

A Theology of Worship
'Singing' a New Song to the LORD

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Prelude

This study is not designed to be a “how to” manual of what to do for worship. It does, however, address the function needed for worship and how this function is embodied and thus enacted. This is the theological approach I take in this study because theology by its nature is inseparable from function, and they should be indistinguishable, though this is not the prevailing approach in the theological academy. What emerges then in this study and hopefully unfolds clearly in the following will challenge our theological assumptions, most notably our theological anthropology, and our basic assumptions of the gospel, along with various other assumptions about worship. This may make you uncomfortable, perhaps even confront you, and will likely be more than you bargained for in a theology. Yet, if you have a serious interest and concern for worship, and what serious Christian should not, then I encourage you to hang in with the pages below. I trust and pray that you will not be disappointed.

The theology of worship unfolding in the study approaches worship with the following perspective in relational terms, not referential terms:

Worship is the integrating focus and the integral relational convergence of our (both individual and corporate) reciprocal relational response and vulnerable involvement in relationship together with the whole of God—nothing less and no substitutes.

This relational dynamic involves ‘singing’, that signifies in this study more than singing but the integrating relational dynamic of life.

By necessity, this relational dynamic requires ongoing relational involvement with the Spirit, whom I have engaged both in and for this study. One experience I’ve had during this time notably illustrates the Spirit’s relational work in taking me further and deeper in relationship together with God.

During the intense work on this study, I started experiencing a ringing in my right ear that was different from the usual ringing I get once in awhile. This caught my attention because one of the strong messages that God has been sharing with us lately is to distinguish between what is of primary significance and what is secondary. Relationship with God (and others) is primary to God, and as we give ourselves to the primacy of relationship with him, we can trust him with the secondary. As the ringing got progressively louder over the next several days, my husband Dave and I asked God to take care of it because it was a secondary issue for me, and I really felt that way.

During those days I did some earwax cleaning, but did not stress about it. On the sixth day, however, I woke up without the ringing—but also with no hearing in that ear. Dave and I affirmed God that I am in his hands, that we are counting on him to make me adequate, and also asked him to make me whole from inner out. I then went to see a doctor that day and the next. Everything went so smoothly—traffic, parking, minimal waiting—in which I experienced God’s presence and intimate involvement. More importantly, I also had a sense that he had a purpose for this to happen to me.

As I reflected with him about my physical hearing loss, the Spirit nudged my thoughts beyond simply hearing, more deeply to how I need to grow further in listening to him both relationally and qualitatively to fully receive Jesus' relational messages (verbal and nonverbal) in the relational language of Scripture. I have written a lot about the Father's relational imperative to Jesus' disciples at the transfiguration—"This is my Son, the beloved...listen to him!" (Mt 17:5)—and he was further speaking this deeper to my heart. He wanted me to listen to the depths of Jesus' whole person extended to me in God's primacy for relationship, to go deeper with him 'without the veil' because I cannot write about that which I do not experience myself. Writing about being the worshiper the Father seeks kept me accountable ongoingly in the imperative to make primary what is primary to God—reciprocal relationship together.

The medication I had to take for my ear seemed to disrupt my sleep; either that or the Spirit kept me awake. I have been listening to him, reflecting, praying for others, opening my heart further during these night times together. Increasingly, I have experienced a qualitative difference in me. He has freed my heart to feel deeply *with* him when his people don't listen to his deep relational messages to us and don't receive his whole person vulnerably extended to us.

If nothing else in this study gets across to you, I hope and pray that it will be the depth of God's heart vulnerably extended to you for intimate, reciprocal relationship together, and that his relational response of grace to us is sufficient for relationship together to be whole. My experience here illuminates how intimately God is involved with us, how deeply he shares his very heart with us, so that we can grow as daughters and sons who can boast that we *relationally* know and understand our Father, rather than boast of secondary matters (see Jer 9:23-24). I boast in this relational outcome from the primacy of relationship together and its further outcome in the following study—'singing' a new song to my Lord.

Verse 1 **Out of Tune in Secondary Sanctuary**

*These people honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me.
They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.*

Matthew 15:8-9¹ NIV (Mk 7:6-7)

Might “these people” be us? Surely not. Could it be that our teachings are also but rules of human composition “taught by men”? Of course! It’s called contextualization and everybody does it; what’s the problem with that? Well, it’s critical if the composition is out of tune. Is it possible that our ways of “doing” worship are similar in principle to “the traditions of the elders” that Jesus was critiquing in this passage from Matthew 15 (see also vv.1-7)? Why even ask these questions now? After all, Christian worship in the West, on appearances, seems to be doing just fine.

So we assume. Just as he did during his life on earth, Jesus today challenges the assumptions that we make about what constitutes worship, and thus assumptions we make about what God desires. These challenges are vital to examine because how we go about worship often is like an ‘old’ out-of-tune song we sing that is dissonant to Jesus. These words from God in the Old Testament may indeed be meant for us: “Take away the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps” (Amos 5:23). We need to start listening better to the tune of our worship or we may just keep repeating the same ‘old’ song—or be lulled by its sound without any further significance, as the Lord told Ezekiel (Eze 33:32).

Here is the heart of the matter that Jesus consistently illuminated: How we see and relate to God flow directly from how we define our own person, and thus do relationships with all others and do church. Jesus’ words quoted in Matthew and Mark’s Gospels were originally directed to the Israelites (Isa 29:13), but Jesus re-spoke them to challenge some Pharisees and what they were involved in as a substitute for God’s qualitative relational terms. We too are accountable for what Jesus’ discloses in these words, which necessarily also include his definitive words about the primary worshipers the Father desires and seeks (see Jn 4:23-24).

In his book *Real Presences*, George Steiner surprisingly points to our worship problem, though I am sure unintentionally. We Christian worshipers can learn a lot by understanding his opening chapter, “A Secondary City,” which is the inspiration for the following section that serves here as an introduction into this theology of worship.

¹ Unless noted otherwise, the Scripture quoted in this study are taken from the NRSV. Cf. the last phrase with Isa 29:13 from which Jesus is quoting: “and their worship of me is a human commandment learned by rote....”

A Secondary Sanctuary

The first chapter in *Real Presences* is “A Secondary City,” Steiner’s biting critique of how modern society has come to engage in music and art at a distance, notably through others such as critics and scholars.² This secondary level involvement is academic study, objective analysis and referential explanation of art, music, and poetry. According to Steiner, we are in fact morally “answerable” or accountable to respond to the presence of the composer or artist, the “other,” as we engage ourselves in their creations.³ Moreover, these forms of human expressions inherently communicate something from beyond themselves—the Other of God’s creative presence. Steiner’s discussion needs much further understanding, but his point is that we in the West have dispossessed artistic expressions of “other” by secondary indirect engagements. That is to say, though Steiner does not say it, we function with relational distance; in other words, as I define in this opening verse, we function in a qualitative gap apart from the primacy of relationship. Steiner’s discussion is relevant to this theology of worship—indeed to church practice and theological/biblical studies in the Christian academy. Steiner is hopeful that we can get back to what is primary by being answerable to the presence of the “other”—poet, musician, artist—those who are communicating something of God, the one who underwrites all human creativity. This study is also a critique of hope for our relational involvement with God in worship.

In Contrast and In Conflict

Before entering ‘a secondary sanctuary,’ we take a brief excursion to provide the context in contrast to and in conflict with ‘secondary sanctuary’. Imagine going to church for corporate worship. One by one, each of us enters the God’s Most Holy Place “behind the curtain” (*katapetasma*, Mk 15:38), the curtain that is no longer there! We hug, then cluster together. There are no empty seats between us, no buffer zones, for we sit easy and warm with each other, or stand. We listen to God’s voice: “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” (Mt 17:5; Mk 9:7). Here behind the curtain that is no longer there—because it was ripped open from top to bottom by Jesus’ relational action on the cross for our reconciliation—we come together with God Face to face, heart to heart, eye to eye. We receive and enjoy his presence, because, as he says, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Mt 18:20). “Here I am!” he says to one and to all. Family time like never before; this is experiential truth. Every one of us—daughters and sons—is engaged with him and each other from the heart without relational barriers, so that no one feels left out (cf. Acts 2:42-47)—as Paul made definitive for the church (Eph 2:14-22).

We do not ask the Spirit to come, for the Spirit dwells in us, the whole of God makes their family dwelling in us (Jn 14:23)—this is our experiential reality. We might ask the Spirit to illuminate the Word’s proclamation about to be preached, yet, we are not

² George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

³ George Steiner, 8-11.

seeking the Spirit's utility for us to gain knowledge, but intimate involvement with our hearts to take us further and deeper as we first listen, to hear, for example, the Father's relational messages (Rom 8:15-16).

Singing, the language of the heart, lifts up from our hearts out through our lips directly to God's heart in face-to-Face relationship together. We see and listen to Jesus with the eyes and ears of our hearts, hearts that the Spirit brings to the Father—carrying us near to the Father's heart by God's relational grace that spans the qualitative and relational gap between us. And we see him looking at us first, as always. Eye to eye, we sing “you, yepa, you!”

The cross underscores us, never forgotten, yet also not the primary focus for too long because the cross serves the Father. The cross crossed us over from being apart (essentially as relational orphans), to daughterhood and sonship; freed us from enslavement to reductionism, saved us to wholeness and well-being, which is *šalôm*.

We learn something important from Moses. In his first encounter at the flaming bush that did not burn, 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. Nu 12:6-8). Moses was just Moses, responding with his person—nothing less and no substitutes—no embellishment, no recitation of ancient creeds, nothing indirect. He answered back, talked back too.

So many ages later, Jesus comes into our neighborhood (the human context) and stands right in front of our face. Here was God Face to face, the Son embodying the God of heart, God's relational nature, and vulnerable presence—that is, nothing less than and no substitute for God's person. Some turn their faces away, but others receive him, his whole person. Paul writes from his own experiential truth that the Face-to-face encounter now possible for everyone is even better than what Moses had, because we have the direct ongoing relational involvement of the Spirit (2 Cor 3:7-8,17), without the veil (cf. Ex 34:33-35). Moreover, Paul continues, God “has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). And “the Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children” (Rom 8:16). This relational reality is our experience of what is primary to God, what is primary to the gospel in God's thematic relational action throughout all history.⁴

Here in a new sanctuary, we first listen to God, let him speak to us, and receive him in a new way, to receive his new song, as the psalmist sang:

*I waited patiently for the LORD / he inclined to me and heard my cry.
He drew me up from the desolate pit / out of the miry bog....
He put a new song in my mouth / a song of praise to our God (Ps 40:3).*

⁴ God's thematic relational action is developed in two studies by T. Dave Matsuo, *The Person, the Trinity, the Church: The Call to Be Whole and the Lure of Reductionism* (Wholeness Study, 2006), and *Sanctified Christology: A Theological and Functional Study of the Whole of Jesus* (Christology Study, 2008). Both online: <http://www.4X12.org>.

A new song rises from the death of something old; newness of life in what is primary, from oldness in the secondary. Below, then, is a glimpse of the old that inhibits the new, that is out of tune with the new and remains lulled in a secondary sanctuary.

Out of Tune

Our Advent/Christmas and Easter observances stand as examples of something old that drowns out the new song from emerging with relational clarity. They are in parallel with the subject of George Steiner's critique—paying more attention to secondary features of music, poetry or art than the *persons* (“presences”) communicating through their music, words or paint. By shifting to the secondary, we disembodied the ‘presence’ of ‘Other’ and our moral answerability (response-ability) when we function as relationally distant viewers of God's vulnerably embodied presence. I focus here on Christmas and Easter as representative of the broader landscape of worship, and how our focus in these celebrations and corporate worship also disembodies and misses the person, God, from the inner out.

The issue is solely a relational issue: whether our worship—individual and private, and corporate and public—has relational significance to God, and to us also. Let's reflect on our cultural (Christian and secular) Christmas and Easter with their related activities and traditions, and the good feelings we get from participating in them, and later contrast this “good stuff” with God's priority for relationship together. No doubt many of you will be offended or dismiss me as an iconoclast (or party-pooper). I have thought of God as those very same things, and the irony is not lost on me. Will you reflect, however, on even the *possibility* that much of what we do to celebrate Jesus' advent into the world (and too much of our corporate worship) has little or no relational significance to God? Suspend for now, hold in tension, your personal preferences and biases. We now enter Secondary Sanctuary.

At the onset of the Advent/Christmas season, churches shift into high gear, driven by something from within, patterns that we hold as sacred, conventions that are part of our Christian identity. On an individual level, our hearts may become attuned to a yearning. Before we are able to reflect on any stirring in our hearts to listen to the Spirit, nostalgia butts its way through, accompanied by the accoutrements of traditions we call sacred. We cannot help but find ourselves mastered by something—be it nostalgia, obligation, or comfort in the familiar. It is axiomatic that in the absence of something deeply meaningful and satisfying (the meaning of “blessed,” Gk. *makarios*,⁵ in the Beatitudes, Mt 5:3-12), we settle for substitutes from the secondary, albeit really

⁵ Greek and Hebrew word studies used in this study are taken from the following sources: Horst Balz, Gerhard Schneider, eds., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990); Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975); R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., Bruce Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980); Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974); W.E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1981); Spiros Zodhiates, ed., *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible* (Chattanooga: AMG Publ., 1996).

attractive substitutes. And the substituting works in two directions: substitutes in what we receive and what we give.

Christmas epitomizes Secondary Sanctuary. “Jesus is the reason for the season” means: Jesus is the greatest gift and expression of God’s grace, and so at Christmas we give each other gifts in many forms; it is what we do, and some of us prefer this way. For others, it is stressful, burdensome, and exhausting. Still, we all get something out of it for ourselves (even when we claim we do it for the other person). The inner logic is convincing and keeps the traditions going and growing. Tradition-as-substitution triumphs at Christmas.

Our Lenten/Easter observances are just like our Christmas traditions, though perhaps more somber at first. The victory of Jesus’ resurrection over sin gives us new life in him. To symbolize this new life in Christ we wear new clothes in a conjoint celebration to springtime.

What *is* tradition? Tradition is the matrix of shared customs steeped in history and transmitted through generations of families, tribes, nations—all of which give us a sense of who we are. Although evangelicals historically had not given primacy of place to Christian tradition to the extent that the Roman Catholic Church has, in the last couple of decades, some evangelicals have turned to reconnecting with liturgical “traditions” of the historic catholic church, renovating early church liturgical practices for today. There is some validity in this turn, I believe, in the desire to be comprehensive about our identity as God’s people. However, as we find ourselves at the point where we seem to value Christian tradition more highly than ever, we need to question the rationalization that since certain aspects of Christian tradition have endured they must be God-ordained, or at least approved. (An important perspective on the history of liturgy is discussed later.)

In this developing context of tradition, let us consider the interaction from Matthew’s Gospel. When some offended Pharisees asked Jesus “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders?” (Mt 15:2), Jesus countered, “And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?” (v.3). Their pious traditions were, in Jesus’ words, “*your* traditions,” “rules made by humans” (v.9). Jesus cannot be any clearer. Our human traditions are not from God. Human traditions are not necessarily problematic. They are only problematic when they signify doing relationship with God on our terms, for example, when we make the “what to do” of our traditions primary and God’s priority of “how to be involved in relationship” (the definition of *agapē*) secondary. When things are out of tune, we speak of Christian tradition in terms which have already reduced some practice having had relational significance (the primary) to an activity or event (the secondary). Communion is another pivotal example, discussed later.

Traditions are conceived, incubate, grow, and establish themselves in shared human experience. Young married couples set out to establish their own family traditions, and to make their own memories in addition to those of their inherited ones. With their repetition, any original meanings, especially relational ones experienced from inner out, tend to become outer in with their transmission, and end up being more about activity or event than relationship, even when relationship is spoken of as primary. Technology certainly enhances the process, through photography, videos, scrapbooking, and preserving childhood mementos. Keeping tradition readily becomes the tail that wags the dog—that is, traditions assert control over our lives. Just as families routinely follow their patterns of traditions, the church’s annual life cycle is patterned according to the

liturgical calendar that follows Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection, and the church's birth at Pentecost. It is problematic when we devote ourselves more to planning for events and holidays relationally distant from the presence of the Other than being relationally involved with God in his immediate presence in the primacy of relationship together as family.

We make much of the secondary things in the absence of the primary, but it is the primary that we need, that deeply satisfies the heart—God's and ours. Yet, as a further substitute for the primary, we compound the problem by skipping major notes in Jesus' new song and essentially go from the manger to the cross. We pattern church life by *events* of Jesus' life—that is, by relating to him situationally, not relationally—and thus fragment and reduce the whole of his incarnation, particularly his relational self-disclosures of the whole of God with us. With the grand event and spectacle of Easter, Secondary Sanctuary gives different meaning to the new-song life that transposes Jesus to an out-of-tune Christology lacking his primacy in the qualitative and the relational.

My childhood memories of Christmas and its season are sensorily etched in family tradition, infused with scent of fir, cookies, jingles, and twinkling lights. Easter also appealed to the senses in coloring eggs and edible bunnies. As I grew older and listened to the music, however, I grew to long for something deeper. The lovely traditions became routine substitutes for any deeper relational connection with this “God-with-us” and this “Jesus sitting at the right hand of God.” The primary and secondary competed for my heart—the primary called out to me, the immediacy of the secondary dangled delights before me. The alternatives were to either follow the calling-voice, or increase the secondary to recapture or create a feeling. The allure of the secondary pulls very effectively at hearts, especially if the secondary is all there is or all we know. In Secondary Sanctuary, there will always be a relational gap, because God's presence for relational connection is consigned to background music love songs in our worship, as clearly noted in our Christmas and Easter traditions.⁶

It is critical to distinguish that the primary is never about me or us primarily, though it is relationally focused on us. The secondary, however, *is* always revolved around me and us, even when we reference God. It is inevitable that our practice in the secondary becomes about us when our person is defined by what we do and have. We depend on those efforts, resources and experiences to shape our identity and determine our self-worth. Consequently, in our preoccupations with secondary matters, despite any good intentions, we make the secondary matters primary, and thus we make God and his desires, his purposes, and his relational terms secondary. Done this way, our worship—at Christmastime, Easter, or the rest of the year—has no relational significance to God in

⁶ Consider also that the origins of when and how Christians celebrating Christmas remain inconclusive. There are only theories as to how and why December 25 came to be the date assigned to Jesus' birth, celebrated perhaps only as late as 311. Liturgical scholar Paul Bradshaw has pointed out that various early Christian communities focused more either on Jesus' birth or Jesus' baptism depending on whose Gospel they had access to (Matthew's or Mark's, respectively). Matthew begins with pre-birth, and Mark begins with Jesus' baptism. See Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 187-89. In this book Bradshaw also discusses the inconclusive origins of early Christian Easter celebrations.

spite of all the so-called attention given to God. Some Christian traditions, I imagine, started out in the primacy of relationship, but have devolved to become more about us, about doing things in the ‘right’ way, orthodoxy, orthopraxy. The secondary seeps in.

Secondary Sanctuary is epitomized in *mediation* for our worship of God, privately and corporately, just as music critics mediate our appreciation of music when we let them. Christmas is just not Christmas without the look, the feel, the sounds, tastes and smells, and Easter is inseparable from new “looks,” happy feelings, the sounds of the “Hallelujah Chorus,” and its own tastes and smells; all of these mediate meaning. Liturgically speaking, whereas the former mediators in OT times were the high priests, the new “de facto priests” are the worship leaders who mediate worship between the congregation and God.⁷ In truth, new mediators who take front and center stage in a worship service can also be a group of singers, or the person giving the sermon—anyone that the congregation watches perform in their perception what amounts to the likeness of “a singer of love songs, one who has a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument” but with no further relational significance (Eze 33:32). The music itself can serve this role, as can the total worship “experience” as it is planned and carried out with flowing prayers, eloquent sermons, and even flowery announcements.

