiences reinforce the performers with applause and other forms of affirmation. Audiences go to performances expecting a positive experience: to be entertained, amused, and moved by an affective experience.

Even against their stated intentions otherwise, worship leaders commonly bring these dynamics of performance into worship, giving primacy to secondary outer aspects of what they do (e.g. sing, play a musical instrument, plan song sets and transitions) and have (e.g. talent, beautiful singing voice, eloquence), all even considered to be spiritual gifts. They commonly display these secondary aspects of themselves in explicit or implicit forms of *performance*. Of course, worship leaders are doing something, namely perform actions, but the sense of performance we mean in this discussion is to *put on display* for other's approval of what one does and has. The rest of the worshipers reinforce these secondary outer aspects of worship leaders, notably with applause, often prompted by a TV-host-like comment. And although some worship leaders consciously try to lead with their hearts rather than by performance (which is commendable), we need to understand that the expression of emotions in itself and worshiping in compatible reciprocal relationship are not the same thing.

We also need to understand that the performance mentality in worship is not a neutral matter because the identity and function of persons are at stake. That is, the integrity of persons whom God created to be whole in his qualitative image and relational likeness is fragmented and reduced to those secondary outer aspects discussed above, and persons in the pews are rendered as an audience, as passive listeners, and thus as mere objects disengaged from relationship with God. Even if worshipers are singing, standing and clapping, they can still be passive, meaning that they can remain relationally distant in their worship that is not an expression of subjects actively engaging in reciprocal relationship with the Lord. The fact that worship bands and choirs are located at front and center of the stage—whether an actual stage or in the space in front of all the seating—predisposes worshipers to passively observe and have their attention focused in this audience mode. When asked about changing this arrangement by positioning the singers and musicians on the sides or back of the chapel, one singer responded that the congregation likes to have persons up front leading. And even if the seating is arranged in a semi-circle to give a more integrated feel to worship gatherings, all eyes focus on the person/s leading worship, and thereby the performance mindset prevails. How long will we continue to maintain, reinforce, and participate in this performance mindset?

Many persons (worship leaders and worshipers in the seats) subtly justify the focus on performance with various rationales. A common rationale is that God deserves excellence from us, deserves our best efforts to use the gifts he has given us. This mindset about God often translates “excellence” to mean how skillful and accomplished the persons performing are. Some churches holding this view hire professional singers and musicians to get a polished sound out of their bands, choirs, and orchestras. Is it appropriate for churches to hire professional musicians? And where does that leave those less skillful but with a heart openly involved with God? That churches pay people to play a musical instrument or sing in worship (even their own members), or at least assign the most accomplished even without pay, reflects the priority given to the skill level of persons leading worship music, and making secondary or unimportant the relational significance of worshipers to God—those whom he seeks “in spirit and truth” and can

count on to be whole worshipers—nothing less and no substitutes.

Psalm 33 illuminates the deeper biblical meaning of 'skillful' for us. Psalm 33:1-3 (NIV) is full of worship language in reciprocal relational response to the LORD. In that response, the psalmist also says to “play skillfully on the strings” in worship. Certainly the OT values skillfulness and the quality of music itself, but the OT sense of skillfulness goes deeper than our notion of skillfulness today. We tend to focus on the proficiency level of musicians or artists, persons who have refined their expertise playing instruments, and give primacy to the quality of the product over the person who created it. In Psalm 33, the context is relationship with God, established from the opening words, “Sing joyfully to the LORD, you righteous... Praise the LORD.” In the primacy of relationship, the psalmist then proclaims, “Sing to him a new song; play skillfully, and shout for joy” (v.3). The Hebrew word for skillful is *yātab* and denotes to be good, pleasing, lovely, and favorable. Though translated incompletely in English as “skillfully,” *yātab* is only about what is pleasing and favorable to God—and thus connoting the relational inner-out idiom of music in God’s relational context. *Yātab* includes inseparably the skillful quality *and* relational significance to God, whereas we tend to focus more only on the skillful quantity having a quality of sound.

The OT uses another word group translated into English as skillful or skillfully—*ḥokmāh*, *ḥākām* to denote to be wise, skillful, intelligent, have insight and judgment—words used in reference to temple artisans and tailors (Ex 28:3; 31:3,6), military strategy (of God, Isa 10:13), and diplomacy (“wisdom” of Joshua as Moses replacement, Dt 34:9). The contexts and related texts are not narrowed down to the level of proficiency, but are inseparable from the involvement of the wise of heart (*ḥākām leb*, Ex 28:3) and the spirit (*rûah*, Ex 31:3,6)—pointing to the significance to God of the whole person who is engaged in serving him from inner out.

This biblical understanding of “skillful” definitively challenges the assumptions we make about what pleases God. Our notions of “skillful” and “excellence” are de-relationalized, thereby fragmenting and reducing persons—not to mention the view of God we project onto him—and reducing relational primacy in corporate worship. Hiring professional musicians or assigning the most accomplished gives primacy to our outer-in terms from our human context of how the music sounds, which is another way to render our worship ‘in their way’. Consider that if the priority of the worshipers were to sing and make music in their hearts to the Lord, they would not notice or care if the sound of the musicians was less than professional or even skillful—complaints that off-notes are distractions would, I’m sure, diminish altogether. Additionally, if visitors are turned off by an off-note or musical mistake, then that is their problem as an audience looking to be entertained. Church leaders and church members must not rely on performance to attract and keep visitors coming—a concern deriving from human contextualization, ‘in their way’ without question. We all need to give primacy to what matters most to God.

Worship is not about entertaining persons’ expectations with ideal presentations, but about fulfilling the primacy of reciprocal relationship together with God as his new creation family. Rather, churches need to examine who, what, and how they are to find their true identity and function in this relational primacy. Jesus declared that the Father seeks honesty of heart vulnerably involved with him, which is the relational significance of “worshipers who worship in spirit and truth” (Jn 4:23-24). The Father seeks only these worshipers because they are the ones with whom he can have intimate relationship

together in likeness of the intimate trinitarian interrelations. On our part, whenever we give primacy to the excellence of the sound of music over the primacy of our relational involvement with God, we diminish worship to mere entertainment shaped by human contextualization.

This discussion extends also to the practice of including non-Christian musicians in bands and choirs. The critical issue involved here is the perceptual-interpretive framework that we use to distinguish what is off key and out of tune, and what composes singing the new song. I think that having non-Christian musicians in the worship band (or other group of musicians leading worship) is primarily about preference for more skillful musicians. I have also heard the rationale that including them is outreach to them, or avoiding exclusion of non-Christians. The sentiment behind such thinking seems commendable, but it reflects an undeveloped understanding of the significance of corporate worship *as* God's family, gathered together in reciprocal relational response to God, which persons without a relationship with God certainly don't participate in. Far more important for these non-Christian musicians is their need to experience family love, not for what they do (i.e. play drums, sing soprano), which only reinforces fragmentation of their person, but to be treated as whole persons with the depth of involvement that goes deeper than inclusion in the worship band/orchestra based on ability. This level of involvement emerges only when primacy is given to relationships; and this is the most important need that all persons have to fulfill in order to be whole.

The function of the musician group is to lead the congregation in praise to God, which by God's definition is composed with only relational language. This then requires the involvement of their whole person, from inner out, nothing less and no substitutes—with no ontological simulations of their heart. What this implies, then, is that the Christian band members themselves are accountable to Jesus for their own person presented, their communication, and the depth of their relational involvement. Many worship band members are themselves youth or young adults, who should themselves receive nurture and mentoring from the pastoral staff or other more mature believers in these primary matters of relational significance to God and to grow in the primacy of relationship—assuming, of course, that they also function in relational significance with God. Worshiping God in this relational significance is what the Psalms call us all to, to “sing a new song” (Ps 33:3; 40:3).

Getting back to the rationales for performance as worship, the common rationale for applauding the worship band, choir, orchestra and special music performances is to show our appreciation for these persons, who put in much time, effort, perhaps even sacrifice. Of course it is an important part of a church family to affirm and appreciate their members, including those who lead worship. Yet, when this expression predominates in the context of corporate worship, the primary purpose for our individual and corporate reciprocal response to God (remember God?) is diminished or lost, and worship loses its relational clarity. Relational clarity means that it's clear who is being worshiped, not in theory but in practice, and the now-routine applause for performance in worship has created the condition of relational ambiguity. How can we worship God in his likeness when his face is obscured from our view?

As a further example of the problem of performance, persons with beautiful voices may give primacy to the sound of their voices rather than to the relational involvement of their heart in singing to God. During a recent live TV production of the

Passion story, one of the professional singers seemed to be delivering her song for the camera rather than to express her heart to the Lord. Viewers were more likely to focus on the singer's talent than seek the deeper substance of not only that singer as a worshiper, but also of any significance to the words being sung. The latter scenario is common in worship, and was the very same issue that God raised in the OT to the prophet Ezekiel. God warned Ezekiel that people came to listen to him, not for the significance of his message from the Lord, but to be entertained (Ezek 33:30-32). We are much too similar to God's people. Although this Passion production was not a worship service, there was very little relational clarity as to who was being honored, and likely no relational significance to God—that is, no reciprocal relational involvement for connection with God from the participants and viewers, despite dramatic referential terms about God.

Continuing with the counter-relational consequences of performance on worshipers, think about what performance does to worshipers. When all other worshipers define their persons in the fragmented parts from reductionism, to some degree many of them engage in the comparative process of measuring their own respective abilities against the more polished worship leaders. Many worshipers, especially excited new Christians, come to worship with a freedom of expression similar to little children, whose relational response Jesus constantly affirmed, (e.g. Mt 18:3; Mt 21:16; Lk 10:21). It is imaginable that these new Christians will pull back from their own relational responsibility to God, diminish their overall participation in worship, and learn to conform as passive observers—like the rest of the congregation—of what the worship team and choir do. Sadly for new and excited Christians, passive observers' hearts remain at a relational distance from God and each other, putting a real damper on their experience in church. Is this a major reason why millennials in the U.S. are not attending church?

The greater responsibility to mitigate performance in worship falls to worship planners and leaders. Yet the rest of the worshipers must deal with their own default mode in which they remain focused on the secondary. When the worship leaders are performing and there is no opportunity to participate, it is difficult for everyone else to be actively involved in worship, but we must not let ourselves be reduced by what's taking place. It's so easy to become passive; haven't you ever sensed that in yourself? I have often felt zoned out (numb, sleepy, even exhausted) by the time a worship service is over. It is not an outcome of wholeness and life. Imagine how God feels.

One last example of the performance of worship, or worship as performance, is an obvious instance of human contextualization. Until these past months I never watched Christian worship-type programs on TV, but my husband and I have recently done so to learn about what others see and experience. I can only summarize what I see: performance in the form of concerts, glitz, glamour—all of which are patterned on their secular predecessors. Moreover, Christian music celebrations and awards shows (e.g. the GMA Dove Awards, Celebration of Gospel) are obviously Christian versions of music awards specials. These shows are entertaining, and no doubt provide financial income for persons. God is certainly mentioned, appreciated in words and songs, and so we can say there is some relational clarity, though we cannot at all assume relationally significant connection takes place between those performers and God or between audiences and God. The theatricality of it all must compel us *at the very least* to ask ourselves if these programs are contextualized expressions of 'in their way', and what their purpose is.

These fragmenting outcomes all have the same origin in reductionism from human contextualization. From the individual worshiper, to the local church, to the global church, fragmentation exists and characterizes us on every point of this spectrum. Therefore, when the global church talks about unity—say, for example, by participating in Communion together or having a global day of prayer—the church must understand what is opposing and preventing that unity. Church unity will only be the relational outcome of transformation, in which our fragmentation and reductionism die so that our whole persons can emerge, and whole relationships unfold and flow as God’s new creation family in wholeness. We are far from that blessed relational outcome, as our worship gatherings reflect, reinforce and sustain this reduced condition. This is why it is so urgent for us to understand and fight *against* fragmentation and reductionism, and *for* wholeness in our ontology and function, also on the spectrum from individual, to local church, to global church.

Worship in Likeness of the Trinity

What then does it mean to worship in likeness of the Trinity (discussed initially as God, the triune God)? Certainly we cannot be exactly like God in the ontological sense of God’s being. Yet, we have been originally created in the image and likeness of God, which is clearly distinguished from and contrary to Satan’s false promise in the primordial garden to “be like God” (Gen 3:5). In previous worship studies I have focused on our reciprocal response of worship, stressing that the response that God seeks from his worshipers must be twofold: (1) our ontology (the heart of who and what we are) must be compatible with who and what God is, and therefore must be the qualitative inner-out whole person with nothing less and no substitutes for who and what we are created to be; and (2) how our whole person functions in our relational involvement with God (in our discipleship-worship relationship) must be congruent with how God is involved in relationships, which is vulnerably present and intimately involved, face to face and heart to heart. That is to say, our ontology in relationship with God needs to *be* in the qualitative image of God’s ontology, and our function in this relationship needs to be involved according to the relational likeness of God’s function.

You have likely noticed the repeated use of *reciprocal relationship* in this study. Relationship with God is never one way, and this includes the worship relationship. God does not do all the relational work, nor do we. Therefore, there must, by the nature of reciprocal relationship (not out of obligation), be compatibility between God’s ontology and function and our ontology and function. We need to understand and deeply embrace our reciprocal relational responsibility in worship, which is inseparable from discipleship. (And please note that if you want the worship relationship without the discipleship relationship, you will have difficulty with this study, if you haven’t already). Unmistakably, then, our reciprocal relational responsibility is fulfilled with the following: when our worship in likeness of God is enacted with our compatible ontology and function in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the wholeness of God’s ontology and function.

Moreover, in order for our response of worship to God to have relational significance to God, it also must be according to God’s relational terms. God’s relational

terms are distinguished integrally by his relational work of grace in response to us for the primary purpose of relationship together, not grace just to save us from sin. To be compatible with the presence of God's relational grace and to be congruent with the relational involvement of God's grace, we must come before him with the vulnerableness of the honesty of our heart. On the basis of this reciprocal relational connection initiated by God's relational response of grace, we have been redefined from our fragmented outer-in person to our innermost, not by God's mere work-activity of grace but by his relational response of grace to our deepest need and condition; and by God's relational grace alone, we are made whole in our person in the intimate relational connection together 'behind the curtain' (Jesus' relational work to bring us face to face with the Father) and 'with the veil removed' (the removal of all relational barriers). The latter are the relationships necessary to be and live whole, the equalized and intimate relationships composing God's new creation family.

In spite of good and sincere intentions, we Christians are careless about our worship, and fall into worshiping God 'in their way', all of which ignores, rejects or denies God's relational response of grace. Such a relational response, even inadvertently or unknowingly, reduces the whole of who, what, and how God has revealed himself to be. Our carelessness is expressed in the assumptions we make about worship: we assume that God accepts anything that we present to him in worship; that our long-standing traditions are pleasing God because they have endured so long; that our rituals and sacraments engaged without relational significance bring glory to God, are good for the church, and must be preserved; that the louder and longer the singing, the more congruent with God's might and power; that it is acceptable to God that the global church worships in segregated fragments—euphemistically called homogeneous units necessary for church growth—along borderlines of denominations, races, ethnicities, age, and social status. We are indeed a presumptuous people, as sincere as we seem to be. In our carelessness (perhaps recklessness), however, we still don't recognize or understand that our assumptions are only variations of the sweeping assumption made by Satan in the primordial garden for all our human terms, efforts, and shaping of God's terms: "You will not *be reduced*" (Gen 3:4).

Therefore, we need to sincerely be open to God's challenges to our worship. We must stop assuming that the global church's worship is compatible with who and what God is, is congruent with how God is involved with us, and that we are not reduced in our ontology and function. God's warning against worshiping 'in their way' has serious implications for how we worship the whole and holy God.

Part of the problem is that the deeper relational issues remain below our awareness or elude acknowledgement, and thus, never get addressed. Even though we today have the benefit of Jesus' incarnation, including his words communicated in the New Testament for us to listen to over and over, yet because we are so firmly embedded in the common, we function in our vision and hearing as those described by Jesus: "seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand" (Mt 13:13). What has happened to our relational awareness and qualitative sensitivity to what we see and hear in worship? Because of our embeddedness in the common, by default we essentially worship 'in their way'. We default to the common assuming that 'we will not be reduced'.

God consistently calls and gathers persons into *uncommon* relationship with himself, Uncommon (i.e. Holy) God, relationship which requires our ontology and function to be compatible with God's. Contrary to our inadequate ideas that holiness is only about not engaging in certain sinful behaviors for moral purity, God never commands merely what *not* to do (as the commandments are commonly perceived), but has a deeper context and purpose. Any words about 'what not to do' must be understood in only the relational terms defining the relational involvement necessary for covenant relationship with the Uncommon God. These commandments composed in relational terms are established to negate participation in the counter-relational work of reductionism. The deeper purpose of all of God's relational action and involvement with us has always been to gather persons into family together in the image and likeness of the whole of God (the triune God).

Another difficulty we have concerns God's words in the Old Testament. By our modern thinking (our modern interpretive lens), we focus so much on the historical-ness of the OT that we miss the narrative significance of God's love story. This focus is how we have been educated and embedded in outer secondary matter of what people did in OT sociocultural and religious contexts. That project focuses on what God and the Israelites did; what God and his people did are, of course, part of the story, but do not comprise the whole story of God's relational response of grace to initiate the good news from the beginning, which was later embodied relationally in the incarnation. The difficulty we have about the OT extends to the NT because the two are inseparably integral to the whole of God's relational communications to us. Without God's whole story, what God and the people did become dis-integrated fragments. Our interpretive lens prevents our understanding whole-ly.

With these fragments we try to piece together any relevant parallels for our practices today, still focused on the outer matter of what to do. Most consequential is that we overlook the primacy of face-to-face relationship together that God initiated with the Israelites. Or, we may not overlook such relationship, but conveniently relegate it to secondary place of priority—in practice, that is, if not in our theology, which was evident in Israel's theology and practice. Intimate relationship together with God can be frightening, threatening, and altogether undesirable, especially in terms of reciprocal relationship together. Some of us would rather keep relational distance than be vulnerable in intimate relationship; and this practice is the prevailing norm that for too long has determined persons and relationships in the church.

The relational context of God's love story is necessary to understand "you must not worship in their way." This particular command was given in the relational context for all the commands that God communicated through Moses, which was to definitively establish the covenant relationship together with the nonnegotiable terms that only God could define. This covenant—God's "covenant of love" (*beriyt hesed*, Dt 7:7-9,12; 1 Kgs 8:23; cf. Dt 4:37)—was the integral purpose of God's relational response to the Israelites (and all nations) in their need. The whole of Deuteronomy is this love story, which began as far back as Abraham, illuminated in the following excerpt:

When God initiated the covenant relationship with Abraham to constitute God's people, the terms God revealed were relational imperatives for all who come together as God's family: "Walk before me, and be blameless" (Gen 17:1). This formed the

good news—which the incarnation embodied—of relationship together that unfolded in God’s definitive blessing face to face (Num 6:24-26). In God’s relational words, “be involved with me in reciprocal relationship, and be whole (*tamiym*),” that is to say, not reduced in ontology and function—notably fragmenting the person to what one does from outer in, and on this basis, reducing relationship together to such secondary matter at the expense of the primacy of relationship defined by God’s terms....

As God’s formative people, Israel soon revised God’s terms by essentially replacing God’s relational language with referential language, thereby reducing the terms for relationship (e.g. torah) to a code of what to do from outer in—that is, as a means for identity markers as a people (primarily as nation-state) and for their self-determination (cf. Jesus’ critique, Mt 15:21-48). This re-formed the covenant from the covenant of love to a quid pro quo contract, and thus revised the book of Deuteronomy from a love story to a template of conformity (Dt 4:37; 7:7-9; 10:15; 23:5; 33:3). God was also reduced mainly to a figurehead or reference point for their theology and practice (cf. 1 Sam 15:22-23; Ps 147:10-11; Jer 7:21-26). The relational consequence was to reshape the covenant relationship of love with God (Dt 7:7-9) to a covenant increasingly detached from the primacy of relationship and distant from God, such that the covenant became engaged in secondary matter merely in referential terms (e.g. Isa 29:13; 58:1-6).¹¹

This covenant of love was the relational context that God initiated into the human context in order for God to be in relationship with his human creatures; in this relational context, his relational response of grace (*hesed*) unfolded to make them whole. It is helpful for us to think of this covenant relationship in terms of composing the only possible context in which the transcendent and Uncommon God and common humans are able to come together.

The primacy that God has always given to relationship together needs to become our own priority above all else that we engage in for worship. In this primacy of relationship, all of our understanding, and efforts for worship and participation in worship also must be determined and matured in our vulnerable submission to God’s relational terms for our reciprocal response of worship to have relational significance to God, to ourselves individually and corporately, and to our witness to the world that God is indeed Uncommon and distinguished beyond all common shapes and forms of hope and love. Important for our growth in reciprocal relationship with God is a whole understanding of ‘love’ (*hesed*, *agapē*).

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

¹¹ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Gospel of Transformation*, 11-12.

markers—although they easily become just that when perceived in referential language, as the people of Israel consistently did. 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).¹²

If you have never thought of God’s “law”—commandments, laws, precepts, statutes, and ordinances—as only relational terms, it is vital to stop here and think about this: God’s commands have only a relational purpose and intended outcome. We need to understand that God functions only according to who God is—nothing less than the whole of God (the Trinity), and no substitutes for who, what, and how God is in relationship. And as God is so distinguished, this is how we can better understand what it means that God is holy and cannot be narrowed down, fragmented, and reduced to ‘in their way’. We discuss the connection between God’s holiness (uncommonness) and God’s relational terms more fully in the next chapter. We will see how holiness is integrally related to God’s love (intimate relational involvement), and how holiness and love compose worshiping God in God’s likeness.

Whole Lips

How do we change and grow from disembodied lips to embodied lips, that is, lips made whole, which more accurately is to say our *person* made whole? Three psalms together (though not to the exclusion of others, of course) illuminate our path to this integrated wholeness: Psalms 57, 108, and 63. Taken together, they provide commentary on Jesus’ rebuke in Matthew 15:8 (also Mk 7:7-8; Isa 29:13) about honoring God with lips but hearts being distant from him.

In the midst of trouble (Ps 57:1-6), psalmist David responds with “My heart is steadfast, O God.”¹³ For David, “steadfast” (*kûn*) denotes firm, faithful, reliable—in spite of the threat on his life by Saul—and thus whole-ly involved with God (Ps 57:-7-8; 108;1-3) in his relational response to God’s steadfast relational involvement with him (57:9-11; 108:4-5). *Kûn* also signifies “established” with the sense of well-being when the heart is deeply satisfied knowing that it trusts in God—that is, relationally counts on who, what, and how God is, nothing less and no substitutes, which defines for us what having faith means in relational terms.

The steadfast heart is expressed in music and worship only when our focus is qualitative and relational, whole-ly involved in reciprocal relational response to God’s relational response to us in our innermost as well as in our situations and circumstances (as David experienced). Only the experiential reality this heart distinguishes true worship from the worship ‘in their way’ of human contextualization, and thereby readily exposes what is common and prevails in quantitative and disembodied ‘lips’ without the

¹² T. Dave Matsuo, *The Gospel of Transformation*, 53

¹³ Although David’s authorship of many Psalms is arguable, I affirm the above psalms were composed by him.

qualitative and relational involvement of one's person from inner out.

As further commentary on Jesus' rebuke of worship of 'lips without heart', David illuminates 'embodied lips' in the sixty-third Psalm. David begins this psalm expressing a harsh situation he found himself in. Yet it wasn't that 'outer' situation of the desert and the circumstance of dire thirst (his human context) that defined his person and his relationship with God. David remained in God's relational context and affirmed and received God's presence and involvement ("your steadfast love," *hesed*, v.3). Relationship with God was primary for David's wholeness and well-being, which he confidently claimed is "better than *any secondary condition constituting life in the human context.*" Because David's heart was vulnerably available to God, he was able to deeply receive God's loving involvement with him, and his innermost ("soul" signifying the heart of the whole person, not a dualism) was fully responded to ("satisfied as with a rich feast"). David's reciprocal response was the inner-out joyful singing with whole-ly embodied and therefore holy (i.e. uncommon, not common) lips and mouth (v.5).

In this heartfelt song to his beloved God, psalmist David also poetically frames God's relational context, "in the shadow of your wings," where he sings for joy in worship (v.7). There in God's relational presence and not a referential place, David is secure in his person, safe in his secondary situations and circumstances. 'In the shadow of your wings' is an important metaphor to understand for our worship to be on God's relational terms and not 'in their way'. Much deeper than a place of protection and security, such as a cool canopy in the blazing sun or an umbrella in a rainstorm, the image is the intimate relational presence of God, face to face, the only context for worship. Scripture uses this image for this purpose to signify God's relational context (see also Ruth 2:12; Pss 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 91:4). Sadly, in contrary practice, God's people "were not willing" to be gathered into God's relational context, causing Jesus to lament and weep (Mt 23:37; Lk 13:34; 19:41). In his lament, Jesus distinguishes 'in the shadow of your wings' in even more personal relational depth as he draws the analogy between a hen gathering her precious chicks to herself, and the vulnerableness of the heart's deepest longing.

From his inner out flows David's compatible reciprocal relational response of worship. In wholeness and well-being expressed in this passage Dave sings to God with embodied lips, herein composing the instructional commentary of worship for us in contrast to the disembodied lips that God rebukes in both Testaments. We need to take this commentary to heart.

Our hearts' vulnerable involvement with God is nonnegotiable, irreplaceably distinguishing that which matters most to God. The inner-out involvement of nothing less than and no substitutes for our whole person makes unmistakable the deeper understanding that pouring out our hearts to God in worship goes beyond our feelings and emotions. Deep in our hearts is always the issue of who or what defines our person, and, accordingly, whether we experience being established in God's relational context by God's relational grace, or continue in our self-determined way in order to survive by the terms of reductionism for our self-worth in the human context.

Yet we never seem to get to the heart of the matter for worshiping God: our whole person signified by the vulnerable involvement the heart. The human heart, which signifies our whole person functioning from inner out in intimate relationship together, remains kept at a relational distance, either intentionally or unknowingly. In the

meantime, the world's peoples—indeed all creation—groan inwardly and outwardly, waiting for good news from the embodied lips of God's family (cf. Rom 8:19-22). Apparently the church's practice—epitomized by its worship practices—has not been sufficient to compose it. It seems that many persons have concluded that *any* good news is better than no Bad News, as they seek spiritualities other than the gospel of Christ. At this point, what do you think, are God's whole relational terms for worshiping God negotiable?

To be freed from the sin of reductionism and be made whole from inner out is possible only by redemptive change, in which the old of reductionism is put to death so that the new of wholeness of persons and relationships can rise up. The global church (again notably in the West) gives evidence in it witness that we have yet to be redeemed from our reductionism and reconciled to wholeness in relationship together with God as beloved daughters and sons in the new creation family. Our relational responsibility in this process begins with acknowledging our participation in the sin of reductionism, and intentionally relinquishing whatever "gains" we receive. This process will include an honest and painful evaluation of our worship practices.

Without our undergoing inner-out redemptive change, how we shape God and worship 'in their way' will continue to remain as a relational barrier with God and distort our worship of God in gatherings without relational significance. The absence of redemptive change may be due to either unintentional ignorance or intentional ignoring on our part—perhaps unwilling to be gathered together in the primacy of relationship, as Jesus lamented. Additionally and of greatest priority for this study, in the absence of redemptive change God is denied who and what the Father seeks from his worshipers. The existing reality prevailing in our midst is that God does not get his due in spite of any good intentions and efforts in corporate worship. We must, therefore, understand about such a condition that instead of persons who worship God "in spirit and truth" (Jn 4:23-24), we are reduced (common, not whole) persons of disembodied lips. Given—and it needs to become our *given*—God's nonnegotiable terms, we can no longer remain as fragmented and reduced persons who worship God 'in their way', as the Scripture so challenges and confronts us.

A Relational Word for Our Voices

In this relational-introducing chapter, the basic issues of this study have been raised. These issues lead us to the ending of Psalm 63: "the mouths of liars will be stopped" (v.11, "silenced," NIV). "Liars" are those who speak (*dābar*) falsely (*šeqer*), or in vain, signifying communication that has no relational significance to God, persons whom David contrasts with those who "rejoice in God" (i.e. the whole of God, not parts of God) and "all who swear by God's name" (NIV). That is, *dābar šeqer* identifies communication from persons whose involvement with God is with less than the whole person—with something less and some substitute—who will be silenced without the significance of a voice. In other words, God does not hear the voices of those who "honor me with lips but whose hearts are far from me." In its full sense, liars signify those who communicate deceitfully or falsely, even if unintentionally, because their words have no significance and essentially become empty words spoken 'in vain'—all of which

communicates both the wrong (read as positive) impression of the worshiper and a misrepresentation of the God worshiped that misuses the name of God (discussed in the next chapter). Before we exclude ourselves from such practice, we need to understand that this includes those (any of us) who merely give the outer appearance of relational involvement with God, whether by role-playing, performing, or merely conforming to others. The outward appearance that lacks the integrating involvement of the heart is simply an ontological simulation, or, to put it bluntly, a lie.

Looking beyond God's hearing, the voice of ontological simulation also has no qualitative-relational significance to our human context, the world. In a seminar I participated in with Robert E. Webber, an influential theologian on worship and worship studies today, he surmised that "Christians no longer narrate the world." Therefore, he asked, "Who gets to narrate the world?"¹⁴ which he thoughtfully didn't know how to answer, that is, in the whole of God's story. Part of the issue involves the ambiguity and/or insignificance of Christian voices in the world that do not warrant being heard. This then raises the antecedent underlying question that we all sorely need to ask ourselves: "Who gets to speak for God?" In all the talking about God, not to mention *to* God, that takes place in worship gatherings around the world, where is our relational significance in compatible and congruent likeness of God that needs to emerge from our embodied lips in order to distinguish the whole of God for the whole world to be whole? We discuss these questions further in chapter 3.

In light of God's challenging words to us, I boldly and unapologetically pray that this study shines the spotlight on the undeniable negative influences on our worship practices from reductionism in human contextualization, most notably because those influences are neither understood nor rarely even talked about in discussions about worship. I hope then that in the course of this study, we as his worshipers foremost come to understand and know God in relational terms, and on this relational basis be convicted that we need to undergo inner-out redemptive change and be raised up as worshipers in likeness of God, the very compatible and congruent worshipers God seeks. In the pages that follow, many of our long-held practices along with their assumptions about how worship ought to be are challenged as never before. If I offend any of you, sisters and brothers, that is a risk I'm willing to take, indeed that I need to take in my relational involvement with the whole of God. If I offend God, I trust him to let me know so that I may be corrected by the Spirit in our reciprocal relationship together.

My heart's desire is for God to be able to receive from us our relational response of worship transformed to be compatible with God in spirit and truth, and thus congruent with the uncommonness that distinguishes nothing less and no substitutes for the whole and holy God. And the blessed relational outcome for us will be the experiential reality as God's new creation family composing the global church. If these outcomes are of no interest or concern to you, then this study is not for you.

¹⁴ For further study of his views, especially on the convergence of liturgical traditions and contemporary evangelical worship, see Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Worship: Proclaiming and Enacting God's Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008).

Chapter 2

Worshipping “in my name”

“You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God”

Exodus 20:27, NIV

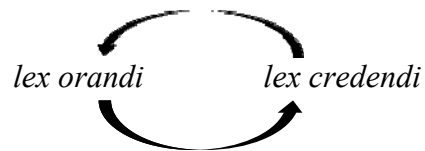
“In Jesus’ name I (we) pray, amen.” This simple phrase (and its many variations) composes the most familiar closing to prayer for Protestant Christians, ranging from little children to eloquent preachers. The biblical source of the phrase is Jesus’ own words (Jn 14:13-14; Lk 11:23-24). Certainly our reasons for praying “in Jesus’ name” have good intentions and are sincere. Yet, the phrase has become so familiar to us that we often say it out of habit, by default with disembodied lips whereby our hearts remain relationally uninvolved with God. Additionally, “in Jesus’ name we pray” seems to generally function merely as a bit of theological information, a referential affirmation that we attach to our prayers for added significance (I share from my personal experience below.) These usages are not in congruence with what Jesus meant when he said “ask in my name.” Thus, this raises an ironic concern about whether we actually cross over the critical line into misusing the Lord’s name in both our theology and practice.

What this beloved phrase points to are issues inherent in the commonness of its usage, issues that, importantly for this study, apply to all the words we use in worship. We need to honestly examine the dominance of referential language (centered on information in fragmentary terms) when we utter “in Jesus’ name we pray, amen,” the Lord’s Prayer, songs and hymns, sermons, and even reading Scripture. Because *referential language* is the language from human contextualization, it unavoidably determines our worship to be ‘in their way’ unless we individually and corporately are clearly distinguished from these common ways by redemptive change: that is, the inner-out change necessary for our person’s and church’s ontology and function (that is, the reality of who, what, and how we are) to be made whole and uncommon (holy) based on God’s relational terms.

Many persons come to worship services to learn about God and/or to experience God’s presence and involvement with them. In other words, they come for the development of their theology and growth in their practice (practice involving both ontology and function). These persons are fed by worship leaders and preachers who enact a particular theology and practice through their words and actions, thereby intentionally or inadvertently instilling in worshipers their views of God. The scope of this influence and the urgency of its responsibility cannot be overstated, nor can the urgency (as in urgent care for persons’ and the global church’s wholeness and well-being in *shalôm*) to confront human contextualization prevailing in our worship theology and practice.

These next two chapters continue to address our worship that is determined ‘in their way’ and therefore not congruent with God’s name and thus the likeness of God. While chapter 2 dealt largely with more observable aspects of worship that give primacy to secondary matters of what worship leaders do and have (e.g. performance, skill level,

spiritual gifts), now our discussion moves to the subtler issue of language used by everyone in corporate worship. This issue is how referential language—that is, the language of fragmented ontology and reduced function with relational distance—distorts our view of God and falsely represents God’s *relational language*. Conversely, a view of God that is fragmented and reduced by human shaping determines our worship language in referential terms. These dynamics speak to the principle of *lex orandi lex credendi*, which means that ‘prayer shapes’ belief (and ‘liturgy shapes theology’). The reverse, *lex credendi lex orandi* (beliefs/theology shape prayer/liturgy), is also true so that the two directions of influence are reflexive in a subtle reciprocating process:



When occurring in reduced ontology and function, *lex orandi* and *lex credendi* become self-reinforcing to sustain the status quo, which the church as a whole has been stuck in for a long time. The status quo may seem to be upended by fresh and innovative changes (e.g. emerging churches, ancient-future features, alt worship, new monasticism), yet in the long view, these are recurring cycles in church history; they just have different names. This dynamic is important to understand for both traditional and contemporary worship.

Most consequential for the majority of our current worship theology and practice is that we end up worshiping not who, what, and how God is as God has revealed, but the ideal (i.e. idol) we have shaped by essentially our process of the idolization of God—the very practice that God eliminated in the Decalogue (Ex 20:4-5). In the global church, so much of our default worship language is referential language, language that keeps us at a relational distance from God (not to mention from each other) that we need to ask ourselves if the God we worship is the same God who has revealed himself. Christians worshipping a different God with the same so-called name of God is not out of the question here.

In contrast to our default referential language is God’s *relational language*, the purpose and function of which is the primacy of relationship to make relational connection between persons. All throughout Scripture, God spoke and continues to speak in only relational language; and only relational language makes the compatible relational response that is congruent with God’s name disclosed in relational terms. Our referential language needs to be redeemed in order for us to grow in worshiping in likeness of Uncommon (Holy) God, as his uncommon new creation family, no longer determined ‘in their way’ by human contextualization. Indeed, an essential aspect of our salvation (involving both what we’re save *from* and what we’re save *to*) is the transformation of our language.

Are God’s relational terms ever negotiable? We certainly function as if they are, in spite of theology to the contrary. Which language do you use when we pray “in Jesus’ name”, referential or relational language?

Equally important, how we pray and worship God communicate the theology and

practice that get passed on to the next generations of believers. With the dwindling interest among millennials in what the church has to offer, notably in the Global North (especially in the U.S.), it is our urgent relational responsibility to vulnerably examine as never before the theology and practice we are passing on to them through our worship practices (i.e. through our doxology). The experiential reality of *lex orandi lex credendi* and its reverse need to be transformed in our worship so that God's own voice (not our reshaping of God's words) will be heard, received, and responded to by his new creation family.

Our doxology must be in God's relational language if it is to have any relational significance to him. But for us to grow in listening and communicating in relational language, we need to recognize our default use of referential language competing with God's relational language. Thus we turn our attention now to these competing languages. As we examine this with open minds and hearts, we will see how referential language subtly dominates in our worship gatherings as well as even in our private prayers.

Relational Language and Referential Language

In Scripture, God definitively differentiates between *relational language*, which is the only language that God communicates in, and *referential language* that exists universally in our human contexts, including in the human brain.¹ Which of these two languages we use in our prayers, songs, and speech in worship reflects our ontology (how we define our person) and function (how we engage in relationships), and provides the key to whether or not our worship of God has relational significance to God. In order for us to grow in worshiping God compatibly and congruently in his likeness, we need to take to heart what God says about these languages.

The only purpose of referential language is to transmit information about some subject matter. Its focus is outer in, and on this limited basis it reduces all its content to the secondary criteria of what persons do or have, thereby fragmenting and reducing a person (God or human) to quantitative parts. In worship, referential language expresses information about God's parts (e.g. the cross, miracles, divine attributes), such that we praise and thank God primarily on the basis of God's parts. It is like relating to our parents only on the basis of their job descriptions, or even just what they *do* for us in their parental roles.

In our worship songs and prayers, we referentialize God down to these narrow terms, which includes referentializing all of God's relational communications and his terms for relationship together, reducing them to information to learn about what to do. Yet, as we process and express this information, we function apart from God's relational context and relational messages to us. Whether we are aware of it or not, referential language ongoingly negatively affects our prayers and all our other words in worship by

¹ For further discussion about relational language and referential language, see T. Dave Matsuo, *Jesus into Paul: Embodying the Theology and Hermeneutic of the Whole Gospel* (Integration Study, 2012). See also Iain McGilchrist for an integrated discussion from neuroscience, psychiatry, and philosophy on referential language and its association with left brain hemisphere functions in contrast to qualitative functions of the right hemisphere; *The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

rendering them without relational significance. And because referential language turns our focus away from the qualitative and relational aspects of God and ourselves to outer aspects, it creates and maintains relational distance, even if unintentionally.

In unambiguous contrast, God’s relational language is only for his primary purpose of making relational connection together. Relational language is always qualitative in focus and relational in function, always speaking to and for the primacy of the whole person (not mere parts) and relationships together in wholeness (not merely gatherings or joint expressions). Here, then, are two languages in conflict with each other, and their difference must be accounted for because they are incompatible in spite of the similarity or even sameness of their words. Making this distinction is vital for the urgent care of our worship condition. Therefore, the inescapable question we are faced with—namely face to face with God—is whose language defines us and determines our worship.

The language of our worship is either God’s relational language—the language from God’s very heart that ‘sings’ (e.g. Zeph 3:17) only for intimate relational connection together (intimacy defined as hearts open and making deep connection together)—or referential language that keeps us at a relational distance, confined within limits we impose on ourselves and God. Relational language is not merely the use of certain words such as ‘love’ or ‘like’ because these words can be used referentially to convey information. Moreover, words such as love or like have been so reduced that they can now be shown with mere emojis on social media.² Although it is said that emojis help communicate feelings in emails and texts that are otherwise devoid of facial and other nonverbal expressions, yet they exist as substitutes for face-to-face involvement—substitutes that only simulate relationships and create illusions of relational involvement and connection.

Relational language isn’t the prevailing language of much of what takes place in our worship gatherings, although many words spoken or sung in worship sound like relational language. Keeping in mind our susceptibility to function as ‘lips without heart’ (from Jesus’ critique in Mt 15:8), we need to think of relational language as communicating *relational messages*—from God to us, and from us congruently back to God in our worship relationship. We need to *think* relationally, for example, that “every communication has a content aspect and a relationship aspect such that the latter [qualifies and/or determines the meaning of] the former.”³ The relational content of any communication is conveyed as relational messages, summarized as follows:

- (1) What one is saying about him- or herself
- (2) How the speaker feels about the other person being addressed
- (3) How the speaker feels about their shared relationship.⁴

² Emojis originated as little face icons expressing feelings but the categories of emoji have expanded to include animals, food, and other objects. Sentences can now be written using only emojis, thus becoming yet another dialect of referential language, one that is a further step removed from face-to-face communication.

³ Paul Watzlawick, Janet Helmick Beavin, and Don D. Jackson. *Pragmatics Of Human Communication: A Study of Interactional Patterns, Pathologies, and Paradoxes* (NY: W.W.Norton & Company, Inc, 1967), 54.

⁴ This rendering of principles from communication theory of Watzlawick et al (“This is how I see myself...this is how I see you...this is how I see you seeing me”; p. 52) is developed by T. Dave Matsuo in

These are relational messages from the speaker to the hearer and demonstrate language's function to make relational connection. In God's communicative acts (by his words and relational actions) to us throughout Scripture, God ongoingly conveys relational messages to us: (1) what he says about himself (e.g. Ex 34:6-7), (2) how he feels about us (e.g. Dt 7:7-8,12-13; Jn 3:16), (3) and what he says about our relationship together (e.g. Jn 17). These are relational-specific words from God's heart to us, so to treat God's Word as a topic of study (notably in the academy) for more information, knowledge, and even wisdom is to de-relationalize God by separating him from his relational messages to us. De-relationalizing God's self-disclosures keeps us at a relational distance (e.g. 'in front of the text' paralleling 'in front of the curtain'). In the academy this is the predominant approach to biblical studies, theology, and spirituality. Many seminarians are aware of and dissatisfied with the incongruence of academic (i.e. referential) study of God's Word as merely a historical or literary text. Similarly, for persons who want to experience more in relationship with God, in order for our own worship language to become relational language, then what critically becomes primary is neither acquiring nor proclaiming referential information, for example, of Scripture and theology. But primacy must first be given to relationally understanding and receiving God's relational messages to us—which likely will require a new hermeneutic of making ourselves vulnerable in the depth of our hearts. This lens will require the help of the Spirit (as in 1 Cor 2:9-11).

Vis-à-vis the above relational messages, we can only conclude that referential language is a substitute language whose ultimate goal is to keep us relationally distant from God. As discussed in chapter 1, many of the Israelites reduced God's relational terms for the covenant relationship (a love story) to referential terms, thereby reshaping the relational significance of the Torah (that God shared in only relational language) into a template for conformity that they needed to follow as an end in itself (i.e. giving primacy to 'what to do'). By referentializing God's words, these persons also reduced God's whole ontology and function, and redefined God on the basis of what he did or should do for them. Referentialization of God is how we practice idolization of God, shaping God according to our own terms. Referentialization also reduces our own self on the basis of the secondary criteria of what we do and have, which is contrary to God's relational message (2) of how God sees our person. Accordingly, this is how we engage subtly in eclipsing God's relational grace by our works, even in worship practice, in order to establish our identity and worth.

In this way—that is, reducing God and ourselves by giving primacy to the quantitative criteria of what to do (over the primacy of qualitative involvement of the whole person in relationship together)—referential language is the language of reductionism. With referential language we are involved with God in worship with only the outer criteria of saying the right words to convey information. In worship, when we recite the Apostles Creed or the Lord's Prayer together, are we using referential language or relational language? Are we involved with God and each other with or without our whole person signified by honesty of our hearts? Consider carefully Jesus' words about where our hearts are in worship (Mt 15:8).

When our prayers and other words in worship are referential language and not relational language involving our whole person, we are presenting disembodied lips to God. But God, as the one who knows our minds and hearts (Acts 1:24; 15:8; Rev 2:23), knows when we worship him with disembodied lips thus rendering our whole person unavailable to our Father for face-to-face connection as his beloved daughters and sons. God rejects such worship from his people (again, Mt 15:8; Isa 29:13) because our referential worship language has no relational significance to him. God seeks the heart of our person compatible in reciprocal relational response to the heart of God vulnerably responding to us in only relational terms (Jn 4:21-26).

Both referential language and relational language are present in any and all human tongues. The distinction between the two languages is made by Jesus in a critical interaction with some Jews who had believed in him (Jn 8:31-47). During this interaction, these persons misinterpreted Jesus' relational words, and Jesus confronted them for their inability to hear him: "Why is my language not clear to you? It is because you are unable to hear what I say" (v.43; cf. Lk 10:21). Although these persons were believers, they didn't "hear" God's relational language; and even Jesus' closest disciples had difficulty understanding Jesus' language (e.g. Mk 8:14-21; Jn 14:9).

Relational language is what Jesus identified as "my language" (*lalian tēn emēn*, Jn 8:43, NIV). "My language" signifies the relational truth of Jesus' relational communications, whether through his speech or his relational-specific involvement with persons in the primacy of relationship. The reason those believers in this interaction couldn't "hear God's words" in relational language is because they were of their "father" whose "native language" was the referential language of reductionism ("lies," distortions; cf. Gen 3:1,4), according to Jesus (vv. 44,47).

Recall (from chap. 1) that liars (distorters) are persons who speak falsely, or in vain, signifying so-called communication that has no relational significance to God. God doesn't "hear" distorted speech, that is, referential language, because persons who speak, pray, sing, preach, and teach only referentially to and about God are misleading since they are not involved with God on God's nonnegotiable terms for relationship together. Such misleading practice also misrepresents God. Referential language creates ontological simulation as the substitute for God's uncommon relational language by creating illusions that something significant is taking place. The above interaction is key to our understanding that relational language and referential language are in conflict and competition with each other—competing for our ontology and function to be either whole on God's relational terms, or reduced to the referential terms from reductionism.

Referential language is the default-native language of our human context, and none of us develops without it. Obviously referential language is necessary when we just need plain information about something in daily life. However, it is when we use referential language while praying and worshiping God, in church life, and notably in theological education, that referential language is problematic. Referential language also tends to make generalizations about persons, which moves us away from being person-specific in our involvement with each other, including with God. We don't experience deeper relational connection without getting specific with others.

We need to be able to discern the difference between "my *relational* language" (Jn 8:43, NIV) and referential language ("[Satan's] native language," 8:44, NIV), but we will be able to do so only by addressing ourselves to the inner-out change we must

undergo in reciprocal relational work with the Spirit. This change is the redemptive change of the old dying (specifically dying to defining our person by secondary criteria from reductionism, i.e. of what we do or have) so that the newness of our person can emerge in whole ontology and function (specifically involving our heart in qualitative function), and accordingly giving primacy to relationships together in wholeness, that is, the relationships made intimate and equalized by God's response of relational grace for all of us.

Virtual Worship

I heard of a worship service put on by an emerging church—also known as alt or alternative worship, which is characterized by new and creative worship expressions—during which time images of candles were projected onto the walls. Virtual candles to create a virtual ambience. This practice with virtual candles may seem odd or contrived to Christians who use real candles in worship services. Yet, virtual reality in worship isn't limited to emergent churches, because traditional liturgical worship, along with “traditional” contemporary worship, can be just as or even more virtual in their worship. I suggest that virtual worship takes place in the global church much more than we imagine. It unfolds in our practice whenever we present ourselves to God in worship on our own terms with something less or some substitute in place of our vulnerable presence and involvement with God.

Any time we give the primacy of our focus and attention to outer expressions—for example, to rock concert-like performances in contemporary worship, on formal prayers in referential language in liturgical worship, on unconventional settings to create moods in alt worship—then our worship can only be virtual worship engaged by our persons reduced to virtual worshipers (or avatars). Virtual worship, like virtual reality on the Internet, is only ontological simulation. But unlike the obvious *unreality* of online virtual reality, virtual worship is easily mistaken for the real thing, for the worship God seeks from us. This is because ontological simulations have become so common to us that by default we assume they are real and significant. Moreover, such simulations aren't easy to detect because referential language can use the same words as relational language—with the essential difference being that in the latter our whole person is involved with God in the primacy of relationship on God's nonnegotiable relational terms.

In contrast to virtual worship, when we worship God engaged on God's nonnegotiable relational terms, then our worship experience will be face to face and heart to heart with God, and will both please God and satisfy our innermost (Ps 17:15). Because God's relational terms are not negotiable to our terms, the worship relationship in likeness of God cannot be engaged at the relational distance intrinsic to the ontological simulation of virtual worship, which gives primary focus to secondary matters, for example, of affective experiences, doctrinal correctness, and theological information as ends in themselves.

Many of us Christians devote much time and effort to studying Scripture, taking notes of sermons, believing that the more informational knowledge we accumulate, the better we can know God (I know this from experience). But informational knowledge about God is merely referential knowledge (as in referential theology for doctrinal

knowledge) that only tells us information *about* God as if God were mere Object to study, rather than Subject-Person who is present and involved for relationship together with us—we who are also subjects and not impersonal objects. Here, even to profess in worship that God is a personal and relational God can become merely referential information that we espouse in referential language without our compatible relational response to God. We do this all the time in prayer and song in corporate worship, and even in our witnessing to others. These words become the code for virtual worship.

The commonest evidence of virtual worship is when we referentialize God (and God's name) in worship by singing *about* God—for example, (information) about his divine attributes, about what he has done, about his superiority over anything else—but not singing relational-specific *to* God as persons compatibly responding to God's presence and involvement with us in reciprocal relationship. Using the third person for God is one indicator that we are only referring to God; and even using the terminology “to God” and “to You” doesn't guarantee our relational involvement beyond merely singing *about* God because this relational-specific involvement requires our compatible relational response “in spirit and truth” (the honesty of our hearts in Jn 4:23-24).

What exactly are we doing when we sing *about* God, even with a lot of emotion? Unless we're just singing as an end in itself, essentially we're singing to each other, perhaps under the premise of edification of the church family. Of course certain songs and hymns sung to each other can be very touching and edifying for persons, songs such as “Oh How He Loves You and Me” and “I Need You to Survive.” But have you ever noticed in worship services that during these kinds of songs, persons don't readily make eye contact—even if they might be holding hands or hugging each other? Notably, Paul certainly worked wholeheartedly for the building up of the church family (e.g. Eph 4:15-16), yet his instructions given in relational terms for worship unmistakably involved “singing and making melody *to* the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks *to* God...” (Eph 5:19-20), and “with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms...*to* God” (Col 3:16).

Sometimes we don't even know where our heart is, but God always does, though not for information because God always seeks our heart involvement and relational response in worship. The earliest disciples, none more than Peter, learned this about God the hard way; yet they finally knew from experience that God is “the knower of hearts” (*kardiognostēs*, Acts 1:24). Peter repeated this relational knowledge of God as the early church struggled with their theology and practice (Acts 15:8; cf. Rev 2:23; 1 Sam 16:7; 1 Kgs 8:39). Peter's earlier worship practice had involved virtual worship (Mt 17:1-7, to be discussed in chap. 3), so it was deeply impressed upon him that God knows when hearts are kept distant and always pursues us for nothing less and no substitutes (cf. Jn 13:6-8).

The vital issue to assess for ourselves here is to give primacy to direct relational involvement with God—not in referential and indirect virtual terms that keep us relationally distant even though we may speak a lot about relationships—but in compatible relational response to God who is always vulnerably present and intimately involved with us only in relational terms. Inseparable from our relational involvement with God is our relational involvement with each other, since worship gatherings are the corporate dimension of our discipleship-worship relationship with God.

Relational distance is the other obvious evidence of virtual worship; and we cannot appeal to our culture or social context for this practice because that would only make evident our person and relationships shaped by human contextualization. Stop and

assess how much eye contact—the very least relational connection we can make—you make with your fellow worshipers. Notably, there is a sad and strange lack of eye contact during Communion in most worship services I've attended throughout my years as a Christian. This de-relationalizing of Communion must grieve God.

These are the critical issues for our corporate worship—whether our gathered worship is liturgical, contemporary, or blended in form and style—that will determine just what we communicate and pass on to the next generations. I believe that currently in the global North, virtual worship is prevailing. What do you honestly and critically think—even if you are only perceiving it from the global South?

A Word about Intimate Relationship with God in Worship

Intimate relational connection with God in worship needs to be clarified so that we don't assume its presence or significance. Biblical intimacy is the relational connection between two persons (divine or human) vulnerably face to face, heart to heart with each other, without the relational barriers of hiding or masking one's innermost being—the significance of going 'behind the curtain' and 'without the veil' (e.g. Ex 33:11; Num 12:8; 2 Cor 3:15-18; 4:6; Heb 10:19-22; 2 Sam 1:26). Intimate relationship with God is heart-level face-to-face connection with God only on the basis of God's relational response of grace to us in our human need and condition, and thus without any relational barriers whatsoever.

When Jesus claimed that to see and know him is to see and know the Father (Jn 12:45; 14:6-9; cf. 2 Cor 4:4,6), he was disclosing to us that he and the Father are so intimately involved together that to know one is to know the other. When we worship God in likeness of God, the relational reality can be in likeness of the relationship between the Son and Father! And while we each need this individual experiential reality as a daughter or son with our Father, intimacy cannot remain an isolated relationship because God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement with us in the Spirit is only fully experienced in the corporate context of his new creation family together—the relational outcome of the trinitarian relational context of family and the trinitarian relational process of family love (Eph 2:14-22).

Therefore, if we are to become compatible in our relational response to God's nonnegotiable relational terms for intimate relationship together, we must reject common notions about intimacy which have been shaped—that is, fragmented and reduced—by our sociocultural context. For example, the notion of intimacy has been fragmented and narrowed down—by referentialization—to romantic or sexual connotations. This notion likely has created tension for some worship planners, leaders, and worshipers alike with regard to even talking about intimate relational connection in worship. Certainly, boundaries need to be established to safeguard against abuse; but if boundaries define what's primary for our church family relationships, then we no longer function by God's relational terms for the primacy of relationships together.

This reduction of intimacy is further distorted by individualism of the Western worldview, so that many Christians think that relationship with God revolves around us individually, and intimacy in worship is between 'Jesus and me'. Another serious consequence of individualism's influence on our worship theology and practice is that contemporary worship often singles out Jesus over the whole of the Trinity. A great many

contemporary worship songs focus singularly on Jesus and Jesus' work on the cross, as a quick survey of contemporary worship songs shows.⁵ The theology inherent in this focus is an incomplete Christology that (1) gives primacy to what Jesus did (went to the cross merely as a sacrifice for us), thereby diminishing or even overlooking the necessary relational work of embodying God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement into our human context to make us whole in relationship together, which is highlighted by his paradigmatic table fellowships; (2) minimalizes or completely ignores Jesus' vulnerable disclosures of the whole of the Trinity and the equal and intimate relationships among the Father, Son, and Spirit; and therefore (3) misrepresents Jesus' whole person and the full identity of his name, which results in discipleship that follows, serves, and worships an idealized stereotype of our shaping. An incomplete Christology results in overly Christocentric worship, which continues to dominate contemporary worship.

The issue of intimacy with God is also often reduced to merely an affective qualitative experience, and usually focused on Jesus. Many persons prefer contemporary worship because they seek the affective and deeper experience that they call intimacy, and contemporary worship provides these opportunities more than liturgical worship does. Yet, a qualitative experience cannot be equated with a relational one because you can be deeply moved, even to tears—with the heart's qualitative affect—but still not make relational connection with God. Relational connection is certainly qualitative more than quantitative, but most importantly it requires relational-specific involvement. And the deeper the relational involvement specific to the persons in the relationship, the more intimate it becomes. Qualitative experiences feel good to us, but we must not be fooled into believing that in themselves they compose relational connection and have the relational involvement needed for essential significance to God or to us. We need to never settle for only qualitative experiences because they are only situational; I know this from my own experiences. And worship planners and leaders need to be mindful of qualitative experiences as ends in themselves—that is, they just become mere ontological simulations composing virtual worship.

Qualitative experiences are often brought about by music and song, but those experiences are only helpful for worshiping God insofar as they help us get in touch with our hearts, our hearts that are the nonnegotiable aspect of compatible and congruent worship of God. To make the relational connection with God, we still have to make the intentional choice to vulnerably receive God's presence and involvement with us, and to compatibly respond to him congruently with our whole persons (cf. 1 Jn 4:19). This choice is not with the secondary matter of what we do (e.g. sing or pray referentially with disembodied lips) or have (e.g. offerings to give), but with *who* and *what* God seeks in the primacy of intimate relational connection together on God's nonnegotiable terms. This is *how* relational-specific we need to be. We need the integral qualitative-relational involvement of our whole person for this connection with God. Without the qualitative (signified by our heart's inner-out involvement), the depth level of relational connection cannot be compatible with the vulnerable heart of God. And without our reciprocal relational response to God, the qualitative alone cannot make the connection congruent with the relational reality of God, but can only create the virtual reality of worship.

Therefore, we need to go more vulnerably and deeply in our understanding of

⁵ For example, take a quick look at <https://www.praisecharts.com/songs/ccli-top-100-songs>, and <https://www.praisecharts.com/themes>.

Jesus than ‘Jesus and me’ in order for intimate relational connection with the whole and uncommon God (the Trinity) to become our experiential relational reality as the new creation family in likeness. As for liturgical worship and intimacy, it is my observation that while liturgical worship provides needed relational clarity (i.e. that God is the focus of our attention) and sweeping theological correctness, there is a fine line between referential language and relational language. And since our default mode is to focus on outer criteria of what God and humans do and have, in liturgical worship we are highly susceptible to reduce God to fragmentary ‘parts’ of God’s ontology and function in past salvific actions. Liturgical worship’s good intentions for ‘right theology’ to maintain ‘right worship’—conforming to the Rule of Faith—is always susceptible, then, to preventing the intimate relational connection with God that God seeks. God’s vulnerable presence and involvement get lost in the formality of the liturgy, not least in set prayers.

Many persons who tend to avoid intimacy may prefer the worship in liturgical churches because there are more opportunities, I believe, to “hide” behind the rituals and structures of liturgy, including its prayers. This is when ‘face’ (*prosōpon*), used in Greek theater as a mask for playing a role different from one’s true identity in real life, becomes our ‘face’ presented to God, masking our true identity, our real persons. What is relationally required of worshipers in liturgical worship beyond learning the congregational responses, other aspects of liturgical language, and gestures (e.g. what to say and when to say it, when to stand, sit, or kneel) is a question deserving examination. I recall the words of a pastor who was about to lead the congregation in a Wesley Covenant Service, saying that the congregation was going to do a lot of extensive engagement in ‘the work of the people’, which is the meaning of liturgy (*leiturgia*). We followed along, taking turns with the pastor reading our portions of the liturgy, which was printed in full in a special bulletin. It was easy to fall into reading referentially, making it very difficult to make compatible relational connection with God. On the other hand, persons who want to remain anonymous in a worship gathering may likewise prefer megachurches where they can “hide,” that is, blend in or get lost in the crowd.

All these various issues related to intimate relational connection diminish our vulnerable involvement with God in worship and prayer primarily through virtual worship or the avoidance of going deeper—just as social media serves to shape persons and determine relationships. Whichever one is at play for each of us, Jesus words, “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me” (Mt 15:8, NIV) must resound in our ears and convict us that our praying and singing while we worship God aren’t to be taken for granted, nor their relational significance to God merely assumed. Our involvement with God through our praying and singing (our practice) reflect how we see God (our theology), and vice versa—the compatibility of which and the congruence of whom we are accountable to have and therefore must take responsibility for in our inseparable theology and practice.

Names and Titles in Referential Language

My reasons for praying “in Jesus’ name” underwent various changes. I first learned to pray with these words as a five year-old in Sunday school, but I didn’t understand what they meant. I knew that somehow Jesus was God and did miracles. Jesus said to pray in his name, so we obediently recited “in Jesus’ name we pray.” This

demonstrated basically that I thought of God in the fragmented terms of his ‘parts’ of what he did in the past (e.g. healed and fed people, walked on water) and had (divine attributes). Unlike some children who intuitively pray to God with vulnerable hearts, the common thread of my journey was that I prayed detached (unknowingly so) from my whole person (cf. Mt 15:8). Moreover, Jesus’ “name” had no significance to me at all, other than I needed to follow this rule.

As I grew older, though I gained more referential information about God and Scripture, my view of God remained vague, not much different from my kindergarten theology. I absorbed the prominent message that as long as I said the right words, including “in Jesus’ name,” God would answer my prayers. Yet he never seemed to be ‘there’ listening or answering me, and by the time I went to college I was agnostic.

Later as a follower of Jesus, I believed that to sincerely ‘pray in Jesus’ name’ would authenticate my prayer in God’s eyes. My theology was reduced to ‘what to do’ from outer in because I thought that God’s response to my prayers depended on (referentially) invoking Jesus’ name (i.e. “Jesus”) because Jesus mediated for me before the Father. This view failed to understand that Jesus’ relational work on the cross tore open the “curtain” so that I/we now have direct access to face-to-face relational connection with God (Heb 10:19-22; Eph 2:18), which was only in compatible reciprocal relationship together (2 Cor 3:16-17; Eph 3:12). I also thought that saying “in Jesus’ name” witnessed to others that I identified with Jesus, especially to non-Christians; in this view, God would be served by my attesting words, again reducing God’s response to my prayers dependent on what I did.

These practices of praying “in Jesus’ name” and related views of God probably sound familiar to many Christians, since most of us learn these or similar views in corporate worship and by hearing them in other people’s prayers. Some of my understanding may have had some referential theological validity, but my theology and practice were not whole because my prayers were referential language addressing an idealized God (an idol). Therefore, I did not vulnerably engage my whole person to be congruently involved with God as God is vulnerably involved with me. Through all those years I didn’t make the necessary relational connection with my Father in either my individual devotions or in corporate worship, which my heart needed. At best I had emotional experiences that I mistook to be heart-to-heart connection with God, but these situations were few and far between and lacked ongoing face-to-face relational involvement. I know now that emotions and situations are fleeting, and cannot compose the experiential reality of intimate relationship with God. Instead, situational “connections” merely create ontological simulations, which are always substitutes for intimate relationship together with God on God’s relational terms. I had settled for so much less than what God wants for all us to experience with him.

No wonder my heart often felt lonely and was not deeply satisfied, since I didn’t experience wholeness and well-being of *shalôm* in the ongoing intimate relationship with God that we all need in our innermost—as Jesus clearly distinguished (Jn 14:27; 16:33) and Paul made imperative (Col 3:15). Moreover, the relational consequence affecting God was that God could not receive from my whole person (cf. Lk 13:34; 19:41-42). Praying “in Jesus’ name” didn’t bring the relational outcome of ‘in my name’ that Jesus pointed to for his disciples (discussed shortly). The gap that exists between what we need deeply in our innermost (and which God promises) and what we actually experience

exposes our heart's critical condition needing to more deeply understand what Jesus meant by 'in my name'. But before we can meaningfully discuss what Jesus meant by "in my name," we need to understand the significance of "my name," along with some comments also about titles we apply to God.

Our common preconceptions about names in general must be discarded before we can imagine names in a qualitatively different way. We have certain ideas about human names, for instance, that family names identify us with our "tribe" and ancestry, whether that identity for the individual involves relational significance beyond the common belief that "blood is thicker than water." Given names are chosen by parents for a wide variety of reasons, but given names don't reveal anything about the person's character, and certainly not their basic ontology and function. In the West, addressing persons by first names is a sign of familiarity but not intimacy (for that semblance we have special nicknames). We carry this mindset and level of expectation into our relationship with God as well.

Even less personal, titles are quantitative descriptors that are applied to persons on the basis of what they do and possess. In human contexts, certain professions use titles as the norm for identifying persons. In the secular fields of medicine, academia, government, to name a few, titles are coveted because they convey status, privilege, and power. Title-holding is a central aspect of the social hierarchies that humans construct in comparative and highly competitive processes, the inevitable counter-relational processes which always result in distance in relationships (discussed in the previous chapter). Being defined by titles fragments those persons' ontology and function to what they do and possess, and these human parts are always distributed on a scale of "better" or "less."

In the Christian contexts of church and the academy, persons in church and worship leadership are defined by titles and roles, and persons in the academy are defined by the titles and degrees they have achieved, not to mention books they've published. The presence and influence of title-holding in church and the academy unquestioningly comes from human contextualization, not from God's relational terms. This is a misguided trajectory and counter-relational path for Christians to find themselves on, participating unquestioningly in church life 'in their way'. Just as in human contexts, it is the norm in these Christian contexts that persons who have those roles and titles are the only ones who are deemed qualified for those positions, and accordingly esteemed. This practice carries over, sadly, into worship gatherings, where we essentially place other idols before ("beside") God—that is, titled persons who perhaps serve as gods. To the extent that this exists, this subtle process makes God's first commandment (of the Decalogue) as relevant for us today as it was for the Israelites during Moses' day. Needless to say, our love of titles for humans engages us unashamedly in the counter-relational comparative-competitive process in likeness of our sociocultural contexts. There is no way we can worship God in God's likeness as long as we're embedded in such reductionism and practicing reductionism's counter-relational work. How do you think God is affected by our engaging in the name of God's worship in likeness of our human contexts?

Jesus addressed this issue of titles in a long rebuke of the scribes and Pharisees, while simultaneously pointing his disciples to their own ontology and function (Mt 23:1-32). Jesus exposed the scribes and Pharisees for defining their persons by what they did and had, doing "all their deeds to be seen by others" (v.5), which means their actions were self-centered and self-serving. Their reduced ontology and function was reflected by

“they love to *be treated with favoritism and be honored*...and to have people call them rabbi.” When Jesus told his disciples not to take on such titles (“you are not to be called rabbi... nor are you to be called instructors”), he wasn’t telling them not to have these important functions in the life of the church, but rather not to define their person and other persons by titles and what they do/have. Jesus was strongly warning them about the reductionism that the scribes and Pharisees demonstrated; and, important for the disciples’ whole ontology and function, Jesus also integrated for the disciples the relational truth that in God’s relational context (“one Father...in heaven,” v.13), all such human-made distinctions are eliminated (vv.11-12). In God’s relational context, persons are equalized before God and each other, thereby eliminating the comparative-competitive process that creates hierarchies ‘in their way’.

The current global relational condition is painfully divisive and hostile. It is urgent for God’s people to understand the connection between reductionism and the counter-relational consequences of making distinctions among persons in this global human condition at every level of human relations—from personal to institutional to national levels. As God’s people, we are complicit in reinforcing and sustaining this status quo because we have yet to acknowledge and die to our own sin of reductionism.

For our further chastening, the remainder of Jesus’ long rebuke exposes the arrogance of the scribes and Pharisees (reflected by their love of titles) and their reductionism’s further counter-relational expressions in relation to both God and other persons. We must not let the unfamiliarity of Jesus’ bluntness and anger—that is, unfamiliar to our common ethos of niceness in our church and worship practices—distract us from the hurtful relational consequences of the how the scribes and Pharisees functioned. We need to address this log in our own eye.

Jesus likewise confronts and rebukes us today on this issue of titles and their underlying fragmentary ontology and function of persons and relationships pervading our worship practice. Worship practice has been unquestioningly shaped by our sociocultural contexts (‘in their way’) to be more “professional,” as we give primacy to the secondary aspects of what titles persons hold. Such practice has no relational significance to God and creates relational distance, noted earlier. Titles used to identify persons—such as Doctor, Reverend, Pastor (including senior, associate, worship, family life pastors), Deacon, and Elder—create stratified relationships in a comparative process. And the reality is that any comparative process evokes some level of competition (more likely implicit), both of which cultivate relational distance and thus counter the primacy of relationship together. Notwithstanding the legitimate respect we need to give persons in church leadership, this practice and its relational consequences have visibly diminished the ontology and function of God’s new creation family in worship gatherings.

In relation to titles for God, perhaps “Lord” is the most-used title that Christians use when either addressing God or referring to God. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned his disciples against involvement with him that referentialized his person (Mt 7:21-23). While Jesus framed this scenario in the future, his relational meaning is vital for us to understand in the here and now. The persons in this scene would say to Jesus, “Lord, Lord” and also engaged in ministry “in your name,” as they would claim twice. These persons seem like earnest disciples, much like many of us today who pray in Jesus’ name and do ministry in Jesus’ name. Yet Jesus denies knowing them (Lk 13:25-27).

How is it possible that persons who engage in Christian ministry ‘in Jesus’ name’ wouldn’t experience being known by Jesus?

The message here is that during their lives in service to God, those persons used his title “Lord” only referentially (cf. Hos 8:12; Mt 25:11-12) without their compatible involvement congruent with Jesus’ whole person; and on that basis they engaged in ministry by giving primacy to the outer criteria of what to do. Accordingly, they defined Jesus’ person by his title. Thus, they composed Jesus’ persons in the comparative process of ‘better-less’, thereby creating relational distance with him who was obviously *better* and they *less*. This is how idealized stereotypes of Jesus get constructed, the idolization of which create barriers for those *less* to make relational connection with him *better*. This dynamic is also seen in Peter’s refusal to let Jesus wash his feet (Jn 13:6-8, to be more fully discussed in chap. 3).

By implication of what transpired with Peter, these other persons’ feet remained unwashed by Jesus and thus experienced the relational consequence “you have no share with me, *my person*” (Jn 13:8). In other words, the level of involvement of their person was shallow (relationally distant), and thus their involvement’s significance (their ontology and function) was not relationally compatible with God. Therefore, the relational connection wasn’t made, prompting Jesus to claim, “I never *relationally* knew you” (Mt 7:23). The significance of “I never knew you” is that those persons were not involved with God according to God’s relational terms (“the will of my Father in heaven”), and accordingly could not “enter the kingdom of heaven” (i.e. participate in God’s life). The kingdom of heaven (also known as “kingdom of God” in the other Gospels) refers to God’s relational context and relational process that Jesus’ vulnerably embodied in the human context both ‘already’ (cf. Lk 17:20-21) and ‘not yet’—otherwise known already as God’s new creation family.