I am grateful to God for new and deeper ways to celebrate the Lord’s “birthday” and the transformation to new life that began for me during the time I lived in a Christian community. For example, instead of participating in the prevailing interpretation of Christmas mediated with card and gift exchanges, we would spend Christmas day relationally focused on Jesus and create a gift for him. A couple of years we made worship banners, another year we created a nativity scene to set up outdoors during the Advent season. Still other years we designed and created worship spaces, wall murals depicting his creation, and other visuals to speak to others of God. After working on these gifts, we presented them to Jesus in a simple time to worship, followed by a Love Feast, a simple meal together that included Communion.

Now my husband and I spend Christmas day creating worship songs for God. We no longer think of the baby Jesus, with whom we cannot have much of a relationship; we are instead relationally involved throughout the day with him—embodied Jesus, real Jesus Face to face in the Spirit’s presence and intimate involvement with us, no mere concept or romanticized sweet baby J (even a *divine* baby). These times are deeply satisfying. The secondary things from the past have fallen away for me, and now I am finally at home in the primacy of relationship together where I *belong*. I know Jesus is enjoying being together very much, too.

Another issue prevailing in Secondary Sanctuary is the question of nonnegotiable liturgical parts of corporate worship. Resources for teaching worship leadership (seminary courses, books) raise the need to define what must be included in the order of worship (the *ordo*). A higher church liturgy defines more features for the *ordo* than a Free

⁷ Davin Seay, “Rooted in Rock: the Origins of Contemporary Worship Ritual,” *Worship Leader*, Nov/Dec 2003, vol.12, No.8, 19-20.

Church liturgy does.⁸ In Secondary Sanctuary, the *ordo* is the primary determinative framework for planning a worship service, for the good intention of teaching and reinforcing theological truths to help the congregation mature. Yet, in God's primacy of relationship, the integral issue is not how many, or which parts are included (even though based in doctrine), but the significance of persons' involvement in the primacy of whole relationship together which necessarily is intimate involvement with God and with each other. The latter is the primacy necessary for wholeness in worship by giving relational clarity and relational significance to the liturgical parts of worship, and is the only nonnegotiable. This whole is constituted only by the primacy of relationship together in wholeness, which the aggregate of liturgical parts can at best only ontologically simulate in narrowed-down referential terms with epistemological illusions. The former without the latter becomes only renegotiated parts aggregated in referential terms from outer in which are out of tune with the *whole* lacking in Secondary Sanctuary.

The out-of-tune sounds of Secondary Sanctuary may not seem dissonant to our ears from outer in but they are dissonant to our hearts, which becomes clear when we pay attention from inner out. Secondary Sanctuary is filled with secondary concerns that occupy our quantities of time, energy, and use up our personal and material resources. This occupation keeps lots of people busy in a secondary life, providing even jobs in churches and a separate discipline for (pre)occupation in seminaries. It looks beautiful on the outside, but if you scratch its walls, you see that Secondary Sanctuary is shaped and constructed from outer in with shallow substitutes of ontological simulation and epistemological illusion which we present to God and others, appearances that we try to pass off as our whole persons from inner out. In Secondary Sanctuary God cannot find the worshipers he seeks. Let's get out of here.

Tune Up!

The purpose of this study is to articulate a theology of wholeness in worship to help the church grow as the worshipers God seeks—that is, to help us move toward 'singing' a new song to the Lord. Such a theology must help us understand wholeness (peace as *shalôm*) because wholeness is essential for God's family—connecting John 14:27 to Ephesians 2:14-18 for Colossians 3:15-16—to grow as the worshipers who “will worship the Father in spirit and truth” (Jn 4:23). This theology of worship is written especially for current and future worship thinkers, planners and leaders—along with other church leaders, and for the Christian academy—who have the unique responsibility to guide God's people into deeper relationship with God individually and corporately, particularly in the context of corporate worship.

⁸ For example, this order (*ordo*) can include: Gathering/Call to Worship, Prayer of Illumination, Proclamation of the Word, Eucharistic Celebration (brief explanation, Great Prayer of Thanksgiving, Sanctus, the Institution, Epicletic Prayer, fraction and invitation, distribution), Prayer of the People, Benediction/Sending.

I hope that readers will recognize the interrelated and irreducible *wholeness* (the significance of biblical peace) of all aspects of life as God's people—worship, spirituality, discipleship, and theological understandings (e.g. Christology, soteriology, pneumatology, ecclesiology). In order to understand the integrated *whole* in worship, it is equally necessary to grasp that which diminishes this whole, which is *reductionism*, the major barrier to growing in our whole person and thus in the primacy of relationship with God. Reductionism's goal in its counter-relational work is to interfere in this primary relationship. I hope and pray that this study also helps illuminate what is involved to help build up our life with him and with each other in the relationships necessary to be and function *whole* in likeness of the whole of God, the Trinity.

The most basic question that we Christians today—particularly church and worship leaders, along with seminaries and divinity schools—are challenged by Jesus to examine is this: How do we define the human person, and thus how do we function, notably in relationship with God and each other? The answers will reveal congruity (in tune) or expose incongruity (out of tune) with being made in the qualitative image and relational likeness of God, the whole of God, the Trinity. This critically addresses the integral issue of theological anthropology, about which we can no longer ignore our assumptions. The importance of theological anthropology is integral to all of our life and practice—for our whole ontology as Christians in particular and for our whole function as members of the human community in general.

At the heart of our life as God's people in the innermost and that which brings coherence to all aspects of this life from inner out is the primacy of the relationship of the Trinity (the whole of God) as embodied and self-disclosed in Jesus in the incarnation. This primacy of relationship is now extended to include us, as Jesus prayed for us in his formative family prayer: “so that they may be one as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one [relational wholeness] so that the world may know that you have sent me” (Jn 17:22-23). Therefore, the primacy of relationship becomes the integral focus of this theology of whole worship, which we engage in with the Spirit. Jesus' relational language in this prayer is ‘singing’ the new song that is our integrating theme in this study. These are the relational words which I pray will compose our new song also so that we can confidently and freely sing with the psalmist, “He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God” (Ps 40:3).

Throughout this study I make many references to other theological/functional studies available on our website, and encourage readers to study them for deeper understanding for personal and church growth. It will quickly become apparent that this study is not intended to give a historical survey of church liturgy, nor deal with specific contemporary concerns and trends for how to “do” worship (e.g. emergent, new monasticism, Liturgical Movement, multicultural worship, music differences). It is a great deal more pressing to uncover the underlying assumptions we have, and to keep listening to Jesus, with the Spirit's involvement with us, in order that the issues we face can be addressed substantively rather than in the shallow way that stays at the level of symptoms and the secondary matter. We sorely need God's integral perspective from beyond our limited understanding, notably helping us distinguish secondary referential terms from primary relational terms.

This theological study is therefore rooted above all in Jesus' self-disclosures in the incarnation of the whole of God, his vulnerable self-disclosures which were only for

the purpose of going further and deeper in relationship together with the whole of God, the Trinity. Interwoven with theological interpretation of Scripture are some insights from the fields of neuroscience, linguistics, and other human sciences. What emerges from this study is a whole perspective that brings to the fore the primacy of relationship with God on God's relational terms, to help transform us. It is unavoidable to begin with our theological anthropology, that is, with how we define our 'person', which necessarily includes transforming our perceptual-interpretive framework from outer in to inner out. We discuss how this is necessary to transform us into the worshipers the Father seeks, beyond the worshipers described in the opening Scripture above signifying a secondary sanctuary.

An in-depth discussion about the worshipers God seeks cannot take place at a relational distance and has no significance to God apart from ongoing involvement of our whole person. God is addressing us, so we need to respond. God presents to us the Other not as a mere Object to observe but as distinguished Subject with whom to be relationally involved. And we are accountable for the compatible relational response necessary to receive God, his communicative acts through Scripture, no longer at a distance, but increasingly entering "behind the curtain" and "without the veil" for Face-to-face relational involvement. Christian worshipers, particularly here in the West but not limited to us, have much accounting to do.⁹

In the Old Testament times, God frequently rejected the Israelites' worship as unacceptable to him, and Jesus' later use of these critiques implicated the Pharisees for the same reason: God's people were engaged in worship that was not according to God's relational terms but was on their own terms which essentially shaped and constructed a secondary sanctuary. They did not come near to God with their hearts, for their hearts were distant. "Hardened hearts" is Scripture's designation for this relational condition (e.g. Ps 95:8; Heb 3:8; cf. Zec 7:11-12). What they did instead, as a substitute for their hearts (the heart is the qualitative function of the whole person from inner out), was to give God something less from their own construction—"rules taught by men" (Isaiah's version, NIV), and "the tradition of the elders" (Matthew and Mark's version). Because they defined themselves by what they did or had, and tried to relate to God on that basis, which is to function from the outer in, this countered God's relational terms from inner out—the counter-relational work of reductionism. Jesus then made doubly definitive what the deeper relational issue was: "You abandon the [relational terms] of God and hold to human tradition. You have a fine way of rejecting the [relational terms] of God in order to keep your tradition!" (Mark 7:8-9).

Jesus' deeper critique is that by substituting something from their own construction in place of responding to God's nonnegotiable terms, they were trying to determine the terms of relationship with God. In other words, they functioned from autonomous efforts of self-determination, if not also of self-justification. Jesus rejects our attempts at determining the terms of relationship with him. He also knows from

⁹ I acknowledge that even as I write this study, I have been chastened by the Spirit for making secondary matters primary, which in effect distances my person from being relationally involved with the Spirit! And so I pray that God speaks to you who read this study, and will help you listen and receive him.

experience the temptation to do so.¹⁰ Ever since the Fall, all human persons have been susceptible to self-determination—that is, pressing for our terms for relationship with God—and consequently to reductionism of our whole person with ontological simulations in epistemological illusions.

Reductionism fragments a person and defines the person by the parts of what one does and has, then on this fragmented basis engages in relationships with others (including God) who are perceived accordingly. By self-determination, we have redefined *who* and *what* we are, which determines *how* we function. If, for example, I define my person by my musical talent or speaking skills, what I present to God in worship becomes about “my music,” “my prayer” or “my sermon.” Where God seeks and accepts nothing less than and no substitutes for our whole person signified by the heart (from inner out), the ability of “my music,” “my prayer” or “my sermon” (what I do or have from outer in) constitute something less and some substitute for my whole person to God and others. Reductionism is this process from self-determination that constitutes the human condition and sin, and the consequence of reduced persons takes place primarily as distant or broken relationships. Furthermore, we even try to reduce God by redefining him by only what he does (e.g. miracles) or has (static attributes, didactic resources), and construct our own referential categories to explain him (e.g. philosophical approaches, systematic theologies).¹¹ Worship, which is only a relational interaction on relational terms, becomes disconnected from inner out by fragmenting the whole ontology and function of both God and ourselves. Little wonder so much of our corporate worship seems routinized or ritualized, while missing a deeper significance that we desire, long for, and perhaps have become resigned to not experiencing in this lifetime.

Even as serious Christians with good intentions and sincere desires to faithfully serve God, we inadequately address our propensity to self-determination that interferes with the most integral area of our lives in Christ—worship. We may not even be aware of this particular barrier because we have focused on secondary matters concerning worship, a preoccupation making secondary matter primary. Specifically, if we do not address how we define our person, and the consequent way we engage in relationship, in all likelihood we will continue to have an experiential gap (not a theological gap) of God’s relational response of grace and ongoing relational connection with God. A subconscious awareness of the experiential gap in our practice makes us try to do more quantitatively to fill a void. One consequence is to live situationally, going from Christmas to Easter as events, and from Sunday to Sunday to experience a “fill-up” in Secondary Sanctuary, when what we deeply need is a tune-up in the relational presence of God. Additionally, any apparent “successes” resulting from our secondary efforts and/or from the activities in a secondary sanctuary—for example, larger attendance, louder singing, greater

¹⁰ It is helpful to see how Jesus dealt with Satan’s attempts to get him to change the terms of relationship with the Father. For a deeper discussion of Jesus’ responses to Satan’s counter-relational work, see *Sanctified Christology* by T. Dave Matsuo. Ch.1, section “Reductionism Made Explicit.”

¹¹ This is a cursory explanation of reductionism. For a fuller theological interpretation of Scripture on reductionism and its counter-relational dynamic, please see Matsuo’s two studies: *Sanctified Christology*, and *The Whole of Paul and the Whole in his Theology: Theological Interpretation in Relational Epistemic Process* (Paul Study, 2010). Online: <http://4X12.org>.

applause, and the like—only generate epistemological illusions of how well we are *doing*, which are based on and continue to create ontological simulations.

God’s relational response of grace distinguishes the qualitative difference of worshiping as whole persons from worshiping as less than whole—fragmented and reduced persons. With a secondary lens, we will be unable to tell the difference simply from outward behaviors, but “the LORD looks on [examines] the heart” (1 Sam 16:7), and knows whose hearts are available to him (cf. Jn 5:42; Acts 1:24, Acts 15:8; Rev 2:23). Peter struggled with being open and vulnerable, but experienced Jesus’ pursuit of his heart (Jn 13:8; 21:15-22; Acts 10:13-15). As we move further into this study, I hope that the interaction of relational grace, wholeness and reductionism will emerge more clearly and urgently for us, particularly for those of us concerned about worship and growing together in relationship with God as his family.

*In brokenness of heart we consecrate our lives, singing
Come, come let us return to the Lord...
With the rending of a heart, with the bowing of a knee
Lord, we are returning with a prayer and a fast
With a song in minor key
Lord, we are repenting with all of our hearts¹²*

Addressing the human heart directs us to the question of how we understand human ontology and function—what it means to be a human person created in the image of God and the new identity we have because of the gospel. In order for us to really change, we need to examine the most basic matters of our perceptual-interpretive framework, and our theological anthropology (human ontology and human function), which includes our biases, preconceptions and all our theological assumptions. Jesus consistently addressed persons on these matters, and we can no longer ignore them. Until we address our perceptual-interpretive framework and how we define the person—whether human or divine—our worship has little or no relational significance to God.

My husband and I know a 20 month-old boy in a Christian family who is slightly developmentally delayed. He does not yet speak in recognizable words, but he sings! What his mother refers to as “his own language” is melodic and joyful, evidenced in his enjoyment as he contentedly endlessly makes his special music, whether or not anyone is listening! His song calls to mind Augustine’s depiction of singing in jubilation:

What does singing in jubilation signify? It is to realize that words cannot communicate the song of the heart....In this way the heart rejoices without words and the boundless expanse of rapture is not circumscribed by syllables. *Sing well unto*

¹² “Come Let Us Return to the Lord.” Matt Redman/© 2003 ThankYou Music/PRS/Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing.

*Him in jubilation.*¹³

When Jesus says “unless you change and become like children,” I think of this little boy jubilating. What Jesus is addressing is human ontology and function and the wholeness we need to be restored to in order to worship as true worshipers, those who “worship the Father in spirit and truth” (Jn 4:23). This is the tune-up needed in relational language with relational words to sing the new song to the Lord, which referential language with referential words can only sing out of tune.

Only hearts that are open and vulnerable can relationally connect with the open and vulnerable heart of God, in the reciprocal relational dynamic of intimacy—intimacy defined as the relational process of hearts opening to each other and coming together. This is the relational dynamic that constitutes worship from inner out. Worship cannot be reduced to what we “do” but finds its significance only in the intimate experience of God’s relational response of grace. Worship in relational terms, therefore, is the unequaled experience “behind the curtain” and “without the veil;” any worship conducted “in front of the curtain” and “with the veil” remains out of tune in Secondary Sanctuary. Furthermore, the relational function of grace by its very nature results in human relationships that are equalized because grace counters defining ourselves by what we do or have at every level of life; as the functional basis, grace negates human distinctions to remove relational barriers based on those distinctions.¹⁴ Intimate and equalized relationships are both necessary and normative for persons ‘in Christ’ because the heart involved thus with God can only be open and vulnerable, as it is redeemed, healed and transformed from inner out—that is, made whole. This relational process was clearly initiated when Jesus deconstructed the Temple at Jerusalem and reconstituted it on his relational terms (Mk 11:15-17). This relational outcome is indispensable for persons in God’s family to gather at the Communion table without the veil to be involved in the primacy necessary for relationships together in wholeness.

We have much relational work to address ourselves to—to leave Secondary Sanctuary and compose a new sanctuary. Beyond a mere metaphor, this major movement is the irreversible shift from worship at the Temple as a secondary place to its primacy in relationship with the whole of God, as Jesus makes definitive (Jn 4:21-24; cf. 1 Cor 3:16-17; Rev 21:22). May this study help us ‘sing’ anew in his purpose for us—to be whole worshipers who will worship the whole of God (Trinity) wholly. Anything less and any substitutes keep us out of tune in Secondary Sanctuary.

¹³ As quoted in Albert L. Blackwell, *The Sacred in Music* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999, 16; *St. Augustine on the Psalms*, tr. Dame Scholastica Hebgin and Dame Felicitas Corrigan, 2 vols. (New York: Newman Press, 1961), 2:11-12.

¹⁴ The issue here is about human constructions of distinction-making based on reductionist human ontology that leads to the comparative process, competition, and eventually systems of inequality. This process is given further understanding in T. Dave Matsuo, *The Whole of Paul and the Whole in his Theology*, ch.3, section “Knowing Christ and ‘in Christ’.”

Chorus:

‘Singing’ a new song to the LORD: Secondary Sanctuary emerges from the focus we give to secondary matters which substitute for the primacy of relationship with God. By making the secondary primary, worship becomes composed of activities which are defined from outer in by what we do and have as indirect responses to God. Instead of our whole person—signified by the qualitative function of our hearts from inner out that God seeks—we give to God the secondary as substitutes. We present to him from outer in that which gives primacy, for example, to human-shaped traditions (Christian and secular), our performance for God ‘in front of the curtain’, and other activities, therefore reversing his primacy for relationship. This focus reflects a theological anthropology that has redefined our whole person to a fragmented person from reductionism, thus diminishing our ontology and function. We will remain out of tune with God, stuck in Secondary Sanctuary, as long as we live from outer in. Most significantly, worship in Secondary Sanctuary has no relational significance to God, and this relational condition will remain as long as such worship is from our reduced terms for worship. Yet God, in his relational response of grace to us, pursues our hearts to transform our person from inner out, so that we can experience the intimate relational connection with him ‘without the veil’. Without the veil, the ‘nonnegotiable’ of God’s primacy for relationship gives relational clarity and relational significance to any and all dynamics of corporate worship. In worship without the veil, in contrast and conflict with Secondary Sanctuary, we will be able to sing in tune with the whole of God (the Trinity) the new song in relational language to compose the new sanctuary as God’s family, with nothing less and no substitutes!

Verse 2

Composing a New Sanctuary

Pay attention to what/how you hear; the measure you give will be the measure you get, and still more will be given you.

Mark 4:24

With these relational words, Jesus addresses the quality and depth of our involvement with him, and what the relational outcome for us will be, which have vital implications for corporate worship. Through this Verse we discuss some difficult areas that will confront most of us, and certainly challenge many of our assumptions about how we see things and our acceptance of the way things are. I pray the Spirit will stir up the ‘eternity substance’ of God that he has planted in our hearts to want *more* than human limits allow (Eccl 3:11). In our church life and practice, and even more so in the Christian academy, it is not part of our culture, mindset and worldview to think relationally, even when we consider relationship to be a priority. This lack attests to the genius and success of Satan, who promotes reductionism and its counter-relational work in our midst. More immediate for our accountability, this involves our framework and lens, which Jesus clearly identified as “the measure you [use and thus] give,” and then made inescapably definitive about that measure determining “the [results] you get”—measured by either the quantitative or the qualitative, the secondary or the primary, the referential or the relational, outer in or inner out.