It is important also to understand why Jesus both sent them away from himself and also called them “you evildoers.” Jesus speaks only from the wholeness of his person in the wholeness of God’s intimate relationship context and process. When the person we present to God in worship is something less and some substitute for our whole person, we are functioning in conflict with who, what, and how God is. Those persons functioned in the sin of reductionism, and Jesus’ words “go away from me”—“me” constituting the whole and uncommon God—indicate their incompatibility with him who is uncommon and their incongruity with him who is whole, due to their common ontology and function. Accordingly, Jesus calls persons who function in the sin of reductionism “evildoers” (a combination of *anomia*, lawlessness, with *ergon*, to practice), meaning that they try to do relationship with God not on God’s relational terms but on their own self-determined terms.

These persons engaged in the ontological simulation *as if* serving Jesus for his sake. Because they functioned according to their own fragmentary terms, not God’s whole relational terms, they could not relationally and validly call Jesus “Lord” simply using a correct title. Any of us who call Jesus “Lord” while functioning basically in self-determination in relationship with God will also be told by Jesus, “I never knew you.” Therefore, ‘Lord’ is only a relational term that we cannot utter lightly as a mere referential title. Furthermore, ‘Lord’ is much more relationally significant than even a referential designation of God’s superior status and authority that we submit to.

Each of us needs to also vulnerably personally examine calling Jesus “Lord” in referential terms, and also calling God “Father” in referential terms. God’s relational involvement with us in the ontology and function of “Father” cannot be referentialized down to a title (albeit with a familial flavor), similar to calling priests “Father.” Our Father continues to seek worshipers who worship him with the honesty and vulnerableness of daughters and sons whose hearts are relationally involved with him in likeness of how he is involved with us (as in Jn 4:23-24). Any referentializing on our part in our songs and prayers render our singing and praying to have no relational significance to God, who as Father seeks only daughters and son who are vulnerably involved in compatible reciprocal relationship—as his true worshipers.

This discussion connects us back to last chapter’s exposure of human contextualization’s shaping of our persons and how we engage in relationships ‘in their way’. The primacy given to quantitative outer criteria to define persons and determine our relationships is what we bring to bear upon God and to define God’s name. By reducing and referentializing God and commonizing and de-relationalizing God’s name, we also bear the consequence that prevents us from worshiping God in God’s likeness. In other words by implication, we fragment the whole of who, what, and how God is, as expressed by God’s personal name, Yahweh (discussed below). Moreover, we rarely question why so much of our worship experiences are shallow and unsatisfying; but we will understand why once we are honest enough to recognize that we’ve been worshiping the idol of God we’ve created, however unknowingly and unintentionally.

Epistemology, Relationship, and Hermeneutics

Please don’t be put off by the words of this subtitle; they may sound too academic, but they are so important for us as worshipers and disciples to understand. Indeed these words are key to hearing God’s words that those would-be followers of Jesus couldn’t hear. This brief section will help us to understand better our own relational responsibility for receiving God’s relational communication, as we transition into understanding God’s name.

By our default mode that referentializes God’s words, we reduce God’s vulnerable self-disclosure to mere information about God and about his words (as in much of theological and biblical studies). Basically, we engage in this narrowing down of God, notably to find out both what we must do to please God, and to get the doctrinally correct information that we must have, in order to better establish our identity as God’s people. Some of this effort to get our theology ‘right’ is well-intentioned, but we need to fully understand that to referentialize God’s words is to *de-relationalize* God’s words, and to de-relationalize God’s words is to de-relationalize and *commonize* who, what, and how God is, thus re-shaping God into a mere idol, a stereotyped God. Idols do not speak and must be spoken for, and so our referentialization of God’s words effectively silences God, whom we then speak for. Therefore, we are no longer accountable to be compatibly and congruently involved with God, and God no longer has our vulnerable involvement to make the relational connection needed to receive his relational communication. Subtly, this dynamic involving our epistemology and hermeneutic is reversed so that our ears (and other organs of perception) become deaf to his self-disclosures, which are disclosed for the only purpose of making relational connection with us.

Whatever our engagement with God, referential language hereby reduces our ontology and function to serve as both the givers and receivers of such information. These are important issues of *epistemology* (what is our source of knowledge), *relational involvement* (what is required of us to understand), and *hermeneutics* (what interpretive lens we use to understand). These issues for how we listen to and communicate with God are either incongruent with God when our interpretive framework and lens function only in referential language, or congruent with God's relational language, explained further here:

When we want to account for terms used for God that are defining, then we need to examine three vital signs for the condition of those terms to be significant of and integral to God:

1. The source of those terms, illuminated by the epistemic field of the source that constitutes the source's epistemological integrity, thus that can be counted on to be definitive. This significance constitutes **the epistemological condition**.
2. The connection with this source in the source's epistemic field, the connection of which can only be made according to the source's terms, and therefore which can only be engaged by relational involvement in order to receive the defining terms disclosed by the source. This significance constitutes **the relational condition**.
3. Upon relational connection with the source and reception of the terms disclosed by the source, those terms must be interpreted by the nature of the source's relational context that only uses relational language with whole relational terms. Conclusions about those terms for God disclosed by the source, therefore, cannot be narrowed down to referential language using fragmentary referential terms, or they will no longer be defining. This significance constitutes **the hermeneutical condition**.⁶

These are essential issues for us to vulnerably receive all of God's relational communication and to compatibly respond as disciples and worshipers; and they underscore why Jesus consistently and forcefully addressed persons' perception, interpretation, and depth level of relational involvement with him (e.g. Mk 4:23-24; 8:14-18; Lk 9:44-45; 10:21). We as God's global church, as his new creation family, and as worshipers-disciples must, indeed *must* address ourselves to Jesus' challenges to us. Otherwise, our idols will (continue to) prevail in our Christian contexts, and God's voice will (continue to) be silenced.

If we are resolved about what cannot and thus who does not speak for God, even if they have titles and resources to appear to do so, then the pivotal question for us becomes: How carefully will we listen to God speak in whole relational terms to reveal the full identity of God's name?

⁶ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Face of The Trinity: The Trinitarian Essential for the Whole of God and Life* (Trinity Study, coming in 2016). Online at <http://4X12.org>.

Understanding God's Name

For us to grow in worshiping God in God's relational likeness, we don't need more referential knowledge about God, but we surely need to listen to, receive, and respond to God's relational language. We need the relational truth of who, what, and how God is to become our relational reality in face-to-face involvement together with the whole and uncommon God. And understanding God's name in its depth is necessary for this relational outcome. Unlike our common use of names in our human contexts, in Scripture the names of persons carry a much weightier significance of reflecting the person's character, reputation, and experience with God, notably in the OT. For example, after Jacob wrestled with God, God changed Jacob's name to Israel, which means "the one who strives with God" (Gen 32:27-28), and Ezekiel means "God strengthens," which Ezekiel certainly experienced in his relationship with God. Yet, how we think about God's name must go even deeper than for human names, which may involve critical life-changing ways. To say we need to go deeper requires our own vulnerable involvement with God, and that will require most of us to ongoingly challenge what interpretive lens we are using, what language (relational or referential) we are using, which depends on where our hearts are in relation to God.

"I AM WHO I AM"

God's name cannot be understood sufficiently only as a title (such as Almighty, Most High, Lord of Hosts, King, Most High God), or as a mere descriptor based on God's specific functions (e.g. Creator, Deliverer, Redeemer of Israel, Rock, Refuge, Provider, Strength). These all appear in both hymns and contemporary worship songs that we sing with much adoration and awe. Certainly God deserves to be recognized in all these ways and praised for who, what and how God is. Yet, the following comments chasten both our view of God and our actual involvement in such worship, even as we address him in sermons, songs, and prayers, including when we pray "in Jesus' name":

Highlighting such titles of God...has had a tendency to reduce God and counter relationship together rather than deepen it—traditionally, and typically today, as used in worship practice to narrow the focus on only parts of God (notably what God does) instead of the whole of God, and thereby as a substitute for face-to-face relationship together. Therefore, these titles of God, valid or not, should never be mistaken for the name of God and the full significance vested in the name God gave, nor should we assume that any substitutes of God's name have any significance to God and also in our theology and practice.⁷

The "full significance vested in the name God gave" is that his name is inseparable from his direct presence and relational involvement with persons. God's presence and relational involvement always engaged the whole of God's ontology and function with persons in relation-specific ways (not generalized), and was evident from very early in the OT. Long before Moses' introduction to God, Jacob experienced God

⁷ For a thought-provoking discussion about God's personal name YHWH, please see T. Dave Matsuo, *The Face of the Trinity*.

face to face in a nightlong struggle (Gen 32:30). After the struggle, Jacob asked, “Please tell me your name.” God didn’t respond with the “information” of his name, but with the question, “Why is it that you ask my name?” Just moments before, God had changed Jacob’s name to Israel, which means “he struggles with God” (NIV), thereby identifying to Jacob that nothing less than God’s own presence was involved with him.

God’s response seems curious at first, but in the context of the entire interaction God, demonstrated that his name is inseparable from his presence and relational involvement. We might speculate that God wanted the relational experience of the struggle together to sink in for Jacob rather than focus on what Jacob could misinterpret as a mere referential title or label. In any case, Jacob subsequently named that location Peniel, which means “The face of God,” because he “had seen God face to face.” This interaction signals to us the significance of “YHWH” that God will later reveal to Moses and the Israelites as much more than a title or identifying descriptor, but as the “relational-specific action” that distinguishes God’s presence, nature, and being.

In ancient times in the Mediterranean region, to reveal one’s name was a sign of intimate friendship; so when YHWH told Moses his personal name, this is the relational action from God for us to embrace about who, what, and how God desires to be experienced in relationship with any of us. Intimacy is the experience of hearts being open to each other vulnerably—that is, with honesty of who one really is, no hiding of one’s heart, and no masking one’s innermost from the other—and making relational connection. In relationship with God, it is this relational reality that makes persons whole. With this qualitative-relational depth, God thus vulnerably revealed his personal name YHWH (Yahweh) to Moses in the remarkable first relational interaction they experienced together (Ex 3:13-15). Moses responded reciprocally with nothing less and no substitutes for his whole person (cf. Ex 4:1,10,13,30; 33:12-15,18), and their relationship together unfolded in the intimacy of face-to-face experience (Ex 33:11; Num 12:7-8).

We need to embrace for ourselves this self-disclosure by YHWH to correct our misconceptions and stereotypes about God as relationally distant in his transcendence—for example as in deism and classical theism. Furthermore, YHWH also interacted with Moses in personally-specific ways, for example, as YHWH responded to Moses’ various concerns and self-doubts about the task he was chosen for. In this reciprocal relationship, Moses received and responded to YHWH’s reassurances of his ongoing presence and involvement, which unfold throughout the rest of Moses’ life as he led the Israelites on their conflict-marked journey (e.g. 33:12-34:10). Moses’ reciprocal response to God demonstrates the compatibility and congruence of Moses’ ontology and function with God’s. Theirs is a heart-level and moving dynamic relationship together indeed.

All during those years together, YHWH faithfully demonstrated to Moses the significance of his personal name YHWH (the LORD) as “I AM WHO I AM,” by his ongoing presence and involvement with him and the Israelites. YHWH’s unmistakable self-disclosures in his relational involvement is attested to throughout in the OT, thereby revealing the significance of the name YHWH as a relational verb. YHWH’s name as relational verb cannot be reduced down to a merely static appellation like other static titles (which is how we commonly use them in our worship)—for example, Almighty, King of Kings and Lord of Lords. I doubt that God is moved or impressed by our addressing him with such titles, no matter how lofty and eloquent they sound to us. The following summarizes this:

What is immediately distinguished in God’s terms is that the name of YHWH is not static. While YHWH (the Tetragrammaton) is the basic name of God identified in transcendence, YHWH does not remain apart but engages the theological trajectory that improbably intrudes on the human context, which is the original context created by YHWH. What emerged with the name of YHWH (“I AM WHO I AM”) has been associated with the verb ‘to be’ (*hayah*) to signify God’s being and existence. Yet, God’s ontology is an incomplete picture to distinguish YHWH, a view which philosophical theology has embraced to render God more conceptual and static. What YHWH distinguishes is the primacy of God’s function that is integral to and inseparable from God’s ontology. The being and nature of God don’t just exist but function in such a way that distinguishes who, what and how God is. Moreover, the function of God doesn’t just describe the ontology of God beyond any other gods, but it distinguishes the vulnerable presence and nature of God’s involvement in the human context. That is, *the significance of the name YHWH as a verb constitutes God’s whole ontology and function disclosed to us*, which otherwise as a nominal do not emerge in their wholeness. Further and deeper, as a verb YHWH’s name does not merely signify God’s activity in the human context—a common notion in OT theology—but constitutes God’s relational-specific action and involvement integral to the whole of God’s presence.

....What distinguishes the face-presence of YHWH is whole-ly constituted by relational-specific action for relational-specific involvement in the primacy of relational together; accordingly, God’s ontology and function cannot merely be observed by disengaged referential terms but can only be relationally experienced (not just spiritually or unilaterally) by the involving relational terms that vulnerably discloses God’s whole ontology and function in the name and with the face-presence of YHWH.⁸

YHWH vulnerably communicates only in relational-specific action by which YHWH’s presence, nature, and being are vulnerably disclosed in our human context. God’s presence constitutes his vulnerable relational-specific involvement with us in his relational context on his relational terms, which he enacts with us in our human context. Moreover—and this also is vital for us to understand for our worship language—YHWH as relational verb must not be transposed to a noun, the way we use names as mere identifiers, or to a referential title. YHWH as relational verb signifies nothing less than God’s vulnerable presence, relational nature, and qualitative being.⁹ YHWH’s name (*šēm yhwh*) signifies ‘YHWH in person’ (as in Ps 54:6; 76:1; 135:1,3; Isa 30:27), not passively ‘in person’ but as Subject always relationally involved with us individually and corporately. In the continuity between the OT and the NT, YHWH was and is always actively enacting his relational purpose of gathering and reconciling us to himself to make us whole together to compose his new creation family.

Whenever we gather for worship, we supposedly gather ‘in his name’ (cf. Mt 18:20), and when we do gather ‘in his name’ to praise, thank, and enjoy being God’s new

⁸ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Face of the Trinity*, my italics.

⁹ For further discussion of God’s vulnerable presence, relational nature, and qualitative being, see T. Dave Matsuo, *The Face of the Trinity*.

creation family together, Jesus stated, “there I am among *you*.” For Jesus to say “I am” must not be understood as static presence (as if only standing there, observing us), nor as just a partial “I AM,” but as the continuity of YHWH in relational-specific involvement with us. We need also to hear all of Jesus’ “I am’s” with this relational lens of YHWH as relational verb enacting God’s whole presence and involvement.

Yet, it is the common experience in corporate worship that what is missing is the primacy of relationship and the experiential reality of God’s presence and involvement with us. Our not being able to “hear” him is how the relational gap occurs in worship (issues of epistemology, relationship, and hermeneutics), as Jesus clarified to the would-be followers who didn’t understand his relational language on account of their referentialization of God’s words. Are the distinctions between the two languages, composing the way these languages determine how we see God and ourselves, and the relational and functional gap that we experience in worship all coming into focus? If we don’t have clarity of the name of God in our theology, then perhaps we are not worshipping the God we think we are in our practice. Don’t make the assumption of those who called Jesus “Lord.”

The Glory of God’s Name

What do you think of while singing about God’s glory? “Glory” is yet another one of those words that we have referentialized in churchspeak to mean much less than its biblical meaning. In worship, we correctly *give* God glory by *glorifying* God (praising and honoring) for who God is. However, this sense of glorifying ascribes to God divine attributes merely as static descriptors for God (what God has), or as active descriptions (what God does). Yet, apart from the vulnerable presence and relational-specific involvement of YHWH, these ascriptions are fragmentary and form stereotypes of God. We then praise God with this generalized understanding of God, which may have accuracy referentially but lack the full significance of God’s name. Thus, in order to understand God’s glory so that we can compatibly “sing the glory of his name” (Ps 66:2) to give him the honor he deserves, we have to get past our notions about his glory that are derived from spectacular images that we equate with God’s glory, majesty and splendor—images of pillars of cloud and fire (Ex 13:21), “a devouring fire” (Ex 24:16), “brightness” (Ezek 10:4; Lk 2:9), Jesus’ radiance “like the sun” in the transfiguration (Mt 17:2), and thunder (Jn 12:29). These images may inflate God’s glory in our worship vocabulary, but the reality needing to be understood is that they deflate the glory of God’s name in our worship practice.

We sometimes try to create in worship an affective (i.e. sensory) experience of God’s glory through our eloquent words (e.g. piles of adjectives in superlative form), audiovisual technology, and instrumental arrangements at high volume. Yet these words, images, and sounds are insufficient to understand the glory of God’s name. They only narrow down (deflate) God’s glory to visible and audible manifestations of God’s divinity, which have no relational significance to God or to us, though we may have an affective, even qualitative experience as we ponder God in reference to his awesomeness.

Jesus unmistakably and vulnerably embodied God’s glory (cf. Jn 1:14), which John’s Gospel qualifies with “the glory as of a father’s only son” that “we have seen.”

Yet when preachers claim (correctly) that Jesus is the real manifestation of God's glory, they commonly describe Jesus' glory in those same referential terms of light, majesty, splendor, and honor. The problem created by referentialization is that referential terms function in a comparative framework in which God comes out on top, in superlatives. This constructs an awesome profile of God without helping us understand the distinguished depth of the whole and uncommon God's glory, who wonderfully is vulnerably present and relationally involved with us for relationship together as family (as John illuminated, Jn 1:10-12).

Thinking about God's glory in these referential terms, we end up worshipping a narrow-down God fragmented from YHWH's name as relational verb. The consequence in our worship is, again, something less and some substitute for whole understanding of God and, thus of ourselves. For our worshipping God in likeness of God to become our experiential reality, we need to understand that YHWH as relational verb is inseparable from God's *glory*. This is where the significance of OT Hebrew illuminates "glory" for us beyond our referentialized notion, as the following states:

The word for glory in Hebrew (*kābôd*) comes from the word [*kābēd*] "to be heavy," for example, with wealth or worthiness. A person's glory...is shaped and seen on the basis of the perceptual-interpretive framework used for how a person is defined and what defines that person. The glory Jesus distinguished brings us further than an abstract attribute of the transcendent God and takes us deeper than a person defined by what he does and has. In the OT, *kābôd* is used poetically to refer to the whole person (Ps; 108:1).

The main idea of 'the glory of God' [*kābôd yhwh*] denotes the revelation of God's being, nature and presence to us, that is, the whole of who, what and how God is. Our initial introduction to God's glory is revealed in creation (natural or general revelation, Ps 19:1-4), which does not distinguish the whole of God but has heuristic purpose (Rom 1:20) that is complete upon encountering the deep profile of Jesus' face from inner out. Paul made conclusive that this disclosure of God's glory was not in referential terms but relational terms from inner out ("who has shone in our hearts") distinguished "in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6). In the incarnation the vulnerable disclosures of Jesus' whole person and presence engaged us with God's glory—that is, God's being, nature, and presence with us: the who (being), the what (nature) and the how (presence) of God. Who, what and how Jesus *is* vulnerably disclose who, what and how God *is*—that is to say, *phaneroō* [reveals in relational terms] God's glory only for relationship, not for systematic theology or doctrinal certainty. Therefore, the who, what and how in the distinguished face of Jesus is the hermeneutical key to the ontology of the glory of God, through whom we can know and understand who, what and how God is. And when the glory seen is the distinguished face of God, the person Jesus presents in whole ontology and function discloses the functional involvement of God's being, nature and presence with us as Subject in face-to-face relationship, not merely an Object to be observed.¹⁰

¹⁰ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Gospel of Transformation: Distinguishing the Discipleship and Ecclesiology Integral to Salvation* (Transformation Study, 2015), 64.

To summarize the above, God's glory (*kābôd yhwh*) is the relational truth of the ontology of God's being in the innermost as heart, his nature as intimately relational, and God's function as vulnerably present and relationally involved, both within the Trinity and with us, for us to deeply experience in covenant relationship together.¹¹ The glory of God is the experiential truth that Jesus embodied into the human context, as John's Gospel plainly claims in relational terms (without any embellishment in comparative referential terms), "we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son." Therefore, when we worship God for his glory, we become relationally accountable for the whole of who, what, and how God ongoingly enacts his name YHWH as relational verb.

If the glory of God revealed is not received as distinguished by the name of YHWH, there is no substantive basis to "ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name" (Ps 29:2; 96:8), to "bless his glorious name" (Ps 72:19), and to "sing the glory of his name" (Ps 66:2). And there is an insurmountable gap in our theology and practice between the experiential truth and experiential reality of God's glory....¹²

When the glory of God's name is distinguished unmistakably in our theology, then this completes one-half of the relational equation necessary for our worship practice. On the basis of this understanding of *kābôd* for God, God likewise holds us relationally accountable for the whole of who, what, and how we are ongoingly in the likeness of God's glory. *Kābôd* for human beings signifies the whole of our being, nature and presence—that is our whole person (Ps 57:8; 108:1), created in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the triune God. God in his *kābôd* seeks nothing less than our *kābôd*, the full weightiness of our whole person from inner out (the relational terms of Jn 4:23-24). As with relational righteousness (i.e. the whole of who, what and how we are that God can relationally count on), only with our whole person vulnerably present and involved with God on his relational terms can we worship the Lord in compatible response and congruent connection with the glory of God's name. This is our uncommon relational-specific involvement with God that can never be composed 'in their way' of relating to God notably with any relational distance. The glory of God's name holds us accountable for nothing less and no substitutes for our own *kābôd*. Therefore, worshipping God in likeness of God—whose personal name YHWH is Subject as relational verb—must reflect our ontology and function compatibly and congruently also in our subject-person also as relational verb.

"Do Not Misuse My Name"

What did God intend when he gave the third Commandment, "You shall not misuse (*šāw*) the name of the LORD your God" (NIV)? How we understand this commandment will influence our understanding of 'in my name' and vice versa. Some common interpretations are: we must not curse using God's name or use it in vain, must

¹¹ For an insightful examination of how Jesus' incarnation embodied God's being, nature, and presence, please see T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology: A Theological & Functional Study of the Whole of Jesus* (Christology Study, 2008); online at <http://4X12.org>.

¹² T. Dave Matsuo, *The Face of the Trinity*.

not speak of God lightly, must not live in ethical and moral ways that dishonor God's name. These are valid interpretations, but they are insufficient to deal with the conflict God's people face between the two competing contexts of the uncommon covenant relationship with God and their common human context.

To briefly review, God issued his relational terms for the covenant relationship in the Decalogue as he was preparing the Israelites to enter the land of Canaan, where they would encounter peoples who worshiped the idols of their deities. God was warning his people against the strong lure of embracing how the Canaanites related to their idols. This would involve (1) using YHWH's name for magical purposes, for hexing other persons, or to manipulate YHWH into doing something for them,¹³ and (2) involve their person in a kind of performance. An example of how pagan peoples related to their idols is demonstrated when God's prophet Elijah challenged the prophets of their deity Baal (1 Kgs 18:16-17-29). Those prophets were trying to get Baal to bring fire to their altar: "They...called on the name of Baal from morning until noon...they limped about...cried aloud and, as was their custom, they cut themselves until blood gushed out over them...raved on." The key words in this interaction are, "But there was no voice, no answer, and no response" (v.29). Of course not, because whatever humans create is not the substantive God, no matter what they call it. And while this narrative account seems humorous, its message is important for us.

The above are examples of persons in reduced ontology and function, which they also projected onto their deities. This is the outer-in ontology and function of the sin of reductionism, relating to their deities based on what they did from outer in, and what they wanted the deities to do for them. YHWH eliminated this fragmentary ontology and function—both for the Israelites' own persons but especially for the Israelites' view and treatment of the one God that would render God's name to mere referential title or descriptor. This points us to the primary misuse of God's name that the relational terms of this commandment focuses on.

The Hebrew word for "misuse" (*šāw'*) signifies worthless, fraud, deceit, and is often translated as "in vain." What *šāw'* means in God's relational terms goes even further than the common interpretations noted above. God also told the Israelites not to use his name 'in their way' because those ways have absolutely no relational significance to him. 'In their way' composes common ways in which their persons become incompatible with God's ontology (God's being and nature), and incongruent with how God functions (God's vulnerable involvement) in relationship together. Only worshipers vulnerably involved with God, relational-specific to YHWH with their whole person from inner out, are compatible and congruent with God's uncommon (holy) name and likeness.

The warning against using God's name in vain (cf. Isa 29:13) is echoed by Jesus when he warned against worship that is in vain or worthless to God (Mt 15:9). Without the involvement of persons' hearts from inner out, even if the worshipers preach, sing and shout God's name and 'in Jesus' name', such activity comprises worship having no relational significance to God because it is not composed by the *kābôd* of both God and those worshipers. This is virtual worship not distinguished as uncommon because it is incompatible with the holy (uncommon) God, having been shaped from the common

¹³ John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mak W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary to the Old Testament* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), 95.

human context. When our person is not whole-ly involved with God, we render God's name to referential language by making God's uncommon name merely common, which is another meaning of "profaning" God's name (cf. Lev 19:12). Again, God's name is inseparable from God's Subject-person and relational involvement, so using God's name in common ways renders God to a god of our shaping—again, an idol—thereby subtly conflicting with God's relational terms of the Decalogue.

Given the above discussion, we need to embrace that misusing God's name is not merely an outward behavior issue of 'what not to do'. We misuse God's name when we speak, sing, and proclaim God's name with anything less or any substitute for our whole person from inner out. We misuse God's name when we worship God incongruently with God's nonnegotiable relational terms, thereby presenting God with mere ontological simulation in virtual worship. In other words, when we misuse God's name, we misrepresent the whole and uncommon God in our theology and practice.

On the other hand, when our ontology and function are compatible and congruent in relational likeness to God, then our worshiping gives the glory (i.e. in and through our *kābôḏ*) due (i.e. congruent with) the glory (God's *kābôḏ*) of his name (e.g. Ps 29:2). This is not a merely academic discussion; we are all relationally accountable to God for how we worship God, "for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name" (cf. Ex 20:7). And God continues to challenge our theology and practice: "Where are you?" (as in Gen 3:4) and "What are you doing here?" (as in 1 Kgs 19:9,13). We can no longer assume the health of our worship condition, nor can we continue to make assumptions for our theology and practice that deny or avoid their need for urgent care. God deserves so much more from us than our sad substitutes in worship, the substitutes that we seem to be self-satisfied with, at least on the surface, given that we don't directly address the status quo of our theology and practice.

Understanding "in my name"

Getting back to "in Jesus' name we pray, amen," I suggest that our most common use of these words is referential, as something we're supposed to say, as a way of authenticating our prayers before the Father, and as a way of identifying ourselves as Christians by virtue of our words, like an outer-in identity marker. This latter purpose reason echoes the outer-in identity markers that many Jews clung to and practice—circumcision, purity, and dietary laws—which Paul definitively clarified as having no relational significance to God (e.g. Gal 5:6; 6:15; Rom 2:28-29; Col 2:21). But there is a further theological issue we need to understand.

As discussed earlier, God's personal name YHWH signifies the face of God's vulnerable presence and relational-specific involvement (as does God's glory) in the OT. In continuity with the OT, in the NT God's face embodied in the Word came into our human context, revealing for all humankind to experience the full significance of God's glory as revealed in Christ's face (2 Cor 4:4,6; Jn 1:14).

Although the Gospels focus on Jesus' incarnation and ministry on earth, Jesus never acted apart from the triunity of God, but rather repeatedly pointed to his relationship with the Father (Jn 4:34; 5:19-24,37; 6:32,38-40,44). Accordingly, whenever Jesus said, for example, to pray "in my name," he was never referring to himself only;

but rather Jesus said “my name” speaking as the Son inseparably in relationship with the Father and the Spirit. Thus, “my name” communicates as the whole of the triune God. With the same qualitative relational significance, whenever Jesus said “in me” as in “believes in me” (Jn 6:35), this signifies believing in the triune God—which counters Christians being overly christocentric. Commonly, the whole of the triune God (the Trinity) isn’t who we have in mind when we say “in Jesus’ name we pray.”

Jesus as the face of the whole and uncommon God embodied is therefore our indispensable key to knowing God’s ontology and function, as well as for understanding our ontology and function necessary to compatibly compose God’s new creation family in the Trinity’s likeness. And, for our prayer and worship practices to be compatible and congruent with the whole and uncommon Trinity, Jesus is our key to the communication necessary to make the relational connection with God in these practices.

In two vital scenes Jesus taught his disciples about prayer to illuminate this indispensable relational communicative act for us to be involved in for reciprocal relationship together. The first scene is the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus specifically addressed the difference between the common ways of praying by some Jews that took place in the religious contexts of his time (‘in their way’), and prayer that makes relational connection with the Father. First, Jesus critiqued those he called hypocrites because they prayed without relational significance but “so that they may be seen by others” (Mt 6:5). In their devoted practice, these Jews engaged in ontological simulation having no relational purpose and significance to God (cf. Mt 23:5), which encompasses all of our prayer-worship practices that don’t make relational connection with God. Therefore, this relational disconnect in prayer converges with the relational distance of ‘lips without heart’ that Jesus critiques on the same relational basis and for the same relational purpose.

The word ‘hypocrite’ in English is understood insufficiently as anyone who doesn’t practice what they preach, and even contradicts what they believe. The Greek roots of our English terms ‘hypocrite’ (*hypokritēs*) and ‘hypocrisy’ (*hypokrisis*) are more fully illuminated here, which points back to the discussion earlier about *prosōpon*, our masks:

The metaphorical sense of *hypokrisis* [is] taken from the world of Greek theatre: the action of a person which is similar to a stage performance as an actor. Deceit is not necessarily the intention of a *hypokrites*, though that is certainly a common issue. The main issue reflected by *hypokrisis*...involves the ontology of the person and its consequence for relationships. This sense of *hypokrisis* addresses the individual person’s functional determination and the underlying human ontology, which Jesus confronted and clarified.

Hypokritai (pl) make a presentation of self (even unintentionally) which does not correspond to or represent their whole person (signified by the function of the heart). Jesus exposed the worship practice of Pharisees and scribes to make their hypocrisy evident (Mk 7:6, cf. Jer 12:2); later, in his list of woes, he confronted them on their duplicity (Lk 11:39, Mt 23:25). The person presented was the measured (scripted if you will) expression of the outer...quantitative and distinctly observable aspects of the person (Mt 23:5-7) purposely for a process of self-determination and justification

(Mt 23:27-28).¹⁴

Paul identified this *hypokrisis* as “masquerade,” the presenting of a role or virtual identity to other persons in relationships. In his second letter to the Corinthian church, Paul addressed this issue existing in the context of church: “false apostles masquerading as apostles of Christ...Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light...his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness” (2 Cor 11:13-15, NIV). “Masquerade” (*metaschematizō*, which the NRSV translates as “disguise”) means to change one’s outward form. In contrast to *metaschematizō* is *metamorphoō*, the inner-out transformation of redemptive change (2 Cor 3:18; cf. Rom 12:2) that requires the transformation of one’s heart, how one defines oneself, and subsequently engages in intimate and equalized relationships together as the new creation family (2 Cor 5:17-18).

This dynamic concerning the presentation of *self* becomes a critical issue about reductionism in prayer and worship, because outwardly we cannot necessarily tell the difference between reduced worship offered to God by reduced persons, and whole worship from the whole worshipers God seeks for whole relationship. This difficulty reflects the genius of reductionism to give ontological simulation the illusion of significance to our practices even when they are dissonant to God. The key indicator of living in reductionism is found in the interrelated presence of (1) insensitivity to the qualitative in life from the inner out—most notably when we get preoccupied with secondary matters—and (2) a corresponding relational unawareness of relational connection (or disconnection), even as the heart and relationship are spoken about in worship gatherings. Worshipers who worship and pray “to be seen by or with others” function as *hypokritēs* in what is essentially performance or theater—even inadvertently and with good intentions. The subtle pursuit in this practice is that their reward is recognition from others, “their reward in full” (Mt 6:5, NIV; cf. 1 Cor 11:15). That is the only benefit, yet that may be all some persons want. It is unmistakable, however, that they did not make relational connection with the Father or the Son, not even to mention the Spirit.

Another related approach to prayer that Jesus exposed was praying and worshiping with the assumption that wordiness, repetitiveness, and rote prayers (and songs) will be heard by God (Mt 6:7; “their worship of me is a human commandment learned by rote,” Isa 29:13; cf. 1 Kgs 18:26-29; Ecc 5:2). Those who pray and worship in this way are focused on the secondary and outer criteria of quantity of words. Although Jesus was definitive about this outer approach to praying, isn’t this practice common in worship services, even the norm? Consider how we sing contemporary song choruses over and over, the wordiness in prayers in both worship and smaller groups, and prayers that are repeatedly recited or read referentially. This reflection should include examining whether our reciting the Lord’s Prayer is seen as only theological guideline for how we should pray, and whether our saying this prayer has any relational significance to God, or even to you. Either way raises the question of why we routinely repeat this prayer structure, because its relational terms evoke the vulnerable involvement of our whole person in reciprocal relationship with God, not mere words and lips presented to God.

Jesus continued to point his followers to pray in the way that has relational-specific significance to the Father: “go into your *innermost place* and pray *vulnerably* to

¹⁴ T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology*, 106-107.

your Father, and your Father who sees your *innermost* will *respond to you*” (Mt 6:6). Certainly the disciples had witnessed the stark contrast between how the *hypokrites* prayed and how Jesus prayed, and they needed guidance from Jesus. Thus Jesus shared the Lord’s Prayer to illuminate the relational context and process necessary for relational connection with God. Matthew’s Gospel places the Lord’s Prayer directly following Jesus’ teaching about praying (Mt 6:9-13). Luke’s Gospel places the Lord’s Prayer after Jesus had spent time alone with the Father (Lk 11:2-4). The disciples no doubt sensed the qualitative and relational distinction with which Jesus went to be with the Father alone, and asked Jesus to teach them to pray. As Jesus shared this most well-known prayer, Jesus was not telling his followers to recite his words referentially, but to come before the Father in Jesus’ own likeness of intimate relational involvement integral to the whole of the trinitarian interrelations. This trinitarian relational context and process is the significance of praying “in my name” in contrast to our common words “in Jesus’ name we pray, amen,” which we need to seriously consider to be no longer of significance to God or to us.

The Lord’s Prayer demonstrates Jesus’ relational language in God’s relational context and relational process, which integrally compose the whole relationship in God’s new creation family. In nothing less than this new relationship together of wholeness do we experience the relational reality of who and whose we are as daughters and sons. This experiential truth and experiential reality signify also “your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”—the relational outcome of relationship with the whole and uncommon God to experience together in our human context with no substitutes.

‘In my name’ is God’s relational shorthand for saying “to be involved with your ontology and function that I can count on to be who, what, and how you are in my own likeness—in the only way that proves accountable for my self-disclosures to you.” Any other use of God’s name is misuse, which misrepresents God in our theology and practice whether in prayer or worship. I have no doubt that God is either angered or grieved, likely both, whenever we pray the Lord’s Prayer ‘in their way’. And how God is affected intensifies immeasurably as we worship with anything less and any substitutes ‘in their way’.