The purpose of this study is to make clear what the issues are, and how they specifically relate to corporate worship. We are at a place in church history in great need not so much for another Reformation but even more deeply of a transformation. Complete transformation (from inner out, *metamorphoō*, 2 Cor 3:16-18) requires dying to the old so that the new can emerge—that is, redemptive change. It is our ‘person’ who needs to change first from inner out, not changing what we do or have from outer in (*metaschematizō*, 2 Cor 11:13-15). Jesus, in his relational words communicated openly to the Samaritan woman, clearly addresses who, what, and how we are as worshipers only from inner out. This is the significance that he spoke of, not of the “worship” the Father seeks, but the “worshipers” (Jn 4:23-24).

The Necessity of Relational Clarity and Relational Significance

Corporate worship planning pursues the concern that worship be pleasing to God and meaningful to and transforming for worshipers. We want to get it right, and often proceed with one of two subtle assumptions. First, we assume that our worship, individual or corporate, has significance to God. Second, if we do not assume the first, then we assume that we are unlikely to know what specifically pleases God, so we do the best we can and ask before and during corporate worship that whatever it is we do would be pleasing to him. In a sense we are guessing, and we look for feedback from the congregation. We may be assuming correctly, or we may not. At the very least, we know

from God's words that where our heart is, is key to worship (individual and corporate) that has significance to God, and is also the key to experiencing God in worship.

We must not assume where our heart is and need to pay attention to its vital signs. Our heart is either focused on and engaged in what is primary to God, that is, relationship together, or is distant, as when we give primacy to secondary matters of what we do/have, and treating worship as performance, situation or event. As I have been learning and experiencing, my heart either responds to God with *relational clarity* and *relational significance*, or is constrained by secondary, indirect involvement that creates and maintains relational barriers even without awareness of doing so. God knows this; he is the searcher and knower of hearts (Acts 1:24, 15:8; Rom 8:27), and pursues our hearts (to heal, cleanse, free and make whole) for intimate relationship with God. What is meant by relational clarity and relational significance?

Relational clarity in worship is our direct person-to-person intentional focus on God. This is not something we create, for example, by words referencing God, but is a relational response we enact directly to *who*, *what*, and *how* God is. The whole of who, what, and how God is establishes the clarity necessary for the relational response of worship in the new sanctuary. Relational clarity is diminished by relational ambiguity; relational ambiguity is what takes place when our *primary* focus is on others (e.g. musicians performing, preachers preaching) or what we ourselves are doing (performing, preaching), even as mediating acts for worship. Ironically, it happens frequently that even something as significant as Communion is led with relational ambiguity and is thus reduced from its deep meaning to becoming a routine activity. It may seem absurd to note this, but think about it functionally. Analogously, haven't you attended a birthday party or other celebration given in honor of someone—perhaps you were the honoree—and after a brief time of recognition and attention, the person being honored is hardly spoken to? In corporate worship, if most of the songs we sing are about God, and not directly sung to him (including in the third person), the result is relational ambiguity. If most of the music is sung by others, like the choir or worship band, and the congregation watches and listens, relational ambiguity dominates, even with words referencing God. This includes prayers directed to God in flowing referential language informative about God but lacking the whole of who, what, and how God is in relational terms.

For our worship to have relational clarity, we must minimize the relationally-ambiguous involvement of “ourselves about ourselves”¹ in worship, be it in prayer, in the Word, in song, or any other means and media of communication and engagement. When our songs say more about ourselves, refer to him in the third person, or when our attention is more on the outer-in musical acts by singers, and instrumentalists, relational focus is ambiguous. Worship leader and songwriter Matt Redman makes this point in his confessional song:

*I'm coming back to the heart of worship,
When it's all about You, all about You, Jesus.
I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing I made it,
When it's all about You, All about You, Jesus.*²

¹ Source of this phrase is unknown.

² Matt Redman, “The Heart of Worship” (UK: Kingsway's Thankyou Music, n.d.), in *The Unquenchable Worshiper: Coming Back to the Heart of Worship* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2001), 104.

When we corporately come together intentionally into the relational context of the whole of God (not fragments about God) whom we are worshiping, there is relational clarity. God's **relational context** is his vulnerable presence, "the Most Holy Place" intimately Face to face with him behind the curtain, which we enter only on his relational terms, involving his relational response of grace. Worship planners and pastoral staffs are responsible to see that the church's worship service has relational clarity in God's relational context. Relational clarity alone, however, is not sufficient to enter into God's presence face to Face. As the saying goes, you can lead a horse to the trough, but you can't make it drink. Likewise, you can point worshipers to God, but you cannot make persons worship as the Father seeks; nor does mere association with a worship gathering constitute worship for those persons. This critically distinguishes mere participation in a corporate process or event from direct relational involvement with God and his family in relationship together. The only worshipers the Father seeks are those whose involvement with him has relational significance.

We are God's family *together*, and being family together means that in corporate worship we are relationally involved from inner out with each other, which converges most notably in Communion as the integral table fellowship of God's family. Further understanding about how involvement together unfolds is addressed later. The issue for relational clarity is to distinguish between what is primary to God, what is only secondary to him, and to examine our own priorities. As this study continues, the incompatibility between God's whole terms and our reduced terms becomes much clearer.

"[T]he true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (Jn 4:23-24).

Relational significance to God is the inner-out involvement of our whole person—nothing less and no substitutes—with him in the intimate **relational process** that Jesus embodies for us in the incarnation. During Jesus' life on earth, the incarnation *between* the manger and the cross, Jesus made known through his relationship with the Father, the Spirit, and interactions with human persons that the innermost of God's being is signified by heart, and that God's nature is intimately relational, which integrally constitute God's presence as vulnerably involved only for relationship. Intimacy is defined as hearts open, vulnerable and coming together. Indeed, at the Transfiguration, the Father told the disciples, "listen to [my] Son," so that they could not only perceive God whom Jesus vulnerably embodied, but also to experience the purpose for this embodiment, intimate relationship together, to be relationally connected in likeness of the Father and Son's relationship together. Involvement in this distinguished relational process engages relational significance—not only in this intimate relationship with him, but with each other also, to be "one [in intimate relational connection] as we are one" (Jn 17:20-22).

John's Gospel 'sings' in God's relational language. In Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's Well, Jesus disclosed to her who "the true worshipers" are, only persons who "will worship the Father in spirit [rendered in function as inner person, heart] and truth [rendered in function as the person in congruence both inner and out, honesty of heart]" (Jn 4:23-24). The Father *seeks* such persons. *Zeteō* ("seek, seek out")

further denotes “to try to obtain, to desire to possess,” in strong relational language that should not be confused with how we do relationships. What is Jesus revealing for relationship?

“God is spirit” denotes God’s innermost being as heart (v.24).³ It is the heart of God embodied in the Son who came to be present and involved with us, nothing less than and no substitutes for the whole of God, his open and vulnerable heart extended to us directly in the person of Jesus. Relational significance, then, means that we respond back to God just as he is involved with us in the intimate relational process—with nothing less than who and what we honestly are (sinful, forgiven, loved, and restored to his image) and no substitutes (of what we do or have) for our whole person signified by our hearts. This is Jesus’ meaning of worshipers who “must worship in spirit and truth.” The Greek for “must” is *dei*, which denotes an imperative by the nature of the thing, in contrast to *opheilo*, which denotes being bound by obligation or duty. By the nature of God’s vulnerable presence and relational involvement, there is no compatible connection with God without this depth of response and still have relational significance to God. Relational significance, then, is a nonnegotiable matter. When our hearts are open and vulnerable in response back to God, the blessed relational outcome is intimacy (heart-to-heart connection); this is the only involvement that has relational significance to the heart of God.

Therefore, worship with lips but not heart is outer in, not inner out, and therefore not relational. Such worship is incompatible to have significance to God because it emerges from persons fragmented or reduced in their function with something less than their open and honest hearts, and with some substitutes in the form of what one does (e.g. perform, even sacrifice) or has (e.g. a title, resources). The Father seeks only the deeper quality of intimate relational involvement with him; this is what he desires and expects of us, for which we are accountable, nonnegotiablely.

Relational clarity is a necessary condition for relational significance in worship, but relational clarity by itself is never a sufficient condition to ensure relational significance. Whole worshipers worship in God’s relational context in which relationship is primary and in the relational process of nothing less and no substitutes, as embodied and made definitive by Jesus. This is worship on God’s whole terms and is the quality of relational involvement that is specific to God—specific not just to parts of God but to only the whole of God. Worship that is person specific (relationally specific) to the whole of God is worship constituted by the necessary relational dynamic having both relational clarity and relational significance.

Learning from the Old Testament

The inner-out response of the hearts of his people in trust and obedience to his person pleases God. When God commanded the Israelites not to have any other gods before him, that he is a jealous God, and also that he abundantly blesses those who love him and keep his commands (his relational desires), he summarized in relational language how he wanted them to respond to him. These prescriptions were the relational

³ For a fuller discussion of God’s being as heart, his nature as relational, and his presence as vulnerable, please see T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology: A Theological and Functional Study of the Whole of Jesus* (Christology Study, 2008), online: <http://www.4X12.org>, ch.1, section “The Person in Practice.”

terms that God set for the covenant, which the people were to submit to and obey as their relational responses from inner out, not obligations from outer in. For God, the relational response of the peoples' whole person from inner out was always primary. *Within* this relational context and process of the covenant, God clearly laid out covenant terms (torah) and instructions for the tabernacle in the wilderness, and later the Jerusalem temple, temple worship (see Lev and Num), as well as the sacrifices. These were God's relational terms to be received as the Israelites' relational responsibility in that reciprocal covenant relationship. The terms of the covenant relationship between God and Israel were nonnegotiable, and keeping the terms with their whole person was the relational response of obedience that had relational clarity and relational significance to him. These were relationally *specific* to Yahweh. By the terms of the covenant relational responsibilities, God also bound himself to the covenant terms (Ex 20:5-6; 34:6-7; Num 14:18; Dt 5:9-10; 7:9-10). "I will place my dwelling in your midst...I will walk among you," (Lev 26:12). God's covenant terms were provided for the Israelites to be able to encounter God's presence and to experience his care and abundant blessing, wholeness and well-being—the meaning of biblical peace (*šalôm*).

Biblical peace as wholeness (*šalôm*) stands in contrast to the reduced (outer in) Greek understanding of peace as merely harmony and the absence of conflict, the latter of which persists as our common view of peace, even in Christian contexts. Jesus makes this distinction definitive: "*my* peace [wholeness] I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives" (Jn 14:27, emphasis added).

The Face of God's presence and involvement with the Israelites composes in relational language the LORD's definitive blessing for wholeness:

The LORD bless you and keep you;

The LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you;

The LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace (Num 6:24-26 NIV).

Hundreds of years later, during the time of Solomon, the temple in Jerusalem became the central location of meeting with God. As Solomon dedicated the temple to the God, God made this promise: "I have consecrated this temple...by putting my Name there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there" (1 Kgs 9:3, NIV). God vulnerably spoke to Israel in relational messages. He was present and involved among them, in the primacy of relationship together.

The OT prophets narrate how this beautiful covenant relationship became a cacophony of out-of-tune sounds as the Israelites attempted to change the covenant's relational terms to their own reduced terms. The absence of relational significance of their whole persons was indicated by how they functioned not only in relationship with him, but with others, since the depth of consistency in all relationships is the function of the whole person from inner out. In the relational terms of the covenant, God had commanded Israel to live in the primacy of reciprocal relational responsibility, first with God and also among themselves (e.g. Lev 19), and specifically to extend his impartiality and compassion by not abusing the socially and economically vulnerable persons—the poor, oppressed, orphans, widows, and foreigners in their midst (Ex 22:21-27; Dt 10:17-19; 24:17-22). Yet, as a whole, the Israelites failed to make God's relational terms primary in their lives (Amos 3:1; 5:10-12; Isa 1:1-4), thus evoking God's rejection of

their “worship,” which lacked inner-out integrity of *who* and *what* they presented of themselves to him:

I do not delight in [your sacrifices].... When you come to [see my Face], who asked this from your hand? Trample my courts no more; bringing offerings is futile; incense is an abomination to me.... I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity. Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul [*nepes̄*] hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them. When you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you offer many prayers, I will not listen (Isa 1:11-15).

I hate, I despise your festivals; I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me [offerings] I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being [fellowship offerings, NIV]...I will not look upon them. Take away the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps (Amos 5:21-23).

Our focus on these passages needs to be not on historical information, but on the relational dynamics involved. The Israelites may have continued to give relational clarity to God by engaging in sacrifices, prayer, and musical “worship,” yet God clearly rejected their liturgical activities because they lacked the relational significance of their whole person in response to the heart of God.

The Worshipers God Seeks

When Jesus challenged some Pharisees with the words quoted at the beginning of this study, he rebuked their practices of piety (in effect, worship as lifestyle) by restating the ancient reprimand to the Israelites (Isa 29:13). Whether the Israelites in the OT or the Pharisees in the NT, their worship was “in vain,” lacking in relational significance to God because they engaged in some substitute from their own construction (“rules taught by men”). In Scripture God challenges his peoples’ worship with his relational language; these are not merely ancient texts bound to the past by chronological time (*chronos*). He therefore continues to speak just as directly and vulnerably to us today (in God’s time of *kairos*) in these verses and through the whole of Scripture. Beyond a mere text filled with referential information about God, Scripture is God’s relational language that only relationally communicates the full self-disclosure of God in ongoing relationship with us.⁴ We too are thus confronted about who and what we present to God in worship.

⁴ Relational language is person-to-person communication that gives primacy to the relationship, which carries deeper significance than transmission of information. Relational language is qualitative in function, whereas referential language is quantitative in its focus on words apart from their relational context and significance. For a fuller understanding about relational language versus 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 Modern World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

Jesus challenges our assumptions, as with the Pharisees, about the quality of our relational involvement with him in worship. Our worship might be “in vain,” as Jesus told the Pharisees, and the Israelites hundreds of years earlier. We may believe that the worship we give God is sincere and faithful to him; yet, it is very possible that our worship is out of tune, or merely lip service, just hot air emitting from our mouths, as far as God is concerned. Such a critique may seem nasty or harsh, but the issue that Jesus raises goes deeper than current worship debates; what Jesus addresses gets to the heart of human ontology and function (theological anthropology), and ultimately what the gospel is all about. He is being relationally involved with us deeply, personally, and beyond what most of us seem to want.

It is said that in corporate worship everything says something theologically.⁵ The use of music, prayers, sermon, the positions of the worship leaders, musicians, the placement of the Communion table and other furniture, the projection screen, visuals—all express how God is seen and related to in a particular place of worship. These elements either reveal God in further and deeper ways, or obscure him. I find it to be more helpful to rephrase that observation with “everything in worship says something *relationally*” (which, in a relational theology, goes deeper than a referential theology). As God revealed himself in the incarnation of Jesus openly and vulnerably heart to heart with us, heart to heart is how our response must be in order to be compatible with how he is with us. He is present and involved—nothing less and no substitutes—and this is the involvement of our whole person he expects back.

In general, we often strain in corporate worship to hear God communicate his heart to us, and we are also constrained from communicating our hearts to him. These constraints can come from either the way the worship time is designed and led, or from ourselves, or both. Whichever the cause, worship of God that lacks relational clarity and relational significance to him in function takes place ‘in front of the curtain’, that is, distant or apart from God’s relational context and process—as it was before the Temple was reconstituted and as still found in Secondary Sanctuary. I can think of nothing more paradoxical, more antithetical to the good news of the whole gospel than corporate worship that creates and/or maintains barriers to intimacy with God and each other. But that is the functional reality when we reduce worship’s relational purpose to the secondary involvement focused essentially more on “ourselves about ourselves.” Even with good intentions, such secondary involvement reflects that we, like the Israelites and Pharisees who were rebuked by God (Isa 29:13 and Mt 15:8-9), worship God on our own reduced terms.

A clear distinction must be made here between intimate relational connection and an emotional or sensory experience. Intimacy, defined as hearts open and vulnerable and coming together in relational connection is what distinguishes heart-to-heart relational connection. Both parties know the connection is made. When we try to create emotional or sensory experiences, these are outer-in efforts that get confused and substituted for real intimacy. Such experiences are ontological simulation without deeper relational connection; this experience has no relational significance for (or clarity of) God. In the absence of this distinction, I suggest that driving at least some of the contemporary efforts to recover ancient liturgical practices (e.g. from third century ecclesial documents

⁵ From Ron Rienstra, in the Fuller Seminary course “Contemporary Theological Issues in Worship and the Arts,” Spring 2005.

like the *Apostolic Tradition*, *Canons of Hippolytus*, the *Apostolic Constitutions*, etc.) is a confusion of emotional/sensory experience with intimate relationship with God. Likewise, persons who turn to high liturgy are often tired of shallowness in worship, and seek deeper significance through long-lived sacramental traditions. There is a real and deep need for the qualitative in our corporate worship that persons understandably seek. Nonetheless, no matter how sincere and desirous we are for a qualitatively deep experience, God seeks worshipers who come to him on his relational terms. We cannot influence God to connect with us on our terms from outer in despite the sacred and liturgical shape of our efforts. When we try, what we get are, again, ontological simulations from our epistemological illusions.

Our reduced terms from either not listening to Jesus, not submitting to his whole terms, or both, are also expressed in the following ways—even unknowingly and with our sincere intentions to worship God rightly: worship that is overly christocentric and that tends to jump from the manger to the cross; worship that rehashes the cross' necessity over and over (Heb 6:1-2), thus which ignores the main half of the gospel involving the relationships we are saved to (Col 3:12-17); and worship that is characterized by indirectness (Jn 4:21). Further in this study, indirectness is more fully discussed.

The following words from Matt Redman's song are about having started to listen to the Son, by turning from substitutes and relational distance to relational clarity and relational significance:

*I'll bring you more than a song,
For a song in itself
Is not what You have required.
You search much deeper within
Through the way things appear;
You're looking into my heart.⁶*

Relational significance (and implied relational clarity) is the integrating theme in this theology of worship, and the rest of this study expands on it. Indeed, relational significance addresses and challenges many contemporary theological issues facing the church today, particularly in the West. But in order for us to further understand relational significance as God's priority for relationship, which thus must become our priority, this necessitates deep, basic change on our part, beginning with our perceptual-interpretive framework (from worldview to mindset). We need to address our perceptual-interpretive framework before we ourselves can become those who worship in spirit and truth, that is, beyond having static doctrinal truths in referential terms which do not translate into experiential reality in relational terms.

⁶ Matt Redman, *ibid.*

In Whose Key? Perceptual-interpretive Framework and Lens

Think for a moment about what you notice and pay attention to when you are in a worship gathering. Likewise, reflect a bit on what you usually ignore.⁷ Your response will depend on two interacting factors: (1) your perceptual-interpretive framework, and (2) what is going on. I discuss the latter in the second half of this study. In this section, focus is given to the former, because the nature of our perceptual-interpretive framework either prevents or leads to growth in relationship with God. Understanding this issue is essential to more deeply understanding why the human heart is so important to God, and why making intimate relational connection with God often eludes us in worship, both individually and corporately, and in our lives in general.

The sociocultural and family contexts in which we grow up form our perceptual-interpretive framework. Perception and interpretation function together, forming the lens through which we receive input, and which determines what we pay attention to and what we ignore—much like the lenses of eyeglasses—in the progressive process of forming biases, mindsets and worldviews. The dynamic of perception as seeing and hearing are frequently addressed in the Old and New Testaments, yet the imperative voice of the words from Jesus (Mk 4:24 at the beginning of this Verse) apparently escapes our attention.⁸ Let's pay attention to Jesus' imperative now.