Worshipping God “in my name”

Contrary to what commonly represents the most important activities of God’s people, worshipping and praying ‘in my name’ involves nothing less than participating in life together with the whole and uncommon God—relationally involved participation only on God’s nonnegotiable relational terms. This goes deeper than common notions of participating in God’s life. For us to participate in God’s life together as God’s new creation family is the purpose and relational outcome for why Jesus vulnerably embodied the intimate presence of the whole of God (i.e. the gospel). Jesus summarized this irreplaceable relational work in his intimate family prayer to the Father: “I made your name [the whole of us] known to them *in my vulnerable presence and relational involvement with them*, and I will *continue to* make it known, so that the *family* love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them” (Jn 17:26). We need to receive the whole gospel and participate in the whole and uncommon Life, Truth and Way embodying it.

Even as I have been writing this chapter, the Spirit has deepened God's relational messages into my heart: our Father longs for me/us to relationally know and understand him in the primacy of relationship together (cf. Jer 9:23-24). And that requires me/us to be redeemed from our reductionism and its counter-relational workings composed in referential language, in order to emerge whole in our ontology from inner out, and to live whole in function (composed in his relational language) "in his name." In other words composed in relational terms, for us (individually and corporately) to be and live in God's very own integral qualitative image and relational likeness, just as he created us to be (Gen 1:28) and newly creates us to live (Col 3:10; Eph 4:24; 2 Cor 3:18). This from-old-to-new transformation is the relational significance of God's relational imperative "be holy because I am holy," which we focus on in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Worship Whole-ly

“You are to distinguish between the holy and the common.”

Leviticus 10:10

“You shall be *uncommon*, because I am *uncommon*.”

Leviticus 11:44,45

What is sacred about worship that makes it holy? As we center our focus on holy worship, there are likely assumptions that must be clarified and corrected. For example, what do you think about God when you sing the old hymn “Holy, Holy, Holy”? Perhaps you envision the throne scene from the book of Revelation where four fantastical creatures continually proclaim, “Holy, holy, holy....” (Rev 4:8). Or your thoughts may rest on God as transcendent, as pure (i.e. without any sin), and beyond comparison to humans. Certainly God is ontologically different from us, but it is important for us to go deeper in our thinking about God’s holiness. While these aspects of God’s holiness are not incorrect, they are only fragmentary; that is, they have been narrowed down by our biased lens, which then don’t take into account all of God’s self-disclosures—specifically those disclosing his vulnerable presence and intimate relational involvement in our human context.

We also need to understand that for humans to be holy in likeness of the holy God goes much deeper than the common notions merely of moral purity and behavioral restrictions in daily living; holiness is by far much more encompassing and integrally encouraging to fragmentary theology and practice. In fact, when God’s people embody *holiness made whole*, then the world would likely take note of the contrast, that is, the difference God and God’s people make in the human context. Therefore, we urgently need to undergo nothing less than redemptive change *from* common definitions of ‘holy’ and ‘holiness’ that are mere static attributes in narrowed-down views of God and ourselves, *to* wholeness of holiness.

In the above Scripture, holy (*qāḏōsh*, *qāḏash*) means to consecrate to God and thus make distinct from what is ordinary function and separate from what is common; holy thereby signifies what is uncommon. Any understanding of God as ‘the Holy One’ must distinguish God’s uncommonness definitively from the common; such understanding currently is struggling to emerge. Also, ‘holy’ must distinguish *us* in uncommon function in worship and all church practice in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole and uncommon God. Surely God is tired of and grieved hearing us sing “Holy, Holy, Holy” while ascribing to God static fragmented attributes. God is not pleased as we sing his praises, yet while we lack whole understanding that leads to uncommon worship involvement with God on the basis of God’s uncommon relational terms. I too am tired of and grieved by outer-in application of “be holy” in the church’s theology and practice that gives primacy to ‘what to (not) do’ as terms of a moral code—and I’m certain that there are many others who feel the same way.

Indeed, ‘holy’ and ‘holiness’ shaped by common thoughts and ideas from human contextualization are no longer ‘holy’ and ‘holiness’, but merely referentialized language

in churchspeak (however sacred). In other words, just as God told the Levites in the OT, these words are addressed to us: “You are to distinguish between the holy and the common” (Lev 10:10), in order to be *uncommon*, because I am *uncommon*” (Lev 11:44,45). To paraphrase God’s words for today, “Be both compatible in ontology and congruent in function to mine so that you can be in relationship together with me.” If we can’t distinguish between the holy and common in both our theology and practice, then we by default are living in the common of our human contexts. Accordingly, our worship cannot have relational significance to God because we don’t have uncommon congruity for compatible relationship together.

What then has God disclosed about being holy that we’re missing?

Antecedents for Worship

Unless understanding of God’s holiness is from God’s self-disclosures, then we have no choice but to come up with our own definitions, just as we do with God’s name and God’s glory (discussed in the previous chap.). Our own definitions derived apart from or as revisions of God’s self-disclosures—that God communicates in God’s uncommon relational context and relational process—can be nothing more than of God’s communication. Such referentialized definitions are also problematic as applied to humans when God tells his people to be holy because he is holy. It cannot be stated enough: In our theology and practice—and for this chapter’s focus—what ‘holy’ and ‘holiness’ signify to God must be rooted in God’s self-disclosures. Anything less or any substitutes for God’s self-disclosures render our views of God to epistemological illusion, resulting in idolization (idealization and stereotyping) of God. Accordingly on this basis, our worship practices are rendered to ontological simulation determined by our biases and preconceptions, including both our traditions and creative innovations, which we practice even with good intentions.

The perception, knowledge, and understanding of God’s uncommonness necessary for our worship to become uncommon are based on God’s relationally specific self-disclosures. Who, what, and how God discloses pivot on God’s uncommon presence and whole involvement throughout Scripture. Only God’s presence and involvement with us in relationship compose God’s relational context and relational processes in which God vulnerably communicates his desires by the Spirit. Without God’s presence and involvement in relationship together, all our “knowledge” and “understanding” must depend on what we come up with using our own means (e.g. based on Greek philosophy and science). How then does God demonstrate holiness in the human context so that we can know and understand what it also means for us to be holy/uncommon in God’s likeness?

God made the relational-specific response to us by vulnerably coming into our human context to directly disclose who, what, and how God is—and this includes how God is uncommon and therefore distinguished from the common. For this relational-epistemic purpose, the Father told Peter, James and John (and all of us) at Jesus’ transfiguration to “Listen to my Son” (Mt 17:5). Yet, as the disciples learned the hard way, listening to Jesus is not as simple as it sounds when we are predisposed to pay attention to certain things while ignoring other matters (cf. Mk 4:24; 8:18). All this is

critical to understand how Jesus was different in the incarnation so that the uncommon was distinguished from the common. As discussed in chapter 1, our perception needs to be redeemed from its reductionist bias that focuses on secondary matter of what God does and has (e.g. divine attributes such as holiness), and is likewise focused on fragmentary parts of Jesus (i.e. his teaching, miracles, example).

Our perception is made whole then only as we are vulnerably involved in intimate relationship with the embodied Word of God (cf. Rom 8:6). Only as we are involved in the discipleship-worship relationship on God's theological trajectory and relational path on God's relational terms can we relationally know and understand God. And only in this relational reality can we experience transformation of our epistemic-hermeneutical means (interpretive framework and lens) to perceive what is whole instead of only fragmentary. This relational connection together with the whole of God constitutes the epistemic humility and ontological humility necessary for us to listen and receive God's self disclosures, and thereby know and understand the uncommon God and what it means for us to be uncommon in likeness of God. This relational outcome is contingent on our involvement in this relational process.

Persons whose epistemology (how we know what we know) depends on human reasoning function as the so-called "wise and learned." Jesus used the metaphor "wise and learned" in a vital scene with the Father and with the disciples (Lk 10:21, NIV) to refer to persons who cannot receive the Father's disclosures ("you have hidden these things from"); such persons don't function with the vulnerableness of their person in epistemic humility and ontological humility, and thus they maintain relational distance. On the other hand, persons who listen to, receive, and respond to God's vulnerable self-disclosure function in such epistemic humility; these are persons who Jesus metaphorically describes as "little children." 'Little children' acknowledge and accept their own epistemic limits and ontological constraints, vulnerably admit they are wrong and inadequate (cf. Job 42:3b-c), and function as subjects in compatible and congruent practice on God's relational terms to be relationally involved in contrast to the relational distance of the "wise and learned." Which are you—the 'wise and learned' or 'little children'? Which do you think the global church is? Which are worship thinkers and planners? Which are persons in the academy?

In both Hebrew and Greek, "holy" (*qādōsh* and *hagios*, respectively), essentially means separate or apart from the ordinary and common. 'Holy' for humans or physical objects means 'consecrated' or, notably, 'separate', as in 'set apart from common usage in service to God'. (By the way, this latter definition cannot be applied to God.) We need to reject the assumption that holiness merely means moral purity. This latter so-called holiness is achieved on the basis of what we don't do or have (i.e. certain sins), which is the same reductionist basis as defining our person by the outer criteria of what we do or have, or don't do and don't have. Such holiness isn't holiness at all, but the reduced practices of piety from outer in, for which Jesus used the metaphor in his rebuke to the Pharisees: "you clean the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence" (Mt 23:25). Holiness narrowed down to merely moral purity does not account from the sin of reductionism, but only reinforces it by its fragmentary focus. Our understanding of 'holy' and 'holiness' for humans must derive from what these words mean for God—that is, first and foremost in relational terms that Jesus embodied with his whole person.

When used of God, ‘holy’ is correctly defined as ‘uncommon’. Uncommon signifies that God is distinguished from the common on God’s own terms; God is not subject to any human terms, neither to define God nor to contextualize God in any way. I have fervently sung worship songs about God’s holiness to affirm that God’s holiness sets God apart from all else. Yet, these notions can subtly shift and thereby misconstrue a view of God who is not just ‘wholly other’ but also as ‘wholly apart’. However, God chooses *not* to remain apart, as the OT through the NT have attested, and the Spirit continues to attest. On the contrary, God’s uncommonness is distinguished from common function *by* his vulnerable presence and relational involvement.

Still, even though YHWH, the Holy One (Ps 22:3; Isa 40:25) vulnerably came into the human context for face-to-face relational involvement with us, YHWH came to us from beyond the common created context of the universe. It is critical, therefore, to understand and embrace that God is the only one who can validly distinguish what constitutes God as uncommon and thus distinct in ontology and function from the common’s human contextualization. This is vital for our own theology and practice in epistemic humility.

Jesus, the Uncommon Key to God’s Self-Disclosures

Interactions between Jesus and three persons in particular illuminate for us the differences between common and uncommon, with direct implications for worship in likeness of God: the former prostitute who washed Jesus’ feet with her tears, Mary (Martha’s sister), and Peter. I have written about these three in other studies, and will again address them because they are so important as examples for us to take to heart for our worship theology and practice. I focus on Peter in this chapter, and the former prostitute and Mary in the next chapter. Notable for us to pay attention to is how Jesus was involved with each person, and then how they were involved with Jesus. Jesus and these three persons demonstrate for us the *three issues for all practice* in discipleship and worship that we are accountable for.

The three major issues for all practice were vulnerably embodied in Jesus’ earthly life, and provide a necessary framework by which to ongoingly examine our practice of who and what we are as worshipers/disciples (our ontology), and how we are involved in relationship (our function). These three major issues for practice help us to be very specific as we examine our actions and their significance in worship. If we are willing and committed to the LORD for redemptive change, the three issues for discipleship-worship practice are invaluable for clarifying the ways we need to change in order for our worship response to be compatible to God for congruent relational connection, to be uncommon as God is uncommon. God’s demonstration of the **three major issues for all practice**—and therefore how we need to live and worship in uncommon likeness—are as follows:

- (1) The significance of the person presented, demonstrating the integrity of the whole person
- (2) The quality and integrity of one’s communication necessary to make relational connection

- (3) The depth level of relational involvement in God’s family love (*hesed* and *agapē*), defined as ‘how to be involved’ in relationships, not focused primarily on ‘what to do’ (even sacrifice)

1. The Person Presented: the Uncommonness of God

As God’s thematic relational-specific action to restore humanity and the rest of creation to wholeness unfolded in the human context, God made improbable strategic and tactical shifts by sending the Son himself into our “neighborhood” to meet us Face to face (e.g. Jn 1:14; 2 Cor 4:6). Immanuel (God with us) came embodied whole-ly for all to see and experience in the person of the Son—that is, a person embodying a subject for relationship, not an object to be observed or even worshiped and served. During his earthly ministry Jesus presented nothing less than and no substitutes for his whole person, inseparable from the Father and Spirit.

Persons witnessed and experienced in Jesus’ person the whole of God (the Trinity), who is vulnerably available to anyone for relationship together. And even though the whole of God embodied in the Son is not the entirety of transcendent God, *who* and *what* persons experienced was nothing less than and no substitute for God’s being, nature, and presence. Beyond the significance of the manger, cross and resurrection, the person Jesus ongoingly presented was who, what and how God is—signifying the incarnation principle of *nothing less and no substitutes*. This is how the person Jesus presented is the ontological, functional and relational keys to know and understand the whole and uncommon God, and for our own person that we present in relationships, notably to God in uncommon worship not shaped from human contextualization (‘in their way’).

What we need to pay close attention to is God’s enactment of his personal name YHWH in relational-specific involvement composing God’s self-disclosures. The following excerpt demonstrates God’s relational self-disclosures, not with a referentialized lens, but with the qualitative-relational lens perceiving the significance of the person presented in the incarnation:

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 for 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*.¹

¹ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Global Church Engaging the Nature of Sin & the Human Condition Reflecting, Reinforcing, Sustaining, or Transforming* (Global Church Study, 2016); online at <http://4X12.org>, 94, my italics.

During his time on earth, Jesus ongoingly made known his intimate relationship with his Father, and made intimate relational connection with his disciples in order to bring them to the Father for their own relationship together in likeness of Jesus' relationship with the Father. John's Gospel highlights Jesus' words revealing that the relationship between Jesus and the Father is so intimate that they are "one" (Jn 10:30,38; 17:20-26), such that to know him is to know the Father and to see him is to see the Father (Jn 8:19; 12:45; 14:7,9). Certainly Jesus' uncommon presence and involvement were distinguished beyond anyone and anything in the common, which are perceived and experienced only in his relational terms (contrast the interaction in Jn 6:28-30, 45-60). As Jesus' disciples would grow in deep relational connection with Jesus, this would bring them into whole relationship with the Father in the relational progression of discipleship to God's very own new creation family. Jesus further revealed that the Spirit would be his relational replacement in whom the whole of God (the Trinity) would come to dwell in the hearts of his followers (Jn 14:15-21, 23; cf. Eph 2:21-22). Yet this new creation family is unlike what is common in the human context, just as Jesus presented in whole relational terms to distinguish his uncommon family (Mk 3:21, 31-35).

In all these disclosures, Jesus is the key who definitively illuminates how the triune God relationally responded to the human relational condition "to be apart" from God's relational whole relational context and process. Nevertheless, the full significance of Jesus' incarnation isn't understood until we experience the relational outcome of being made whole in relationship together with the whole and uncommon God. This is why a commonly held incomplete Christology which views Jesus in partial terms (e.g. from manger directly to the cross) is just plain wrong and communicates a "different gospel" (cf. Gal 1:6-7); and still this narrowed-down Christology prevails in much of church theology and practice. This common view of Jesus fragments and reduces the whole of God's self-disclosures, thereby functionally reshaping the God we worship in the process of "idolization of God."

The relational process to depth of understanding and knowing Jesus—and thus the Father, as Jesus says (e.g. Jn 10:30; 12:44; 14:9)—can take place only in *God's relational context* and by *the trinitarian relational process of family love*. This relational context and process determine the primary purpose and significance of discipleship (inseparably with spirituality), in which God's primacy of relationship is nonnegotiable: to follow Jesus in this relational context and relational process, in the relational progression from disciples to friends (Jn 15:13-14) all the way to the Father; as we do, our experiential reality is face to face connection with the Father as adopted daughters and sons in the new creation family constituted only in uncommon likeness of the Trinity (Jn 17:21-26). This relational outcome is our ongoing relational reality in compatible reciprocal relationship with the Spirit (2 Cor 5:17; 4:6; Rom 8:15-16; Gal 4:4-7). The relational process by which we participate in this uncommon life together is the uncommon dynamic of family love in likeness of the trinitarian persons' interrelationships, which Jesus vulnerably makes known to us.

How we perceive the person Jesus presented during the incarnation must perceive and understand *all* that Jesus disclosed through his relational words and relational-specific actions. We must stop fragmenting Jesus' person by paying attention to only parts of the incarnation, such as his teachings, miracles, and sacrifice on the cross. As important as these are, they don't constitute the whole of Jesus' relational work in family

love. John's Gospel is vital for this qualitative-relationally heavy (as in "glory") view of Jesus as having "made known" (*exegeomai*, to bring into full view, Jn 1:18; 17:6-26) the Father before the very eyes of our hearts (cf. Eph 1:18)—nothing less and no substitutes. To highlight this in Jesus' words (paraphrased): to see me is to see the Father, to know me is to know the Father (Jn 14:7,9); the Father and I are one (10:30; 17:11,21-22); the Father is in me, and I am in the Father (10:38b; 17:21).

The Person Jesus presented, and that the Spirit's person continues to present just as Jesus did, is nothing less than and no substitutes for God—the whole and uncommon Trinity who is vulnerably present now and intimately involved with us in reciprocal relationship person to person. Regardless of our worship context (e.g. liturgical, contemporary, alternative) he wants our whole person presented as subject-person, not presenting performers and passive objects; our God wants all of us together, to make intimate relational connection in worship as the new creation family God has saved us to be integrally whole-ly and uncommon.

Worship leaders, preachers, singers, and musicians can no longer hide behind performance of their roles or their credentials (e.g. education and training), and the congregation can no longer hide behind the former, can no longer depend on others to mediate their worship, and cannot take comfort in passivity or anonymity. All these ways in our theology and practice reflect the subtle influence of some common source in our surrounding contexts. If any of us present ourselves in those ways to God as our worship, we do not have the integrity of being whole, but rather only present parts of their person, if not some substitute. Such presentations certainly appear to be the common prevailing in most of our worship. While such presentations may be sufficient for those participating in these gatherings, the who, what and how of the persons that God gets have neither inner-out integrity nor relational significance to God.

Because God vulnerably embodies his heart to be relationally involved with us, anything less from our persons would not be compatible reciprocal response for congruent relationship together. But when we make ourselves vulnerable to God and God's relational terms for our compatible and congruent reciprocal response in worship, this leads to the outcome of whole holiness in God's image and likeness that indeed praises the whole and uncommon Trinity. This distinction reflects the difference between the holy/uncommon and the common; and this is what we are to distinguish and how we distinguish ourselves as the worshipers the Father seeks—that is, those who worship whole-ly, with vulnerable honesty of our hearts (Jn 4:23-24). Just as God told the Levites to distinguish between the holy and the common, now that all Christians comprise God's "priesthood" (1 Pet 2:9), this is *our* person-al and collective family relational responsibility (Eph 4:20-25). If we are not willing to distinguish between the holy and the common, God will hold our persons accountable for the relational consequences (cf. Rom 14:12; Heb 4:13).

2. The Quality and Integrity of Communication:

God's Uncommon Relational Language and the Embodied Word

God has made it clear in his covenant (old and new) promises that the whole of God can be counted on in the covenant relationship with his people to be who God claims to be and to enact what God promises. God does not lie (Ti 1:2), mislead, deceive or

communicate mere referential information, but communicates only in the relational truth of God's relational language (discussed in previous chap.). Indeed, the incarnation presented nothing less than and no substitutes for the embodied Word of God into the human context for the purpose of relationship together.

God ongoingly communicates relational messages with the quality and integrity of who, what, and how God is, so that relational connection is always accessible on God's side of the relational equation. To review, relational messages communicate the following: (1) What one is saying about him- or herself; (2) how the speaker feels about the other person being addressed; and (3) how the speaker feels about their shared relationship. The very fact of the incarnation is God's relational messages vulnerably embodied for one relational outcome, so that through all of God's relational provisions we may relationally experience and thus know and understand the whole and uncommon God. God desires and expect this of us (cf. Jer 9:23-24).

Additionally, the incarnation principle of "nothing less and no substitutes" composes the significance of the Person presented as God's righteousness, more accurately rendered 'relational righteousness'—to distinguish it from the common use of 'righteousness' as a somewhat abstract static attribute of God. 'Relational righteousness' signifies that God can be counted on in the new covenant relationship to be whole-ly who, what, and how God says he is—nothing less and no substitutes. Relational righteousness is essential for us to embody uncommonly the worship relationship. Relational message (2) is the one we Christians think we understand best: God loves us. Yet even this message has gotten reduced in our narrowed-down understanding of love as what God does (notably as just sacrifice), and not as the depth of involvement in ongoing relationship. The depth of involvement is clearly distinguished in many of Jesus' uncommon interactions with persons, which certainly challenged and confronted the common religious practice in those times—not to mention in our time today. And relational message (3) is one that we as the new creation family must grow further in hearing from God, and will be increasingly blessed in as we enact in like involvement.

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

Can God count on us to be whole-ly (whole + holy) who we say we are—in uncommon ontology and function that is distinguished from how we commonly live? On God's part, all the words Jesus uttered were congruent with the person he vulnerably presented, for the integrity and quality of all his communication. Any failure on our part to understand God's language reveals more about us and the inadequacy of our epistemic, hermeneutic, and relational involvement.

Moreover, for communication to make relational connection, how the listener/receiver hears is inseparable from what the speaker utters. God doesn't speak in a secret language that only "elite" Christians (e.g. mystics, scholars) can understand, nor does he speak only in theophanies (see Num 12:6-8). For persons (and traditions) to claim so are in error, simply wrong, perhaps elitist, certainly self-serving or exclusivist—the position assumed by temple leaders objecting to the children worshiping whole-ly (Mt 21:15-16). Church leaders, persons in the academy, and even many Christians in the pews continue to elevate referential knowledge in referential language, assuming, for example, more education better qualifies persons to interpret God's Word, and to speak for God.

This attitude is no different from the temple leaders who assumed they knew who Jesus was better than the children who loudly praised Jesus after he cleansed the temple (Mt 21:14-16). To briefly summarize that scene, temple practice had, by Jesus' time, become so distorted and narrowed down that women, Gentiles, and disabled persons were denied access, thus marginalizing them.² Jesus entered the temple and cleansed it of the practices and activities that had reduced the temple to "a den of reductionists" (v.13; cf. Jer 7:11). Jesus thus restored the temple to its primary function in wholeness as God's relational context for relational involvement together as "a house of prayer" open to all persons (Mk 11:17; Isa 56:7). By his uncommon actions—which certainly cannot be denied of the use of physical force—Jesus restored access to God to all those who functioned inner out with righteousness ("who choose what pleases me...who bind themselves to the LORD...to love the name of the LORD, and to be worship him...who hold fast to my covenant *relationship*," Isa 56:1-7, NIV). Accordingly then, the uncommon fight for wholeness (as in peace) requires the rigorous fight against reductionism (as in Lk 12:51-53).

The primacy that God gives to relationship above all else is unmistakable in Jesus' relational action to "re-sanctify" the temple, that is, to redeem it by setting it apart from common function to restore the temple to its original purpose for relationship together. This restored temple function for relationship with God became immediately evident as blind and lame persons came to Jesus there and were healed and made whole from inner out. Then in uncommon function the children (*paidas*) responded by shouting in the temple "Hosanna to the son of David!" (Mt 21:14-15). The chief priests and teachers of the law became indignant when they "saw the children shouting in the temple area, 'Hosanna to the Son of David'" (Mt 21:15, NIV). These temple leaders confronted Jesus about the children proclaiming such worship in the temple; their indignation exposed their own fragmentary condition from their reduced theological anthropology (ontology and function), assuming that based on their knowledge and expertise they knew better than kids.

Whether in worship or in discipleship, the problem for us is that we can never adequately understand and receive Jesus' relational language by using a referential

² The outer temple courts were supposed to be for Gentiles but were jammed with vendors for persons to change currency and buy animals to sacrifice. Craig Keener comments that Jesus' action probably wasn't so much about commerce per se taking place but all this activity took up the space that was supposed to be for Gentiles. Jesus' reference to "a house of prayer for *all peoples*" (Isa 56:7) is significant for the issue of who can rightly worship God in his temple. Keener also notes that the OT temple didn't exclude women or foreigners from the temple, but the architects of Herod's temple extended Jewish purity laws to exclude those persons from access. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary, New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 101.

language lens; and this was the disciples' ongoing problem in understanding Jesus. "Do you still not perceive or understand?" (Mk 8:17), and "Have I been with you [pl.] all this time, and you still do not know me?" (Jn 14:9) Ears that fail to hear, eyes that fail to see, hearts that fail to understand (Mk 8:17-18) signify our person at a relational distance, who didn't make relational connection with Jesus because his language is only for relational purposes and not primarily to dispense information, as referential language is designed to do. God's relational language cannot be reduced by any form of our own dialect in 'worshipspeak' (referential language in worship, similar to referentialized church language as 'churchspeak') and still be God's voice.

Therefore, whether we are speaking to or about God, or trying to speak for God, none of these sounds will have relational significance to God if we are not involved with God in compatible ontology and congruent function of our person. We are all faced with the need to die to trying to engage in relationship with God on our own terms—which includes using referential language from human contextualization—so that we can emerge in the qualitative integrity of whole and uncommon ontology and function. This involves emerging in God's relational context and process and being "relationalized" in God's relational language, in contrast and conflict with being de-relationalized by referential language. The Father seeks worshipers whose language he can count on to reflect our person honestly, with the qualitative integrity of who, what, and how we really are—nothing less and no substitutes.

3. The Depth of our Relational Involvement: Uncommon Family Love

The incarnation is the incomparable enactment of God's relational-specific response to us in our human condition, the human relational condition summarized as 'to be apart' from the trinitarian relational context and process of God's whole. John's Gospel summarized the essence of this unfathomable relational response to us in our human condition: "for God so loved the world" (Jn 3:16), to redeem us and reconcile us together in God's very own family—the new creation family. God's family love as *hesed* and *agapē* are the depth and breadth of God relational involvement with all human creatures to such an extent that Jesus came and "having loved his own, loved them to the end" (Jn 13:1b). There is no other primary purpose for all of God's enactments in the world than to gather persons into the trinitarian relational context (God's whole), and on the basis of God's relational grace. The relational outcome for us when we compatibly respond to God's relational initiatives (composing the best news of the gospel) is for us to be adopted into this new creation family as beloved daughters and sons. This is our primary and uncommon calling, which must take precedence over ministry and service, and all other priorities that *we* self-determine with good intentions.

Jesus' presence and involvement with persons was always accessible for deeper relational connection—and now ongoingly open and vulnerable for heart-to-heart relationship 'behind the curtain' and 'with the veil removed' (Heb 10:19-22; 2 Cor 3:16-18). Whenever Jesus' deep involvement with persons was reciprocated and connection was made—in the redemptive process of dying to the old and receiving God's relational grace to be raised up *new*—this intimate connection made persons whole in their ontology. Conjointly, whenever persons vulnerably reciprocated congruently from inner-out, their experiential reality was their whole function to make ongoing relational

connection with the Trinity—Father, Son, and Spirit—as members in God’s new creation family.

Mary (Martha’s sister) is the clearest example for us of the depth of congruent relational involvement with Jesus, whereas other disciples (notably Peter) had difficulty reciprocating. Jesus’ vulnerableness in his deep relational involvement with persons was evident throughout his earthly life as he experienced the range of responses from humans, from open reception (e.g. Jn 1:12-13), to relational distance (e.g. the disciples, Jn 14:9a), to rejection (Jn 1:11, 6:66). Jesus was ongoingly exposed to human sin (notably the sin of reductionism), and deeply affected by it (e.g. Lk 19:41-47).

Yet, without being influenced and determined by these human contexts—such that the uncommon would be compromised, diluted, and simply rendered common—Jesus unwaveringly embodied God’s relational grace and family love (*agapē*) to human persons with nothing less and no substitutes. Persons such as Levi (Matthew) and Zacchaeus experienced Jesus in this way (face to face, heart to heart) especially at Jesus’ table fellowship—a relational context whose process becomes for us the definitive expression of the depth of Jesus’ involvement with persons, and which needs to determine all participation in Holy-Uncommon Communion. Mary, Levi, and Zacchaeus are discussed more fully in chapter 4.

We need to understand that just as it was for Jesus, our own vulnerableness is necessary to experience the depth of uncommon family love; and vulnerableness is essential to embody and extend family love to others to gather and build with Jesus the whole and uncommon God’s new creation family. In human relations within the new creation family, we can be sure that this vulnerableness will bring frustration, pain, disappointments, and grieving to our hearts, all of which Jesus experienced to assure us of his ongoing empathy (Jn 14:27; 15:11; 16:33). This is an important aspect of the cost of being uncommon in likeness of the Uncommon (cf. Jesus’ grief, Lk 19:41-42, and Paul’s attitude, Phil 3:10). Yet, we must not fear pain, since we are not alone in it, and it is part of the territory of participating in God’s life in the depth of God’s family love. The sharing in the trinitarian process of family love—as Jesus embodied uncommonly and definitively for us (Jn 15:9; 17:26)—is how holiness and love are inextricably interrelated. It is only at this depth of relational involvement that we “share with” Jesus (Jn 13:8), that is, to participate in God’s uncommon life, which his footwashing for his disciples (Jn 13:1-8) initiates us into (discussed shortly below).

As our epistemological, hermeneutical, and relational key, Jesus has vulnerably embodied the three major issues for all practice to demonstrate ‘whole holiness’—that is, the whole (not fragmentary) and uncommon ontology and function of Jesus’ person vulnerably present and intimately involved in the primacy of relationship. Our discipleship-worship relationship must be in Jesus’ whole and uncommon likeness—that is, in likeness of Jesus’ whole holiness—to take us beyond merely a common likeness in a fragmented holiness (an oxymoron). The person we present to God, the integrity of our communication in worship, and the depth level of our relational involvement with God depend on whether we vulnerably receive and compatibly respond to the whole of the incarnation, or just selective part of Jesus (e.g. his moral teachings). The whole of Jesus or fragmentary parts will determine whether our Christology is complete or incomplete.

Will our Christology be made whole to enable us to hear the incarnation communicating whole-ly to us on God’s own relational terms in God’s uncommon relational language? Or, in contrast and conflict, will our incomplete Christology continue to limit and constrain the incarnation according to our common terms, constraining us at a relational distance in ontological simulations from human contextualization and referential language? These issues are what God says we must distinguish between—in both our theology and our practice.

What the global church has been choosing—likely by default, yet still accountable for—is evident in worship gatherings wherever there is constraint and distance in relationships, along with any “tribalism” (or provincialism) based on outer criteria of denominations, race, ethnicity, class, age, gender, special interests, and more. These are all conditions of the common (the profane) of human contextualization, and are antithetical to God’s new creation family. Chapter 4 discusses the new creation family in greater depth, but suffice it to say here that these fragmentations grieve the whole and uncommon God, and pervade the global church. And until the global church is transformed into God’s uncommon likeness, we cannot worship God whole-ly.

Peter’s Common Path of Good Intentions

Peter was unpredictably challenged when his life was intruded on by the whole Face of the embodied Word, the full profile of whom was difficult to embrace. In many ways, Peter’s relationship with Jesus is deeply enlightening for anyone who follows Jesus. Peter’s struggles and subsequent transformation from his common practice as disciple-worshiper to uncommon practice has been illuminating for my own unfolding relationship with God. As we continue to delve deeper into the significance of “worshiping God in likeness of God” with whole holiness, Peter’s life—who is representative of the other disciples—is also very encouraging and helpful to our own discipleship-worship relationship.

I have heard various teachings that Peter’s difficulties in his relationship with Jesus were due to mere character quirks, and leave his struggles at that. But so simplistic a response diminishes the depth of Jesus’ love for Peter, and reduces our own accountability to the “*who, what, and how of the whole* of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6) in our own discipleship-worship relationship. Peter’s struggles highlight key challenges and struggles with self-determination in reduced ontology and function for any of Jesus’ followers. These include issues that we’re not even aware we have, which are likely from underlying assumptions we live by, based mostly on a theological anthropology defining our person by the parts of what we do and have, thus are shaped by the common in surrounding contexts. It’s important that we understand how Peter’s common (read reduced) ontology and function were unsurprisingly incompatible and incongruent with God’s uncommon (holy) terms for Face-to-face relationship together. The relational consequence for Peter was that he often did not perceive nor receive the depth of Jesus’s presence and involvement, which he needed so that he could become whole and uncommon in his theology and practice, including his worship.

Just as we need to de-idolize God in order to be able to listen to God clearly on God's relational terms, we also need to de-idealize Peter from our common preconceptions of him, and to allow him to get down off any pedestal we've put him on. Certainly Peter was significant: he was part of Jesus' inner circle, the apparent leader among the Twelve, was named "Peter" by Jesus to signify "the rock [on which] I will build my church." (Mt 16:18), and the first bishop of Rome (or the first Pope). Yet, we need to stop fragmenting Peter's person into these "parts" of his title and roles. Only then can we listen carefully to Jesus' relational interactions chastening Peter, and through these involvements receive the Spirit's relational communications to us for our own discipleship-worship relationship.

As we more deeply examine Peter's issues with a qualitative and relational interpretive lens, we begin to see that the heart of Peter's difficulties with Jesus was his resistance to being vulnerable with Jesus. Moreover, we will come to appreciate with Peter (later in his journey) God's call to uncommonness in God's likeness: "as he who called you is *uncommon*, be *uncommon* yourselves in all your *practice*; for it is written, "You shall be *uncommon*, for I am *uncommon*" (1 Pet 1:15-16)—in uncommon compatible response to the whole and uncommon God. As we continue, pay attention to how common Peter's issues are in your Christian contexts, notably how persons function in worship.

One area of Peter's worship and discipleship that we tend to affirm him for are his sincerity and good intentions (e.g. Lk 5:4-8; Jn 6:66-69; Mt 16:21-23). We also sympathize with Peter's impulsiveness, seeing it as a personality trait of spontaneity that simply got him in trouble at times—again, with good intentions. Are sincerity, good intentions, and a harmless character trait "enough" in God's eyes, that is, for our ontology and function to be compatible and congruent with God's?

Peter's relationship with Jesus had ups and downs. The common thread of Peter's 'downs' is that Peter's practice stemmed from a comparative process of his self-determined terms ('in their way') for being Jesus' disciples and worshiper. Specifically Peter used a biased lens through which he viewed persons, including himself and Jesus, in terms of fragmented outer parts of what he and Jesus did or had. On this quantitative basis, Peter engaged his common comparative process with Jesus. With his bias Peter constrained himself and Jesus to outer-in roles as student and teacher—Jesus the rabbi in a higher-better status, and Peter the student in a lower-less status. By making this distinction, he created a relational barrier between them. Peter's fragmentary practice is evident in two key interactions with Jesus: the first was Peter's worship at Jesus' transfiguration, and the second interaction took place at the last table fellowship when Jesus prepared to wash the disciples' feet.