Seeing Outer In: quantitative perceptual-interpretive framework⁹

The common perceptual-interpretive framework from our sociocultural context focuses on and defines the human person by “outer,” or quantitative aspects of what persons have or do. With such a focus I come to define my person by ‘what I do’, which includes my job, education, or achievements. Conjointly, I come to define my person also by ‘what I have’, which entails my possessions, social status, and personal attributes and resources such as gender, race, and appearance, intelligence, and abilities, even spiritual gifts. The Greek word *bios* refers to these quantitative aspects of life which we document in bios and display in résumés. These criteria define my person from the outer in. In defining myself from outer in, that which gets ignored or hidden is my heart, which signifies my whole person from *inner out*. The biblical view of the heart (Heb. *leb*) defines it as the inner person, the qualitative dimension that is the seat of human emotion,

⁷ It would be illuminating to reflect further on what you pay attention to and ignore in your family, at work, at school, or any other social context.

⁸ Cf. Jesus' parallel words about perception and interpretation in Matthew 13:11-16, linking back to the OT: “seeing, they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand” (cf. Dt 29:4; Jer 5:21; Eze 12:2), and Matthew's version of the prophecy from Isaiah 6:9-10: “You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive. For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, understand with their heart and turn—and I would heal them.”

⁹ Human perceptual-interpretive framework is addressed and challenged throughout Scripture, especially by the prophets, by Jesus (e.g. in his interactions with his disciples and his challengers such as synagogue leaders, Pharisees), and Paul. See Jesus' critiques in *Sanctified Christology*, Introduction: Approaching the Whole of *the Word* by T. Dave Matsuo. For further related study about Paul and the perceptual-interpretive framework and lens (*phronema* and *phroneo*, respectively, Rom 8:5-6), see Matsuo's Paul Study, *The Whole of Paul and the Whole in Paul: Theological Interpretation in Relational Epistemic Process* (Paul Study, 2010). Online at <http://www.4X12.org>, ch 4 “Paul's Journey Matures.”

desire and will.

As mentioned in the Verse 1, the process of defining oneself from the outer in is *reductionism*. Reductionism is the process of fragmenting a whole into one or some parts, say a person, and defining the whole by its part(s). This process diminishes the integrity of the whole, and is always less than the whole. Reductionism determines how we function by giving primacy to those outer aspects of our person by which we come to define ourselves. Using this quantitative interpretive lens, we also view and define others likewise, from outer in, and engage in relationships accordingly, including with God.

From childhood on, I spent a lot of time drawing and playing the piano, and so in my family I was identified favorably as the one who did those things. Negatively, I was the timid one scared to take risks (e.g. jump off the diving board), and so I was also defined by what I did not do. We four children each had such labels, reflecting that in our family we all related to each other through what we did or attributes we had, but we rarely perceived ourselves and each other from the inner out, and therefore rarely—if ever—made deeper relational connection.¹⁰

It is axiomatic that defining one's self from the outer in engages us in the comparative process of outer criteria, because we are always evaluating our worth in comparison with someone else: how well I measure up, or not. It is a tenacious spirit that we all know, comparing ourselves to siblings, schoolmates, and even media personalities, not to mention Christian role models (cf. the disciples, Lk 22:24). The outer-in focus drives the comparative process even in worship: Does someone play the guitar better than I do? Do I have a better preaching gift? Did we have a more creative worship, a more Spirit-filled worship than another church? Did I look better, or less cool, than so-and-so? Does our church have more worship attendees than the church down the street? The comparative process creates distance in relationships by horizontal partitions and vertical stratification, fragments persons by reducing them (as well as ourselves), and has no place among those in God's family. In this better-less dynamic, relationships also become vertical, that is, hierarchical, however subtly or benignly that hierarchy may be imposed and presented—as noted about the disciples, which Jesus put into deeper relational perspective (Lk 22:24-27). This is hurtful to all relationships—from the personal to the systemic—and is especially egregious among Christians.¹¹

Christians correctly identify idols in this process (e.g. the idols of success, of numbers), but addressing idols usually does not get to the root cause. I have always found my idols impossible to get rid of, notwithstanding the numerous times I laid “my crowns” at the foot of the cross in repentance. This action, which quite commonly is integrated

¹⁰ Additionally, in my family and out in the broader sociocultural context in which I grew up (the US), I was defined negatively by my gender and race/ethnicity. I note my experience simply to show how reductionism works; it affects all human persons in all human contexts in some form or other. For your own experience, substitute your own specific criteria of what you do or have by which you have defined your person—and have been defined by others.

¹¹ The comparative process sees others as competition to best, and is the foundation of hierarchical relations. As this dynamic becomes solidified, relationships stratify into hierarchical structures become reinforced (e.g. through the exercise of power relations), they become institutionalized, and systemic. The process of defining the human person from the outer in is basic to all human stratification—sexism, racism, classism, ageism, and the like.

into worship services, has not brought about inner-out change because it is change attempted from outer in, changing the outward form denoted by *metaschematizō*.¹² The dynamic of having idols must be addressed *as* the problem of reductionism, defining oneself by outer-in criteria of what one does and has. Whatever form they take, idols provide persons with criteria by which to “better” define their person, if not to justify oneself.¹³ Reductionism profoundly diminishes human ontology and function, and constitutes the sin of counter-relational work from Satan’s influence. Reductionism—the redefinition of person (divine and human)—needs to be addressed from the inner out by the redemptive change (*metamorphoō*) beginning with the transformation—*redemptive change*—of our perceptual-interpretive framework and lens (Rom 8:5-6, 12:2) as Paul clarifies for the church.

Christians are not unaware of the dynamics of comparison and competition, yet we do not think through their deeper relational implications vis-à-vis God’s grace, and creating distance within the church family. Many individuals feel distressed about their own problem of comparison and competition, but most attempts to change do not stick because attempts are made only from outer in, not recognizing the basic issue of how one defines their person.

As I grew up defined from outer in, I simultaneously learned to push down my heart, becoming more and more closed, refusing to be open and vulnerable and take risks. This variable process is how we become distant and detached from our hearts.¹⁴ Scripture refers very often to hearts hardening, becoming cold, or hearts of stone. The Greek word for “hardening” is *porosis*, denoting becoming callous or insensitive to the touch (Eph 4:18, cf. Mk 3:5). Outwardly I appeared like a nice friendly person, yet I was detached from my heart; inwardly, I was really lonely and numb. In college I decided to “follow” Jesus, but it took me decades before I could say our relationship progressed beyond situation-based good feelings to become a significant experiential reality for me, since my heart needed a lot of redeeming, freeing and healing from being reduced. I suspect that this helps us understand longtime notable servants of God, like Lewis Smedes (a former Fuller Seminary professor), who never felt up to his death that God was his friend¹⁵; or why Mother Theresa felt God had abandoned her the last fifty years of her life, and felt despair beneath her smiling face, which she called “a mask” or “a cloak that covers everything.”¹⁶ From God’s side, as Jesus made definitive, “the measure we use to define our person and give to determine our involvement will be the limits of measure we receive in our hearts and experience in our relationships.

The primary consequence of distant hearts and the comparative process is the

¹² Outer-in change was exposed and denounced by Jesus in his dealings with the Pharisees (Mk 7:14-23) as hypocrisy (Lk 12:1), by Paul as masquerade (2 Cor 11:13-15), and by Paul as Peter’s hypocrisy (Gal 2:11-14).

¹³ Reductionism so understood is evident in the ongoing struggle in the OT times between God and Israel.

¹⁴ It is difficult to determine what dynamic led to what outcome, because there is a chicken-egg sense in these developments. I think they happen roughly simultaneously—and inevitably—as we grow up.

¹⁵ Lewis B. Smedes, *My God and I: A Spiritual Memoir* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003, 160-61).

¹⁶ Associated Press. “New Book Reveals Mother Theresa’s Struggle with Faith,” Beliefnet.com/story/223/story_22353.html. Accessed 8/27/2007. The Beliefnet article came out on the occasion of the release of the book in 2006, *Come Be My Light: The Private Writings of the ‘Saint of Calcutta’* (Doubleday).

effect on our personal relationships, most notably with God. Not surprisingly, distant hearts are unavailable for deeper connection with others because intimate relational connection can only take place when hearts are open and vulnerable to each other and come together. This relational gap exists even in the longest and most committed relationships (with God, marriage and family). The comparative process either limits or disallows our heart to be vulnerable to others because of the need to be better than others, not less, to get the upper hand over others rather than be subordinate. Our self-worth (indeed our life) is on the line. These are relational barriers we erect and furiously maintain, even below a calm, even irenic demeanor. In church, we never address this process adequately for what it is, a problem of our theological anthropology.

Because we do not live in a social vacuum, and, more important, in isolation from the whole of God, it is crucial to recognize that as persons created in the relational likeness of the Trinity, we ongoingly do *something else* in place of intimate relational connection: we make substitutes with things of secondary importance, making them primary. With friends and family, we give each other things (including emails and text messages), spend time doing activities, take lots of photographs. In worship, substitutes can take forms that appear truly meaningful, such as liturgical formats trying to physically create an ambiance of sacredness in the worship area, or being innovative for the worship time. I dare to suggest that much of our Christmas tradition in church and the transition to Easter are largely about substitutes of secondary matter that have created their own sense and feeling. This was amplified for me when a pastor quoted his wife as saying that it wasn't until she started wrapping presents "that it finally started to feel like Christmas." The quest for a sensory experience is common in both contemporary worship services and in high liturgical churches. At issue for either of these kinds of churches, and for others also, is our focus on the outer in, secondary aspects of ourselves, God, and others—all with intentions to go deeper, which invariably are not fulfilled.

Intimate relational connection is uncomfortable for people (I know!), and we often actually prefer substitutes. For example, regarding worship services, we derive meaning from numbers of people in attendance, even contrary to our distaste for the idea of looking to numbers. Our relational involvement with others becomes measured, polite, but distant, though we do things together or for each other. We measure (rationalize) how well our relationships are going by quantitative criteria—by how much time we spend together in ministry and Bible studies, or how much we serve, and even sacrifice for others. With the measure we give and use, it is inevitable that as we gear our efforts to what we can do in service and ministry for God, even at some sacrifice to do so, and with the sincerest intentions, our heart remains distant, and the experience of the results wanting. Sadly, we are reinforced in, and reinforce in each other, this process of reductionism in church, however inadvertently and unknowingly we do so. This is how reductionism directly counters deeper relationship in so much of our church gatherings. Despite our good intentions and in spite of any "successful" results, we still must recognize and take responsibility for the fact that such worship does not have any relational significance to God. "They worship me in vain," he says unequivocally. God, apparently, holds us accountable for his self-disclosures. Hmmm, "the measure we...."

Both the OT and NT identify "hearts far from me" as well as the substitutes his people make—rules taught by men" and "tradition of the elders"—as problematic vis-à-vis God. In principle, if not specific actions, we commonly do the same—we try to do

relationship with God on our reduced terms, which are always the outer-in terms of what we do and have. In theological anthropology, reduced terms are the only terms available in the human condition, which we cannot claim to be saved *from* without the redemptive change of experiencing the primacy of what Jesus saves us *to*. Insofar as this is true in our churches, Satan has triumphed, since the primary engagement Satan has with Christians is to interfere in the intimacy of relationships between God and us, and among us. Indeed, Satan's counter-relational work is ongoingly in churches, as Paul exposed: "Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness" (2 Cor 11:14-15 NIV).¹⁷ The result is that church mirrors various social institutions or becomes much like a friendly volunteer organization, and less like persons relationally bonded together sharing family love as Jesus loved his disciples—the family whom Jesus prayed for (Jn 17:21-26) and Paul echoed (Eph 3:16-19).

To summarize the influences of our *unredeemed* perceptual-interpretive framework of reductionism: (1) regarding our ontology: we define our person from the quantitative outer in criteria of we do or have, which fragments and reduces the whole person, making secondary or ignoring the heart's function for the primacy of relationship; (2) regarding our function: based on this outer-in definition of our person, we engage in relationship with God and others with what we do or have, thus embedding us in the comparative process with a secondary focus on both persons and relationships apart from their wholeness; (3) implications for church: we carry this way of doing relationships to our church life and practice, resulting in relational distance and barriers. The consequences of reductionism of our person ripple throughout everything we do—including how we relate to God in our worship practices. Since reductionism always works against wholeness, God ongoingly rebuked reductionist ontology and function of his people in OT times, further addressed it in Jesus' incarnation, and continues to do so in our time today by the Spirit.

Grace: transforming perceptual-interpretive framework

There is only one alternative to reductionism: the whole of God's relational response of grace. We Christians speak inadequately of grace. Grace is one of those basic Christian words about which we assume we know the significance. We pray for the gift of grace and to possess grace, for example, to not explode at someone. We ascribe grace to a good grade in seminary, or other desirable outcomes in our life situations. Theologically we know that only by grace can we be in relationship with God. Yet, the relational significance of grace is missing in ongoing experience (function) in our relationships.

With the influence of the Reformation, grace is usually theologically associated only with the fact of Jesus' dying for our sins so that we can have eternal life. The cross becomes a once and for all event, "a God thing;" grace is also the mysterious prevenient force that makes our hearts ready. The cross is easily perceived as mere referential event

¹⁷ In his two letters to the Corinthians, Paul was exposing and rebuking reductionism in the church that was the source of fragmented and distant relationships. We can learn much from Paul's conjoint fight for the gospel of wholeness (peace) and against reductionism. For a full discussion, see *The Whole of Paul and the Whole in His Theology* by T. Dave Matsuo. Online: <http://www.4X12.org>.

which reflects a reductionist interpretive lens that concentrates on “what Jesus did” and does not listen to his whole person extended to persons for relationship together in God’s relational response of grace even before the cross and after the manger.

The deeper implications of relational grace for our transformation are these: Grace makes possible the intimate relational connection with Christ who in relationship together embodies grace by this integral relational process: (1) forgiving me, notably of the sin of reductionism (cf. Lk 7:36-50), (2) redefining me from the inner out, (3) transforming me from reductionism (cf. Gal 1:3-4), and (4) reconciling me in relationship together to be whole (cf. Rom 5:1-17). How we have put limits on grace’s function is again a matter of perceptual-interpretive framework, including our interpretive lenses from Christian contexts shaped by the Reformation and variations since. Grace functions as the only basis for relationship with God because without God having initiated his relational response of grace there is no possibility of relationship with him (Gal 1:3; Eph 2:1-5)—both for initial connection and in ongoing involvement. This is clearly an unequal relationship, yet not a unilateral one because God desires us only for reciprocal relationship together (Gal 2:21). Grace signifies God’s sufficient terms for reciprocal relationship with him (2 Cor 12:9); therefore, grace *demand*s our whole person.¹⁸

Reciprocal relationship together signifies the imperative relational nature (*dei*) necessitating “in spirit and truth” for our worship to be of relational significance to God. For our part in receiving and living by grace in relationship with God, it is nonnegotiable by the nature of grace that we be honest, open and vulnerable with who and what we really are, including as sinners, as inadequate before God, and even as those struggling with disengaging from outer-in ontology. Not only is grace this functional basis for relationship with God, it is also the ongoing base for our reciprocal relationship with God. The function of relational grace is the primary nonnegotiable for our reciprocal response of worship.

Beyond grace’s function to account for our sinfulness vis-à-vis the transcendent and holy God, grace functions in God’s self-disclosure in Jesus as he openly and vulnerably presented himself to us for relational connection (Jn 1:14). He risked (and continues to risk) being affected by our sin, by relational distance, disbelief and rejection, as persons were/are both attracted to and repelled by him (Jn 1:10-11). Jesus’ involvement with persons shows us the significance of love (*agapē*), not about what to do (even sacrifice), but about being deeply involved relationally with the other person for that other person’s sake. Children in God’s family experience this relational response of grace distinguished in the involvement of love, God’s family love that makes us whole and is the ongoing base to live whole. These are ways that Jesus revealed the Father’s heart (Jn 1:18), and to those “who received him [*lambano*, to embrace and follow a teacher’s instruction] and believed in his name (i.e. responded in trust, *pisteuō*), he gave the right to become [the family] of God” (Jn 1:12)—the relational outcome of grace.

Just as Jesus came openly and vulnerably, the only compatible relational response

¹⁸ In order for grace to be functional for our transformation to be whole and live whole in relationship, one must be “poor in spirit” in relation to God (the first Beatitude, Mt 5:3). Poor in spirit means that we must come openly and vulnerably before God with our genuine selves, having sin, failures, and inadequacy to establish relationship with God by anything about us. For further discussions of the relational demands of grace, please see *Following Jesus, Knowing Christ: Engaging the Intimate Relational Process* (Spirituality Study, 2004). Online: <http://4X12.org>, ch.2, section “The Demand of Grace;” and also *Sanctified Christology*, ch.2, section “The Demands of Grace.”

I can make is with my own openness and vulnerability, the honesty of heart about who and what I truly am; this is the meaning of the worshiper who worships “in spirit and truth” (Jn 4:23-24). I cannot present anything less than or any substitutes for my whole self with what I do or have from outer in and expect to be compatible. Grace requires the irreducible relational dynamic of **nothing less and no substitutes** in reciprocal relationship with God. As I receive God in his relational response of grace and forgiveness extended to me, with my heart open and vulnerable making reciprocal relational connection with his own heart, this is the process of intimate relationship in likeness of the Trinity; and, as a relational outcome, I am made whole from the inner out in this relationship together. The Spirit is key for us to function in reciprocal relational process: “And by the Spirit we cry ‘Abba,’ Father. The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children” (Rom 8:15-16). Worship is this dynamic relational process in the relational context of God’s family integrally constituted in the Trinity. Moreover, this relational outcome is the experience of *šalôm*, which is the Hebrew word for peace meaning wholeness and well-being with God and each other—the relational condition signified in the relational involvement of “in spirit and truth,” or of nothing less and no substitutes. This experience is the relational reality ‘already’ of what we are saved to, to constitute whole soteriology.¹⁹

The relational experience of God’s grace distinguished in his involvement of love is to experience transformation from inner out (*metamorphoō*, 2 Cor 3:18), that is, the redemptive change necessary to become God’s daughters and sons only on God’s terms. Jesus’ involvement with persons in the NT changed them from the inside out by grace, by freeing their hearts from enslavement in being defined from outer in from reductionism, redefining their person from inner out in their relationship with him. Luke’s Gospel features such a transformation of two unlikely role-models for us: the ex-prostitute who washed Jesus’ feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured her perfume on them (see Lk 7:36-50), and Mary of Bethany who anointed Jesus’ feet with expensive perfume and also wiped his feet with her hair (Jn 12:1-8; cf. Mt 26:6-13; Mk 14:3-9). Both of these women risked derision, but stepped out to connect with Jesus and vulnerably responded to him with their whole persons. They did not let the social constraints and opinions of others stop them from freely giving of themselves to Jesus from the inner out.²⁰ These women demonstrate clearly for us worshipers who worship in spirit and truth; theirs is worship that has relational significance to God. (We examine these two women more deeply in Verse 3).

Some worship thinkers or preachers focus on the extravagance of the ex-prostitute’s actions, and urge us to worship extravagantly following her example.²¹ The focus on extravagance is similar to others’ focus on “excellence,” both of which tend to stir up our susceptibility to emphasize the outer aspects of our communication (form,

¹⁹ Whole soteriology accounts for not only that we are saved from our sin, but also that we are saved to the experiential reality of being God’s daughters and sons in his family, constituted in the Trinity.

²⁰ These two women are discussed more fully elsewhere on this website. See “Relational Clarity and Relational Significance in Worship” (in Worship Perspectives section), and *Following Jesus, Knowing Christ*, ch. 5 “Developing this intimate relationship.”

²¹ For example, Darlene Zschech writes of the ex-prostitute’s response to Jesus as “excessive, abundant, expensive, superfluous, lavish, costly, precious, rich, priceless, valuable”; though Zschech also refers to the woman’s tearful and heartfelt gratitude, there is an ambiguity in what is given primacy. *Extravagant Worship* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2002), 23-24.

style), and worship God with relational substitutes of what we do (make music skillfully) or have (talents). The deeper significance of the ex-prostitute lies in her person: the whole person she presented to Jesus, the qualitative significance of her communication, and the depth of relational involvement she engaged together with him. She experienced God's forgiveness and grace, and simply loved back with the depth of her person in reciprocal relational response compatible with Jesus' relational response. She was transformed from inner out.

Relationships based ongoingly in grace, functioning from inner out with hearts open and vulnerable in relationship are by their nature both intimate and equalized. As noted earlier, intimacy is defined as hearts open and making deep connection together. It is vital to also understand that because God does not define human persons by human-shaped outer in criteria and categories, God's relational response of grace deconstructs both these human distinctions and their resulting stratifications and hierarchies in relationships which constitute relational barriers. God hates our human constructions because they reduce persons and create and maintain distant and even broken relationships—all antithetical to his created order and in conflict with human ontology and function created in the whole of God's qualitative image and relational likeness. Intimate and equalized relationships are the only relationships that have significance to God. These are relational outcomes of grace that the church has yet to take to heart, which is evidenced by the failure of prevailing Christian life and practice to highlight Mary's vulnerable relational involvement and intimate response "in remembrance of her" wherever the gospel is claimed and proclaimed, just as Jesus definitively declared (Mt 26:13; Mk 14:9). This is a serious critique against much church leadership and the Christian academy, who are accountable to God for how we receive and respond to his relational response of grace distinguished in his involvement of love. Relational compatibility is neither optional nor replaceable by the secondary.

The Gospels recount how Jesus' main twelve disciples had difficulty in their relationship with Jesus because of their perceptual-interpretive framework and how they defined their person. Peter in particular exemplifies their difficulties. More on Peter is discussed in the next Verse. From human terms, the ex-prostitute and Mary are unlikely role models, yet they embodied a qualitative difference from a more likely role model, Peter.²²

*Only by grace can we enter, only by grace can we stand.
Not by our human endeavor, but by the blood of the Lamb.
Into your presence you call us, you call us to come.
Into your presence you draw us, and now by your grace we come, now by your grace
we come.*²³

We need to have whole understanding of the relational significance of grace and our necessary (*dei*, by its nature) reciprocal response to give full meaning to the above

²² Peter's struggle with his reductionism and the effect it had on his relationship with Jesus are discussed in depth in T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology*, ch.2, section "The Demands of Grace," and ch.8, section "The Rigorous and Vulnerable Process of Reconciliation."

²³ "Only by Grace," by Gerrit Gustafson © 1990 Integrity's Hosanna! Music.

contemporary song, as well as to traditional hymns like “Just as I Am, Without One Plea;” otherwise our singing will be out of tune.

Seeing Inner Out: qualitative perceptual-interpretive framework

As noted earlier, throughout the OT and NT, God communicates his priority for human hearts to be involved with him. The primacy of heart for relationship constitutes the qualitative perceptual-interpretive framework from God’s own self-disclosures. The Hebrew word for “heart” is *leb* and means the seat of the will and emotions, the inner person.²⁴ God seeks our heart made in his image because it is only at the depth of the heart that we are available from inner out to God for relationship, whole relationship together in his likeness. Only with our open and vulnerable heart can we present our person in compatible response to the heart of God extended to us. The involvement of the heart constitutes whole human ontology and whole function of human persons, and this is why God examines and searches hearts (“heart-knower,” *kardiognōstēs*, Acts 1:24, 15:8), as well as minds (“I am he who searches hearts and minds, Rev 2:23), that is, the whole person from inner out, not fragmented, for example, into dualism.²⁵ When God sent the prophet Samuel to find and anoint the one to succeed Saul as king, Samuel focused on the secondary and was influenced by the appearance of one of David’s brothers, prompting God’s response to Samuel: “Do not look on his appearance...for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart” (1 Sam 16:7; cf. 2 Cor 5:12). Samuel’s outer-in lens was from the quantitative perceptual-interpretive framework that we have just discussed.

To summarize, the heart is the qualitative integration of the whole person made in the likeness of the whole of God and, when transformed, is the functional basis for experiencing intimate relationship with the whole of God constitutes in the Trinity—which is why it is so important and why God wants and pursues our heart.

With this qualitative interpretive lens, God’s priority for relationship together comes into view clearly. For example, in John’s Gospel, Jesus says of his disciples in his paradigm for those who desire to serve him: “Whoever serves me must follow me” (Jn 12:26). We tend to first focus on the word “serves,” and seek what it is we should do in service to him, due to the shaping influence of our old lens of defining ourselves by what we do or have (e.g. trained for, experienced in, have a gift or passion for). However, in this statement Jesus expresses the primacy of relationship in the words “*must follow me.*” “Must” (Gk. *dei*, here denoting necessary by the nature of being Jesus’ disciple) is the imperative, giving “follow me” primacy as the relationship together that constitutes discipleship. Contrary to our common notions about discipleship, for Jesus discipleship was first and foremost relationship together, of intimate involvement in this primacy *with* him—not engaged in the secondary *for* him—so that his disciples would experience the depths of his person (cf. Jesus’ prayer for all his followers, Jn 17:23-26).²⁶ That is, his whole person sought, and still seeks, persons for intimate relational involvement, nothing less and no substitutes—over anything we *do* for him, or *have* that we give him. In

²⁴ Other words convey this sense of the inner person, e.g. *nepeš* (soul) and the words for kidneys and bones.

²⁵ See also 1 Kgs 8:39; Pss 139:1,2,23; Prov 21:2; Jer 17:10; Lk 16:15; Rom 8:27; 1 Thess 2:4.

²⁶ There is much more to understand about this relationship with Jesus than can be shared in this study. Discipleship is the process to grow deeply with God, essentially synonymous with spirituality.

relational words, his relational message of how he sees us is that he does not define our person by what we do and have. In compatible terms, we might need to paraphrase Jesus' relational words for worship thus: "Whoever serves me in worship must, by the nature of being whole worshipers, first and ongoingly be relationally involved with me." One can easily see that discipleship and worship are inseparable when our relationship with him is primary, and when we live whole. Furthermore, worship constituted by our ontology and function "in spirit and truth" is by necessity the ontology and function that establishes discipleship in its primacy *with* Jesus.

The whole person is integrally the *who* and the *what* God can count on in relationship to be honest, open and vulnerable from the inner out. This is not about dualism which fragments the person into body and soul, nor even about the better-sounding yet inadequate 'doing vs. being'. Following Jesus can take place only on his whole terms, for the relational progression from disciple to friend to the family of God—what we are saved to 'already' in this lifetime, expressed in Jesus formative family prayer (Jn 17:20-26).²⁷ On these distinguished relational terms we journey *with* him in his relational context which is constituted by the Father, Son and Spirit involved together in the intimate relational process (God's process of family love), by which we experience the deep reality of being his daughters and sons as full members of his family, the church. If our corporate worship does not "build up" this family relationship (God's desire and purpose; Eph 2:21; 4:11-16), then for whose purpose do we gather at church?

The qualitative perceptual-interpretive framework helps us become aware of relational dynamics, and to grow in sensitivity to qualitative communication (not information) from God. These are vital for us to keep what is primary to God primary, and the secondary, secondary. Corporate worship times together need to help worshipers listen to God's self-disclosures which are only relational communications—not for information *about* God, but only to build up our relationships with him and each other as his family. This should make us rethink the purpose of sermons and other teaching in church life, including theological education in seminaries, and put all aspects of serving God into proper perspective.

According to God's qualitative being, relational nature, and vulnerable presence, relationship with God is never unilateral; it is a reciprocal relationship, which then requires us also to grow in primary relational awareness from our half of the relationship, to grow in the quality and content of our communication back to God, and to grow in the depth of our involvement with him. All communication that takes place in a relational context—that is, between persons—has a relational component, whether we are conscious of it or not, that qualifies the content of communication for deeper understanding. This means that all of our communication explicitly or implicitly also conveys one or more of the following relational messages to the person being spoken to:

1. How the speaker feels about the other person
2. How the speaker feels about the relationship
3. What the speaker is saying about his/herself in the relationship.

These relational messages sing out clearly at Jesus' baptism, when the Father said

²⁷ For the full discussion of this relational progression from disciple to friend to family, see *The Relational Progression: A Relational Theology of Discipleship* (Discipleship Study) by T. Dave Matsuo, online at <http://www.4X12.org>.

to Jesus “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased” (Mk 1:11; Mt 3:17; Lk 3:22). How the Father feels about his Son is unmistakable and deeply moving (message 1), revealing his heart in the innermost (message 3), and being vulnerably involved directly with the Son (message 2). Later, at Jesus’ transfiguration, the Father addressed the disciples: “This is my beloved Son; listen to him!” (Mk 9:7; Mt 17:5). In contrast to referential words, here the Father involves himself directly with the disciples by relational language, communicating to them that they are important to him (message 1) as he shares his love for his Son with them, implying the second and third relational messages.

The Father also communicates the relational imperative that the disciples “listen” to Jesus. Jesus later challenges how we listen, telling his disciples to “pay attention to how you listen” (Lk 8:18). To listen only to the words that Jesus speaks as referential words disembodies the relational words from his person. Such listening fragments Jesus into parts (teachings and examples), and is outer-in listening; it is listening for referential information (knowledge) that serves to define and determine *me*, and shifts us from the primacy of God’s relational context and process (cf. Paul’s statement, “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up,” 1 Cor 8:1). If, however, we listen to the whole person of Jesus with our person open and vulnerable, we can perceive Jesus relationally disclosing “nothing less and no substitutes” of the whole of God (the Trinity), with the qualitative function of God’s heart, God’s desires, and thus can have whole understanding of what is primary and that only which has relational significance to God.

Listening first to Jesus with our whole person from inner out gives primacy to the relationship together in the discipleship relationship on Jesus’ terms. Those persons deeply involved in spiritual disciplines express this very matter—that the key for spiritual growth is “Listen.”²⁸ Otherwise we are always susceptible to make the relationship the way we want it, which invariably renegotiates the terms down to the secondary. Transformation as Jesus’ disciples makes the shift from the primary focus always circling back to *me* to awareness of the qualitative in life from the inner out, and relational sensitivity beyond *me*. Listening to Jesus is central to this shift. Yet, listening in itself is insufficient and necessarily involves being a function of relationship. Otherwise listening becomes another method (albeit a spiritual methodology) of what to do. Knowing our tendencies, Jesus qualified this relational imperative not only with *what* we listen to but also with *how* we listen because “the measure” (limit, *metron*) we give in our involvement will determine the extent of what we receive, understand and experience in relation to God (Mk 4:24).

By listening in relational terms to Jesus’ whole person, we will grow together in the relational progression that leads to wholeness (peace) in the gospel of peace (Eph 6:15). Wholeness is not an end in itself, a condition for the individual to feel better, though the individual does feel better. Wholeness is only the well-being experienced from inner out in relational reality of being together with our Father, as daughters and sons, in relational likeness of Jesus’ relationship with the Father (Rom 8:29). Wholeness is the relational outcome of being loved (*agapē*) by God. *Agapē* is not primarily about what to do (and what God does) but is primarily the depth of God’s involvement with us

²⁸ Enzo Bianchi, *Praying the Word: An Introduction to Lectio Divina*. Trans. James W. Zona (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1998), 45, 80-81. Cf. Joan D. Chittester, OSB, *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily: Living the Rule of St. Benedict Today* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1990), 14-26.

in the primacy of relationship, individually and corporately. *Agapē* is God's family love that frees us from the fear (of rejection), fear which leads us to hiding our whole selves, self-preservation, comparing ourselves with others, and other causes of relational distance; in wholeness we are freer to reciprocate relationally with God in love and each other in intimate relationship, and experience wholeness (peace) in relationship together as the outcome of the gospel of peace. Thus, we deepen our understanding of biblical wholeness thus:

Wholeness is the conjoint function of the whole person involved in relationships together necessary to be whole—transformed relationships both equalized and intimate. The whole person is defined from the inner out signified by the importance of the heart in its qualitative function, who then joins together in relationship with both God and others with the involvement “in spirit and truth.”

These relational dynamics are what constitute the primary things of God. Consider then how we make worship music styles primary, or the numbers of attendees in church primary—at the expense of deeper relational involvement with God and each other, involvement that may even reduce the numbers present and limit the music. Consider also that we essentially make relationships secondary, in spite of churches' statements, creeds, and activities that talk of relationships, even as a priority. We indeed need to pay attention and listen carefully to where and how we are out of tune.

The Person We Present

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable to you,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer (Ps 19:14).*

These familiar words the ancient poet communicated in qualitative relational language should not be reduced to referential language that only transmits information. The person we present to God is inseparable from our communication to him, relational messages included, both in our relationship with him daily and in corporate worship. The Bible frequently addresses persons' communication—verbal and non-verbal, heard, seen and implied—because we ongoingly convey something relationally. Our communication either causes relational distance or functions for connection; often the intent is connection but the process promotes distance, resulting in ontological simulations.

Several basic principles from communication theory are helpful for us. First, in any interactional situation, a person cannot *not* behave; and if all behavior in an interactional situation has message value—that is, communicates something—then “one cannot *not* communicate.” It follows also that “Nobody does not worship,” because worship is always a relational communication.²⁹ Second, in this context, activity and inactivity, words and silence all communicate something, having message value. These forms of message-sending include the absence of talking and not noticing the other

²⁹ This is a chapter title in Harold M. Best's book *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Art* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003), 17.

person—nonverbal communication still conveys something. “Every communication has a content and a relationship aspect such that the latter classifies the former.”³⁰ To review, relational messages convey:

- (1) What one is communicating about you, how one sees and feels about you
- (2) What one is saying about your relationship together, how that person sees and feels about the relationship
- (3) What one is saying about one’s own person³¹

Worship is the particular such context we are focused on, that is, God’s relational context distinguished by its relational process that involves nothing less and no substitutes for the whole person(s). We have seen that in the person of Jesus, God’s communicative acts are self-disclosures, not for the purpose of giving us information about God, as if God were an object for study (as most biblical and theological studies tend to make him) but as Subject. As Subject, all his self-disclosures in Scripture are for one purpose only—primacy of relationship without resorting to any subjectivism. God’s communicative acts include the three vital relational messages to human persons: he shares that (1) we are important to him and he wants our whole person signified by the heart, not what we have or do; (2) our relationship is primary, and anything we do (for him) or have (to give him) from outer in is only secondary without significance to him; and (3) he can be counted on to be all who, what, and how he says he is. This last message is in essence the significance of righteousness, the righteous God.

The language we use in relation to God is utterly important because it reflects our underlying theological anthropology—our ontology and function—either in the image of God, or of our self-determination. In most worship gatherings, Bible studies, and seminary classes, we primarily speak *about* God in the third person. This kind of speech is what philosopher and psychiatrist Iain McGilchrist, who synthesizes neuroscience and social sciences, calls “referential language”—language used to transmit information about something in narrowed-down terms, likely to explain something with more certainty.³² In contrast, God speaks only in “relational language,” which we could very well also call “whole language” of the whole of God. God’s relational language wholly communicates the person(s) of God, nothing less and no substitutes, in his relational context and process, not mere information about God in a reduced context and process of human shaping.

The distinction between referential language and relational language is pointed to by theologian Helmut Thielicke. A few years ago I was surprised to come across his words in a little book that was written as guidance for young divinity students. In it he warns:

“The man who studies theology... might watch carefully whether he

³⁰ 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), 48-53.

³¹ This rendering of relational messages drawn from Watzlawick et al is by T. Dave Matsuo. For an expanded discussion of relational messages, see his *Sanctified Christology*, Introduction, section “The Basis of This Study.”

³² Iain McGilchrist, 79-83.

increasingly does not think in the third rather than in the second person. This transition from one to the other level of thought, *from a personal relationship with God to a merely technical reference* usually is exactly synchronized with the moment that I no longer can read the word of Holy Scripture as a word to me, but only as the object of exegetical endeavors.”³³

“Consider that the first time someone spoke of God in the third person and therefore no longer with God but about God was that very moment when the question resounded, ‘Did God really say?’ (cf. Genesis 3:1). This fact ought to make us think.”³⁴

In his own way, Thielicke has distinguished between referential language in thinking and speaking *about* God, from thinking and reading Scripture as relational language in direct interaction *with* God as one engages in theology. He warns against the reduction of Scripture as God’s communication to merely an object of study. I am curious as to why his important admonition is neither regularly repeated nor urgently followed; this ought, indeed, to make us think about on whose terms we engage in and with God’s Word in the academy, where referential language is the *lingua franca*.

Thielecke’s warning applies as well to worship for the same reasons—we need to understand, for example, that God’s Word proclaimed in church is God’s self-disclosures to us for relationship, and our participation in worship is for reciprocal relationship, in response to God’s whole person vulnerably present and relationally involved. All else is secondary, that in relational terms disembodies the vulnerable presence of God and thus removes his relational involvement, rendering him inaccessible for relational connection—which renders us to a relational condition incapable of the primary. By referential efforts and activities, we have foregone the primary to pursue the secondary. In principle, this is George Steiner’s point in “A Secondary City.”

The focus and pursuit of the secondary in tension with what is more primary also emerges in the human brain, which should challenge Christians even more about the need to restore the qualitative heart and its primacy in relationship. Giving us further understanding of whole or reduced function of our persons, current research in neuroscience is able to link these functions to our brain hemispheres. At one level of perception, the left hemisphere focuses on fragments, referential parts of something, and then makes generalized abstractions from aggregated parts; it also seeks certainty in order to control. This is the process of reductionism of a whole. The left hemisphere is also where our spoken, discursive language, its logic, its grammatical structures and vocabulary are primarily situated.

The right brain hemisphere, by contrast, perceives or tries to grasp the whole to which the distinctive individual entities belong. It is attuned to relations and relationships among the parts, to nuances in facial expressions and tone of voice. These are the qualitative aspects of life. McGilchrist emphasizes that both hemispheres are engaged in all functions, yet the left hemisphere’s functions have come to compete with, even

³³ Helmut Thielicke, *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1962), 33 (my italics).

³⁴ Helmut Thielicke, 34.

dominate, the right's functions.³⁵ This is seen, for example, when "knowledge of the whole is all too soon followed by knowledge of the parts."³⁶ Here is part of McGilchrist's conclusion:

I believe the essential difference between the right hemisphere and the left hemisphere is that the right hemisphere pays attention to the Other, whatever it is that exists apart from ourselves, with which it sees itself in profound relation. It is deeply attracted to, and given life by, the relationship, the betweenness, that exists with this Other. By contrast, the left hemisphere pays attention to the virtual world that it has created, which is self-consistent, but self-contained, ultimately disconnected from the Other, making it powerful, but ultimately only able to operate on, and to know, itself.³⁷

The left hemisphere is associated with referential language (discursive speech of words, syntax, etc.), less for relational connection to the whole (right hemisphere focus) than as "a means of manipulating the world." McGilchrist's message is to show that the right and left brain hemispheres, and relational and referential language respectively, function with competing purposes; the right seeks connection with "other" and the whole, whereas the left seeks to fragment and dominate.³⁸ These understandings underscore our earlier discussion about the conflict between reductionism and the whole, their perceptual-interpretive frameworks, and human ontology and function. Yet, what we must keep in mind about neuroscience is that its research and conclusions are based on outer in; they only provide a helpful window to the inner out. To go further requires a deeper framework and lens for whole understanding of both the qualitative and the relational.