At the transfiguration, Peter, James and John were confronted by the whole ontology and function of Jesus (along with Elijah and Moses), and fell down frightened (Mt 17:1-8). Controlled by his fear, Peter's first impulse (his default mode) was the outer-in focus on doing something rather than to be involved with Jesus relationally in this defining moment. While the content of Peter's communication was about his offering, what was really going on inside Peter was that he was frightened (par. Mk 9:6). Instead of admitting his fear to Jesus, Peter presented something less than his whole person from inner out, a substitute in the form of offering to make three shelters. Peter was reacting to

the situation, functioning as an object rather than responding as a subject to Jesus' Subject-person being vulnerably revealed. As an object, Peter focused on the secondary matter of 'what to do' in worship over being vulnerably involved with Jesus in his relational response of worship. This limited any depth of Peter's relational involvement with Jesus to the shallowness of his relational distance during this exclusive moment of Jesus' full self-disclosure as the whole of God.

It is critical for us today to learn from Peter's common reductionist practice; we need to recognize the substitutes we too offer in worship, and that so much of our practice engages us as objects reacting in default mode to the 'circumstances' of worship (e.g. being prompted by worship leaders, functioning passively as observers of a performance). This default mode signifies the relational distance that is defining for what prevails commonly in relationships today, and that pervades worship practice today—even as offerings are lifted up in worship of God's name. Who does God 'get' from us when we function in this mode of the common?

Peter's heart was unfree to be vulnerably and directly involved in worship with Jesus' person, and therefore his worship at best could only be something offered indirectly (i.e. apart from face to Face)—performing a service, not unlike Martha in the kitchen. We might want to credit Peter with having good intentions, but there is a crucial matter for us to understand here: Peter's worship practice had no relational significance because he remained relationally distant from Jesus. Peter's focus lacked relational clarity, and his indirect response and measured words emerged more from his guarded heart than relational involvement with Jesus. In terms of the relational dynamic, Peter worshiped with a relational barrier (the significance of the veil over his heart), not vulnerably with Jesus face to face, heart to heart. His worship response was incompatible and incongruent with Jesus' presence and involvement with Peter (and the others). Theologically, how Peter worshiped Jesus reflected his "hybrid theology,"³ and his practice was with a divided heart—both of which were composed without whole-ness in his ontology and function.

Notice that when Peter offered to build three shelters, the narratives of this scene make no mention of Jesus or the Father responding to Peter's offer. In fact the Father interrupted Peter "while he was still speaking" with his relational imperative to "Listen to my son!" (Mt 17:5; Lk 9:34-35). Then Jesus responded to the disciples who had fallen down in their fear when he "came and touched them" (Mt 17:7). We can only conclude that Peter's worship had no relational significance to God.

We often assume that sincerity and good intentions (Peter's and ours) are always "good," and impulsiveness (not to be confused with spontaneity) in itself is not necessarily "bad." Yet we need to examine these assumptions in terms of the conflict between wholeness and reductionism—that is between whole persons in whole relationships together, and reduced persons in relational distance.

For example, for many of us, our intentions to use our musical and leadership talents/skills in the worship band may seem to be sincere and good (e.g. to serve God in worship, to use "my gift" for God). But if our real motive (even if it escapes our conscious awareness) is to gain attention or approval for 'what I do' (for self-worth)—

³ "Hybrid theology" is discussed in full in T. Dave Matsuo, *Did God Really Say That? Theology in the Age of Reductionism* (Theology Study, 2013); online at <http://4X12.org>.

especially in a comparative process with others—then our actions conflict with God’s relational terms of relational grace. God knows our hearts better than we do, and holds us accountable for our practice, and our implied theology. Moreover, our real motives are exposed every time we get defensive when given any negative feedback or criticism. Our implied theology is exposed for what it is: reshaping God into an idealized idol that gives primacy to what we do instead of our whole person in congruent relational response of worship. In this way, our theology is hybrid theology (like Peter’s) whereby we try to hold together our theology (saved by grace) and incongruent practice (self-determined)—which self-reinforces the status quo in the *lex orandi lex credendi* reflexive (prayer/worship determines belief/theology). This is how grace has become no longer about God’s relational provision for and response to our human condition, but rather some vague quantity used to exercise liberty. No wonder we can feel justified in our practice; and no wonder God claimed through the prophet Jeremiah that “the heart is devious above all else...who can understand it?” And “I the Lord test the mind and search the heart” (Jer 17:9-10).

As the Gospel narratives reveal Peter’s common fragmentary practice, John’s Gospel especially illuminates how Jesus continued to vulnerably pursue Peter’s heart with the depth of family love—along with the other disciples’ hearts at the last table fellowship before going to the cross. For Jesus, table fellowship signified the primacy of relationship together with him during his time on earth, which he made definitive for embodying the new (Lk 5:33-39). Jesus continued his relational work of family love, extended in his most vulnerable relational involvement with the disciples—even before he reached the cross—at his last meal with them (read Jn 13:1-18). At the evening meal before Passover, Jesus began to wash the disciples’ feet, which was customary for servants to do. Peter refused Jesus, and was sternly corrected by Jesus. Even after having been with Jesus for three intense years, Jesus’ vulnerableness still made Peter uncomfortable (i.e. threatened). This involves both the relational significance of Jesus’ act and Peter’s own theological anthropology. The following illuminates Jesus’ significance:

At their pivotal table fellowship leading to the cross, Jesus vulnerably revealed his whole person to his disciples as never before, and intimately involved the depth of his Self in deeper relationship with them by washing their feet (Jn 13:1-9). The gospel Jesus reveals here and its outcome [that] he unfolds are not about the primacy of serving but only about the primacy of relationship together that is transformed to be both equalized and intimate. The good news of *who* Jesus was was vulnerably revealed to them without the stratified relations that come with the title of “Lord”; and *what* Jesus was was intimately involved with them without the relational distance that comes with the role of “Teacher” (13:13-14). Jesus revealed the good news of the whole of God’s vulnerable presence and intimate involvement in ongoing reciprocal relationship together.⁴

In relational terms, Peter’s message to Jesus was a refusal to engage with Jesus on Jesus’ terms for intimate relationship together. Incongruently with Jesus, Peter was

⁴ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Gospel of Transformation: Distinguishing the Discipleship and Ecclesiology Integral to Salvation* (Transformation Study, 2015); online at <http://4X12.org>, 4-5.

choosing to stay at a relational distance within his old constraints, resisting letting Jesus' vulnerable heart touch his own. Heart-to-heart connection with Jesus would be the irreplaceable relational response of God's relational grace to Peter, which would free Peter from the constraints of his old outer-in living, and would thereby redefine his person from inner out. As we must expect, Jesus continued to pursue Peter for communion together: "Unless I wash you, you have no share with [*meros meta*] me" (v.8). In other words, Peter needed to "die" to his old way of defining his person (cf. Jn 12:24; Rom 6:2-11; Col 2:20; 3:3; also "put to death," Rom 8:13), and vulnerably let Jesus constitute Peter's person whole from inner out by his relational grace (the significance of Jesus washing the disciples' feet). This is how Jesus makes it possible for his followers to experience intimate communion together as the new creation family. "Share with me" only involves the relational experience of communion together with Jesus. Various other words signify this relational 'sharing with' together—*koinōnia* refers to the fellowship and participation together that Jesus' table fellowship embodies and calls persons to (cf. Acts 2:42); *koinoneō*, to be a partaker in, share together in (1 Pet 4:13); *koinos* refers to what is shared in common by several persons (Acts 2:44).

This reciprocal relational process to "share with me" signifies the process of sanctification (making uncommon, setting apart from the common for devotion to God), for which we need Jesus to wash our feet. In much Christian practice, sanctification is just a vague theological concept. Many see sanctification as a unilateral process, an assumption that is corrected by Jesus' interactions, which necessitated a reciprocal response from persons. To "share with me" necessitates whole persons who compatibly and reciprocally respond for ongoing relationship together. On Jesus' part, he kept pursuing Peter for Peter's part in the relational work together that was necessary for Peter to become whole from inner out. This pivotal interaction makes unmistakably clear the relational function of grace and family love being enacted by the whole and uncommon God, which are unmistakably distinguished beyond any common function in the human context.

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

Peter had difficulty adjusting to Jesus the Subject, whose whole ontology and function made it uncomfortable for Peter to deal with. That involved Peter having to go beyond the limits of both a narrowed-down epistemic field and his personal comfort zone. So, Peter had the choice: either to reduce Jesus to an object shaped by Peter's terms, or to accept Jesus the Subject and thus change to the relational terms of Jesus' whole ontology and function. This ongoing choice is simply stated in relational terms, though certainly not simply enacted or readily made; and we all face

this choice ongoingly. Theologically speaking, the choice is between either maintaining an incomplete Christology or embracing a complete Christology. While the former choice may hold in focus the Object of the Word, however fragmentary, the latter choice embraces the irreducible Subject of the Word.⁵

Given Peter's final reply to Jesus ("not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" 13:9), his relational posture still reflected his outer-in interpretive lens. Peter focused on the act of washing as an end in itself; thus Peter continued to avoid Jesus, whose vulnerable Face was presented to Peter's face, eagerly seeking Face-to-face involvement without the relational distance created by titles and roles—that is, 'with the veil removed'. Peter did not make the compatible relational response Jesus sought: to vulnerably receive and respond in relational trust of Jesus' whole person who was presented for the most intimate connection in God's relational response of grace to Peter's person, thereby to redefine Peter from inner out to make him whole in the primacy of whole relationship together. This is the function of relational grace and the relational significance of Jesus' footwashing, the relational outcome of which still eludes many worshipers today along with Peter. And this relational outcome remains unfilled until our relational involvement is composed by Jesus' whole relational terms in uncommon reciprocal response to Jesus' whole ontology and function uncommonly present and involved with us—whose likeness distinguishes our worship from the common 'in their way'.

Hybrid Theology and Divided Hearts

Until Peter underwent inner-out redemptive change (the transformation that is evident from his epistles), he functioned with a hybrid theology and divided heart (as Paul exposed, Gal 2:11-14). This issue is vital for us to understand and address in the global church because hybrid theology and divided hearts prevail in much of the global church today, rendering God's witnesses to the world to common ontology and function. The evidence for these influences in our worship gatherings are those relational conditions expanded on in the previous chapter. With the urgency for our understanding, then, hybrid theology is seen clearly in the person Peter presented to Jesus, clarified as follows:

What we saw...unfolding in Peter—in contrast to what unfolded in Paul—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. The expected consequence reduces theology and practice to a fragmented condition, thus preventing whole theology and practice. 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

⁵ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Gospel of Transformation*, 123.

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 God's theological trajectory) and the whole ontology and function improbably embodied in Jesus (and his relational path).⁶

When we define our person (and others) by secondary parts of what we do and have, we conjointly hide or mask our hearts to be less vulnerable with others. This requires us to do a lot of rationalizing and justifying our self (the mode of self-determination) whenever questioned or challenged. This was precisely how Peter functioned with Jesus, which reflected that Peter's reduced theology and practice (his theological anthropology) needed redemptive change from inner out (*metamorphoō*, e.g. 2 Cor 3:18).

Self-determination in Peter's relationship with Jesus reflected that Peter had a divided heart, not the wholeness of an "undivided heart" (Ezek 11:18-19; cf. Jer 24:7; 32:39). One of the psalmists asked YHWH, "give me an undivided heart", which is essential to "walk in your *relational* truth on your *relational terms*," and to "*relationally respond in worship...with my whole heart*" (Ps 86:11). In contrast, Peter's heart was not whole because it was divided (cf. double-minded, Jas 1:8). This condition of being double-minded and divided of heart goes beyond, for example, the simplistic notion of believing in God but having doubts, or just mixed feelings. The person with a divided heart wants, on the one hand, to follow Jesus, but on the other hand wants to follow Jesus on his or her own terms (cf. Jn 8:31-38). These are key issues for us as worshipers in order to be able to distinguish between the uncommon and the common; and these issues have direct implications on the significance to God of all our worship gatherings.

Peter's good intentions were related to his self-determined efforts at relationship with Jesus. His good intentions with a divided heart and hybrid theology need to be further understood, for which the following helps us:

When sin and what's good are conflated with the narrative of sin without reductionism and good [as in good intentions] without wholeness in human contextualization, then the human condition gets ambiguous and our human condition takes on a duplicity—in its depth perhaps analogous to a bi-polar disorder (highs and lows, ins and outs, unpredictable, even contradictory). Our prevailing narrowed-down condition has had a voice in what Scripture calls "double-minded/divided in heart" (*se'ep*, Ps 119:113, cf. *se'ippiym*, 1 Kg 18:21; and *dipsychos*, Jas 1:8; 4:8, cf. 3:9-12)...[A] fragmented mind or heart functions in duplicity, with ambiguity or shallowness of identity (as Jesus contrasted in ontology and function, Mt 5:13-16). And double-minded's complexity composed from inner out by a fragmented heart requires redemptive change—not common changes shaped by human contexts (cf. Rom 12:2)—to be transformed to wholeness, distinguished by the relational process defined only in relational terms for this undivided relational outcome (Jas 4:7-10).⁷

⁶ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Gospel of Transformation*, 39.

⁷ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Global Church Engaging the Nature of Sin & the Human Condition*, 87.

Even after Jesus' ascension, he continued to pursue Peter, to correct Peter's hybrid theology and divided heart. In a vision, the Lord made definitive to Peter that he must no longer make distinctions among persons on the basis of any outer criteria (e.g. race, ethnicity, age, class): "What God has made clean [uncommon], you must not call profane [common]" (Acts 10:9-15). Though we may wish to credit Peter for devoutly following his Jewish upbringing, God persisted in making clear to Peter that he needed to reject his old bias about dietary laws (related to purity) and what constitutes the common. By this God was indicating that he extended salvation not only to Jews, but now to the Gentiles (see Acts 10).

That is, God was leading Peter in the process of distinguishing between the holy and the common ("profane and unclean," v.14), and that God was the sole determiner of this distinction's criteria. This was God's continued pursuit of Peter for Peter's transformation to whole theology and uncommon practice, which had yet to fully take place (e.g. cf. Peter's self-concerns dominating his interaction with Jesus, Jn 21:15-22). Led by the Spirit, Peter then went to the home of Cornelius, a Gentile, and preached to the Gentiles there that the Good News was extended also to them, and baptized those who received Christ. On subsequent occasions, Peter proclaimed this same message (Acts 11:1-17; 15:6-11).

Yet, even thus having his theology corrected by God, his practice was not, which was evident when Peter contradicted his new theology and practice at the church in Antioch by making distinctions between Christian Jews and Christian Gentiles and separating himself from the latter. He thus persuaded other Jewish Christians to do the same, with the relational consequence of fragmenting the church (Gal 2:11ff), so that "even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy" (2:13). In family love, however, Paul confronted Peter about his hypocrisy (Gk. *hypokrisis*), for "not acting in line with the truth of the gospel" (2:14, NIV). As discussed previously, *hypokritēs* means one who outwardly displays an identity different from one's own, as an actor, to give an illusion. Peter's distinction-making in God's family illustrates the lack of wholeness in his person (continued hybrid theology and divided heart). The relational consequence of such a presentation is always experienced by distance in relationships, without necessarily the deception commonly associated with hypocrisy.

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

To use a mask is to perform in a role from outer in, for example, be it as worship leader, musician, singer, preacher, and all gathered worshipers, all enacted to construct a drama of worship. Masks in worship give the appearance of worshiping God, of being relationally involved, of being devout, even spiritually mature. But mere appearance does not mean being vulnerably involved with God or each other with the vulnerableness of the child-person that Jesus clearly makes imperative (e.g. Lk 10:21; Mt 18:3). The outer-

in performance of these roles draws attention and gives primacy to the outer presentation of what one does and has, for example, musical talent, eloquence, style in preaching, even demonstrative singing—performed even with the good intentions of worshiping God. Yet, the true or full identity of those engaged does not emerge as long as a mask is in place. Moreover, inseparable from performing roles is that the significance of one's performance is always measured in a comparative process, whether in comparison to what others do and have, or by the comparative feedback we get from others who also focus on the performance (or that mask).

The *hypokrisis* in Peter's life demonstrates for us the qualitative difference between outer-in change (*metaschematizō*) and inner-out redemptive change (*metamorphoō*). Jesus and Paul both warned against *metaschematizō*, and for the necessity of *metamorphoō*. Only by *metamorphoō* are we transformed from common ontology and function to uncommon. This is Jesus' point in saying, "The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks" (Luke 6:45). This redemptive change requires both dying to the old (reductionist ontology and function from outer in) so that the uncommon wholeness of the new creation can emerge, made possible by Jesus' work on the cross *and* the experiential reality of ongoing intimate connection with the whole of God, now in compatible reciprocal relationship with the Spirit.

These are critical issues to face and thus to own in our theology and practice. The majority of global Christians not doubt will be offended by this statement, yet it must be said: Despite its good intentions, the global church in general and many local churches in particular epitomize a hybrid theology, and their practice is dominated by a divided heart. This is evident in church life and worship gatherings wherever there is distance and related lack of depth in relationships, along with all divisions based on outer criteria including the following: global South and global North, denominations, "tribalisms" that divide worshipers by race, ethnicity, class, age, gender, special interests, worship traditions and styles, and nationalism. These common divisions certainly represent our preferences and levels of comfort, composed by the limits and constraints within which we feel safe and secure. These criteria also give us a sense of identity and belonging, even though misleading and misguided, and lead us to practice exclusion by default. Furthermore, these identities from the common are self-determined, and in conflict with our new primary identity we have as God's new creation family—the whole-ness of which is irreducible and nonnegotiable.

Given our human condition in the church, this hybrid process of trying to conflate the common with the uncommon will not go away in our theology and practice. Nor will our divided hearts be healed and made whole by addressing only the presenting issues without confronting their underlying human condition of reductionism and its counter-relational working. The breadth and depth of reductionism is the full composition of sin that we need to be *saved from* in order for the whole reality of what we are *saved to* truly to be constituted in the church.

Jesus challenges us to be vulnerable in the depth of family love with sisters and brothers who we feel are different from us: "If you relate only to *persons most like you* (e.g. *who look like you*), what more are you doing than *the common*?" (Mt 5:47) When, for example, we put preference for our comfort in particular worship traditions and styles

above new creation family relationships with all sisters and brothers in Christ, we deny the relational truth and experiential reality of who and whose we are as God's new creation family. All Christians in the global church desperately need to listen to Jesus' chastening, which is further expanded here:

...Hybrid theology and practice...reflect a fragmentary condition that drifts, strays, wanders or is misled from God's theological trajectory and Jesus' relational path. If the global church maintains a hybrid or bifocal identity (conflating human context with God's context), its identity in the world will be ambiguous or shallow (as Jesus made definitive [in Mt 5:13-15]). If the global church has a hybrid theology and practice, the global church and each local part of it will be reduced to fragmentary ontology and function. Here is where selectivity of Scripture is exposed as the defining issue for "the measure we use." The OT clearly maintained a necessary distinction of God's people from the surrounding human contexts of the common in order to be distinguished as the uncommon belonging to God (Ex 23:24; Lev 18:3; 20:23; Dt 12:30-31; Jer 10:2-3). The integrity of their identity was compromised by any element of the common, which Israel engaged when their practice of the law became merely identity markers in human contextualization. This clear distinction between what's common and uncommon—thus including between what's good without wholeness and with wholeness—was to be maintained by Jesus' followers "not of the world." Jesus called them "out of the world" to be whole in order to be distinguished whole "in the world," so that they would make whole the human condition (as Jesus prayed, Jn 17:13-23). Yet, as discussed earlier, the disciples in general and Peter in particular had difficulty being distinct from their surrounding human context and distinguished in the whole of who, what and how they were—for example, "which of them would be the greatest."⁸

There is ample evidence of our relationally fragmented condition of the global church's theology and practice. Yet the church's solutions for the problem of fragmentation have been ineffective because they never address the underlying source: the sin of reductionism. Ineffective, unfruitful approaches still make distinctions among us based on secondary criteria (noted throughout this study) by which we define persons on that fragmentary basis, and determine how we continue to 'do' relationships. The global church, moreover, cannot justify fragmentation by appealing simplistically to diversity (read pluralism) or a shallow multiculturalism without the depth of qualitative relational significance. We as God's new creation family have one primary identity that takes precedence over all our secondary identities, including our identity of origin.

Therefore, the practice of this primary identity as the 'global church-new creation family' functions in relationships together without partiality (without the human-defined distinctions based on human differences, as Peter learned) or favoritism (i.e. personal preference) in uncommon equalized and intimate relationships—just in relational likeness of the whole and uncommon Trinity. This is how we fulfill Jesus' injunction, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48). We cannot continue to narrow down "perfect" (*teleios*) to a static divine attribute indicating merely the lack of sin;

⁸ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Global Church Engaging the Nature of Sin & the Human Condition*, 88. This study is an important resource for the global church's transformation.

rather, we need to understand ‘perfect’ to signify being fully-developed, mature, and thus complete integrally in whole ontology compatible with the qualitative image of the Trinity, and in whole function congruent in the trinitarian relational process of family love. The uncommonness of God is integrally expressed in God’s *agapē* involvement for Face-to-face relationships with the veil of relational barriers removed (as in Eph 2:14-18).

For us to ‘be holy because God is holy’ means we are to be uncommon in our practice; and ‘to be perfect as our Father is perfect’ is to mature in our *agapē*-involvement in uncommon relationships together for the relational outcome of wholeness—the uncommon peace composed by Jesus (Jn 14:27). And while this statement—“The supreme manifestation of God’s holiness is his love”⁹—is correct, holiness is only sufficiently understood integrally as God’s uncommon ontology and function, and love must signify for us the depth of the Trinity’s involvement in the trinitarian relational process of family love. Uncommon relationships are equalized by God’s relational response of grace, which eliminates the comparative process of secondary criteria to determine our self-worth and identity. Uncommon relationships, having been equalized, then can be reconciled heart to heart for the relational intimacy necessary to respond to our human condition of being relationally apart.

If and when our theology is made whole, its practice will necessitate significant changes. Whole theology (not hybrid) and practice mean that corporate worship can no longer give primacy to outer secondary criteria to define and determine who will lead us in worship, what will be the focus of worship, and how we will worship God. For example, just because a person has more education (and referential knowledge), musical talent, eloquence in preaching, or any particular “spiritual gift”), this doesn’t qualify that person automatically or by default to lead others in worship in likeness of God. Yet, this was the argument the temple leaders raised in their objection to children leading worship (Mt 21:15-16). Those criteria must be deferred to persons who can lead us in worship that has relational significance to God on God’s uncommon and whole terms. Mary (Martha’s sister) is one such person (to be discussed in the next chap.)

‘Whole theology and practice’ eliminates from corporate worship any dynamics that cause vertical and horizontal relational distance. The subtlety of this relational distance should not be overlooked because it has immeasurable relational consequences. These fragmenting dynamics stratify relationships, so whole theology and practice calls for examining most if not all aspects of our current practices, including long-standing traditions. Every part of the global church is accountable to the whole and uncommon God for worship practices along the entire worship spectrum: contemporary, liturgical, alt; high church to low church; megachurches to house churches; centuries-old congregations to new emerging churches; global South to global North. You know the phrase “Don’t throw out the baby with the bathwater”—it is time to examine the baby to see if this baby is just a golden calf.

Only our uncommon practice on the basis of God’s whole relational terms constitutes us to be compatible and congruent in our ontology and function with the whole and uncommon God. This means for us as worshipers to worship God in likeness of God: to *worship whole-ly* (whole + holy) because God is whole-ly uncommon, the

⁹ K. E Brower, “Holiness,” *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd edition, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 478.

theology and practice of which are irreducible and nonnegotiable. As mentioned earlier, the wholeness of *shalôm* is the inner-out emergence of persons and their convergence in the primacy of relationships that have been specifically redeemed from reductionism and reconciled to God and each other in intimate and equalized relationships. Anything less and any substitutes do not constitute us as whole and uncommon in God's likeness.

Worshiping with Washed or Unwashed Feet

We might wish to describe Peter's response for Jesus to wash more of his body parts as just another expression of Peter's good intentions, or perhaps his thick skull, even in a humorous sense. But here again, these attitudes diminish or ignore the seriousness of the sin of reductionism, and also eclipse the depth of Jesus' vulnerable relational involvement with Peter that countered reductionism's counter-relational workings. For us to try to justify Peter is indicative of our likeness of Peter, our own likely subtle relational barrier of avoiding Jesus face to face, who is kneeling before us to wash our feet also. Jesus in this way—his most intimate and vulnerable presence and involvement with us—disconcerts many of us. Some of you may inwardly be thinking: Surely the Son of God, the King of kings and Lord of lords wouldn't stoop so low as to wash our sweaty feet—perhaps as a one-time example of servanthood for us but not as ongoing involvement in relational terms; we must not bring Jesus “down” to our level; isn't keeping Jesus on his throne (read pedestal) the proper way to treat the transcendent Creator of the universe?—to which we must ask ourselves, isn't our discomfort a large motivator behind this attitude, just like Peter's?

Important for the often stated desire to experience God in our worship services, to remain in this relational posture of keeping Jesus at a relational distance has serious implications for our worship. We cannot have it both ways—that is, to worship with unwashed feet (in yet another way that we worship ‘in their way’), but to expect to experience God's presence and involvement. In other words, this relational posture reflects the common in ontology and function, and thus indicates the necessity for Jesus to wash our feet in order to be ongoingly transformed to wholeness in our whole person (not our multiple parts).

Peter's interaction with Jesus kneeling before him illuminates that Jesus is also kneeling before us ready to wash our feet if he hasn't already. Just as Jesus told Peter “Unless I wash you, you have no share with me” (Jn 13:8), unless Jesus washes our feet, we have “no share with” him, including no share with him face to face in worship. Our worship cannot have relational significance to God if we remain with ‘unwashed feet’—keeping relational distance with the biased lens of our terms. What do we choose: Do we let Jesus wash our feet on his relational terms, or do we continue to impose our terms for relationship with God? The latter always includes our own terms for worship. We need to understand the deeper significance of Jesus washing our feet—on the basis of Jesus' words to Peter.

That is, the significance of letting Jesus washing our feet goes beyond and deeper than the prevailing view that Jesus was demonstrating the humbleness required for servanthood and servant leadership. It is correct that humbleness is involved, but if we never identify and die to the sin of reductionism, humbleness can become an end in itself,

and also merely an outer-in presentation of the self as in role-playing (ontological simulation in virtual humility)—even with our sincerity and good intentions. Moreover, without dying to the sin of reductionism, we cannot become uncommon in likeness of the whole and uncommon God, although our virtual humility may fool others. Likewise, many of our practices, including how we participate in worship need to be scrutinized with the interpretive lens that focuses on the primacy of whole persons in whole relationships. This specifically is vital to address who and what defines our ontology and determines our function in order to establish our full identity as God’s uncommon people.

Being made uncommon/holy is signified in Scripture as sanctification or consecration. In OT times, the cultic system for consecration (i.e. to set apart from the common and unclean, and devoted to God), involved ritual washing and sacrifices. These rituals composed necessary means in order for the Israelites to be set apart for devotion to YHWH. For God, these practices were intended to be engaged by persons relationally responding as whole persons—that is, with the qualitative-relational involvement of their hearts, as with all the other relational terms of the covenant. By foremost being involved with God with their whole persons from inner out, as the Israelites submitted to these whole relational terms of the covenant, they thereby fulfilled the terms for “sanctify yourselves...and be holy, for I am holy” (Lev 11:44). This outcome is the qualitative-relational reality of wholeness (*shalôm*) and uncommonness (*qādôsh*, holiness). Of course, this relational outcome reverted to relational consequences when they transposed God’s whole relational terms to their reduced referential terms that de-relationalized the covenant relationship.

The key to sanctification (becoming uncommon ontology and function) was always the vulnerable involvement of persons’ hearts in compatible reciprocal response to God. The primacy that God gives to the heart of the person also illuminates God’s vital qualifying statement about circumcision (an outward sign of the covenant relationship, Gen 17:10-11): “Circumcise your *hearts*” (Dt 10:14; cf. Lev 26:41; Dt 30:6; Rom 2:28-29). For God, physical circumcision alone never had relational significance. Indeed, all of the terms for covenant relationship with the whole and uncommon God gave primacy to the whole person. This was always the heart of God’s covenant of love (*hesed*, also “grace,” Dt 7:7-8, 12), not a covenant based on any outer-in criteria from human contextualization (e.g. “not because you were more numerous than any other people”). Covenant relationship with YHWH was never a quid pro quo contract, which was the prevailing practice of covenants in the surrounding contexts. God’s relational covenant was uncommon, distinguished from the common notably by God’s own vulnerable presence and relational-specific involvement with his people.

However, under the influence of reductionism, many Jews performed washing—along with dietary practices and circumcision—as merely outer-in rituals, as if the covenant relationship were a common contract. This fragmentary process commonized what was initially for the relational purpose of setting themselves apart for covenant relationship with God. And what this hybrid theology implied was in practice a covenant with the idolization of God reduced to human shaping.

In the NT, Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for their practice of ritual washing for purification as an end in itself, a practice that ignored the necessary inner-out repentance from the common (Mt 15:1-3; 23:25-26). Their outer-in practice precluded contact with persons whom they considered to be impure/unclean. These Pharisees were thus offended

by Jesus for not complying with their purity laws as he freely associated with such persons. In their self-determined holiness, the Pharisees challenged Jesus for eating with “tax collectors and sinners” (Lk 5:30), and letting the ex-prostitute touch him as she washed Jesus’ feet with her tears, dried them with her hair, and kissed and anointed his feet with perfume (Lk 7:36-50). Jesus definitively rejected their fragmentary practices of piety that was nothing more than ontological simulation, which was the content of “the tradition of the elders” (Mt 15:2; Mk 7:3-5) based on their epistemological illusion that they knew what mattered to God. Jesus also made sure to expose the relational consequences that the Pharisees’ practices had on others (Mt 23:4,13,15,23,34).

The Pharisees’ practices of piety (including ceremonial washings, circumcision, dietary restrictions) were their self-determined efforts to maintain their identity, undoubtedly believing their identity was holy. Certainly many Pharisees’ efforts differentiated them from persons who didn’t and couldn’t measure up in the Pharisees’ comparative process, yet their virtual holiness got no recognition from God (cf. Mt 6:2,5,7,16). They were wrong to think God viewed them as uncommon in God’s likeness. This only validates the stereotype most Christians have of Pharisees. Yet, their practice of Israel’s faith was rigorous and not lacking in direct effort. Their highly-engaged practice of faith, however, was misguided, and the subtleties of misguided faith must not be ignored by us because these subtleties also encompass our practice of faith today.

Their self-determined “sanctification” proved the complete inadequacy of common terms to bring about sanctification as inner-out transformation (*metamorphoō*). The latter is the only process of sanctification—signified by Jesus washing our feet for whole uncommon ontology and function of *shalôm*, that is, in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole and uncommon God. Jesus conclusively illuminated the relational consequences of anyone following Jesus on their own terms, as he declared through parables: “I never knew you; go away from me you evildoers” (Mt 7:23), and “I don’t know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers” (Lk 13:27, NIV). Does Jesus know you? Does Jesus know us—even as we “prophesy in your name, cast out demons in your name, and do many deed of power in your name?”

We need to examine our attitudes about sanctification and holiness further. The most common approach to holiness in Christian culture focuses on biblical injunctions to be clean, pure, blameless, and perfect. These words appear in Scripture often, but their meanings have been so referentialized by our quantitative interpretive lenses that they are understood only as moral-ethical behaviors, which includes our thought life (which doesn’t constitute the inner person as the heart does). For example, purity is associated with abstention from premarital sex (i.e. virginity, especially for females), and blameless (above reproach) is associated with marital fidelity or having no bad habits, lustful thoughts, or addictions (e.g. pornography, drinking, gambling). These injunctions need to be understood more deeply in the framework of giving primacy to the integrity of wholeness and well-being of persons and relationships, just as God does (notably in the Sermon on the Mount, Mt 5-7).

Ironically, our fragmenting notions of purity and blamelessness, while perhaps keeping persons from engaging these behaviors, in effect fragment persons after all. Outer-in practices in the name of holiness are what Paul says “have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship...but they lack any value *for addressing the underlying sin of reductionism*” (Col 2:23, NIV). Paul points us instead to God’s

vulnerable presence and intimate relational involvement that constitutes us as uncommon: “I will live in them and walk among them....Therefore, *distinguish yourselves from the common*.... And I will be your father, and you shall be my sons and daughters” (2 Cor 6:16-18). In God’s relational context and relational process, then, “*reject those practices that reduce you* [e.g. to fragmentary parts of sexual bodies and urges], making holiness *whole in your compatible reciprocal response to God* (7:1). What Paul further illuminates and echoes only have significance in relational terms, which are reduced to do’s and don’ts in referential terms.

When Jesus washes our feet, our whole persons undergo redemptive change from inner out and emerge in the experiential truth of uncommonness in likeness of the uncommon God—while the experiential reality of this relational outcome requires our ongoing choices in the primacy of relationship together. That is, sanctification is not a unilateral or one-time event in our lives. Being and living uncommon in God’s uncommon likeness is an ongoing reciprocal relationship that is conjointly compatible in ontology with the qualitative image of the *person-al* Trinity, and congruent in function in relational likeness of the *inter-person-al* Trinity. Uncommon ontology and function hereby give primacy to persons and relationships in the trinitarian relational process of family love.

Jesus comes before each of us to wash our feet, and as he does, he calls us to respond by letting him make heart-to-heart connection for intimate relationship together. This requires of us to die to our self-determined way of relating to God from outer in, from imposing titles and roles that we use to maintain relational distance from God, as well as with each other. As we die thus from our old ontology and function, Jesus washes our feet to make the deep relational connection with us, the depth of which is unfathomable yet our experiential reality that responds to our deepest relational need.

This brings us to an important issue about the common interpretation of Jesus’ words after the footwashing: “So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you should do as I have done to you” (Jn 13:14-15).

It is the norm in Christian teaching (in church and academy) that Jesus is talking about servant leadership. This interpretation focuses on Jesus humbling himself and not letting his role/title as Lord and Teacher keep him from doing “lowly” jobs. Rather, as the common interpretation goes, Jesus’ disciples (especially those who lead, but also any disciple) need to take on whatever jobs need to be done; that is, “lead by serving.” Many Christians (leaders or not) take serving to its logical end of sacrifice. All the focus essentially becomes on the work of serving—even sacrificing for—the church. No wonder there is so much burnout among pastors and others who “lead by serving.”

This clearly was not Jesus’ intention. The example that Jesus set is the vulnerable person presented without relational barriers (e.g. of roles and titles) for only the deepest relational connection together directly face to face (cf. also Jn 12:26). The primacy of intimate relationships together heart to heart that Jesus embodied with the disciples was to be the determinant for the disciples’ relationships with each other, because this is the likeness of the intimate relationships *within* the Trinity. Their relationships together needed to be on Jesus’ relational terms (the significance of 13:16), which also compose the relationships of the trinitarian persons. Therefore, these are Jesus’ words to us today also!

After washing the first disciples' feet, Jesus went to the cross to complete the redemptive process to free us from our sin of reductionism, to open the relational way into the Father's most intimate relational context and process signified by tearing away the temple curtain (Heb 10:19-22). With Jesus, then, we emerge in the vulnerableness of our person in wholeness for intimate and equalized relationships behind the torn curtain and with the veil removed—for the only relationships that compose *shalôm* (as in God's definitive blessing, Num 6:24-26).

Having Jesus wash our feet is essential for us to follow him on his improbable theological trajectory and intrusive relational path in whole holiness (i.e. uncommon wholeness). When we let Jesus wash our feet, this will become evident in an inner-out transformation (in an ongoing process of change) such that we will give primacy to what God gives primacy to: whole persons and whole relationships. Whole holiness will distinguish worship whole-ly. And as we worship whole-ly, we fulfill the significance of the worshipers "the Father seeks...who worship him in spirit and in truth" (Jn 4:23-24). Moreover, uncommon wholeness becomes the framework into which we integrate all the secondary issues (e.g. worship style, music, structure) to give whole perspective, thereby eliminating our "self-imposed worship." And whole perspective must always give primacy to the wholeness and well-being of persons and relationships together in the trinitarian relational process of family love; this is the essential qualifier for all Christian ethics.¹⁰ This is the significance of having our feet washed by Jesus, thereby to worship God with washed feet rather than feet standing, walking, jumping, or dancing 'in their way'. Has Jesus washed your feet to worship whole-ly?

Washed Feet and a New Identity

Although we don't have the details, the good news of God's family love for Peter apparently led him humbly and vulnerably to eventually be made whole and uncommon. Peter finally let Jesus wash the feet of his whole person. This meant for Peter that his boasting shifted from what he would do, to boasting in relationship with God by God's relational response of grace to him (1 Pet 1:1-2). His boast emerged from his truly new and uncommon identity, no longer boasting in his self-determined efforts, but in the whole of God's distinguished relational context and relational process extended (1:3-4).

As Peter wrote to the various churches, he could encourage them further and deeper to uncommon ontology and function because he intimately knew the difference from his own experiential reality of God's relational grace (1:13-16). The shift for Peter was clearly an inner-out transformation—no longer an outer-in change of behavior—such that Peter could justifiably talk about "new birth" (1:3,23). And just as God told the Levites, "You are to distinguish between the holy and the common" (Lev 10:10), Peter could now distinguish this difference in God's whole terms. Moreover, Peter identified that this relational responsibility has been extended from the Levite priesthood now to all of God's people—"to be a holy priesthood" (2:5), "a royal priesthood, a holy nation"

¹⁰ For an illuminating and helpful discussion of "sanctified" Christian ethics, please see T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology: A Theological & Functional Study of the Whole of Jesus* (Christology Study, 2008). Online at <http://4X12.org>, Chap.7 "Jesus and Culture, Ethics, and Mission."

(2:9). Clearly Peter identifies for us today who can echo God’s voice: “a people belonging to God on God’s relational terms...that you may declare the praises of *God’s vulnerable presence and intimate involvement in relational-specific acts*” (2:9, NIV).

Peter vulnerably expressed his heart in his letters for us to connect with deeply for our own relationship with God. It is touching and edifying to consider Peter’s journey from commonness to uncommonness, on the basis of the Trinity’s relational involvement with him, knowing the struggles he went through for this change. This puts into whole perspective our understanding of sanctification, as noted in this quote:

“In some ways 1 Pet. is a summary of the NT view of sanctification: it has to do with God’s choice (1:2; 2:9), the work of the Spirit in applying the benefits of Christ’s sacrificial death and resurrection (1:2-3), and lived in obedience to God’s call to holiness (1:14-15; 2:5) and love (1:22; 4:8). Sanctification, in sum, is essentially a *relational reality*, completed in Christ’s death on the cross, experienced through the indwelling Holy Spirit and brought to its final goal when we see God (Heb. 12:14; 1 Jn 3:2-3).”¹¹

And as Peter’s life attests, sanctification is a relational reality only when it becomes our experiential reality based on God’s whole relational terms—which is the reality Jesus embodied and prayed for his followers to whole-ly experience, that is, in his likeness in contrast to and conflict with ‘in their way’.

Having had our feet washed by Jesus establishes us ‘whole’ in our uncommon new identity as the Father’s daughters and sons in the new creation family. This identity will certainly have ups and downs, depending on our compatible and congruent relational involvement with God; it will be tested, challenged, and pulled at by reductionism and its counter-relational work to create relational distance. Yet on God’s part, our identity is secured. When we gather to worship God, this is nothing less than “family time” for God’s new creation family. We gather to celebrate the whole and uncommon God to boast in who, what, and how God is—integrally with who and whose we are in order to worship whole-ly together with nothing less and no substitutes.

Celebrating the Reality of the New Song

God’s new creation family embodies the relational truth and relational reality of the “new song” (cf. Ps 40:3; 33:3; 96:1) in the intimate experience of uncommon worship without the veil—that is, without the relational distance common to worship. The song on the following page was composed for this very celebration and boast, and is included here for your encouragement to worship whole-ly, with the feet of your whole person washed by Jesus, in face-to-face, heart-to-heart, person-to-person relationship with the whole and uncommon Trinity! The veil is indeed gone!

¹¹ K. E. Brower, “Sanctification, Sanctify” *New Bible Dictionary*, 1059, my italics.

‘Singing’ the New Song¹²

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹² Composed in the key of Jesus with the Spirit and sung with Paul (2 Cor 3:16-18), Kary A. Kambara and T. Dave Matsuo, ©2011. Printable sheet music in pdf is available at <http://4X12.org>.

Chapter 4 The New Creation Family in the Trinity’s Likeness

**“Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.
By this everyone will know that you are my disciples,
if you have love for one another.”**

John 13:33-35

**“Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them,
and we will come to them and make our home with them.”**

John 14:23

How does the new creation family distinguish itself at worship from the prevailing common practices ‘in their way’ that we’ve identified in this study thus far? Only by keeping Jesus’ relational terms (“my word” and “my commandments”) in the primacy of relationship together based on the intimate involvement of love. By loving as we are loved, Jesus’ followers enact the congruent response necessary to embody the “home” (i.e. the new creation family) of the Trinity. When we live as beloved daughters and sons in the wholeness of our person, and worship the Father in Face-to-face and heart-to-heart connection together (as the Father seeks, Jn 4:23-24), this composes our worship relationship together as the new creation family in whom the Trinity is present and involved (cf. Gal 6:16; 2 Cor 5:17). In this corporate intimate relationship—notably enacted in Communion—we distinguish ourselves and our worship from the common worship practices ‘in their way’.

This is to emphatically state that no individual can distinguish the church or its worship as God’s family, no matter how famous or gifted they are; and churches need to make every effort to be redeemed from that fragmented mindset of individualism prevailing the Western church (cf. Paul’s emphatic point about this issue in 1 Cor 1:21-23). Nor do a church’s reputation, wealth, ministries, and service distinguish the new creation family, as Jesus made clear in his post-ascension discourse to the churches (Rev 2-3).¹ Only by corporately loving as we are loved—loved not simply by Jesus but by the whole Trinity (Jn 17:23)—can the church (local and global) make the Trinity relationally known and understood in its midst (cf. Eph 2:19-22), just as Jesus made the Father known (Jn 1:18) and prayed for his family (Jn 17:26). By our ‘embodying new’ the worship relationship, we corporately attest to the trinitarian relational context and process of family love. And although we are not experiencing this in the global church today (for the reasons discussed in this study thus far), we should be encouraged because by embodying this new relationship together in love, there is much more for us to experience of God’s presence and involvement with us in worship than the status quo—not in us individually but in us as God’s distinguished family of the new creation.

A word to the yearning hearts of many dissatisfied and discouraged Christians: As we grow personally and corporately in relationship together with God in our worship

¹ For an in-depth discussion of Jesus’ post-ascension discourse, see T. Dave Matsuo, *The Gospel of Transformation: Distinguishing the Discipleship and Ecclesiology Integral to Salvation* (Transformation Study, 2015). Online at <http://4X12.org>, 302-316.

gatherings (i.e. family times), we will mature in our wholeness and well-being, and we will know and understand God in relational-specific terms—just as Paul prayed for (Eph 3:16-19) and made definitive for the church (4:13-16). In this distinguished relational reality of relationally knowing and understanding God (cf. Jn 14:9), this will constitute the boast that God has desired (see Jer 9:23-24), and our hearts yearn for. Moreover, our identity as the Father’s new creation family (not merely an adjective or label) will have clarity and effectiveness (light and salt, Mt 5:13-16) to witness to who and whose we are in our worship gatherings and to the world—as Jesus defined for his family (Jn 17:21-23).

In response to the question raised at the end of chapter 1—who can speak for God?—*we* together only as family will truly be able to echo God’s voice, within the global church and to the rest of the world. It is therefore time for God’s new creation family to come into its own, to mature as *who* we are and *whose* we are: the Father’s daughters and sons, and each other’s sisters and brothers in the Trinity’s new creation family.

Our Unavoidable Relational Responsibilities

When Jesus said the above words, he stated an improbable and remarkable relational truth: “we—*that is, the trinitarian we*—will come to them and make our home with them.” How does the Trinity dwell in us such that together we constitute God’s uncommon home—the relational outcome that has escaped our experience? One common answer is that God dwells in us by the Holy Spirit (Eph 2:22), though perceived mainly in individual persons. Another common view is that ‘God *inhabits* our praise’ (cf. Ps 22:3, *yāšab*, dwell, inadequately rendered “enthroned on” in NRSV), with the assumption inclusive of any type of praise (contrary to Mt 15:8-9). Both these views are usually understood in referential (not relational) terms, and thus are unable to make any functional-relational difference in our worship experience.

The answer to this urgent question is Jesus’ prior words in the above verse that define an essential *relational contingency*: “Those who love me *in the depth of trinitarian family love* me will keep *my relational terms*, and my Father will love them....” That is, keeping Jesus’ uncommon relational terms (“my commandments” only as terms for relationship together) to love as Jesus has loved us (Jn 13:34) would constitute them to become the Trinity’s home. Jesus here defined our relational responsibility necessary to enact the essential reality (not to simulate a virtual or augmented reality) of the trinitarian relational context’s new creation family into the human context—the Father, Son, Spirit together with them/us (Jn 14:6-31). Just as Jesus spoke these words of relational truth then, so may the Spirit now help us deeply understand them so that the new creation family will emerge as never before. This is the only relational outcome that matters to the Trinity and that has significance for the gospel we claim for ourselves and proclaim to others.

This chapter focuses below on particular persons in the NT who illuminate specific relational matters to encourage and guide us through unavoidable relational responsibilities in our discipleship and worship practice. These are necessary matters to deal with in order to mature the persons and relationships of God’s new creation family

on God's nonnegotiable relational terms. A former prostitute illuminated relational grace and forgiveness necessary for the intimate relational involvement of love, and Mary of Bethany embodied the vulnerable relational work required to compose whole involvement in God's life. These two women's relationships with Jesus dynamically witnessed to the whole and uncommon God—the whole who, what, and how the triune God is in uncommon family love. In this distinctly qualitative-relational work of raising up and maturing the new creation family, we need to give secondary priority to the secondary matters of ministry and service in order for the primacy of relationship together to emerge unmistakably as the essential reality in our churches and not a virtual-augmented reality. And, if we want to experience this relational reality composed by the Trinity's presence and involvement, we have to enact our reciprocal part in relationship together.

Moreover, for the relational work of maturing persons and relationships in this distinguished family, the triune God is present with and in us in the indispensable person of the Spirit. Jesus told his disciples that with the Spirit's coming to them, his vulnerable presence and intimate involvement (inseparably with the Father) would now be ongoing, to fulfill conjointly Jesus' promise to "not leave you as *relational* orphans" (14:18), and Jesus' formative family prayer (Jn 17:21-23). And since the whole of God engages only in reciprocal relationship, we need to further examine what is expected of us—the nonnegotiable relational contingency.

Jesus emphatically stated this relational contingency for his disciples more than once and in various ways: loving Jesus is the significance of obeying/keeping his commandments (i.e. his terms for relationship together); by keeping Jesus' commandments we love Jesus (14:15,21,23); to remain/abide (*menō*, dwell) in trinitarian family love is to keep his commandments (15:10); and the new commandment to love each other as Jesus loved them/us (13:34). These are Jesus' relational contingencies that must define and determine the purpose of our worship gatherings, and move us away from all the secondary matter that we now fill up the worship hour with 'in their way'.

An example of beginning the relational work of cultivating family relationships (as opposed to maintaining relational distance in worship) is to incorporate into worship gatherings the intentional effort for everyone to learn each other's names, not all at once, but over a period of time commensurate with the size of the church. In small churches this would be much easier, and can be incorporated with greeting times. In large churches, other alternatives need to be pursued; it simply may not be possible to learn more than fifty or so names. We all need help, and sometimes structured activities are helpful to get persons out of limited social circles at church. The irreplaceable key is to make direct relational connections (not casual) in order to grow relationships.

Keeping God's relational terms of love in the primacy of whole persons and relationships is a relational dynamic that we must stop reducing to a referential pronouncement of belief or good intentions. Direct relational involvement, no just participation in the Trinity's relational context and trinitarian relational process of family love is our reciprocal relational responsibility to compose our identity as the Father's uncommon new creation family. In this dynamic identity as the Father's daughters and sons, the new creation family embodies the trinitarian relational context and the trinitarian relational process of family love into the world (the human context) in a reciprocal relational process of *reciprocating contextualization*, explained briefly here.

Without the presence of the palpable Word and reciprocal involvement with the person of the Spirit face to face, the church does not unfold in wholeness—regardless of the church’s membership, resources, situation and circumstances....This irreplaceable relational process unfolds for the church in ongoing involvement in *reciprocating contextualization*...with the palpable Word in order to address the surrounding contexts (as in the *ek-eis* relational dynamic), and to be distinguished whole and have the significance of wholeness by ongoing involvement in *triangulation* (e.g. connecting a situation with connection between the church and the palpable Word, as in the process of navigation) with the palpable Word, to be guided in those specific situations and circumstances. Without this relational involvement with the palpable Word, the church is faced with contexts, situations and circumstances in which it isn’t, or doesn’t know how to be, distinguished and significant. This lack of involvement leaves the church susceptible to, if not already subject to, the surrounding influences, which then shape the church’s identity and function according to those common terms.²

Certain segments of the church (notably Reformed theology) minimalizes our reciprocal relational responsibilities as God’s people, an attitude which carries over into worship. If we are listening vulnerably to Jesus relational contingency, we cannot let ourselves continue to expect God to unilaterally do all the relational work (e.g. “dwell in our praise”), as Reformed theology commonly does. Our relational responsibilities as the new creation family are nonnegotiable to compose the holy/uncommon context and whole process in which worship has relational significance to God. The new creation family is not a vacant house for the Trinity to occupy, but the people gathered and set apart (made uncommon) to embody and thereby enact the Trinity’s relational-specific response of family love, first within the church, and then into the world.

Much relational effort needs to be given to re-orienting the gathered worshipers to take up their relational responsibilities in corporate worship; and I believe that many worshipers want such opportunities but don’t have them. Re-orienting needs to be a step-wise process to encourage persons in their compatible responses to God. I suggest that worship planners keep in mind to lead worshipers in the three major issues for all discipleship-worship practice: (1) the person they present to God, (2) the quality of their communication for the purpose of making relational connection with God, and (3) the depth level of their relational involvement with the Lord.

An initial non-threatening step is to have persons write short personal notes from their heart to the Father, Son, and Spirit, collect them in a basket, set the basket symbolically before God’s Face, and read a few out loud. They should focus on relationship with one or all of the trinitarian persons, as opposed to referring to secondary criteria of what God does or has, or on other people. These notes could be thank you’s, relational requests, questions, or honest feelings—use Jesus’ feelings in the garden of Gethsemane and on the cross as examples (Mt 26:39; 27:46). Try this over several worship gatherings, and see what the Spirit unfolds for the new creation family. The purpose is to help persons grow in relational involvement with the Lord, to directly communicate their nothing-less-no-substitutes whole person with God face to face, heart

² T. Dave Matsuo, *The Global Church Engaging the Nature of Sin & the Human Condition: Reflecting, Reinforcing, Sustaining, or Transforming* (Global Church Study, 2016). Online at <http://4X12.org>, 125.

to heart. Perhaps persons can stand up where they are and read their own note to God. Granted this example focuses on the individual's worship relationship, but as these personal expressions are corporately shared, worshipers are corporately edified and built grow together.

The New Relational Order of Worship: A Paradigm Shift

Before discussing the NT persons who can lead us in worship, there is a necessary paradigm shift for our current worship practices that we need to understand and make. This is a major shift in our worship practice from the familiar and common 'order of worship' (liturgical *ordo*) to the uncommon 'new relational order of worship'. This paradigm shift requires the following: our inner-out transformation that integrally involves the vulnerable presence of our whole person in relationships (as the Father seeks, Jn 4:23-24), the new mindset and interpretive lens provided by the Spirit (Rom 8:6), a new understanding of what matters most to God as God has disclosed to us in Scripture, and a new view of our relational responsibilities in worship. Jesus calls all of this integral newness the "new wine," (Lk 5:37-38).

With this paradigm shift, we need to also understand that we can never significantly transform our worship practice just by changing outward behaviors (*metaschematizō*, cf. 2 Cor 11:13-15), or merely by embracing different symbols and patterns for worship—as evidenced in contemporary and emergent church worship. We cannot simply exchange one liturgical order for another, switch music styles, change clothes, or employ the latest technology. We must undergo the redemptive change of our theological anthropology by redemptive change from inner out—that is, the change where the old dies so that the new wine can emerge (*metamorphoō*, cf. Rom 12:2; 2 Cor 3:18), and flow whole-ly as God's new creation family in uncommon likeness of the Trinity. Redemptive change is essential for the new relational order to have qualitative relational significance in worship.

We will need to leave behind many old 'wineskins' of the familiar and common in our worship practices. This alone will likely be unsettling, maybe scary, and certainly met with resistance (the significance of "the old is better," Lk 5:39). Likewise, stepping out in 'new' practices can also create tension, heighten anxiety, and scare people away. Some practices may outwardly appear to remain the same (e.g. some aspects of Communion, discussed below), yet what must be transformed is our vulnerable involvement in those practices with the primacy of relationship on God's relational terms.

At the heart of the paradigm shift is the need for our resolve, our determined choices (cf. *kūn*, Ps 57:7; 108:1), to embrace the relational work of sharing together in the trinitarian relational-specific process involved in family love, which much of our corporate worship lacks today. The alternative is to live with the status quo of what amounts to old wineskins in spite of new appearances. The problem with old wineskins, according to Jesus, is that they cannot hold new wine without bursting, hence ruining both wineskins and new wine. Much of our worship history has seen such outer-in change, thus ruining much new wine without cultivating its significance and growth. Do you know churches like this? Indeed, I believe that loss of the new wine is precisely how the churches (at least in the global North) have lost their voice (authority and credibility)

to proclaim the good news of God’s relational-specific response to us in our human relational condition. Still, the new wine keeps sprouting to emerge and flow, and it is our responsibility with the Spirit to establish new wineskins for it to fully flow to maturity.

The paradigm shift is the necessary step for us to enact our transformation to worship in the new relational order of equalized and intimate relationships together. Inseparably, equalized and intimate is the nature of relationships integrally composing God’s new creation family such that there is no question as to who and whose we are. Or, as Jesus told his disciples in his new commandment (his distinguished relational terms): “Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples...” (Jn 13:34-35). Are we ready to love as Jesus has loved us—notably, has he washed our feet so that our whole person emerges vulnerably together in the new relational order of worship? By the way, for Jesus’ followers, this is not optional if we want to share in his intimate life (Jn 13:8).

The significance of ‘new relational order of worship’ is designed to illustrate the paradigm shift regarding what we give primacy to—*from* the common use of ‘order of worship’ as the assumed determinant in worship planning (focused on what to do), *to* ‘the new relational order’ of our relationships together on the distinguished, uncommon basis of God’s relational grace (focused on *agapē* involvement of how to be involved in relationship).³ These two competing paradigms are mutually exclusive as the *primary* determinant of worship: The old-wineskin ‘order of worship’ signifies the common usage of a template for worship that is susceptible to turning worship into a referential and relationally stagnant activity with a fragmentary composition. The new-wineskin ‘new relational order’ is not a structured reality but the relational reality composing the new creation family based on the relational ontology of the Trinity, whose function is only whole and thus neither partial nor fragmentary. Moreover, these old and new paradigms cannot be combined into some hybrid, because the old will always fragment the wholeness of the new.

Therefore, the ‘new relational order of worship’ establishes the trinitarian relational context as the contextualizing ‘framework’ for worship, and the trinitarian relational process of family love as the embodied dynamic for worship, replacing in primacy any external structure that we have depended on for centuries. Note, however, this paradigm shift does not eliminate orders of worship, because they have an important function for planning worship and the flow of any worship service. Yet, any worship order has to understand its underlying significance. What we are talking about is *who* and *what* define and determine the nature and function of our worship gatherings, and *how* to fulfill this relational purpose.

Certainly there are worship thinkers who emphasize the primacy of relationship with God in worship, and warn of slavish adherence to any worship orders. They are correct to point out the difference. Yet, until our underlying theological anthropology—that is, how we define the person, and on this basis how we engage in relationships, both of which then determine how we practice church—is addressed and transformed, clergy and worship leaders will always default to using any worship orders in referential terms. Default means specifically in this case: used as templates that will be the primary determinant for their worship practices as a subtle substitute, which then reshapes the

³ The ‘new relational order’ is discussed in full in T. Dave Matsuo, *The Gospel of Transformation*.

likeness of the Trinity to something lacking qualitative relational significance. With this likeness, is this the kind of God you want to experience in relationship together?

Wineskins of Worship Old and New

When Jesus had table fellowship with some tax collectors and sinners, he was engaged in crucial relational work. In response to his critics, Jesus spoke of “new wine,” which cannot be contained in “old wineskins” (see Lk 5:37-39; Mt 9:17; Mk 2:22). The new wine signifies his disciples’ (and new creation family’s) ontology and function needing a compatible context to mature in. New wineskins signify the discipleship-worship practices necessary for persons to grow and mature in wholeness, just as new wine needed to be put into new wineskins to age properly. Old wineskins (already too stretched out for fermenting grapes), however, signify any context of discipleship-worship practices that have become reduced or fragmented and thus are incompatible with new wine, which then are unusable for the new wine to mature in. Indeed, new wine and old wineskins are so incompatible that both are ruined when joined together. Jesus was teaching about the incompatibility and incongruence between the new and the old, that is, his uncommon disciples-worshippers and common practices focused on secondary matters.

As the title of this chapter points to, we need to transform a particular prevailing aspect of worship—the common practices that converge in an explicit or implicit ‘order of worship’, which is like an old wineskin. Again, by no means does this discussion suggest doing away with orders of worship, but to shift our worship paradigm involving who and what defines and determines the very nature of our worship gatherings. In other words, orders of worship must be redeemed from their common usage and re-contextualized into the trinitarian relational context and relational process of family love.

Worship services worldwide generally follow a basic liturgical pattern called the ‘order of worship’ (or liturgical *ordo*) consisting at minimum of four symbols or movements: gathering, word, table, and sending (with variations in their wording).⁴ Various church denominations add many others to this so-called ‘deep structure’ (in function as a template), but some or all of these four are what most worship services share in common. These four symbols/movements roughly correspond to the gospel: God has gathered (or called, as in ‘the called out’ people, or *ekklesia*) through the proclamation of the Word, we respond and come to the Communion table where we memorialize Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross and partake of the elements representing Christ’s body and blood, and then we are sent out into the world to make disciples. Although there are many added parts to the basic order of worship—notably the lengthy Great Prayer of Thanksgiving for the Eucharist—most contemporary worship orders more or less follow these four.

We certainly can affirm the importance for the global church to have theological and ecclesial consistency in worship through time, which standard orders of worship provide. There is no dispute that orthodoxy in theology and practice—that is, correct theology and practice that are whole and not referentialized—are necessary for God’s

⁴ Other liturgical scholars identify the four elements as bath, word, table, and prayer.

church family. Yet orders of worship—for example, the Book of Common Worship (Anglican)—must serve the primacy of God’s new creation family, and not vice versa; and the new creation family must not serve patterns of worship for the sake of their preservation.

For example, one issue concerning templates for worship is that worship programming becomes dependent on a series of the symbols/movements as referentialized parts, and their referentialization (in language, purpose, and process) renders them relationally disparate, lacking an integral purpose, namely for the relational primacy as new creation family. This is why in terms of relational experience, there often isn’t integration between parts of worship, though thematically there may be. For example, let’s say there is a theme for worship for a given month. That theme will be integrated into the opening comments of gathering, the hymns and praise songs, sermons, prayers, visuals. Yet the primacy of relational involvement (both with God and with each other) is pushed to the margins, if not ignored, in service of the parts. The parts may add up to some kind of total, even assumed to equal the whole, but lack the integrating wholeness of reciprocal relational involvement together as new creation family in likeness of the Trinity. In other words, the reality facing us is that the sum of all these parts do not add up to equal the whole composed by the Trinity. Nevertheless, in the subtle influence of what’s common, old wineskins may appear useful, good, or even better (cf. Lk 5:39)—which is why they persist in worship practice, even while they do not mature the new wine in whole ontology and function. This is why many church thinkers have concluded that the church is failing to form disciples, though too often disciples are defined only for ministry work and service.

A worship service determined primarily by orders of worship also easily becomes overly focused on going from part to part. Worship leaders talk a lot about needing to make smooth verbal or musical transitions from one part of the worship service to the next, such as from the last song in a music set to the offering collection, or from Communion to intercessory prayer. The focus is less (or not at all) on primacy of relationships together, and more on what to do—even with worship leaders’ sincere desires to lead others in worship. In the absence of the primary, we focus on the secondary so that awkward transitions become a primary concern of both worship leaders and some worshiper. What God would care about this—a God who values relational connection, or a God who prefers perfect presentation in secondary matters?

Related to this issue of transitions from part to part is what the congregation is doing. Worship for many persons is more about being led in an expected manner (e.g. smoothly, eloquently, and thus with the appearance of sacredness), and less about their own relational responsibilities as subject-persons intimately involved in the worship relationship with God. These persons focus more on how the worship leaders do their job than on their own accountability for their relational part, namely the three major issues for all worship-discipleship practice: the person they present to God, the quality and integrity of their communication, and the depth level of their relational involvement with God in worship. Furthermore, even though some worshipers may come to worship ready to worship with their whole-person in congruent involvement with God, they may be subtly influenced by everyone else around them such that their ‘new wine’ is squelched in an old wineskin. The sum effect is not wholeness together but the conformity of fragmentary parts.

Following the order of worship as described may have relational clarity, and help worshipers know what to expect, as liturgies of the Eucharist provide (i.e. the Great Prayer and its many parts); yet, our participation in such orders can easily lack relational significance involving our vulnerable relational involvement with the Lord altogether as the new creation family. Liturgical worship's relational clarity is perhaps its most important function. However, I suspect that many persons prefer to recite or read their parts of the Great Prayer because it's more palatable to do so and thereby keep relationally distant than to palpably open their hearts before God. Palpable communion together is what God desires, but making referential statements in set prayers merely engages us in palatable Communion.

We need to embrace that we are all responsible and accountable to God and each other for the person we present in worship, the quality and integrity our communication in worship, and the level of involvement in relationships together that compose corporate worship in likeness of the Trinity. Church leaders together with worship planners and leaders must take the lead in these three major issues for all worship practice, giving primacy to the new relational order of worship, and dealing with the common order of worship accordingly—that is, forsaking old wineskins for new ones in order for the new wine to be nurtured, matured, and flow. Unavoidably, however, what also converges with these dynamics involves our theology anthropology underlying how the person is defined, relationships are engaged, and thereby how church is practices, which may require redemptive change in order for the new wine to emerge at all.

Therefore, this paradigm shift cannot be reduced to merely what's "creative" and innovative as ends in themselves; that reduced view is just another old wineskin made to look new. Rather, church leaders and worship planners/leaders together must intentionally cultivate and grow the new creation family's relationships of the new relational order—the equalized and intimate relationships that compose our identity as God's very own daughters and sons. This is the both new and uncommon relational context that must determine every aspect of worship gatherings.

To grow to maturity requires rigorous involvement in the conjoint fight *for* wholeness of persons and relationships and *against* the sin of reductionism, both of which need to be given priority in worship planning. The song "Only By Grace"⁵ is a meaningful song to sing about the equalizing work of God's relational grace that needs to find application in the very surroundings of worship. One very visible change that nonverbally communicates the new relational order of worship is to move the worship leader and musicians out of front and center stage to the sides (or even the back) of the chapel/sanctuary, and the choir similarly. There is no good reason to perpetuate the relational distance (not just physical distance) created by the performer-audience positioning of worshipers. Each church's physical space may present challenges, but the Spirit is willing to meet them if we are!

Relationship with God cannot be intimate if it lacks relational clarity, which means there can be no ambiguity as to who is being worshiped. At the very least, worship leaders need to ensure relational clarity by helping the worshipers give their *primary* attention and relational involvement directly to God without mediation, and thus not on themselves, not on performances or performers, or even "honored guests." Songs that are

⁵ By Gerrit Gustafson, © 1989 Integrity's Hosanna! Music.

sung directly to God (in the second person) and not indirectly about God (in the third person) are a part of relational clarity. Church leaders also need to take up their relational responsibilities to grow these worshipers outside of the actual worship service, to “equip the saints” for “*maturing* the body of Christ...in love” (Eph 4:12,16). These comments presuppose, of course, that church and worship leaders are themselves involved in the nonnegotiable relational work that Jesus requires of his disciples. In other words beyond the referential, relational clarity ends up having no meaning unless it is composed, embodied, and enacted with relational significance, which requires the vulnerable involvement of whole persons.

Relational clarity in our equalized and intimate relationships together as sisters and brothers is vital also—that is, relational clarity of the persons we present with relational significance to each other, as well as to God. An important step for many if not most churches and their worship would be to eliminate the use of titles when both addressing each other, or when referring to others. The titles of Reverend, Pastor, Doctor, Father (for priests), and other titles only serve to create relational distance, inevitably in the comparative process of reductionism (defining persons as more-less by secondary criteria that have no significance to God). Using titles in worship intentionally or inadvertently counter equalized and intimate relationships, since the purpose of titles is to set persons above others, a glaring practice of worship ‘in their way’. Jesus eliminated the use of titles for his disciples (Mt 23:1-12), as discussed in chapter 2. Will we heed Jesus’ words?

When we embrace our relational responsibilities as daughters and sons, the Father can relationally receive all who are his (nothing less and no substitutes)—that is, relationally receive our whole person (not what we do in service and ministry), whom he loves and pursues for life together in intimate communion. It is only in the dynamic, ongoing reciprocal relational involvement of love (*agapē*) that the Trinity can come and make their home in us (Jn 14:23). When involvement this takes place, it means that we will have been transformed into our new and uncommon *functional* identity (i.e. in practice as well as in our theology) as God’s new creation family. Moreover, our corporate worship gatherings will be qualitatively and relationally distinguished from the current status quo or what’s common. It will be remarkable to experience God’s new creation family emerging together thus distinguished from the fragmentary life templates that we’ve let define and determine our persons and relationships together. Social media dominate Christians’ attention and determine how we function more and more with each tech innovation, promoting virtual and augmented realities that also infect the church. For example, showing TV-like videos with “commercials” advertising the church’s activities are inappropriate and intrusive distractions into the new creation family’s most important gathering—relationally no different from parents on their devices during dinnertime, while their children lack connection as relational orphans.

Church and worship leaders must take the lead by first understanding for themselves the de-person-izing and de-relationalizing influences of social media, then directly critiquing it. Limit using technology to *only* ways that help facilitate relational involvement in worship (e.g. projecting song lyrics) without further augmentation; do not let the culture’s dependence on technology enslave you any longer in the virtual. We can liken these relational actions to the lopping off and pruning that the Father deems necessary in order for his beloved family to mature (cf. Jn 15:1-2). We will not grow in

the trinitarian relational context and process of family love while spending so much effort over worship ‘in their way’—that is, trying to be culturally relevant in order to appeal to persons (notably millennials). That effort cannot distinguish who and whose we are, period.

In honest reflection on the condition of the world around us, we as Christians must acknowledge our corporate failings as God’s new creation family. The world (indeed also many Christians) isn’t very interested in the Good News as we have presented it through our churches and worship times, and it’s not for lack of our efforts and good intentions. It is time for us to turn from our self-determined views of God and assumptions about what pleases God in worship (cf. Ps 46:10), to mature into who, what, and how God calls and expects us to function in order to be distinguished unmistakably as the Father’s new creation family.

Furthermore, the new creation family emerges only ‘behind the curtain’ of the old worship context, which signifies where and how communion unfolds with God’s most intimate presence. We must follow Jesus ‘behind the curtain’ to join him in the sacrifice he made on our behalf to have direct access to relationship with the Father (Heb 9:24-26; 10:12-14, 19-20). Here behind the curtain we (personally and corporately) must also remove the veils (covering our faces and hearts) of relational barriers (2 Cor 3:16-18). The Father’s new creation family worships in uncommon ontology and function only ‘behind the curtain’, Face to face and heart to heart. Remaining in common worship practice, however, keeps us ‘in front of the curtain’, relationally apart on our own relational terms and with the veil still in place. Such practice neither claims the good news of Christ’s sacrifice nor receives the communion constituting its relational outcome (discussed later).

In view of the church’s current condition, we need a new ‘call to worship’ ‘behind the curtain’ in the ‘new relational order of worship’ with veils removed—compatible and congruent with the relational ontology of the Trinity, summarized here:

In the mystery of the Trinity’s ontology, we have experiential relational connection with the whole relational function of the Trinity’s whole relational ontology—in the experiential truth of the whole gospel’s trinitarian relational context of family and trinitarian relational process of family love—to understand the very relational likeness constituting our ontology and function to be whole. This relational outcome cannot be composed by referential terms, nor can it emerge from the referential likeness of God. On the unequivocal contrary, this whole understanding is the relational outcome of experiencing the relational reality of God’s vulnerable presence and intimate involvement with us. This experiential truth is crucial for our theology and practice: If God is not vulnerably present and relationally involved with us, then our epistemic field of knowing who, what and how God is is narrowed down to referential terms that, at best, can only boast of having fragmentary information *about* God—without experiencing the truth of the whole of God in the reality of intimate relationship together.⁶

⁶ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Global Church Engaging the Nature of Sin & the Human Condition*, 50-51, 34, 96, 158. And for an in-depth study of the Trinity, see Matsuo, *The Face of the Trinity: The Trinitarian Essential for the Whole of God and Life* (Trinity Study, coming in 2016). Online at <http://4X12.org>.