This raises the question whether the theological community will make the shift to inner out and meet the challenge for whole understanding.

More than the Christian academy, however, some segments of the scientific community recognize the deception of a reductionist perceptual-interpretive framework and what dominates the modern mind. David Brooks implied as much in his comment that "philosophy and theology are telling us less than they used to."³⁹ His recent book on human ontology and function (in novel form) raises deep issues that theology has yet to address.

All these issues about human ontology and function directly influence how we actually function in worship, both private and corporate. The person we present indicates our perceptual-interpretive framework, our preconceptions, assumptions, and biases. We struggle to speak in relational language to make connection, and are more comfortable with referential language to create or maintain distance with God and each other, whether we do so intentionally or unintentionally. Much of our difficulty is that we do not listen well because of our preconceptions and biases filter what we pay attention to. Married couples often need help in both listening to the other person and articulating what they

³⁵ Iain McGilchrist, 93.

³⁶ Iain McGilchrist, 97.

³⁷ Iain McGilchrist, 93.

³⁸ Iain McGilchrist, 104, 113.

³⁹ David Brooks, quoted in interview by James Atlas, *Newsweek*, Mar.7, 2011, 47 regarding Brooks' book, *The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement* (New York: Random House, 2011).

mean in relational terms; they need to help to see what they have paid attention to and have ignored. Parents and children also strain to communicate. We have now circled back to the influence of our perceptual-interpretive framework and the need for its transformation. Jesus' words need to resound in our ears: "The measure you...."

Modern technology certainly has impinged on human ontology and function. While modern technology has necessary and positive uses for communication, negatively the use of social media also exacerbates the reduction of the human person and relationships. The person that gets presented on Facebook, for example, must conform to pre-designed categories created by Facebook's engineers, reducing the person to Facebook's templates.⁴⁰ Also, psychologist and social scientist Sherry Turkle has documented countless instances in which persons acknowledge that the person they present is not who they are; this is either deliberate or by default. In fact, some users even think their online persona is more who they are than in real life.⁴¹

Technology may exacerbate our relational connections, but the human condition has always been engaged in counter-relational work from self-determination (for self-justification) ever since the Fall. Presenting to others anything less and any substitute *dis-integrates* the person we present, *dis-qualifies* the content of our communication, and *dis-engages* any depth of relational involvement—causing relational distance with God and making face-to-face relational connection inconvenient and uncomfortable. Our dependence on and addiction to technology only embeds us further in the giving of substitutes and making secondary matter primary (e.g. how good you can appear to others, how many "friends" you have), including in relationship with God, privately or in corporate worship, because how we are with each other and how we are with God are inseparable. This is what John means in his first letter where he says that if we do not love each other, we do not love God; he is talking about the depth of our relational involvement with each other (1 Jn 4:7,19-21). The lack of depth and quality of relational connections that are experienced in corporate worship and various church gatherings speak loudly and clearly of the theological anthropology that we live. Jesus states that all such involvement has no relational significance to him (see Mt 7:15-23). "Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven" (v.21). Persons will come to him on [their] basis of what they *did* in his name (v.22), yet his response is "I never knew you" (v.23). Only whole persons involved with his whole person from inner out, nothing less and no substitutes ("he who does the will of my Father," v.21), are the ones he "knows" (1 Cor 8:3; 13:12). The persons whom Jesus "never knew"—and we are often like them—are unable to compose a new sanctuary, unable to 'sing' a new song. Any song we compose is off-key, indeed a different key altogether. Our fragmented and reduced left-brain worship has no relational significance to him.

⁴⁰ Jaron Lanier, *You are not a gadget: A Manifesto* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 3-44.

⁴¹ See Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Ourselves* (New York: Basic Books, 2011). Turkle and others have also concluded that many persons prefer text-messaging to phone conversations and face-to-face interaction. *AARP Magazine* reports that among older adults age 55 and over, 25 percent prefer chatting via social media over face-to-face interaction (Mar/Apr 2011).

Functional implications

To grow as the worshipers the Father seeks, three issues for all life practice will serve as a connecting thread to help make the challenges raised in this study practical and applicable to our person and how we function in relationships. These issues are embodied for us in Jesus' life and practice, and should ongoingly challenge our own life and practice. They are as follows:

1. The significance of the person presented
2. The content and quality of one's communication
3. The depth of relational involvement with others⁴²

First, God himself came into our human context in the person of the Son in full disclosure, presenting nothing less than and no substitutes for his whole person. Second, Jesus communicates the whole of God (the Trinity) in self-disclosure to us—not merely for information to possess, but his qualitative heart from inner out for intimate relational connection. Third, Jesus was always openly and vulnerably involved with persons for heart-to-heart relational connection in order to make them whole, thus embodying family love (*agapē*) of the whole of God.

These three issues for our own practice have clarity in Jesus' person and are invaluable for our growth, especially as we think of worship. As mentioned in the section on relational significance, everything says something relationally, and these three issues for practice form a relational lens with which to transpose all the dynamics in corporate worship into a key such that our 'singing' has relational significance to God (discussed in Verse 5 of the study).

As we continue in this study, we are increasingly challenged to address our assumptions about theological anthropology, what it means that we are made in God's image, what the gospel is, and who is in tune with the worshipers the Father seeks. I encourage readers to be openly engaged with the Spirit for his help to "listen to my Son" as the Father tells us, to put the pieces together for whole understanding in our hearts of God and his desires for his children—us!

Chorus:

'Singing' a new song to the LORD: To compose a new sanctuary, we need to challenge our assumptions about the quality and depth of involvement of *who* and *what* we present of our persons to God. This critically involves our theological anthropology, which may need to be transposed. If we are to 'sing' in a new sanctuary "in spirit and truth," we will need deep transformation in our innermost (*metamorphōō*), not merely to change what we do and have (*metaschematizō*). This transformation is nothing less than the redemptive change that involves dying to living outer in (defining our person by what we

⁴² Jesus' embodiment of the three major issues for all practice is developed fully in T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology*, ch.1 "The Person Presented."

do/have), and being made whole from the inner out in intimate relational connection with the heart of God. The depth of this connection can be made only by God's relational response of grace to us, which is God's relational terms for reciprocal relationship together with him. By its very nature, the relational function of grace demands the openness and vulnerability of our honest hearts—that is, nothing less and no substitutes for our whole person so that our reciprocal response is compatible. The depth of experience of God's relational response of grace transforms our perceptual-interpretive framework and lens—how we define our person and thus engage in relationships (with God and others)—transposing our focus from outer in to inner out, and from referential language to relational language, in God's primacy for relationship. Moreover, the relational outcome of God's relational response of grace is intimate and equalized relationships among his family because we can no longer define ourselves in the comparative process from reductionism. God's relational response of grace is integral to “the measure” we give in our involvement with God, and ongoingly necessary for redemptive change from inner out to be the worshipers the Father seeks, to compose the new sanctuary in the primacy of relational terms that has relational clarity and relational significance to God, specific to the heart of the whole of God.

Verse 3

Jesus, the Key

I have made [you] known to those....

John 17:6

Could the Father have sent someone other than the Son? Instead of sending the Son into the world, the Father might have continued sending his angels or some other intermediary to be a guide for us in this life, or hand someone a book of ready-made New Testament Scriptures. Back in Moses' time the Old Testament indicates that at one point God would have sent an angel in place of his own presence had Moses not argued for God's own presence (see Ex 33:1-3,12-17). For Moses, a substitute was not good enough, was not acceptable to Moses. In the historical arc of God's thematic action to restore humanity and the rest of creation to wholeness, God made strategic and tactical shifts by sending the Son himself into the human context to meet us Face to face (2 Cor 4:6).¹ Jesus' embodiment, including between the manger and the cross, of the whole of transcendent and holy God (the Trinity) to the world was radical, shocking, and profound. Understanding the whole of Jesus is the key to whole understanding of the heart of God, and to growing in our own person as we are created to be.²

Much of worship today can be considered theologically christocentric. Yet, much of this worship is challenged in a lack of understanding of Jesus as the theological key to the whole of God, particularly if its emphasis is overly christocentric. Furthermore, this evidences a lack of the functional and relational keys that Jesus embodied in his whole person for his followers to experience in relational progression together with the whole of God, not just with him. This Verse addresses this lack and hopefully will fill any gaps in our understanding with what Jesus disclosed of the Father and the primacy of their relationship, together with the Spirit, as the whole of God. *Who* and *what* Jesus disclosed of God is also keyed to *how* he made God known (*phaneroō*, Jn 17:6). As distinguished from *apokalyptō* (to reveal), which only refers to the Object revealed (as if to be observed for information), *phaneroō* also involves "those" to whom the revelation is made. In other words, Jesus disclosed *who*, *what* and *how* God is as Subject vulnerably present and relationally involved only for the primacy of whole relationship together (Jn 17:26).

Jesus came and dwelt among us as nothing less than and no substitutes for the whole of God, only for the purpose of relationship as family together. The whole of the incarnation was for reconciled relationship in Face-to-face involvement together, to constitute human persons into God's trinitarian context, which is God's family. As the

¹ I encourage serious readers to see the full discussion about God's thematic relational actions reaching their fulfillment in the strategic, tactical, and functional shifts in Jesus' whole person in the incarnation. See *Sanctified Christology* by T. Dave Matsuo.

² For a fuller discussion on how Jesus is our "key," please see *The Person, the Trinity, the Church: The Call to Be Whole and the Lure of Reductionism* (Wholeness Study, 2006). Online: <http://www.4X12.org>. The full quote is "Christ is the hermeneutical key that opens the ontological door to the whole of God, and also the functional key that opens the relational door to the ontology of the whole of God's family constituted in the Trinity, the Trinity qua family" (Introduction, section "A Window to the Whole").

Word of God, all that Jesus embodies speaks in **relational language**. The gospel translates into good news only in this language of Jesus' relational words and messages throughout the incarnation. Thus, the importance is immeasurable that we pay attention to his life between the manger and the cross, for the person Jesus presented was openly and vulnerably extended, revealing to humanity God's being, nature, and presence (the first issue for practice). All that Jesus communicated verbally and non-verbally disclosed his whole person openly and vulnerably (the second issue for practice). And, Jesus involved his whole person with other persons—the Father, his disciples, and others—revealing the primacy and depth of relationship that God engages (the third issue for practice).

The person Jesus presented in the incarnation, the quality of his communication, and the depth of his relational involvement with persons integrate the three major issues for all practice as 'nothing less than and no substitutes' for the whole of God—signifying the "incarnation principle"³—readily available and accessible for relational connection. In his own relationship with the Father, Jesus also is the functional key integral for our becoming whole, and reveals his intimate relational involvement with his Father (the trinitarian relational process of family love) that constitutes our own response to the Father as those who worship in spirit and truth—that is, whole worshipers with nothing less and no substitutes for our whole person functioning also from inner out. This wholeness is the purpose for which God has created (and *recreated*) us, to "be conformed to the [relational] image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn within a large family" (Rom 8:29). Jesus' relational dynamic constitutes the heart of the gospel, which is the only good news for the human relational condition. Yet, that which is good news for those wanting transformation in their relational condition from inner out also becomes uncomfortable (even bad) news for those wanting to maintain a relational condition of 'something less and some substitute'. Christians need to recognize this relational reality existing in our midst (in ourselves) that essentially engages in counter-relational work to the whole relational work of Jesus and the gospel.

For Jesus, little children represent how to function with the openness and vulnerability sought by God for relational connection together. "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 18:3). He did not mean we literally act like children (cf. Nicodemus' literal, outer-in interpretation, Jn 3:1-9), but only relationally, requiring redemptive change (3:3). Little children signify the soft (as opposed to hardened) hearts that are open and thus both sensitive to the qualitative and relationally aware. These are hearts of whole persons with whom God is able to connect through his relational response of grace.

At that time Jesus, full of joy [leaping, skipping] through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you Father...because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure" (Lk 10:21 NIV).

³ T. Dave Matsuo fully develops the incarnation principle of nothing less and no substitutes in *Sanctified Christology: A Theological and Functional Study of the Whole of Jesus* (Christology Study, 2008). Online: <http://www.4X12.org>.

We need to be ongoingly asking ourselves: **Who and what is the person we present to God in worship (individual and corporate), and the quality of our communication to him, and the depth of relationship we engage with him? Is our response compatible with how Jesus is?** The Gospels also show that Jesus' presence for relationship caused humans to react negatively. Some overtly rejected him. Others had difficulty relationally connecting with Jesus from inner out, as was the case with the twelve male disciples (e.g. Peter in Jn 13:6-10; 21:15-22. Cf. Lewis Smedes and Mother Theresa, discussed previously). Others connected deeply with Jesus, such as some of the women disciples (Lk 7:36-50; 10:38-42; Jn 12:2-3). Most of us fail to understand this qualitative and relational difference for how we are involved with him, and it is evident in most corporate worship.

The person we present to God cannot be assumed to be whole. Jesus' critique at the opening of this study ("these people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me") challenges us where we are. God says that he wants our whole person, defined from inner out, for heart-to-heart relational connection—nothing less and no substitutes for Face-to-face relationship together. Everything else is secondary to God's primacy of relationship, no matter how dedicated, devoted or well-intentioned we are.

We can learn further from Jesus' disciples and others with whom Jesus interacted. In my opinion, even though the Gospel narratives (and related texts in the New Testament) do not define an order of worship or prescribe set formulas for worshiping, we can learn what it means to worship from Jesus' relational words and messages more than any other source from church history, from the ancient period of the early Fathers through the Reformation. Indeed, our Sourcebook for worshiping the whole of God needs to be composed in relational language by the relational words and messages of Jesus.

*Transcendent God, holy God
Vuln'rably present is who you are (who you are)*

*O, Righteous God, faithful God
Int'mately involved (with us) is what you are (O, what you are)*

*Revealed by grace, with your love
Here for relationship (with us) is how you are (yes, how you are)⁴*

Sourcebook Notes

Jesus did not tell the Samaritan woman at the well information about the *worship* God seeks, but he disclosed the significance of the whole persons the Father seeks: "true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth" (Jn 4:23-24). Jesus focused on the person and how the person relates to the Father. The whole person's ontology and function must be in compatible reciprocal response to God's ontology and function: "God is spirit [heart] and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth" (v.24). In the text of his relational language, the verb form "worshiping" refers to the relational action and "worshipers" the ones engaging in it. One wonders when "worship" became a noun,

⁴ "The Whole of God Embodied" ©2008 T. Dave Matsuo & Kary A. Kambara.

which makes worship easily construed as event, program, and activity instead of a relational process.

Nevertheless, Jesus' disclosure to the Samaritan woman, together with Jesus' other relational words that "their hearts are far from me" are relational messages that God wants our whole person from the inner out for relationship together. Anything less or any substitute for our whole person means nothing to him relationally. An underlying assumption, or even stated intention, we make in such efforts for worship is that we can touch, move, please, impress, and perhaps entertain God apart or afar from direct involvement in relationship together—treating God as if he were an 'audience of One' who merely observes our efforts. In such a mindset, we can easily see ourselves also giving something less and some substitute along with Peter at the transfiguration of Jesus.

At the transfiguration, Peter, James and John were confronted by the whole of Jesus (and Elijah and Moses), and fell down frightened (Mt 17:1-8). Peter's first impulse was to do something, not to engage relationally. This is a good example of presenting some substitute for one's whole person, in this case to make three shelters. Moreover, while the content of Peter's communication was about his offering, what was really going on was he simply was frightened (par. Mk 9:6); thus Peter presented something less than his whole person from inner out. This limited his involvement to reduced ontology and function with Jesus during this vital moment of his full self-disclosure as the whole of God.

In relational terms, the three disciples stayed within their comfort zones, giving God only what they wanted to give, their own shaping of worship that can take place individually and corporately. It is instructive to note here what God ignores (pointing to God's perceptual-interpretive framework). Peter, focusing on the situation, not thinking relationally, was frightened, and reacted in his default mode of 'what to do'. He offered to build three shelters, but the narrative of this scene makes no mention of Jesus or the Father responding to Peter's offer, only Jesus' relational response that he "came and touched them" (Mt 17:7). We can only conclude that Peter's worship had no relational significance to God.

God does not do relationship on our terms; worship on our terms, whatever we think we are experiencing, is always an *ontological simulation* that is based on *epistemological illusion*. Ontological simulation is shorthand for the illusions we create to substitute for direct and whole relational experience with God and others. Our involvement in such relationships is limited to what we do or have, and are shallow and ambiguous relationships. Epistemological illusion is shorthand denoting the biases, assumptions and the terms from human construction by which we think we know God (however sincerely we feel), know what God desires—a boast that cannot be made on secondary terms (cf. Jer 9:23-24).⁵

We are no different relationally from Peter when the person we present to God in worship is defined by roles we have in leading worship, teaching, or serving in other capacities, and are engaged with God (and others) on the basis of these roles. Inseparable from this person we present to God is the referential content and reduced quality of our communication, and indirect depth level at which we engage relationally with others,

⁵ These are vital issues needing further study; they are fully discussed in T. Dave Matsuo's two studies, *Sanctified Christology* (Christology Study) and *The Whole of Paul and the Whole in his Theology* (Paul Study). Online: <http://www.4X12.org>.

foremost with God. In effect, we maintain relational distance by remaining ‘in front of the curtain,’ outside of God’s intimate relational context and its process of intimate relationship, heart to heart, face to Face.

In OT tabernacle and temple practice, only the high priest was allowed to enter the Most Holy Place behind the curtain. This was where the high priest encountered the presence of Yahweh, and served as mediator to make the needed animal (blood) sacrifice for the atonement of the people of Israel. This sacrifice made it possible for Israel to be restored to and continue in covenant relationship with Yahweh. The people could only stand outside, or “in front of” the curtain, as the sacrificial animal served as a substitute for them. From the NT, we know theologically that the curtain in the temple was torn from top to bottom at the moment of Jesus’ death on the cross, signifying the work of atonement Jesus finished (Mt 27:51; Mk 15:38; Lk 23:45; Rom 3:25; Heb 2:17). Of the four Gospel accounts of Jesus’ crucifixion, only John’s Gospel does not record that the curtain was torn. I suggest that in place of that fact of the torn curtain, John records Jesus words “It is finished” (Jn 19:28,30, *teleō*, to accomplish, fulfill), to signify that he now fulfilled the relational requirement in his own person to open up direct access to the Father.⁶ This is not merely a static doctrinal truth about atonement. In relational terms, we are now free to enter behind the curtain into the most intimate place (Heb 6:19; 10:19-22), which is in God’s presence Face to face without the veil (2 Cor 3:14-18; 4:6). Therefore, in relational terms the veil no longer exists, yet we can still function as if it does by not being directly involved at the depth level that Jesus constituted conclusively on the cross.

Consider, then, that so much of worship (individual and corporate) takes place ‘in front of the curtain’ in spite of our desires, intentions, and assumptions that we in fact are ‘behind the curtain’. This is why it is necessary to listen to what has relational significance to God, and why it is unavoidable to challenge our ontology and function. If the person we present to God is not whole, functioning from outer in, giving something less (hiding behind a role, hiding our hearts thus displaying a mask as in a masquerade) and some substitute (offering what we do or have, e.g. Peter), what this means relationally is that we do not live behind the curtain, but in front of it. The implied message we communicate is that we have functionally replaced the curtain that Christ died to remove. Is this the gospel we claim and proclaim?

Therefore, “must worship in spirit and truth” is a relational imperative requiring our whole person.⁷ The involvement of our person, made whole in relationship with God that is based only in relational grace, is the significance of “true worshiper,” the person who is vulnerable before God and wholly available for intimate connection. This is what it means to be worshipers behind the curtain, in the Most Holy Place—that is, in God’s relational context and by God’s relational process, the whole of God’s irreducible and nonnegotiable terms for ongoing reciprocal relationship together.

These indispensable notes on Jesus’ relational words and messages are integral

⁶ It is worth looking at all seven of Jesus’ statements while he hung on the cross together as a whole; they are discussed in *Sanctified Christology*, ch. 6, section “The Ultimate Salvific Discourse.”

⁷ Although it is not possible to fully discuss here, Jesus’ incarnation exegetes God’s being as heart, his nature as relational, and his presence as vulnerable (Jn 1:18). For an insightful examination of how Jesus’ incarnation makes fully known these aspects of God, please see T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology*. See also Matsuo, *Following Jesus, Knowing Christ: Engaging the Intimate Relational Process* (Spirituality Study, 2003). Both studies are online at <http://www.4X12.org>.

for our Sourcebook on worshipping the whole of God. Jesus' relational language further composes the primacy of the qualitative and the relational for the deepest level of corporate gatherings together at table fellowship. We now examine this integrating context for whole relationship together as God's family.

Jesus' Table Fellowship

And as Jesus sat at dinner in Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples.

Mark 2:15

Your faith has saved you [sōzō]; go in peace [wholeness].

Luke 7:50

The experience that Jesus' disciples had was the experience of reciprocal relationship *with* Jesus, with varying degrees of making deeper connection with him beyond merely spending time together. Peter, for example, exemplified the difficulty most Christians today have experiencing this deeper connection (to be addressed below). Jesus did not teach them or leave them with primarily a lifestyle, an ethical paradigm to imitate from outer in (neither virtue nor character ethics), a set of doctrines for a belief system, a religion of rules, a program to set up his church, or a missiological strategy—although the transformation of Jesus' disciples deeply involves ethics, faith and beliefs, ecclesiology, and mission.⁸ Nor did Jesus or the Spirit unilaterally zap them with divine power to transform them, as Paul's encounter with Jesus (post-ascension) on the Damascus road is often (incorrectly) characterized. And he certainly did not leave the disciples with a pattern of worship, a clerical hierarchy, or a priority of song styles for worship. He established reciprocal relationship together, specially chosen, to whom he would share his most intimate self-disclosures (*phaneroō*, as he told the Father, Jn 17:6).

The Gospels provide key instances when Jesus deeply involved himself with his disciples and others at a shared meal. I suggest that Jesus' table fellowship serves as a metaphor in human contextual terms for God's relational context, and the relational interactions that take place signify God's relational process. The key for us is the significance of Jesus' interactions with persons at these gatherings. As the interactions unfolded, Jesus increasingly disclosed the purpose for being sent into the human context, not as teachings or announcements in referential language, but in the relational language of his very person, the embodied Word of God: reconciled relationship.

Jesus' intimate table fellowships are definitive markers in the larger context of God's thematic relational action in history. In God's big picture, all of God's communicative acts in human history were for the purpose of restoring humankind and all creation to wholeness, in his relational whole. All of God's activity in the world responds to the human condition—the relational condition from autonomous efforts in self-determination whose consequence is to be relationally apart—to reconcile persons to himself and to each other also, for the intimate relationships necessary for persons'

⁸ See T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology* ch.7, "Jesus and Culture, Ethics, Mission."

wholeness and to be whole together. These are the reconciled relationships that function together in likeness of the whole of God, the Trinity, that Jesus prayed for (Jn 17:21-23)—God’s whole as the body of Christ, God’s new creation family constituted in the Trinity, that Paul clarified theologically (Eph 2:14-22; Col 3:10-11).⁹ In remarkable strategic and tactical shifts, God came into our human context embodied in Jesus for Face-to-face encounter with his human creation embedded in the human relational condition. We need to keep in mind this larger context of God’s thematic relational action in which Jesus redefined persons from inner out and thus made them whole in God’s whole in the gospel of wholeness (Eph 6:15; Isa 52:7).

For this reconciliation to be experienced by persons, the vulnerable engagement of Jesus’ whole person had to be reciprocated (the significance of faith as relational trust, and submission to his relational terms; cf. Jn 6:28-29) for redemptive change to take place from inner out. In the following examples, we witness the responses of three persons who exemplify the experience of God’s family love (Levi), whole ontology and function (Mary), and the essential relational dynamic of forgiveness (former prostitute) to be made whole. We then examine Peter’s ongoing relational barrier to intimacy with Jesus, which should sound familiar to most of us.

Imagine someone like Levi (Matthew) before he became a disciple (see Mt 9:9-13, Mk 2:13-17, Lk 5:27-32). Though a Jew, he and fellow tax collectors were ostracized by the Jewish religio-cultural community because of their occupation—an ostracism based on outer in criterion of what they did (e.g. often using their employment with the Roman government for dishonest gain). Levi, whether or not he himself was dishonest, experienced the relational condition of being “apart,” that is, the condition of *relational orphan*. Yet, Jesus did not perceive his person from outer in with that quantitative lens, and called Levi to be with him as a disciple. Jesus also had dinner with Levi—and other tax collectors and sinners—at Levi’s house. Sharing meals in biblical times was an important social communion that connoted “a depth of relationship together involving friendship, intimacy and belonging,”¹⁰ and so Jesus scandalized the Pharisees by disregarding their standard of acceptable company and maintaining purity. Certainly for Levi, Jesus’ person extended in surprising relational overture toward him affected Levi in a way no mere referential language could have. The following reconstruction of Levi’s experience deepens our understanding of the relational dynamic Jesus engaged Levi in; it is excerpted from *Sanctified Christology*:

Jesus sees Levi deeper than from the outer in of a reductionist quantitative framework; therefore he sees a person from the inside out experiencing reductionism who needs to be redefined, transformed and made whole. The person Jesus presented pays attention to this Levi; and the significance of Jesus’ person is not lost to Levi, who is used to being treated with contempt. He well knows that for this Rabbi (and miracle worker at that) to engage him is radical, counter-cultural, and simply

⁹ For in-depth discussion about wholeness, see T. Dave Matsuo, *The Person, the Trinity, the Church* (Wholeness Study).

¹⁰ T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology*, ch.3, section “Tactical Shift.” For further discussion of Jesus’ table fellowship and in the Mediterranean world, see S. Scott Bartchy, “The Historical Jesus and Honor Reversal at the Table” in Wolfgang Stegemann, Bruce J. Malina, Gerd Theissen, eds., *The Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 175-183.

contrary to life as he knew it. Yet, Jesus wasn't making a sociocultural, political or philosophical statement. He is making a statement of his person only for relationship: "Follow me."

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

Yet, for him to cross those social, cultural and religious barriers, Levi would openly have to let go of his old life and reject reductionism—its perceptual-interpretive framework and its substitutes for the whole of persons and relationships, both prevailing in the surrounding context. This is a risk Levi is able to take because he is entrusting his person to relationship with the vulnerable person he can count on to be truly who and what he is, nothing less and no substitutes. He can count on this person Jesus in this relationship because he personally sees how Jesus is in practice—the significance of his person presented, the qualitative difference of his communication, the intimate depth of relationship he engages—is congruent with who and what he is, thus confirming for Levi that Jesus' whole person is for relationship. This is what Levi must have seen (not merely *blepō*, to see, but more like *horaō*, to recognize the significance of, encounter the true nature of, to experience) in Jesus to support making such a drastic change.

Levi's story is about the gospel.¹¹

Levi experienced the relational response of grace as Face-to-face involvement from Jesus, and thus experienced being redefined and relationally loved from inner out. Only in this relational involvement did Jesus establish Levi into the relational context and process of the whole of God—what we otherwise know as the gospel. Levi directly experienced God's family love, which is the significance of Jesus' table fellowship. In his table fellowship Jesus embodies the functional and relational keys of the gospel, along with the keys to whole worship. Levi's experience of the gospel embodied by Jesus was extended to Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector. Integrated with Levi's story of the gospel, Zacchaeus' story of the gospel deepens our understanding of the relational significance of table fellowship and its relational outcome that is the necessary basis for our involvement in Communion. Very briefly, Zacchaeus pursued Jesus (up a tree, no less) and Jesus responded to him with table fellowship (Lk 19:1-10). Without getting into all of the relational dynamics (discussed elsewhere¹²), the relational outcome of Jesus' family love for Zacchaeus at table fellowship emerged even more distinguished than in Levi's story: "Today salvation has come to [Zacchaeus] because he [now has become] a son of Abraham" (v.9). Speaking in relational language, Jesus makes unmistakable that the relational outcome of his table fellowship is what he saves *to* (*sōzō*, to make whole, not

¹¹ T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology*, ch.1, section "His Person Presented to New Disciples."

¹² To read about Zacchaeus who, like Levi, experienced family love with Jesus, see *Sanctified Christology*, ch.3, section "Tactical Shift."

just deliver *from*, v.10): relationship belonging to the whole of God's family. This relational involvement and outcome of the gospel is celebrated in Communion, that is, by those who have gone behind the curtain to be involved with Jesus in his sacrifice and who have emerged with him without the veil in whole relationship together as his family.

The relational significance of family was not ignored by Zacchaeus and Levi, which would have reduced them to observers at Jesus' table fellowship. God's family was not a unilateral relationship, and this is vital for us to realize. Both Zacchaeus and Levi responded in reciprocal relationship to make their own person open and vulnerable to receive Jesus' person, first to experience this connection and then for ongoing reciprocal relationship together (implied for Zacchaeus in Lk 19:8, and for Levi as a disciple). God does not do unilateral relationship (an oxymoron indeed), though that is what we often expect from him in our terms (e.g. in our prayers). Most importantly, both relational distance and just observing as we participate in Communion communicate that we are disengaged from reciprocal relationship together.

Jesus warned against the assumption that God does relationship unilaterally—and we are urged to pay attention here. There are persons (many of us) who sit at Jesus' table, so to speak, but do not reciprocate with their whole person, to whom he says, "I don't know you or where you come from" (read Lk 13:22-27 NIV). These persons will protest, "We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets," or "did we not prophesy....drive out demons....perform miracles in your name?" to which he will reply, "I don't know you....Away from me!" (Mt 7:22-23 NIV). This is a critique we must not ignore, for Jesus holds us each accountable for his self-disclosures which are only and all for reciprocal relationship; and he specifically holds us accountable for whose terms we try to have relationship together on! Levi responded to Jesus, but Scripture does not mention anything further about him. However, Scripture does provide more for us to understand and take in from Mary's whole involvement with Jesus at another table fellowship.

Shortly before his crucifixion, we are given a deeper glimpse of the disciple Mary showing us whole ontology and function in her expression of family love as Jesus' follower and worshiper (see Jn 12:1-8; cf. Mk 14:3-9; Mt 26:6-13; Lk 7:36-50). This narrative is especially noteworthy as a model of one who worshiped in spirit and truth (Jn 4:23-24). She demonstrates for us how discipleship and serving as worship are made whole. Jesus was having table fellowship with Lazarus and others when Mary came to wash Jesus' feet. Recall that Mary already has given primacy to relational involvement with Jesus over her human context's prescribed behavior for women that focused on secondary areas of serving (cf. her sister Martha, Lk 10:38-42). Mary's person experienced being made whole from inner out in the primacy of her relationship with Jesus. Here at table fellowship, Mary again stepped beyond the restrictions from her culture (women stay on the margins of a gathering at home), and washed Jesus feet with expensive perfume and used her own hair to wipe them. Viewing her actions with a quantitative lens gives primacy to secondary matters, such as the extravagance of her act—for example, the lavish expense of the "pure nard" (v.3), not to mention the issue of using her hair (cf. Lk 7:38). We tend to view Mary more for *what* she did than her whole person, because we use a quantitative lens.

That was not Jesus' lens, for he always made the person and relationship primary—that is, he saw (and sees) the heart (cf. Acts 1:24; Lk 16:15; Rev 2:23; Heb

4:13). This was an intimate act by Mary openly and very vulnerably loving Jesus with her whole person (intimacy defined as hearts open, vulnerable, and connecting together). Her relationship with Jesus defined her and determined how she functioned, from inner out; thus Jesus rebuked her critics (“Leave her alone,” Jn 12:7), and received her deeply: “She has done a beautiful thing to me” (Mk 14:6; Mt 26:10, NIV). Just as when earlier she sat at Jesus feet, here again we see that she neither defined her person from outer in nor allowed others to determine how she would be involved with Jesus in the depth level of love, to which Jesus affirmed in her (“Mary has chosen the better part,” Lk 10:42). Matthew and Mark’s accounts also record Jesus’ words: “Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.” As with Levi, Mary’s story is about the gospel. Yet, it is more than coincidence that she has *not* been remembered wherever the gospel is preached; it indicates a reduction of the gospel claimed and proclaimed. Since she embodied the significance of the gospel for human function, the primacy of her example is mentioned twice in John’s Gospel (see Jn 11:2).

Along with Mary, Levi, and Zacchaeus (whose experience is inseparable from Levi’s), one more person embodies being made whole in God’s family love—once again at table fellowship. An unlikely yet beautiful encounter takes place between Jesus and a woman who was not only “less” in religio-social terms, she was considered “least.” In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus’ interaction with a former prostitute reveals keys for us to understand for our own journeys with him (Lk 7:36-50). Her relational involvement of worship challenges our own worship, which needs to be freed for the connection God seeks. Moreover, her action illustrates integrally that grace, faith, and peace (wholeness) are dynamic relational functions, which necessarily converge in the primacy of relationship.

A known (former) prostitute entered a dinner party attended by Jesus. The party’s host, a Pharisee named Simon, was shocked that this woman came and physically touched Jesus. According to Simon’s religious beliefs and practices, Jesus should not have allowed her to touch him because she was considered unclean. But here she washed Jesus’ feet using perfume (a tool of her trade), her tears, hair and kisses. Simon could only see the woman from outer-in terms of her occupation, his lens a product of his human context. Jesus, however, saw the woman with his *qualitative* lens; Jesus perceived her from the inner out, her open and vulnerable heart (signifying her whole person) and received her. “Your sins are forgiven” (v.48) signifies that Jesus did not define her by her actions and past life because he had redeemed her from her old identity from outer in, and now redefined her from the inner out by relational grace and forgiveness, only for relationship together. She *deeply received* Jesus in his relational response of grace only because her heart was open and vulnerable. Having been so deeply loved, the reciprocal response of her heart freely emerged as she stepped out in faith to wash Jesus’ feet with her tears, wipe them with her hair, and anoint them with perfumed oil. “Your faith has saved you” affirms her faith as relational trust in Jesus’ person (e.g. that he would not reject her), thus showing us the dynamic significance of *faith* that we often reduce to something merely to possess.

The Greek word for “saved” (*sōzō*) means to deliver (e.g. from the reductionism of her person and function), and also to be made whole (in the relational reality of redemptive reconciliation), which is the significance of Jesus’ relational words to her,

“Go in peace”—which, in Scripture, is always about wholeness, in contrast to the Greek notion of peace meaning absence of conflict, conflict that his woman likely would still experience in social contexts. This sister “has shown great love” by giving primacy to her relationship with Jesus, in reciprocal relational response to having been loved first—in a beautiful example of one who worshiped in spirit and truth. We should not, however, overlook 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 relational response of love in forgiveness from inner out (Lk 7:47). The extent of our reciprocal relational response is directly contingent on the extent of our experience of God’s relational response of grace.

The relational outcome for Levi, Zacchaeus, Mary and the former prostitute was being restored to wholeness, the relational experience of being transposed by Jesus in God’s relational context of family by the relational process of family love (the functional significance of ‘adoption’). Experiencing grace and forgiveness in order to come together in this relationship with God is redemptive reconciliation. It is redemptive because the old must die in order for the new to emerge in reconciled whole relationship together. Each of these persons experienced Jesus’ Face to face involvement—nothing less and no substitutes—and each reciprocated with their own person, nothing less and no substitutes, openly and vulnerably stepping out of comfort zones of their life situations and circumstances and religio-cultural limitations in order to experience more with Jesus.¹³ Any negative reactions and repercussions from others were the cost they were willing to pay in order to go deeper with Jesus. The significance of these relational dynamics converges and emerges in table fellowship with Jesus, who continues to integrate his family into the primacy of whole relationship together (Jn 17:26).

Mary and the former prostitute’s washing of Jesus’ feet marked their reciprocal response back to Jesus, not from the position of a servant, but as whole persons who can reciprocate in family love. In stark contrast was Peter’s experience at the last table fellowship Jesus had before his death.

The Lord’s Supper and the Major Relational Barrier

The Synoptic Gospels each give an account (with minor variations) of the final supper Jesus shared with his disciples, with Jesus sharing the bread as his body and the cup as the blood of the new covenant (Mt 26:26-28; Mk 14:22-24; Lk 22:14-21). John’s Gospel does not have this account of the institution of the Lord’s Supper. What John seems to purposely do is to concentrate on the depth of the relationship with Jesus that the Lord’s Supper inaugurated in two movements in Jesus’ new key. First, John elaborates on Jesus’ relational language for what are unmistakable allusions to the bread/body and cup/blood of the Lord’s Supper, unfolding a matrix of connections in Jesus’ relational words: eternal life and believing in him (Jn 5:24; 6:29,40,47); bread from heaven as himself, “the bread of life” (Jn 6:27, 32-35,41,48-51); and eating his flesh

¹³ Scripture consistently speaks of relationship with God in terms of moving *from* something else *to* him. In the OT, God brought the Israelites out *from* slavery in Egypt *to* worship him on the mountain as his people. The NT speaks of our salvation *from* sin *to* new life (new creation). In these examples at table fellowship with Jesus, persons stepped out *from* their old, their comfort zones, *to* relational connection with Jesus.

and drinking his blood (6:53-58), not literally (cannibalism), but relational language for intimate relationship with Jesus in the innermost behind the curtain, which the atonement sacrifice in referential language maintains at a relational distance, keeping those participants in front of the curtain as if the veil still exists in their relationship together. Together with the Synoptic accounts, what emerges is the primacy of intimate relationship perceivable only in relational language.¹⁴ Second, John recounts Jesus washing the disciples' feet at their last meal together, recalling the footwashings by Mary and the former prostitute. It will be Peter who demonstrates the major relational barrier to receiving Jesus. (Why is it that none of the male disciples are recorded as having washed Jesus' feet?)

We are brought back to the primacy of relationship inherent in Jesus' table fellowship; and Jesus' continued relational work of family love extends to its deepest depth of relational involvement—even before he reaches the cross—at the last meal he had with his disciples (read Jn 13:1-18). We need to understand, and thus experience, the relational dynamics of this defining table fellowship that composes Communion in the new sanctuary no longer with the veil. At the evening meal before Passover, Jesus began to wash the disciples' feet. Peter refused Jesus, and was sternly corrected by Jesus. What's happening in relational terms? This involves both the relational significance of Jesus' act and Peter's own theological anthropology—which are vital for us to understand for depth of relationship with Jesus and for depth of involvement together in Communion table fellowship.