Within this discussion on our relational responsibilities and wineskins—all within the defining relational context of worship ‘behind the curtain’ and ‘without the veil’—we examine Jesus’ interactions, first with the former prostitute, then with Mary of Bethany. The interactions Jesus had with these women don’t initially appear to be related to worship as we know it today. But the relational involvements from both these women deeply embody their worship relationship and commitment in the uncommon ontology and function that we seek through this study. In fact, their worship is so clearly distinguished that they are worship leaders with the qualitative relational significance needed for us to learn from and be encouraged by.

Uncommon Worship Leaders for the New Creation Family

Of all Jesus’ followers mentioned in the NT, two women emerge to lead us in uncommon worship with more relational significance than the other disciples. What distinguishes them from the others is not their gender but rather the quality of their persons over the quantity of the others’ service. A former prostitute and Mary (Martha’s sister) demonstrated the specific choices that are involved in their worship that definitively had relational significance to Jesus. In compatible reciprocal response to Jesus, the two women fulfilled the three major issues for our discipleship-worship relationship with Jesus. Their witness will challenge much of our own worship theology and worship practice with uncommon ways foreign to our worship lexicon.

To briefly review, the previous chapter discussed how Jesus embodied the three major issues for all practice essential for our discipleship-worship relationships to be in his likeness, as follows: (1) the significance of the person presented, demonstrating the integrity of the whole person; (2) the quality and integrity of the person’s communication to make relational connection; and (3) the depth level of relational involvement in the trinitarian relational process of family love (*hesed* and *agapē*), defined as ‘how to be involved’ in relationships, not about ‘what I need to do’ (even sacrifice). As we examine these two persons’ practice, be aware of their underlying theological anthropology and how they defined their person, and on this basis how they involved their person with Jesus in relationship together.

The Former Prostitute: the Relational Paradox

The interaction between Jesus and the former prostitute demonstrates the relational necessity of God’s forgiveness for our wholeness in reconciled relationship together (Lk 7:36-50). Forgiveness is essential to being uncommon, because we need to be relationally reconciled to the uncommon God in order to experience this essential difference in our ontology and function. In other words, if we are not forgiven for living according to what’s common, how can we be essentially different to enact uncommon function from inner out?

The former prostitute received Jesus’ forgiveness for her common moral failures, which should not be considered worse than any other common practice. However, the former prostitute’s experience went much deeper than forgiveness for those sins; she experienced the fulfillment of God’s definitive blessing from OT times (Num 6:24-26).

That is to say, the former prostitute—this most unlikely person—became, paradoxically, a kind of gospel foremother to us. This woman experienced God’s relational response of grace to her human condition with the face of Jesus, face to face in intimate relationship, (Lk 7:36-50), which required the integral two-fold significance of salvation: (1) Jesus freed her from the old and common definitions of her person from outer-in (i.e. her occupation), and conjointly (2) this transformed her to wholeness and holiness (uncommonness) in reconciled relationship with Jesus.

What unfolds from this unlikely person is the relational paradox of a once-common person in relational connection to and intimate involvement with the uncommon God. This relational paradox further signifies a once-reduced person now vulnerably extended with her whole person to the whole of God. On the essential basis of the quality of her whole person, her relational actions at Jesus’ table fellowship compose her uncommon response of worship with the qualitative relational significance to lead us today in uncommon worship.

I have also included her in this section as a worship leader because her interaction with Jesus further illuminates our discussion of Jesus washing the feet of our whole person—a necessary relational reality for church and worship leaders to receive personally. Of course, Jesus didn’t physically wash this woman’s feet—just the reverse here. Yet he did ‘wash’ her for the deeper relational dynamic of “have [a] share with me” (cf. Jn 13:8), which is necessary for us to receive from Jesus for our own relational reality with him in worship. She experienced God’s forgiveness and grace, and loved back simply with the depth of her person in reciprocal relational response compatible with Jesus’ relational response. She was transformed from inner out. Moreover, her actions demonstrate that grace, faith, and peace (wholeness) are integral dynamic relational functions needing to converge in the primacy of relationship with the whole and uncommon God. This woman becomes for us ‘the relational paradox’ that must also become our essential reality in the whole and uncommon relational response of worship—the irreducible and nonnegotiable response in contrast to and conflict with ‘their way’.

This known former prostitute entered a dinner party held for Jesus. The party’s host, a Pharisee named Simon, inwardly criticized Jesus for letting this woman physically touch him, and do so in such a demonstrative intimate way. According to Simon’s religious beliefs and practices, Jesus should not have allowed such impropriety because she was considered unclean. But here she washed Jesus’ feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair, kissed them then poured perfume (a tool of her trade) on them.

Simon could only see the woman as ‘less’ on the basis of her occupation (and likely also her gender). His lens was a product of his religious context that gave primacy to such outer criteria. Jesus, however, saw the woman in her innermost (cf. Acts 1:24a; Rev 2:23; Ps 139:1), through his qualitative-relational lens. Jesus focused on her open and vulnerable heart (signifying her whole person) in reciprocal response to him, and received her at that level. This is how Jesus engaged with persons in God’s uncommon relational context, not influenced by how her sociocultural context viewed her, whereas Simon’s common behavior was determined by his religio-cultural context.

Apparently Jesus had a prior interaction with the woman in which Jesus forgave her for her common moral failings. Forgiveness for this woman wasn’t limited to the commonly referential view that forgiveness means just wiping a slate clean. Rather, she

experienced the deeper significance of intimate relational connection in God's relational response of grace to her whole person. What she experienced with Jesus was to no longer be defined her by her circumstances and actions in the past. He knew that prostitution was a fragmenting, dehumanizing occupation, reducing persons to only their bodies for sex (for both prostitutes and their customers). In a highly moralistic religious context such as Pharisaical Judaism, prostitutes were not deemed 'less' but 'least' on the basis of their occupation—unclean and untouchable sinners.

Jesus' vulnerable presence and relational-specific involvement with the woman freed her from her old identity from outer in by his relational response of forgiveness *and* relational grace, thereby redefining her person from the inner out for the purpose of making her whole in relationship together. Jesus' forgiveness freed this woman from her common sins, and relational grace established her in wholeness of intimate connection in relationship together. This is how Jesus 'washed the feet' of her whole person—which Peter had difficulty receiving—and reiterates why we too need to let Jesus wash the feet of our whole person. In her compatible reciprocal response to God's relational grace and forgiveness, the former prostitute enjoyed her 'share with Jesus' (cf. Jn 13:8), and Jesus enjoyed the depth of relational connection too—signifying what and why the Father seeks this from worshipers (Jn 4:23-24).

It's vital for us to understand that this woman deeply received Jesus in his relational response of grace by letting her heart be open and vulnerable with him—the enactment of her faith, that is, as relational trust in Jesus that he would not reject her. Having been so deeply responded to in her human condition and relational need, the reciprocal response of her heart freely emerged as she stepped forth in faith to wash Jesus' feet with her tears, wipe them with her hair, and anoint them with perfumed oil. Jesus' affirmed her faith, saying "Your faith has saved you" (v.50). This interaction shows us the dynamic relational process involved in faith, correcting our mistaken view that faith is some quantity to merely possess. Faith is dynamic relational trust in God to be whole-ly (not fragmentary) who, what, and how God is in relationship.

Furthermore, "saved" (*sōzō*) here didn't mean that the woman's faith produced her own salvation (only God can save). Significantly, Jesus affirmed the reciprocity of her relational response (of faith) to vulnerably entrust her person to Jesus. Her reciprocal response was necessary for her to experience the reality of being freed from the sin of reductionism of her person and function in order to experience wholeness in reciprocal relationship together. For the former prostitute and for all of us, this reciprocity affirms our persons as subjects worthy to engage in relationship with the whole and uncommon God. We must embrace the reciprocal nature of relationship with God if we want to grow both in our wholeness, and to know and understand God in our innermost (cf. Jer 9:24).

The relational process that the former prostitute experienced was redemptive reconciliation; she was redeemed from the old (common) to the new (uncommon) of being made whole in relationship together with God. Jesus thus definitively affirmed this significance for her life: "Go in peace" (v.50). In Scripture, "peace" is always about wholeness and well-being of persons, in contrast to the Greek notion of peace meaning absence of conflict, conflict that his woman likely would still experience in social contexts. To paraphrase Jesus' words to her in his blessing and 'sending': "go forth now in your whole and uncommon ontology and function in the primacy of our relationship together—and let the new wine flow!"

And with the further significance of Jesus' words, this woman "has shown great love" by giving primacy to her relationship with Jesus, in reciprocal relational response to having been loved first. Her worship is a touching example of one who worshiped in spirit and truth. Yet we should not idealize her or her relational reality; sin is sin, forgiveness doesn't make distinctions. What is important for us is to embrace for ourselves the relational contingency that Jesus makes definitive here: This reciprocal relational involvement of love at this vulnerable level emerges only from one who has been vulnerably open to experience God's relational response of love in forgiveness from inner out (Lk 7:47; cf. Mt 6:14-15; 18:21-35). The extent of our reciprocal relational response is directly contingent on and proportional to the extent of vulnerably receiving God's relational response of grace and forgiveness.

The former prostitute is the relational paradox for worship on two accounts. First, given that her human context cast her as a most unholy and undeserving person, the reality that she demonstrates uncommonness/holiness seems incongruous—that is, in common terms. For human persons, the most common definition for holiness is purity and is about sexual abstinence until marriage (e.g. "purity pledges" or "virginity pledges" made by evangelical teens and young adults in the U.S.). Obviously the former prostitute didn't fit such a definition of holiness, since she was considered morally impure and unclean by virtue of her occupation. Yet, it is this immoral woman—in contrast to her detractor, Simon the Pharisee (with his overt practices of piety)—who corrects us and our common notions about what it means to God to be uncommon/holy.

On second account, prostitution (along with pornography) epitomizes in the extreme the substitutes that humans turn to in place of genuine intimate connection in human relationships. Engaging in prostitution and engaging prostitutes fragment and reduce persons, and their activity provides only ontological simulation of relational connection through sexual acts; intimacy based on sex is also common confused in marriage. Indeed, for many females, prostitution is a literal enslavement, for others it is a job to make a living, or a means to support drug addictions. And so for the former prostitute to be a role model for intimate relational connection with Jesus makes her the relational paradox.

But herein lies God's distinguished ways: What is impossible in the human context, in God's relational context this woman was redeemed and relationally reconciled, becoming a most uncommon and whole person on the basis of God's relational terms (cf. Lk 18:27). Her uncommon ontology and function in her whole reciprocal relational response of worship are vital for us to understand for our own uncommon ontology and function. Her life exemplifies the relational paradox of those who make up God's new creation family, and demonstrates for us what it means to worship in new wineskins.

Beyond Common Forgiveness

Most of us have asked God during worship services to forgive our sins, very often during the Lord's Prayer, as a prelude to Communion, or in conjunction with asking Jesus into our hearts. We've asked God for forgiveness for a variety of moral failures, primarily when we've done, said, or thought something we know is wrong (e.g. lying, stealing, cheating, being jealous). Some of us have asked God to forgive us for "deeper" sins, such as disbelief and lack of trust, pride, or self-justification. Any of these sins we might

confess before we take Communion, focusing on Jesus' spilled blood that signifies God's forgiveness through Jesus' death on the cross (Mt 26:28; Eph 1:7)—that is, blood essentially disembodied from Jesus' person and thus derelationalized from direct involvement in relationship together (the only significance of forgiveness). Accordingly, in general, Christians don't demonstrate the "great love" as the prostitute did (Lk 7:47) that emerges from only the essential relational experience of forgiveness. Many worship gatherings demonstrate "loves little" instead, which demonstrates unmistakably the common experience of "one to whom little is forgiven." Consequently, we seem to have made even forgiveness into something common, lacking relational significance. This is our basic experience with sin and forgiveness.

We have much to learn from this woman as to the essence of forgiveness and the relational response of grace necessary for our person's ontology and function to be made whole. This is the only basis for our worship involvement to have relational significance to God, because it is composed by the reciprocal nature of our relational response of having been loved first. In contrast, we who have been forgiven little love little, because the existing reality is that we haven't experienced having been loved first. The prostitute teaches us the truth that the vulnerableness of our hearts is necessary to receive God's forgiveness, then relationally trusts that God has indeed forgiven us whereby we are free to express our whole person in loving response to God and others, and to share this same forgiveness with others (cf. Mt 6:12, 14-15). In addition, her relational paradox clearly demonstrates the irreplaceable basis required for any of us to significantly respond with love in likeness of how the Trinity loves us (Jn 15:9; 17:26)—the relational response of love that distinguishes us as the Trinity's new creation family (Jn 13:34-35; 17:23).

Therefore, we need to embrace this sister as one who whole-ly fulfilled the three issues for all discipleship-worship practice. For the first major issue, the person she presented to Jesus was without masks or substitutes for her person; she didn't try to make herself more "acceptable" to Jesus, but was involved with Jesus only in vulnerable honesty of her heart without pretense or embellishment. The quality of her communication was direct, and with uncensored heart she vulnerably expressed to Jesus how she felt about him through her unconventional nonverbal expressions—expressions deemed unacceptable by the prevailing religious order (e.g. Lk 7:39)—in the new relational order of worship. And the depth level of her relational involvement was clearly with her innermost being, having been forgiven and made whole in redeemed, reconciled relationship together with Jesus, the essential reality of which could never be reproduced by virtual or augmented reality. The interaction between Jesus and this woman was relationally involving and dynamic at a depth that can be neither simulated nor simply idealized. We can imagine that she went forth with her face shining brightly for having intimately experienced the relational grace and glory of God (the who, what, and how God is in God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement) in the face of Jesus (as in 2 Cor 4:6). This is the uncommon relational outcome awaiting all of us who follow the prostitute's relational path of worship.

Mary: the New Relational Order Emerges

Mary is also an unlikely worship leader, as well as unlikely teacher with respect to the new relational order in our worship-discipleship relationship—unlikely, that is, if

we are thinking in the common terms of our current worship practices. For starters, Mary didn't have the same recognition or status as Jesus' twelve closest disciples. We know nothing about Mary up until Jesus had dinner at Martha's house (i.e. Lazarus'), such as any past accomplishments, her resources, her education—nothing to distinguish her in her sociocultural context, most notably in the existing religious order.

What then distinguished Mary from the other disciples? Simply, yet uncommonly, her undivided heart composing her whole theology and practice. By involvement with Jesus with her heart not fragmented (especially by secondary matter), Mary provides instructive contrast to Peter, since he struggled (due to his hybrid theology) practicing discipleship and worship on his own self-determined terms. And where Peter at times made empty boastful statements (even with good intentions) about his devotion to Jesus but did not follow through on them, Mary *lived* her boast—which I call her 'whole-ly boast' (whole+holy). That is, Mary's qualitative and relational involvement with Jesus was her whole-ly boast, her boast that didn't depend on boastful words or outward displays of devotion. It was Mary's whole *practice* that witnessed to her relational reality of who defined her person, and what determined her relational involvement with Jesus—which also involved the significance of her theological anthropology.

We need to learn this from Mary for our own worship to have significance and be distinguished. These qualitative and relational aspects of Mary illuminate the essential significance of the new relational order for relationships that distinguish the new creation family in likeness of the Trinity. Mary's discipleship-worship practice set her apart from the common practices 'in their way', which also shaped the other disciples and that continue to pervade the global church today. Therefore, we need to consider the following discussion on Mary imperative for all Christians and our gospel, because that's how Jesus considered Mary (Mt 26:13).

Mary's First Steps

When Jesus visited Martha's home (Lk 10:38-42), Mary made an unexpected counter-cultural move that upset Martha but pleased Jesus. Yet, what she did was not simply to defy a cultural norm by leaving her (woman's) place in the kitchen with Martha in order to sit at the teacher's feet to study. Much more significant was that she enacted her whole person with determination (cf. *kûn*, Ps 57:7; 108:1, to be resolved, have one's heart set on) to *be* directly involved with Jesus "*where I am*" (the relational imperative of discipleship, Jn 12:26). In the relational primacy of discipleship, Mary (1) rejected the constraints of being defined from outer in by her socio-religious context that would have kept her at a relational distance from Jesus, and (2) "sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying," to be directly relationally involved with Jesus as his disciple. That is, Mary gave primacy to relationship together as Jesus' disciple in congruence with Jesus' nonnegotiable relational terms for discipleship—the primacy of which Christians have commonly reinterpreted in various secondary ways (as the disciples demonstrated, discussed below).

Mary made the paradigm shift we are discussing in this chapter: Mary chose the primacy of relationship with Jesus at the expense of what was expected and acceptable behavior as defined by her socio-religious context of the time. She defied the order (template) sanctioned by the leaders of Second Temple Judaism, to which Martha still adhered. While this scene wasn't specifically about worship, the discipleship and worship

relationships are inseparable, thus the paradigm shift applies.

More than the other disciples, we witness in Mary the relationally specific response to Jesus in the primacy of relationship that needs to define all his disciples. Martha, by contrast, responded to Jesus indirectly, and her involvement was more generalized in the performance of her prescribed role (as object-person), much like Peter. Mary's choice (as subject-person) was direct and face-to-face with Jesus' person. Although none of the Gospels mention Jesus having called to Mary to "follow me," she did indeed follow Jesus on Jesus' nonnegotiable relational terms, which distinguished her response to Jesus even beyond the responses of the other disciples.

Like the former prostitute, Mary engaged in the compatible reciprocal relational response necessary for Jesus' disciples-worshippers to function in his likeness. And although in this scene we don't know what Mary might have said, her actions definitively embodied her relational messages communicated vulnerably to Jesus, the content and quality of which spoke loud and clear to Jesus. It is vitally significant that Jesus was pleased by the depth of Mary's relational involvement with him, and affirmed Mary for having chosen the "good part" (Lk 10:42). It is equally instructive for us that Jesus contrasted Martha's practice—"worried" (*merimnaō*, have anxiety) and "troubled" (*thorybazō*, upset, distracted, v.41)—with Mary's practice as having chosen the good "part" (*meris*, from *meros*, part, share). This statement overlaps integrally with Jesus' words to Peter that "unless I wash you, you have no share [*meros*] with me" (Jn 13:8). This 'share' that Mary chose was to participate in Jesus' life in the primacy of relationship together, to be "where I am" (cf. Jn 17:24).

Much like Martha, many worship planners and leaders become anxious, worried, and distracted by preparations and performance to make worship acceptable to God, which, as with Martha, are tasks with good intentions that somebody has to take on. We need to understand, however, that our preoccupation with secondary matters about worship are likely from self-concerns about what people will think about us, about how we measure up in a comparative process, which signify our reduced theological anthropology fragmenting persons and relationships. Again, this self-concern reflects a divided heart that is not relationally secure and confident in God's relational grace (recall Peter's fear at the transfiguration). Mary's heart was undivided and secure, and thus, like the former prostitutes, she was free to involve her whole persons directly in face-to-face relationship with Jesus, the Son of God.

The primacy that Mary gave to relational connection with Jesus puts into whole perspective where service and ministry fit into our discipleship-worship relationship—a secondary place. Whenever we reverse these priorities and give primacy to service and ministry, then we will be determined foremost by focusing on 'what to do' over how to be relationally involved with God and others. This is axiomatic, and Jesus' words (Jn 12:26)—his relational paradigm for his disciples—must finally be heard and responded to without reduction and negotiation!

These two sisters illuminate the choices before us: the choice involving transformation of our ontology and function from common practice to the uncommon, and thus risk engaging a new order; or the choice to remain constrained by the common's traditional expectations notably giving primacy to serving, even if serving Jesus with good intentions, which maintain the old order. When Jesus ended by saying that the good part that Mary had chosen "will not be taken away from her," he was assuring her of her

permanent place with Jesus in God's family—the new creation family—where she now relationally belonged (as in Jn 8:35-36). Jesus' expectations for his disciples-worshippers certainly defied the common's expectations, and still do. Are we listening to “my Son,” as the Father makes imperative?

Consider for yourself what limits and constrains you in worship, the self-consciousness and concerns that keep you measured, self-contained, and at a relational distance. What is your comfort zone (the answer to which helps identify how you define your person)? What changes in worship gatherings would help you and others to take first steps in the equalized and intimate relationships of the new relational order to follow Mary's lead? Consider these issues vulnerably with the Spirit.

For persons in church and worship leadership, it's important to identify the expectations that cause you to become preoccupied, anxious or stressed, and where those expectations come from. Consider these in light of the primacy that God gives to the whole person in vulnerable honesty of heart for whole (equalized and intimate) relationships together. Mary and the former prostitute embodied undivided hearts, such that their persons were defined and determined by relationship with God only on God's relational terms of grace. Thus their self-worth didn't depend on their performance and measuring up in a comparative process. They experienced the transformation of their identity from the old (in common terms) to their new identity with Jesus. Jesus calls us to the same relational identity that they enacted in compatible reciprocal relational response of faith (relational trust).

Additionally, for persons who don't have the roles, titles, and expectations of church and worship leaders, it's necessary to address things from a different angle. That is, the rest of us also have our reciprocal relational responsibilities as disciples-worshippers. We too need to die to the old-common of being defined and determined in the comparative process by secondary criteria of what we don't do or don't have (lead worship, roles as leaders). Important for us to understand is that while persons who are considered as 'better' (e.g. church and worship leaders) need to be 'equalized down', others who are considered as 'less' need to be 'equalized up' (cf. Jas 1:9). By assuming our own relational paradox, we must reject seeing ourselves as “mere” worshippers, and can no longer passively assume a 'lesser' place of importance in worship. We need to exercise our resolve to be equalized up and take uncommon steps with Mary, which then would also be intrusive as she was: no longer defined and determined by outer criteria from our religious contexts, but as full daughters and sons for direct, face-to-face-worship in our permanent place in the Father's new creation family.

The new relational order signifies relationships in the new creation family that are integrally equalized and intimate, the *only* basis for which is God's relational response of grace (and forgiveness) in response to our innermost condition and need. In this new relational order, the church must give primacy to whole persons and whole relationships together, regardless of roles, social status, and all other human-made distinctions. To reiterate from chapter 3, being equalized by God's relational response of grace to us necessitates letting Jesus 'wash the feet of our whole person', just as the former prostitute and Mary experienced. This also requires us to be involved in Communion with Jesus behind the curtain with our veil removed, discussed further below.

Mary's whole and uncommon ontology and function were further distinguished in a second interaction with Jesus when Lazarus died (Jn 11:28-33). In this interaction, Mary demonstrated a deeper level of vulnerability with Jesus than in the first interaction. Her relational trust (faith) deepened along with her relational expectations of Jesus for how Jesus would be involved with her and would receive her as she freely shared her heart with him. That is, Mary's expectations deepened as she grew in relationally knowing and understanding Jesus in reciprocal relationship together. This dynamic of growing further and deeper in our relationship with God is the relational reality of *reciprocating contextualization*: being contextualized and matured in the trinitarian relational context of family and trinitarian relational process of family love, while remaining in and interacting with the human context.

After Jesus talked with Martha following Lazarus' death, Mary was told that Jesus was calling for her, and she quickly went to Jesus, knelt at his feet, and poured her heart out to him weeping. In all four Gospels, Mary rarely spoke. But in this one instance when she did say something her words were the same as Martha's (Jn 11:21,32); yet, though their verbal content was the same, Mary more simply, freely and deeply expressed her whole person to Jesus, and with a very different relational outcome. Mary didn't stay at a comfortable distance relationally from Jesus, in contrast with Martha's more restrained interaction with Jesus at a noticeably different level of affect, for both Martha and Jesus (vv.20-27). Mary was free to be vulnerable and direct with Jesus in a way that none of the other disciples demonstrated (cf. Mk 6:52; 8:14-17; Jn 4:27,31-33).

Understandably, Mary's vulnerability and pain touched Jesus' heart, seeming to portend the coming painful journey to the cross Jesus would soon undergo. That is, the anguish that Mary and Jesus felt together now—"he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.... wept" (Jn 11:33)—would continue beyond the situation of Lazarus' death to Jesus' own. John's Gospel appears to intentionally relationally link Mary's pained heart with Jesus' impending suffering (cf. 12:27; 13:21), notably by bringing them together again later as Jesus prepared to go to the cross (discussed shortly).

Mary could be even freer and more confident with Jesus because she was ongoingly experiencing relational grace extended to her. It was this ongoing experience of relational grace received through Jesus' acceptance of her and his intimate relational involvement with her whole person that had come to increasingly define and determine her ontology and function. Accordingly, Mary's actions here further composed her reciprocal response to Jesus' response of grace to her person, thereby even further eliminating the constraints from the religio-cultural context that limited Martha's involvement. With those relational barriers removed in Jesus' vulnerable presence, Mary was no longer self-concerned about the secondary matters of 'what to do'. For example, Mary wasn't self-concerned about the proper way to behave with one's "superior" as Peter was with Jesus (at his footwashing), and as Martha's measured involvement conveyed. Mary's freedom with Jesus is the freedom we can all experience because, as Paul clarified for us, "when one turns to the Lord, the veil of *relational barriers* is removed" (2 Cor 3:16-17). This is the only freedom that has relational significance to God—not the so-called freedom of being able to do whatever we want, nor even just freedom from sin—which therefore is essential, indispensable, and irreplaceable for us to worship God in likeness of God, not determined 'in their way'. Such freedom as Mary's (and the former prostitute's) also confronts and challenges who, what, and how we

present ourselves to God in worship gatherings—the person we present, the integrity and quality of our communication, and the depth level of our relational involvement with God and with each other.

In contrast to how so much of corporate worship focuses on God revolving around our lives, we see the relational progression to maturity in Mary's interactions with Jesus. Most notable, Mary increasingly participated in Jesus' life as she reciprocated with her own vulnerable heart in face-to-face connection together. From their shared pain in the above interaction to the non-verbal and heart-wrenching interaction discussed next, the depth level of Mary's relational involvement with Jesus was even further distinguished in her new-order interaction with Jesus.

Mary Participating in God's Life

Their third interaction took place at another table fellowship in Lazarus' home (Jn 12:1-8; Mt 26:6-13; Mk 14:3-9). Here Mary further illuminates the person's ontology and function vital for leading worship, as well as what participation in God's life is truly involves. This interaction was not an isolated situation in which Mary *did* something commendable in service to Jesus—a common interpretation by worship writers. If that were all that Mary signified, it would not warrant Jesus' affirmation aligning her practice with the gospel itself (Mt 26:13; Mk 14:9).

Moreover, in contrast to discussions from biblical feminists, Mary's primary importance supersedes the three most common interpretations: as a female disciple, she challenged androcentrism and patriarchalism, she challenged traditional roles for women, and she was the first disciple to recognize and anoint Jesus as the Messiah. While each of these aspects of Mary is important, what is most significant about her third interaction with Jesus is the depth of Mary's maturity in her discipleship-worship relationship with her Lord. Mary's maturity is indicated in the following: in her whole ontology and function, that is, presenting nothing less and no substitutes for her person in likeness of Jesus; involved with the vulnerableness of a child-person illuminating the integrity and honesty of her undivided heart; in decisively distinguishing the uncommon from the common as she embodied equalized and enacted intimate relationship with Jesus at the depth of "where I am." On the basis of these observations, we can conclude that Mary, more definitively than the other disciples, participated in Jesus' life defined only by his relational terms for his disciples, and thus directly involved her in the life of the Trinity (as in Jn 14:21). She was the kind of worshiper that the Father seeks to compose the uncommon new creation family to whom the Trinity will come and make their home. Pay close attention to Mary's person and the depth of her involvement in this new-order interaction with Jesus.

During dinner, Mary came and poured very expensive perfume on Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair (Matthew and Mark's Gospels say "a woman came...and poured the ointment on his head," Mt 26:6-13; Mk 14:3-9; cf. the similar action from the former prostitute, Lk 7:37-38). Other disciples who were present chastised Mary, calling her action wasteful because the perfume should have been sold and the money used to help poor people. The contrast here is pivotal for determining the extent of participating in God's life, and thus the significance of worship involvement.

This was a crucial moment leading up to Jesus' death, which Jesus had indicated

to the disciples. Yet, those disciples focused on ministry (i.e. on ‘what to do’), not on Jesus’ person in the primacy of relationship, nor what was ahead for him. Such a focus on the secondary matter of ministry indicated the relational distance they were keeping from Jesus, and certainly from their own hearts—which was demonstrated even more distinctly in their lack of involvement with Jesus in his anguish at Gethsemane (Mk 14:32-42). To many of us, serving is the most worthy discipleship effort to focus on and to give primacy to; this is a prominent message given in worship services as well. But our apparent good intentions about serving often belie a heart unavailable for relational connection. As mentioned earlier in the study about persons who are defined and determined by secondary criteria of what one does or has, those persons are less sensitive to the qualitative and less aware of the relational. This qualitative insensitivity and relational unawareness were painfully true about the disciples here.

Mary, however, was focused vulnerably and intently on the person Jesus, well aware of his impending death, and so despite the harassment from her fellow disciples, she acted according to her undivided heart. In Jesus’ own words, Mary “has prepared me for burial” (Mt 26:12; par Mk 14:8; Jn 12:7). In her sensitivity, surely Mary’s heart was breaking as she anticipated the ordeal Jesus was soon to undergo; and in her relational awareness she participated with relational involvement in his whole life, even while not fully understanding the circumstances.

What unfolds from Mary should not be idealized, because this is simply the nature of the new creation unfolding with whole ontology and function in likeness of the Trinity. The following understanding about Mary is critical for us to understand in our own involvement with Jesus in worship. Keep in mind that this discussion isn’t advocating singling Jesus out from the whole of the Trinity, but is focused on congruent relational involvement with the Son and, on this relational basis, with the Trinity.

Mary demonstrated two senses of *kûn* (cf. Ps 57:7; 108:1, noted earlier): she was *established* in the primacy of her relationship with Jesus and not merely in the role of servant; on this primary basis, with the *resolve of her heart*, she directed her attention to act on what she had been considering. Mary’s heart, even at what could be considered an elementary stage, was both defined by the whole ontology of her person (constituting the new creation), and her involvement was determined by her person’s whole function (composing the new relational order)—neither reduced nor fragmented by the secondary. Therefore, Mary deeply involved her whole person with her Lord in this act of worship—openly and vulnerably involved with Jesus in the giving of her person to Jesus in trinitarian family love, which certainly was only in likeness of the Trinity’s love that she experienced first.

Unlike many Christians, Mary’s confidence was not in her abilities, education, training, titles, or status. Her confidence was based on her relational experience of relational grace that freed her from any self-concern and limits that might otherwise have constrained her involvement with her Lord. Accordingly, Mary’s vulnerableness with Jesus wasn’t akin, for example, to Peter’s situational so-called openness (e.g. his bold declarations, Mt 16:22; Jn 13:37) because Mary’s response emerged as *relational trust* in Jesus’ whole person. As noted above with the former prostitute, relational trust is the significance of faith, the relational response beyond the common practice that faith is a quantity to possess, a belief affirmed. Contrary to such referential terms, in functional relational terms faith is only our relational response to God that is contingent on who,

what, and how God is. Relational trust in the whole of God embodied by Jesus must by its relational nature embrace Jesus' person jointly in the theological trajectory of his whole ontology and on the intrusive relational path of his whole function, which challenges all common function. Mary teaches us the depth of this relational response and the relational outcome unfolding from such involvement in relationship together without common limits and constraints, which challenges the common function of all Christian worship.

Because of Mary's vulnerable reciprocal response to Jesus, Jesus was able to engage her in equalized and intimate relationship together. In relationship together heart to heart with Jesus, Mary experienced the necessary "share with me" (Jn 13:8), and "better part" (Lk 10:42), thereby taking her place as daughter in the Father's new creation family (cf. Mt 12:30,49-50; 2 Cor 5:17) in likeness of the Trinity (2 Cor 3:18; Eph 4:24). This is the very relational connection that Jesus came to make with all persons, the intimate connection in which the Trinity is relationally known (Jn 1:18; 14:9b,11,20-21,23; 15:8; 17:3,6,21-26). Unmistakably, therefore, Mary illuminates the kind of disciple and thus worshiper that the Father seeks. She was a "true worshiper" whose person functioned whole from inner out with honesty and vulnerability of heart (i.e. "in spirit and truth," Jn 4:23). And the Trinity seeks nothing less and no substitutes from all of us.

Jesus' affirmations of Mary's life and practice are vital to understand the unfolding of God's theological trajectory and relational path to establish persons together in likeness of the Trinity, as Jesus prayed (Jn 17:20-26). From Mary's first steps in face-to-face relationship with Jesus as his disciple, to this last table fellowship together, Mary fulfilled Jesus' relational contingency for his new creation family that "those who love me will keep my word" so that "my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them" (Jn 14:23). Hers was the compatible and reciprocal response to Jesus and how Jesus is relationally involved with persons: "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you" (Jn 15:9). Jesus' relational involvement with persons embodies love (*agapē*), God's family love, which he enacted beyond sacrifice and deeper than serving. God's family love is never primarily about what to do—not even with acts of sacrifice, though it can include sacrifice—but about being deeply involved relationally with the other person for whole relationship together (cf. Jesus' involvement with others while on the cross). At this point, compare your feelings about Mary with what Jesus felt.

Since God is always vulnerably present and intimately involved with persons, those who receive God with their own vulnerable hearts for relational connection (only on his relational terms with relational grace) are those persons who will experience the depth of the Father's family love, and who will be made whole in intimate connection belonging to God's new creation family. This was Jesus' only relational purpose and work that composed the integral basis for Mary's reciprocal relational response. Mary's relational connection with Jesus—like no other disciple's—is the outcome of God's relational involvement of family love to reconcile persons with him in the new creation family. And only this relational outcome is the good news that composes the 'whole' gospel of Christ (i.e. the gospel of peace, wholeness in relationship together, Eph 6:15). Therefore, Jesus highlights the significance *to him* (and thus to the Trinity) of Mary's act of worship by making the most remarkable statement about Mary, a statement that rightfully should be taught and celebrated in the global church:

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

The key for Mary’s compatible and congruent response—again in contrast to Peter and the others—was that she made the choice to be vulnerably involved with Jesus in reciprocal relationship together, which thereby composed her worship as whole and uncommon. In the relational terms of the three major issues for all practice that Jesus vulnerably embodied (discussed in chap. 3), Mary’s practice whole-ly embodied, enacted, and fulfilled the congruent reciprocal response. We see her integral congruence in (1) the integrity of the person she presented to Jesus, (2) the quality of her communication to make relational connection with Jesus, and (3) the intimate depth level of her relational involvement with him. More than any other disciple mentioned in the Gospels, Mary is the one who understood God’s words “be uncommon because I am holy,” which by her practice—and notably not by her words—she distinguished between the “holy and common,” (Lev 10:10). This is our relational responsibility also, and any lack of assuming this responsibility renders our worship, including our persons and relationships, to ‘in their way’.

Listening to Jesus and Mary

Ever since Jesus commended Mary, she is rarely, if ever, attached to Jesus’ gospel. The gospel we claim and proclaim never tells of Mary’s qualitative and relationally significant response to Jesus—as compared to, say, Peter, James and John’s missional activities (even as important as these activities were). This glaring omission exposes our ignoring Jesus’ words throughout church history. Selective listening has allowed us to avoid Jesus’ words about Mary and to ignore the Father’s imperative to all disciples to “Listen to my Son” (Mt 17:3). These omissions in our collective theology and practice have been overlooked as we have irresponsibly trained our attention elsewhere. Being vulnerable with Mary simply hasn’t been part of the church’s theology and practice.

For clarification, being vulnerable with the Father does not involve the common perception of being weak, fragile, and liable to collapse if attacked. That perception comes from a universal human fear of disapproval and relational rejection. Relational vulnerableness is the honesty of one’s heart exercised by a whole subject-person (not a reduced object) face to face with the Father, trusting in the Father’s unfailing love.

The omission of Mary’s relational significance to the gospel is less about androcentrism as some biblical feminists would claim (though gender is undoubtedly involved). Our omission is about the threat that Mary’s person presents to those (both male and female) who are defined and determined by reductionism (namely a theological anthropology of reduced ontology and function) instead of by God’s relational grace and *agapē* involvement. The latter requires vulnerableness of our person before God, which includes epistemic and ontological humility. We collectively need to come before our Lord and face this “threat.” Church and worship leaders need to take the lead by first listening hard (i.e. with honesty and vulnerableness of heart) to Jesus’ relational-specific language to them; and this likely will require a paradigm shift from referential language to relational language to understand Jesus’ relational terms.

Mary's qualitatively sensitive and relationally aware involvement with Jesus make her the definitive worship leader for us to learn from in order that we also mature to 'embody new' the worship relationship. Mary edifies us by how she listened to Jesus' relational language and responded congruently in his relational language, just as the Father makes imperative for all disciples-worshippers (Mt 17:3). With Mary, we see Jesus able to build the new creation family one person at a time. Here we can understand Jesus' expanded vision of this relational work to fulfill his words to all his disciples that they will "also do the *relational* works that I do and, in fact, will do greater *relational* works" with the Spirit's coming (Jn 14:12 with vv.15-26).

Therefore, our worship gatherings need to make this unavoidable paradigm shift: leaving behind the old approach to orders of worship in order to embrace and embody the new relational order of worship that celebrates new/uncommon persons in new/uncommon relationships together, conjointly equalized and intimate relationships without the veil of relational barriers that integrally compose the new creation family with nothing less and no substitutes. In such worship, the Trinity will delight in our likeness, and we in the Trinity.

And so let's be clear, growing the new creation family will require many of us to change, starting with being open to being taught by someone (a woman at that) occupying a seemingly minor place in the Gospels' narratives. We must no longer ignore Mary's discipleship-worship relationship. Instead, we need to listen to Jesus without being selective, thereby taking seriously the unconventional truth that Mary can "speak" into the church's current condition (in decline) as she illuminates for us the uncommon practice necessary to follow Jesus on his uncommon theological trajectory and whole relational path. Our sister Mary is the most encouraging and edifying disciple-worshiper for maturing the new creation family that I know. Let us finally begin to focus on the fact that Jesus said that "wherever the gospel is preached in all the world, *Mary's reciprocal relational response to my whole person* will be *celebrated* in remembrance of her" (Mt 26:13).

Whole-ly Communion: the New Creation Family's Table Fellowship 'Behind the Curtain'

As initially noted previously, the new creation family emerges only 'behind the curtain' where we follow Jesus into the "Most Holy Place" to join with him in the sacrifice he made there as our high priest (Heb 10:19-25). Jesus' sacrifice of death on the cross tore open the curtain separating Uncommon God from the common human context, thereby giving us direct access to the Father (Eph 2:18; 3:12). We participate in Jesus' death by relational involvement with his whole person, whereby we join together with him integrally with our own dying to the old, and emerge resurrected in "newness of life" with Jesus as well (Rom 6:3-11). There is a complexity of relational significance in our joining with Jesus 'behind the curtain' and with the veil of relational barriers removed. Paul summarized all this relational-specific work enacted by the Trinity—on the Trinity's nonnegotiable relational terms—to adopt us as daughters and sons in the new creation family together (Eph 1:3-14; 2:19-22).

All of this relational-specific work enacted by the Trinity came to its pivotal climax with Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for us. In common referential terms (in theology and practice, notably in worship), we narrowly define and limit Christ's salvific work on the cross to (1) the means to atone for our sin(s), resulting in (2) eternal life, namely, that our life with God after we die is secured. These are both true but these aspects of the Jesus' cross and salvation are incomplete. Jesus clearly defined eternal life (what we are saved to) only in relational terms for the present, as Jesus prayed to the Father: "that they may *relationally* know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (Jn 17:3).

This is the relational truth for the Father's new creation family, which composes the defining reality that needs to become the relational reality we all must by its nature experience in our worship gatherings in order to be distinguished as the new creation family in likeness of the Trinity. And the experiential reality of the new creation family together—conjointly 'behind the curtain, with the veil removed'—in likeness needs to define and determine our Communion practices.

The nonnegotiable relational implications of 'behind the curtain with the veil removed' bring us back to Jesus' nonnegotiable relational terms for his disciples-worshippers, which the former prostitute and Mary enacted with their vulnerable, new-order involvement with him. They demonstrated for the new creation family what our worship must involve to take place behind the curtain without the veil. Therefore, unless we follow Jesus behind the curtain, and follow the lead of the former prostitute and Mary to remove their veils, our worship will remain 'in front of the curtain' in common, referential worship with our veils in place, having to relational significance to the Trinity.

A Critiquing Antecedent

We now enter a necessary discomfort zone—at least for many worshipers—in regard to familiar practices of Communion⁷ (Eucharist, the Lord's Supper). It may seem impious to some persons, but in this final section of the chapter, readers are asked to: (1) reflect on their thoughts and experiences of Communion, whether in liturgical, contemporary, or alternative worship gatherings; and (2) challenge deeply embedded assumptions about the relational significance to the Father of our Communion practices. We have indisputable precedent for going into this discomfort zone—for which I pray we all engage in reciprocal relationship with the Spirit in order to heed the Father's words to "listen to my Son" (Mt 17:3).

In the OT, God defined for Aaron a critical relational responsibility as priest—"you are to distinguish between the holy and the common" (Lev 10:10, discussed in chap.3). This responsibility directly involved how the Israelites lived out God's relational terms of the covenant, for the purpose of maturing the Israelites to be an uncommon people clearly distinguished from the common as they enacted the covenant relationship within the human context—so that God's presence could dwell among them (Lev 26:9-12). God expected Aaron to examine their practices in light of God's relational terms disclosed in the Decalogue and other terms of the covenant relationship, correcting practices 'in their way' as necessary. It must clearly be understood that God's

⁷ I use the term Communion because it best reflects the trinitarian relational involvement of family love that we are meant to share in together.

commandments from the beginning of the covenant were only the relational terms for reciprocal relationship together. God's relational terms were distinctly in contrast to composing a template for God's people to conform to, which is what Israel did anyway in forming their behavioral code for their self-determination.

In the NT, Jesus' very person (inseparable from his practice) brought into direct conflict his holy/uncommon relational terms with the common religious practices and assumptions of his day, notably the Pharisees' worship with disembodied lips (Mk 7:6-7). To Jesus, the Pharisees' worship practices had no relational significance. Indeed, Jesus identified their entire system of piety—"the tradition of the elders," "human precepts and doctrines," "human tradition," "many things like this," vv.5,7-9,13)—as an ontological simulation, in which they worshiped their idealized (or idolized) Object of their faith that substituted for God's presence and involvement, along with God's relational terms for worship (v.13). Jesus embodied definitively the necessary process of critiquing our worship practices, to determine whether they are congruent with God's relational primacy, or determined by the human context's influence 'in their way'.

Therefore, on the basis of participating in Jesus' (i.e. the Trinity's) life, it is our relational responsibility as our Father's daughters and sons in the new creation family (indeed God's uncommon priesthood, 1 Pet 2:5) to ongoingly distinguish between our holy/uncommon practices and common practices in worship. Just as Jesus did, so we too must distinguish whether our worship practices—and, with greatest concern, our practices of Communion—are uncommon behind the curtain without the veil, or merely common 'in their way' in front of the curtain with the veil. No sacrament or ritual is too sacred to examine, question, and change in order to be made whole in congruence with the Father's desires. To be clear, this discussion clearly presumes the defining importance of Communion for the life of the church and its primary significance in worship. Otherwise, without this central focus, the gospel and Jesus' relational work on the cross have lost the qualitative relational significance necessary to ongoingly enact the relational reality of their relational outcome: the new creation family composing the new covenant relationship together behind the curtain without the veil, in likeness of the Trinity (as in Jn 8:31-32, 34-36; 2 Cor 3:16-18; Col 3:9-11).

As we begin this examination, keep in focus that our primary purpose is for our theology and practice to be compatible with the Trinity's uncommon presence in our midst, and also to be congruent with the Trinity's whole relational involvement in our lives primarily as persons and in relationships. Whatever your worship's customary approach, to help us thoughtfully examine current Communion theology and practice, take account of the following questions prayerfully with the Spirit about participation in Communion:

- What do you think is the depth level of relational connection that God experiences with you and other persons during Communion?
- Do you experience Communion as a heart-to-heart connection with God and other worshippers?
- How has participation in Communion significantly changed who you are in your innermost, not just your outward behaviors? This question addresses current scholarship focusing on the transforming influence of attending church regularly.

- Have you ever noticed (the irony of) how relationally separate everyone is while “partaking together” of the bread and cup—for example, persons usually don’t even make eye contact, say a personal word to others, or make a physical contact during this “shared intimate experience” (the definition of communion)?
- For worshipers in liturgical worship, what is the depth level of your relational involvement with the Lord during the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving (either reciting or reading your part)? And do you ever feel like expressing your own words to God?
- For worshipers in contemporary worship, what is the depth of your relational involvement with the Father while remaining focused primarily on Christ (as most contemporary worship does)—which may include involvement with Jesus’ person if the focus is on what Christ did?

After accounting for such questions, I hope that readers will now further take into account a very different way to understand Communion ‘behind the curtain with the veil removed’—different from prevailing common practices ‘in front of the curtain with the veil’, though by no means theologically different from what the NT unfolds in the primacy of relationship that Jesus embodied.

Face to Face Communion

Communion (capital “C”) has its beginning not at Jesus’ last supper with his disciples, but in his collective-cumulative table fellowships that included his disciples (male and female), Pharisees, tax collectors (notably Levi [Matthew] and Zacchaeus) and sinners. Keep in mind also that the interactions that Jesus had with both the former prostitute and Mary (discussed above) took place at table fellowship.

At Jesus’ first table fellowship (Lk 5:27-39), something qualitatively-relationally unique and new took place for those who were present, which could not have happened had Jesus adhered to the practices of piety prescribed by law in Second Temple Judaism. At these intimate gatherings, Jesus embodied face-to-face relationship together with the whole of God (the Trinity): the Uncommon and the common came Face-to-face. As persons responded with the vulnerableness of their persons to Jesus’ whole person—who was vulnerably present and intimately involved with them on the relational basis of relational grace—they experienced the depth of relational connection of belonging in the Father’s family. Relational truth wasn’t just an ideal to recite prayers about at an altar, but became these persons’ relational-experiential reality touching their innermost to make them whole. Without the reality of this relational connection there was no reality of this relational outcome. The communion at Jesus’ table fellowship required relational terms for this reality to unfold. Perhaps a virtual reality could emerge from referential terms, augmented by a referential prayer and ritual, but not the essential reality embodied by, in, and with Jesus.

During this uncommon table fellowship, Jesus’ new wine parable prefigured the Father’s new creation family as the new wineskin in which his disciples would mature in their new ontology and function (Mt 9:9-17; Mk 2:13-22; Lk 5:33-39). In these Face-to-face gatherings, Jesus demonstrated the new relational order of the new creation family of equalized and intimate relationships—the new wineskin itself! This new wineskin is nothing less than the intimate communion in the trinitarian relational context and

relational process of family love necessary for his disciples to grow and mature (Lk 5:37-38), which Paul made conclusive for the church family (Eph 4:15-16, 22-24; Col 3:9-17).

With Levi, and later with Zacchaeus, Jesus demonstrated the integral connection between his table fellowships and the discipleship-worship relationship. After Jesus had called Levi, Levi, out of his joy hosted the first table fellowship (Lk 5:27-29). Later, Jesus called to Zacchaeus to prepare table fellowship together (Lk 19:1-10). Both these men, like the former prostitute, undoubtedly received Jesus' forgiveness for moral failures (e.g. cheating persons as tax collectors). We know that both these men's lives were radically changed by Jesus' relational responses of grace, as they were now equalized in this new relational order. The relational response of grace to their whole persons went much deeper than the common interpretation that Jesus merely includes marginalized persons into the church. Levi and Zacchaeus were freed from having been fragmented and reduced, and relationally marginalized in the comparative process, to intimate communion with Jesus, thereby taking their place of relationally belonging at the Father's family table.

Imagine Levi's deep gratefulness to be counted among Jesus' followers. Imagine how thankful Zacchaeus felt to be affirmed as "a son of Abraham," meaning that by Jesus' presence and relational-specific involvement with him, he now relationally belonged in God's family. Levi's and Zacchaeus' transformation involved rejecting the old/common ways of defining and determining their persons and relationships, and choosing to relationally respond to Jesus' relational response of grace to their persons—just as the former prostitute and Mary did. Likewise in reality, intimate communion at Jesus' table fellowship is the relational-specific response that the Trinity has made to each of us, and that we share in collectively just as Jesus promised, to "not leave you as *relational* orphans" (Jn 14:18, NIV). These are vital examples of the deeply relational-specific significance of Communion for each of us today. We are called personally into corporate whole and uncommon communion as God's distinguished family. Again we are asked, has Jesus washed the feet of your whole person to be made whole in reconciled relationship together for whole-ly communion?

Experiencing Jesus' relational actions would have required the other disciples to deal with their own mindsets, given that Jesus didn't just invite these two tax collectors (commonly despised by Jews in that time) to his table, but relationally included them into their nascent "family." These uncommon gatherings publicly defied the common religious practices of that time. No doubt some of the other disciples were deeply touched in their own hearts. But it is also likely that some of them worried that "we've never done it that way" or "what will others think of us?" In light of our own likely inner resistance to changes in long-held traditions in our practices of Communion, it's increasingly imperative that we listen carefully to Jesus—not just his words, but who and what he embodied in his uncommon vulnerable presence and intimate involvement with persons at his table fellowships. These are the relational antecedents of new wineskins that compose not just each person's communion with the Trinity, but must compose our corporate practices and relational involvement in Communion today, as the new creation family behind the curtain without the veil. The unavoidable truth is that our Communion practice proclaims the gospel we've claimed; and this action speaks louder than any of our words.

At Jesus' last supper with the disciples before going to the cross, and as Jesus shared the bread and wine, he instructed them, "do this in remembrance [*anamnesis*] of me" (Lk 22:19-20; 1 Cor 11:24). Jesus intended that his words and actions be taken relationally, not referentially as the church has done for centuries. He did not intend for his uncommon relational language to be common-ized by turning them into a recitation of what God did/does or has (i.e. God's deeds and divine attributes, as the Eucharistic liturgies do), or as a mere memorial service of his salvific sacrifice on the cross (as Protestants do). Referentializing Jesus' language at his last table fellowship creates and maintains relational distance on common terms that *we* have determined. The consequence of referentializing Jesus' relational language is that our common practices of Communion are for the most part merely ontological simulations worshipping an idealized God, having the appearance of holiness, sacredness, and godliness (commonly defined) without any functional-relational significance to God.

We may unknowingly referentialize Jesus' relational language, but we are still accountable for how we listen (cf. Lk 8:18). Fragmenting and derelationalizing Jesus' relational language and commonizing Jesus' practice create a very imposing relational barrier to relationally connect with Jesus. This is how the "tradition of the elders" came to be reified in Pharisaical Judaism, that is, by referentializing YHWH's relational terms (his commands), and then building a system of relational stratification and divisions—all the while appearing to serve God in their self-serving simulations of holiness, sacredness, and godliness. We also see these processes in some of Jesus' would-be disciples in John's Gospel (Jn 6:22-66), in an interaction demonstrating the counter-relational consequence of referentialization of the Word for a more palatable communion; and I believe exposing this dynamic was the Spirit's intention for having John include this scene.

John did not include the narrative of the Lord's Supper where Jesus told his disciples, "do this in remembrance of me" (Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24,25) and that the bread is his body and the cup is the blood of the new covenant (Mt 26:26-28; Mk 14:22-24; Lk 22:14-21). Rather, John's Gospel unfolded the vulnerable and intimate relational significance of the bread and cup signify for communion with Jesus (inseparably with the Trinity), indisputably defining in only relational terms (not static doctrine) the new covenant that Jesus inaugurated at the Lord's Supper. We need to listen to Jesus vulnerably with the Spirit, and to open our hearts to receive, carefully consider, and respond to Jesus' relational language that is meant also for us.

Jesus knew that the crowd was following him on the common basis of what he could do (i.e. miracles, Jn 6:26). They also focused on the common of what *they* should "do to perform the works of God" for eternal life (6:27-28), thereby exposing their reduced ontology and function and referentializing lens (vv.30-31). Jesus kept speaking in relational language, but they kept responding in referential language. The interaction turned even more blatantly disconnected as Jesus identified himself as the bread from heaven, "the bread of life" (vv.35,41,48-51), the bread being his flesh for them to eat. The crowd grew agitated as they continued to listen referentially only in common terms, not understanding Jesus' intimate relational language. The last straw for them was Jesus' statement, "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life...*they* abide in me, and I in them...whoever eats me will live because of me" (vv.54-57). These common disciples found this too difficult to accept (v.60), so many disciples "no longer went about with Jesus" (v.66).

Those followers held onto their common and referentialized interpretations of his perplexing words, but Jesus language is only perplexing when heard through a referential language filter. In relational language, Jesus was making a vulnerable self-disclosure and call to the most intimate relationship together by equating eating his flesh and drinking his blood also with “abide in me and I in *you*” (v.56, cf. “abide in my love,” 15:9). Whether their mis-understanding was innocently unintentional is highly questionable, but they unquestionably maintained relational distance from Jesus (e.g. vv.41,52,60). Those persons were looking for a more palatable Jesus for palatable “communion” with him, but Jesus could not and did not conform to their common terms, so they left. His whole person in this interaction definitively distinguished between the uncommon (nothing less and no substitutes in the primacy of intimate relationship together) and the common (anything less or any substitutes) that those persons preferred.

When Jesus said “I am the bread of life” (Jn 6:35), he was also fulfilling the relational function of “the bread of the Presence” of the old covenant (Ex 25:30; Lev 24:5-9). “The bread of the Presence” belonged to Aaron and his sons (Israel’s priests) “who are to eat it in a holy place, because it is a most holy part of their regular share of the offering made to the LORD” (Lev 24:9, NIV). Jesus himself became this bread of the vulnerable presence for intimate involvement together for us to ongoingly “share with me” behind the curtain without the veil. So at this point in church history, we still need to come to this understanding:

To avoid Communion in worship is to avoid Jesus’ most intimate presence, and to practice Communion in front of the curtain with the veil is to reject Jesus’ deepest relational involvement—the practice or lack of which renders the Trinity’s uncommon presence and whole involvement without significance for us, and thus without the likeness necessary for us to embody the new creation and to enact the new covenant.

At Communion’s table fellowship, we are invited, called, and indeed expected by our Lord to “eat my flesh and drink my blood,” the relational outcome of which is the intimate Face-to-face family time between the Father and Jesus’ disciples-worshippers behind the curtain without the veil. This is the uncommon/holy relational significance of Jesus’ words at his last supper: “do this in remembrance of me” (Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24-25). We are to come together vulnerably, with nothing less and no substitutes for our whole person abiding (*menō*, to dwell) in compatible reciprocal relationship in the trinitarian relational context and relational process of family love. This is the only compatible ontology and congruent function that can make relational connection with the uncommon Trinity on the Trinity’s whole relational terms of grace. And this reciprocal response is how we integrally celebrate Communion such that ‘remembrance’ functions in relational terms beyond merely referencing what Jesus did in the past. That is, when Jesus told his disciples to “remember me whole-ly,” he defined for us to love (in the depth of relational involvement) each other just as the Son has loved us (Jn 13:34), just as the Father loved the Son (15:9,12). This whole-ly remembrance may include recalling Jesus’ (and therefore the Trinity’s) relational work through history, but only has significance to God in our relational involvement with him, not as a recital of information.

Jesus had similarly stated about Mary (discussed above) that wherever the gospel is proclaimed, her practice—that is, her reciprocal relational involvement of love just as Jesus had loved her—would be told “in remembrance of her” (Mt 26:13; Mk 14:9), not to make her witness common by focusing on what she did, but in uncommon practice of the trinitarian relational process of family love. On this relational basis, as Jesus made unequivocal, to remember the good news of Jesus’ ongoing family love is to remember Mary’s reciprocal response of love as definitive for all of us to enact the gospel’s only relational outcome: the new creation family in likeness of the Trinity. Therefore, ‘remembrance’ in Communion is only the relational dynamic that composes the present reality of the Trinity’s uncommon relational terms for the Father’s daughters and sons to be intimately involved in the life of the Trinity as new creation family together—which Mary fulfilled at her last table fellowship with Jesus.

In likeness, therefore, our Communion practices need to be re-embedded in this integral understanding of all of Jesus’ relational work, not reduced to only his suffering and death, or a merely symbolic foretaste of an eternal table in the ‘not yet’ as Communion commonly does. Otherwise, Jesus’ words during his final supper will only continue to be both decontextualized and derelationalized from their primacy in our practice ‘here and now’, thus commonized ironically ‘in their way’ as they have been for centuries—though practiced with a very good ontological simulation of sanctifying (making holy, setting apart in service to God) significance.

We have done a great disservice and thus injustice to the Lord’s Supper (even with good intentions) by giving primacy to fragments of Jesus’ whole person—namely, selectively focusing on only some of his sentences and limiting his involvement to his sacrifice on the cross—thereby making Jesus much more common in a palatable Communion. For example, we highlight Jesus’ words of institution from a single table fellowship, disconnecting them from the three years of Jesus’ transforming relational work in the deep involvement of family love at all his table fellowships. We elevate those words with special gestures, as if a few recited sentences from Jesus capture their relational depth. Or we dwell on the suffering of Christ for our sins, as if Christ came only to demonstrate the sacrifice of salvation (as an end in itself).

Whether in liturgical, contemporary, or alternative Communion, all common practices construct what amount to a *palatable* Communion that is more acceptable to the majority present, for example, without being accountable for more. Yet what our fragmenting has done is create *inedible* Communion that has lost its essential quality and thereby no longer has functional-relational significance to God or to us as Trinity’s new creation family. Palatable Communion and its consequence of inedible Communion are critical conditions for the body of Christ. The most undeniable symptom of these seemingly overstated charges is the distance in relationships during Communion. Even if relational distance from God is not apparent, existing relational distance from each other demonstrates the lack of love’s relational involvement due to not having been truly loved first, which directly indicates having relational distance with God—as Jesus illuminated at his table fellowships. Relational distance is simply incongruent with Jesus entire relational work enacted in the human context, and also with his ongoing presence and involvement in post-ascension integrally with the Spirit—just as Paul’s theology and practice was transformed (e.g. Gal 5:6; 6:15).

Whole-ly Communion in likeness of Jesus' table fellowships, therefore, is nonnegotiable and irreducibly needs to become the functional-relational determinant of our worship gatherings—which celebrates but does not stay narrowly focused only on Jesus' sacrifice on the cross in an incomplete Christology. Accordingly, our understanding of the cross needs to be theologically mature (for a new view of the cross in complete Christology⁸) to include Jesus' continued relational work to establish the new creation family while engaged on the cross. Specifically focused on the primary, even while suffering on the cross, Jesus established his mother and disciple John together in the primacy of new relationships together as family, which Jesus earlier unmistakably defined as his uncommon family: “Whoever *compatibly responds* to the will of my Father in heaven *are my family*” (Mt 12:50, NIV).

In light of Communion's relational centrality for the functional-relational identity of the new creation family—far more important than mere memorial service—contemporary churches urgently need to give primacy to Communion's relational significance, that is, if we want our existing condition to be transformed. This may involve bringing Communion into worship on a weekly basis. Yet, this is not to say that celebrating Communion has to take place with certain frequency, or more in traditional liturgical forms. On the contrary, the pivotal issue here is only that the relational significance of Communion can be neither ignored nor reduced to mere memorial or derelationalized ritual. That fact that many non-liturgical churches have Communion only once a month or even less often likely reflects an incomplete Christology that is (ironically) overly christocentric, with the relational consequence of minimalizing the primacy of the new creation family. This is a glaring consequence for the church in the U.S., which promotes the primacy of individualism, the nuclear biological family, and related interests at the expense of the whole gospel enacted by the Trinity's uncommon intimate presence and whole relational involvement.

For liturgical churches, in which the Eucharist is central and defining for corporate worship, an important challenge is to eliminate relational barriers inherent in the dependence on formal (i.e. forms and templates) traditions. We need to vulnerably examine who is served (God or humans), for example, by the palpable distinctions made between the clergy (titles, robed) and laity, the performance of gestures, and by the structured prayers throughout the service. Certainly the earliest churches did not need or follow such elaborate clothing and templates in their worship. Their focus was the primacy of relationship together (e.g. Acts 2:44-47; 4:32-37), although that focus was always being pulled apart by the common influences from their human contexts—which Paul integrally fought for and against (e.g. Col 2:8-9,16,20-23).

While contemporary churches celebrate Communion too infrequently (once a month or less), liturgical churches celebrate Communion twice a week, which may be too often. The issue here is that both approaches to worship are guilty of making common Jesus' uncommon communion by narrowed-down palatable Communion practices in front of the curtain, which is not edible for the new creation family. The frequency issue—like all secondary issues for worship—needs to be defined and determined by and thereby contextualized in the trinitarian relational context with the trinitarian relational process of family love. Again, throughout the incarnation, Jesus embodied the trinitarian

⁸ For an insightful discussion of this new view of the cross, see T. Dave Matsuo, “*Did God Really Say That?*” *Theology in the Age of Reductionism* (Theology Study, 2013). Online at <http://4X12.org>, 139-50.

relational context and enacted the trinitarian relational process of family love into the human context. And as persons like Mary compatibly responded to Jesus in congruent reciprocal relationship together, theirs was the experiential reality of wholeness in the Trinity's relational context by the dynamic of reciprocating contextualization, which was indispensable for the relational response of worship to be in likeness of the Trinity—distinguished from 'in their way'.

In conclusion to this chapter, focus further and deeper on the following important insights for whole-ly Communion in uncommon likeness of the Trinity as the new creation family—no longer determined 'in their way':

If our theology and practice are the outcome of relational connection and involvement with God's communicative action in self-disclosure—not merely from an authoritative Word or an inerrant Bible—then we are contextualized beyond human contextualization to the further and deeper contextualization in the now-accessible relational context and process of the whole of God. That is, this distinguished contextualization is the trinitarian relational context and process into which the whole of Jesus—the embodied communicative Word who vulnerably came to us to “take us” experientially to the whole of God—not only intimately contextualizes us but whole-ly constitutes us in relationship together. This relational dynamic involves us in the distinct integrating process of our human context converging with the primacy of God's relational context and process (as Jesus distinguished for his disciples, Jn 17:13-17), which I define as *reciprocating contextualization*....

The relational context and process of God are distinguished in the whole life and practice of Jesus; his intrusive relational path established the relational context and process of the triune God in order to know and experience the whole of God in intimate relationship together—distinguished in Jesus' formative family prayer (Jn 17:20-26). Without this contextualization that Jesus composed in the human context, any other contextualization (e.g. in missiology and theology) would only be reductions epistemologically and ontologically of God's self-disclosure. The absence of the distinct integrating dynamic of reciprocating contextualization (between God's and human) results effectively in both disembodiment of the Word made flesh to referential terms and failing to grasp the whole qualitative-relational significance of the gospel, reflecting incomplete Christology.⁹

Our participation in reciprocating contextualization is the only way for us to fulfill “You shall be holy because I am holy” (Lev 11:44-45), which Peter finally understood and echoed later in his life (1 Pet 1:15-16). Importantly, reciprocating contextualization ensures the two essential criteria that our worship theology and practice, and notably our celebrations of Communion, have qualitative relational significance to God: (1) that the God we worship is the God self-disclosed, not the God we have idealized and

⁹ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Gospel of Transformation*, 27-28.

stereotyped; (2) that our practice—notably all of our worship practice—is congruent with God’s uncommon relational terms and not our own common self-determined terms ‘in their way’.

In the current state of the world and the church, there is much personal and relational fragmentation, both subtle and overt. The identity of God’s people in this common context is extremely faint or painfully ambiguous (as Jesus illuminated, Mt 5:13-15), even if quantitatively present in our neighborhoods, politically active, and nationally televised (as the disciples analogously demonstrated, Mt 26:8-9). Who and what are we going to be defined and determined by, beginning with worship? Will we remain the status quo church with common worship practices, defined and determined in common ontology and function ‘in their way’, the church that even many Christians are dissatisfied or disillusioned with—not to mention dismissed by the secular elements in our prevailing sociocultural contexts? Or will we emerge as the uncommon and truly new creation family, in and with whom the whole of God (the Trinity) dwells?

YHWH stated to his worshipers, “let those who boast boast in this, that they *relationally* know and understand me, that I am YHWH” (Jer 9:24). Will we be those very persons because we are the new creation family in whom the whole and uncommon Trinity is vulnerably present and intimately involved? Will we thereby be the uncommon persons and relationships together—distinguished in our compatible reciprocal relational response of worship—to echo in likeness the whole and uncommon God’s voice?

Nothing less and no substitutes for the Trinity is present and involved in order for us to become, to be, to embody, and to enact nothing less and no substitutes in likeness of the Trinity.

Addenda: Worship Resources for the New Creation Family

It is essential for Christians personally and together as church to understand the following: For our worship practice (most notably our songs and Communion) to have both relational clarity and relational significance for the Trinity, it must, by its defining nature, be composed by our worship theology in whole relational terms and not in reduced referential terms. Whole theology is simply irreplaceable for whole practice as persons and relationships in the new creation family.

Based on wholeness in theology, the following resources encourage wholeness in our worship practice. Included here are the lyrics to two songs written for the new creation family to boast in likeness of the Trinity, to celebrate both who and whose we are. These songs are followed by a suggested Communion to help worshipers personally and corporately experience the relational significance and integral outcome of following Jesus behind the curtain and removing the veil. Also included is a short list of worship songs both having relational clarity and that give worshipers opportunities for their direct and vulnerable relational involvement with the whole of God, the Trinity.

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

Whole-ly Communion¹

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

Bridge:

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

Final verse:

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

¹ ©2015 Kary A. Kambara & T. Dave Matsuo. Printable sheet music in pdf is available at <http://4X12.org>.

The Global Church Celebrating

You God are whole and uncommon,
Distinguished beyond all the common,
None to compare, none to compare
You God are whole and uncommon.

Your Word is whole and uncommon,
Distinguished from all in the world,
Here to transform, here to make whole
Your peace is whole and uncommon.

Chorus 1: Praise the whole and uncommon
God beyond all that is common,
You have transformed, you make us whole
Your family whole and uncommon.

We are not parts of the common
Fragmented apart from God's whole,
We are transformed, we are made whole
Peace together whole and uncommon.

We are God's whole and uncommon
Distinguished family from the common,
No longer old, raised in the new
Now together like the Trinity.

Chorus 2: Praise Father, Son and Spirit,
Thank you for family together,
You equalized, you reconciled
All persons, peoples and nations.

We shout with joy in our hearts,
Clapping and dancing inside to out,
No longer apart, no more orphans
God's family whole and equal.

We sing the new song from within,
Proclaiming joy to all the world,
Here is your hope, here is your peace
Wholeness together beyond common

Chorus 2: Praise Father, Son and Spirit,
Thank you for family together,
You equalized, you reconciled
All persons, peoples and nations.

[everyone shouting, clapping, dancing to the Trinity]
Yes! Yes!! Yes!!! All persons, peoples and nations.²

² ©2016 Kary A. Kambara & T. Dave Matsuo. Printable sheet music in pdf is available at <http://4X12.org>.

A Suggested Communion³

The following is a suggestion for transforming Communion from its common practice(s) of either an individual and private time, or a formalized pattern to a “new and living way” in the dynamic flow for Communion behind the curtain (or with the curtain torn open) with the veil removed (cf. Heb 10:20). Suggestions for worship should never be thought of in secondary terms of ‘what to do’ but only as guidelines for how to be involved in the primacy of relationship together in family love.

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

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

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

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

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

Sing “Whole-ly Communion.”

³ This suggested Communion first appeared in an earlier study. I include it here as a resource for your consideration.

Further Songs with Relational Clarity for Our Relational Significance

An important corrective step to grow in worship as the Trinity's new creation family is to balance the overly christocentric focus (i.e. on Christ's sacrifice on the cross) by intentionally including songs for the Trinity (or Father, Spirit), songs as the church (new creation family), songs about relational grace for salvation conjointly *from* sin and *to* wholeness in life together. The following songs are suggested here for their relational clarity. Keep in focus that for songs to have relational significance in our worship practice, they must be composed by worship theology in whole relational terms and not in reduced referential terms.

Songs for the Trinity (or Father) and/or related to being the new creation family⁴:

About the Father	(T. Dave Matsuo and Kary A. Kambara)
Awesome Intimately	(T. Dave Matsuo and Kary A. Kambara)
Good Good Father	(Chris Tomlin)
I Need You to Survive	(Hezekiah Walker)
Make Us One	(Aaron Keyes, Bryan Brown, Evan Wickham, Michael Gungor)
O God Our God	(T. Dave Matsuo and Kary A. Kambara)
'Singing' the New Song	(T. Dave Matsuo and Kary A. Kambara)
The Global Church Celebrating	(T. Dave Matsuo and Kary A. Kambara)
The Image of Grace	(T. Dave Matsuo and Kary A. Kambara)
The Spirit of the Word	(T. Dave Matsuo and Kary A. Kambara)
They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love	(Peter Scholtes)
To Thee Be Glory Forever	(John Foley, S.J.)
We are One Body	(Paul Baloche and Ed Kerr)
We are One in the Bond of Love	(Otis Skillings)
We are the Church	(Richard K. Avery and Donald S. March)
We Thank You, Father	(Brother Gregory Norbet)
Your Very Own	(T. Dave Matsuo & Kary A. Kambara)

Songs for Communion and other times

One Bread, One Body	(John Michael Talbot)
Whole-ly Communion	(T. Dave Matsuo & Kary A. Kambara)

Songs for God's Relational Grace, and for dying to the sin of reductionism

Face to Face	(T. Dave Matsuo and Kary A. Kambara)
The Face of God	(T. Dave Matsuo and Kary A. Kambara)
Healing Grace	(John Chisum and Gary Sadler)
Only By Grace	(Gerrit Gusdafson)
We Fall Down	(Chris Tomlin)
Your Grace is Sufficient	(Martin J. Nystrom)

⁴ Songs by T. Dave Matsuo and Kary Kambara are available in printable sheet music at <http://www.4x12.org/songs.htm>. The other songs can be found online, e.g. <http://www.worshiptogether.com> and other sources on the Internet.

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