Peter's refusal to let Jesus wash his feet issued from essentially trying to assert his own terms for relationship with Jesus. Peter had similarly rebuked Jesus about going to the cross because Peter's "teacher" would not do such a despicable thing (cf. Mt 16:22-23). Specifically, Peter defined both himself and Jesus according to their roles (disciple-lower, teacher-higher) with a quantitative lens from outer in, and now he would not allow his teacher to do such a demeaning act. Peter asserted these roles as primary, but Jesus did not acquiesce to Peter's terms, instead correcting Peter in yet another relational message of love, "Unless I wash you, you have no share [part] with me" (Jn 13:8)—that is, no relational involvement with me. Peter was still trying to determine the terms for relationship with a quantitative lens from outer in, thus by its nature with relational distance. Peter's reply, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head," expressed his continued outer-in focus of his reduced anthropology and missed Jesus' whole person. Though Peter balked at receiving Jesus' whole person presented at the

¹⁴ George Eldon Ladd and others have debated as to whether John 6 contains allusions to the bread and wine of the Eucharist. Ladd takes the view that John was not a sacramentalist, but that he was countering any "magical-sacramental views" of a literalist sacramentalism that was "exerting a dangerous influence on many Christians." Rather, John was speaking of "spiritual feeding" on Jesus (by the work of the Spirit). See Ladd's *Theology of the New Testament*, rev., Donald A. Hagner, ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1993), 321. This discussion demonstrates interpretive constraints imposed by referential language, or even with the more open view that John's Gospel is "making the implicit explicit" (Hagner, lecture 11/7/2006). While the latter comment points to what the "explicit" is, only by thinking in *relational language* does Jesus' call to relational involvement with himself (eternal life, Jn 17:3) emerge distinctively. In a similar comparison between the Synoptics and John's Gospel, the former three contain transfiguration accounts, but John's Gospel as a whole expands and deepens the transfiguration's self-disclosure; thinking in relational language, what clearly emerges is the Son's intimate and irreducible relationship with the Father, extended to us, notably in the Father's words "listen to [my Son]!" Referential language is insufficient to listen to God's full self-disclosures.

deepest level of involvement, Jesus still vulnerably extended himself to Peter from inner out for the most intimate connection to redefine him by grace from inner out to make him whole in the primacy of whole relationship together—the function of relational grace and the relational significance of Jesus’ footwashing and Jesus’ table fellowship.

We need to learn from Peter’s embeddedness in reductionism from his self-determination and its relational barrier that prevented him from entrusting himself to Jesus. What these relational dynamics also reveal (or expose) specific to theological anthropology is that when the person is defined by what one does and one’s role, this necessitates not only doing things to define the person but also *not* doing certain things which threaten one’s identity and self-worth. This is how Peter functioned and expected Jesus to function. Along with trying to prevent Jesus from going to the cross, we saw Peter’s self-concern earlier in his fear-driven, constrained response at Jesus’ transfiguration. We also see Peter’s measured relational response after Jesus’ resurrection, when Jesus continued to pursue Peter’s whole person for relationship (Jn 21:15-22). Even in that last exchange, Peter’s focus turns elsewhere in the comparative process, asking “what about him?” to which Jesus continued (albeit with growing impatience) to call Peter back to their relationship: “What is that to you? [You must] follow me!” Apparently Peter did eventually experience being made whole from inner out, as he expresses in his two letters. Engaging in deeper relational involvement, most notably going behind the veil with Jesus as well as letting him wash our feet, is the most critical function that persons with a reduced theological anthropology do not do and manage to avoid with secondary substitutes in ontological simulation—“OK, then, wash my hands and head also.”

Our own involvement with Jesus is always at issue as we reconsider Jesus’ relational messages, verbal and nonverbal, in both sharing bread and wine with his disciples and in washing their feet. Beyond the clarification of Peter’s example, we need hermeneutical correction from the popular misreading of Jesus’ footwashing as a model for “servant leadership.” Reading Jesus’ words as referential language focuses on what Jesus did (washed feet), and what we need to do, “you also ought to wash one another’s feet....you also should do as I have done for you” (Jn 13:14). This lens of servant leadership is an outer-in misinterpretation stemming from an interpretive framework based on a theological anthropology defining our person and thus Jesus’ person by what we do—here, for example, the humble service of washing his disciples’ feet, or the even loftier version that Jesus *thus* counters hierarchical social structures (Jn 13:12-17). Though Jesus certainly equalized relationships by necessity at his table fellowship, this relational dynamic was neither about sociology nor theological reform. These issues, along with servant leadership, are not unimportant yet they only secondarily reflect their underlying relational condition lacking the primacy of whole relationship together—the wholeness Jesus composes at table fellowship together behind the veil in the new sanctuary on the basis of the deepest level of relational involvement.

Servant leadership does not pay attention to Jesus’ paradigm for those who desire to serve him as the primary determinant of how a follower of Jesus is to live (Jn 12:26, as discussed earlier). We need to put together his paradigm for serving him with his words spoken in response to his critics who questioned his table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners: “Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice’” (Mt 9:13). For Jesus, mercy is about the person functioning from inner out focused on and involved

with others in the deep relational process of family love, whereas in human terms sacrifice always focuses on what to do and the person doing the sacrificing (e.g. persons who are praised for their sacrifice). Recall that any sacrifices or offerings to God never had relational significance to him without the whole ontology and function of the persons bringing the offerings to him behind the veil, not presenting them before him in front of the veil. This is the whole function and ontology that has redefined serving to be relationally involved in love also with the poor, orphans, widows, and foreigners in the community's midst—any persons in the relational condition of being apart, which includes those in church and the academy.

Jesus does definitively counter stratified and hierarchical relationships and structures—and this is indeed the outcome of having a “part with me” by letting him wash our feet to redefine our person from the inner out by the relational function of grace, which is never primarily about ‘what to do’. Stratified relations (based on roles, personal resources, physical characteristics, or human afflictions) that are “changed” from the outer in still function, however much under the radar, from reductionism until that person(s) is made whole from inner out. An example of this would be a male pastor who tries to be open to females as equal pastors, and thus is nice to them, but is still involved in the comparative process and competitiveness in his relationships generally; he is functioning from outer in. Jesus countered all such reductionist anthropology in order to make whole in the relationships necessary for persons to be whole.¹⁵

As Jesus' disciples, each of us is faced with Jesus at our feet. Have you let Jesus wash your feet to redefine you by grace from inner out (*metamorphoō*) so that you have a “part with me”? Unless we have, we can be certain that we function in relational distance with an identity and self-worth shaped by self-determination and reductionism, even if we have changed our outward appearance (*metaschematizō*), for example, by embracing a servant-leader concept.

The experience of God's relational response of grace necessitates dying to the “old” of our self-determination together with its reductionism and counter-relational focus on secondary matter, and submitting to Jesus' primacy of relationship. Jesus' sacrifice behind the veil has made possible our dying to the “old,” and his resurrection makes possible being raised “new” in God's whole—what we are inseparably saved from and saved to. As we are submitted without the veil in relational trust to his person with our whole person, nothing less and no substitutes, wholeness emerges in relationship together in the innermost likeness of the whole of God—dynamics which Paul composed theologically (2 Cor 3:16-18) and ongoingly pursued in his own deeper relational

¹⁵ The following excerpt from T. Dave Matsuo's *Sanctified Christology* identifies Jesus' relational actions as establishing his “new relational order”: “Since cultural custom obligated a host to make provision for washing the dinner guests' feet, either water or a household servant was provided for this menial purpose. For Jesus, however, nothing less and no substitute of his whole person than he personally assuming this footwashing would be sufficient to constitute his relational involvement of family love—that is, as the embodiment of God's grace. This goes well beyond merely the act of serving and humility in function. This is not about what to do but how to be involved in the new relational order. Yet, Jesus did not reverse the stratified old relational order but transformed it. He was not exercising a role as servant but dissolving roles which create barriers to deeper relationship—an important distinction to grasp.... [T]his act was only for transformed relationship together and ‘the full extent’ of his relational involvement vulnerably making evident his family love [Jn 13:1 NIV].” Ch.8, section “The Rigorous and Vulnerable Process of Reconciliation.”

involvement with Jesus (Phil 3:10-11). *This* is the irreducible and nonnegotiable relational significance of Jesus' table fellowship, his footwashing, the Lord's Supper, and the relational outcome of the gospel of wholeness.

Relationships based on grace must (*dei*, by nature) be characterized in two vital and observable ways: **intimate** and **equalized**. These are relationships that are intimate, because, as relational grace requires, hearts need to be open and vulnerable to God in compatible and reciprocal relational response, and by extension to each other. Jesus disclosed his own relationship with the Father, revealing that their connection together is so intimate as to be 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). Mary and the ex-prostitute experienced this intimate connection with Jesus. And these women were equalized as whole persons, because grace nullifies the distinction-making based on secondary, quantitative, outer-in criteria for defining persons and doing relationships—all resulting from efforts of human self-determination (cf. Acts 15:9). Equalization is a necessary process for persons not to remain fragmented and reduced to outer in, and for relationships to be freed from barriers and opened to the depth of involvement in likeness to what Jesus defined in his relationship with the Father—the relational outcome Jesus prays for (Jn 17:21-26). This relational outcome of equalization for all persons “in Christ” is summarized by Paul, that Christ destroyed the relational barriers (the old reductionist criteria of outer-in distinctions that created relational distance and barriers (Eph 2:11-18; Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 12:13; Col 3:11). The prominent barriers Paul highlights, without being exhaustive, were based on race/ethnicity (“There is no longer Jew or Greek”), class (“slave or free”), and gender (“male and female”). Levi, Zacchaeus, Mary, and the former prostitute all experienced being equalized by grace, redefined from inner out in their respective relationships with Jesus; there was no intimate connection without the process of equalization. This is how in function God “shows no partiality” (*prosōpolēmpsia*, respecter of persons, favoritism, Rom 2:11; Eph 6:9; Col 3:25; Jas 2:1) because God looks only at the heart, inner out, whereas humans who function from self-determination look outer in (1 Sam 16:7; cf. 2 Cor 5:12).

These integral relational dynamics converge at table fellowship with Jesus and they emerge with him in the primacy of reciprocal relationship together in wholeness.

Being Family at the Lord's Supper

Equalized and intimate relationships together as sisters and brothers at the Lord's table integrally deepen Communion and broaden it, transposing it from its common practice as an individual interaction made with Jesus privately, back to corporate sharing (the *koinonia* at his table) as God's family, that is, what we have been saved to. “Family” is no mere metaphor for the new creation, for Jesus identifies his disciples using family language: “Whoever does the will of my Father...is my brother and sister and mother” (Mt 12:50; Mk 3:35; cf. Rom 8:29, Heb 2:11-12); “go and tell my brothers” (Mt 28:10). This is the relational clarity of the corporate life made whole in relational terms which the Lord's Supper celebrates in only its relational significance, and thus composes the new family as the whole understanding of a complete soteriology that involves both what we have been saved *from* and *to*, inseparably.

Communion celebrates this fact that we are no longer relational orphans, but have all been adopted into one family. This relational outcome assumes that we have partaken of Jesus' sacrifice with him behind the veil so that we have been redeemed for our adoption. And each subsequent Communion celebrates this intimate connection in relationship together and our further participation in the primacy of whole relationship together as family until its relational conclusion at Jesus' return. Up to the end times, each person has individual accountability for the person he or she presents, and also for the corporate family's relationships together. *Intimate and equalized relationships* are the only relationships that are whole and have relational significance to God. These are the relationships of God's new creation family in Christ—the *new relational order*—and are the relationships in likeness of the relational oneness of the Trinity:

By vulnerably being involved in footwashing, Jesus radically changed our relationship with God (as signified in God's strategic shift) and how to be involved with God (as signified in Jesus' tactical and functional shifts)—and thus how to be involved with each other. His vulnerable relational act directly connects with his salvific action on the cross which tore down the veil in the temple between God and his people. His footwashing vulnerably engaged his followers in transformed relationships, the specific relationship which operationalized the relational significance of the torn veil opening the way for deep and intimate communion with the whole of God. Thus, this new relational order operates only by the function of transformed relationships, which are necessarily both equalized and intimate relationships by the nature of the Trinity's relational ontology.¹⁶

The experience of this new relational order began with Jesus' table fellowship, solidified in the Last Supper, and becomes the interpretive lens to understand the full significance of Communion today in order for its celebration to be the ongoing emergence of God's new family in relational progression of relationship together in wholeness. As Jesus shared his last meal with his disciples, he instituted the new covenant, though in an experiential sense, he had already embodied with them the new covenant: "having loved his own who were in the world" (Jn 13:1). John's Gospel portrays this time as the setting for some of the most intimate moments between Jesus and the disciples as he shares his heart with them (Jn 14-17), and with the Father (his "formative family prayer," Jn 17), as Jesus prepares them for his departure. Importantly, this included his promise to them of the Spirit, to be with them always as his own relational replacement (Jn 14:15-27; Mt 28:19), whose presence with them is even better than his own bodily presence with them (Jn 16:7-15). And he shared all this with them knowing there was yet one more cup to drink—the cross, to put to death the old, and the resurrection to inaugurate the new.

Jesus' work on the cross is indeed indispensable in God's thematic relational action composing the gospel, but the cross alone is neither constitutive of nor definitive of the whole. Many preachers remain fixated on the cross, reflecting a Christology that is incomplete and often overly christocentric because it does not "listen to him" (as his Father made imperative) in the primacy of relationship embodied in his incarnation, notably between the manger and the cross. This failure to "listen to him" in relational

¹⁶ T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology*, ch.8, section "Communion in the New Relational Order."

language reduces discipleship to hearing his teachings and observing his activities only in referential language for information about God and about what to do (how most Christian ethics direct us, mission paradigms send us, and servant models convince us). An incomplete Christology yields a truncated soteriology of being saved from sin, and that is where it revolves. Accordingly, a truncated soteriology yields a renegotiated ecclesiology that shapes relationship together on our reduced terms. On the other hand, listening to him in relational language is to be vulnerably involved with him as his disciples in the relational progression to know the whole of God in the relational context of family and process of family love.

The cross serves only this relational purpose, and establishes us in the full relational context signified in the Lord's Supper—the sharing together as daughters and sons made whole (though with some difficulty, like Peter) in intimate connection with Christ (“in Christ” as Paul says throughout his writings), who thus composes the new song for us to ‘sing’ as the family of God, the church. This is a complete Christology, which is necessary for the full soteriology that saves us to the new creation family, both in the ‘already’ (realized) and the ‘not yet’ (future)—an ecclesiology of the whole.

Jesus' table fellowship provides us with whole understanding for the significance of the Last Supper, and therefore the Communion we Christians celebrate now. The relational work of family love that Jesus engaged at his table fellowships during his incarnation went to establishing with his disciples together a new relational order. Equalized relationships were evident in the nascent house churches in participation of persons unhindered by ethnicity, varied occupations and social classes, and both genders—which is what Paul lovingly nurtured Philemon to embrace with Onesimus (his former slave, Phlm 15-16). And intimate fellowship among these diverse persons was indicated by physical affection as well. Persons in ancient Mediterranean cultures regularly shared a kiss as a gesture of affection and respect among family members, and Middle Easterners extended the kiss to persons outside family to indicate honor and fellowship, as Larry W. Hurtado notes in his volume on earliest Christian worship. Thus the ‘holy kiss’ that Paul encourages through his letters takes on new creation family significance:

The solidarity and intimacy of early Christian groups at worship are also vividly reflected in what appears to have been another [besides sharing in one loaf and one cup] characteristic gesture, the kiss of Christian liturgical fellowship. There are references to the ‘holy kiss’ in several Pauline letters (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26) and probably the same gesture is referred to as the ‘kiss of love’ in 1 Peter 5:14. The simple exhortation to share the kiss, without any further explanation, indicates that the gesture was quite broadly practised and familiar among first-century Christian groups.... The early Christian practice seems somewhat unusual in making the kiss a regular liturgical gesture and in extending the circle of allowed intimacy to all congregants of both sexes.¹⁷

Given our hyper-sexualized sociocultural context (in stark contrast with other cultures), fears about misunderstandings and concerns about hygiene, the gesture of

¹⁷ Larry W. Hurtado, *At the Origins of Christian Worship: The Context and Character of Earliest Christian Devotion* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 42-43.

kissing each other, especially of the opposite sex and on the mouth (as the earliest Christians apparently practiced¹⁸) is out of the question for us today until we can wrest touch from reductionism that suspects any touch as sensual/sexual, and maturely reclaim much-needed affection for God's family—a sidebar issue of the women tenderly touching Jesus' feet (discussed earlier). The prevailing dearth of any physical affection (caring touches, warm hugs, grasping hands) reflects our lack of wholeness, for we are much-afraid or uncomfortable to respond to the basic human need for touch. A brief but beautiful scene takes place at Jesus' transfiguration. As the disciple cowered in fear, Jesus "came and touched" them (Mt 17:6-7). *Haptō* ("to touch") denotes "not just physical contact but touch with involvement and purpose in order to influence, affect them, notably Peter—that is, by his relational messages from his relational context of family and relational process of family love."¹⁹ The most relationally significant touch from Jesus was when he washed the disciples' feet, as he would ours.

As we grow in wholeness as individuals and corporately as this new creation family, our worship gatherings will, I suspect, become much more affectionate, even with God, as those who worship in spirit and truth—with hugs and perhaps kisses!

A final area to consider is how Jesus table fellowship has been inadvertently reduced by two interpretations that have good intentions: (1) table fellowship as a paradigm for an ethics of inclusivity, and (2) as a paradigm for equal-gender church leadership. These two paradigms intend to elevate marginalized persons to equal status at Jesus' table.

Regarding the ethical paradigm, some Christian ethicists would have us see and embrace Jesus' table fellowship as an ethical paradigm of inclusiveness for church practice in the 'already' as a foretaste of the eschatological kingdom of God in the 'not yet'. The perception of Jesus' table fellowship of inclusion of marginalized persons (among whom women are listed²⁰)—as an ethical example for Christians to imitate—is a product of a particular interpretive framework, and is not the proper approach to human diversity. Imitation of Jesus' behaviors is an outer-in approach that does not address the deeper issue of the outer-in process of distinction-making in conflict with the inner out relational function of grace (what Paul signifies in his shorthand term 'in Christ', Gal 3:28). The concept of "inclusivity" as an ethical category begs the questions: Who are the "included" (the *un*-marginalized)? How did they get that way? To think in terms of inclusion is to operate with a narrowed-down category of included-excluded, which still operates in the dynamic of making distinctions based on outer-in criteria from human contextualization of gender, race/ethnicity, occupation, and other human differences. Distinction-making is implicit when certain persons are singled out, for example, in one ethicist's view that God's kingdom is "gestured in open conversation with women...to welcome sinners, and to treat women as equals."²¹ In practice, any distinction-making

¹⁸ Larry W. Hurtado, *At the Origins of Christian Worship*, 43.

¹⁹ T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology*, ch. 2, section "The Demands of Grace."

²⁰ Richard Burrige, lecture outline for a seminary course, "New Testament Ethics": August 7, 2007, 4b.

²¹ Allen Verhey, "Ethics" in *Dictionary of Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 198.

implies that “different” is “less”, involving comparison and competition.²² Inclusivity as an ethical category operates essentially by making distinctions, pointing to a reduced theological anthropology, both of which are antithetical to God’s relational response of grace ‘in Christ’.

Biblical feminist Letty Russell sees Jesus’ table fellowship as the paradigm for church and church leadership, a round table that has no hierarchical head.²³ Equality characterizes this table fellowship. Inclusiveness and equality indeed are important and necessary parts of wholeness—only parts and not wholeness in themselves, even together. However, if inclusiveness and equality are not functions in God’s relational context of family on God’s whole terms, which necessitates the intimate relational process of grace, inclusiveness and equality remain in their essence outer-in social structures. Indeed they may be modern anachronisms which no longer have a place in the human relational condition. Moreover, there is a subtle problem that if changes we attempt are only structural (outer in), attempts at inclusivity and equality inadvertently maintain and reinforce the very exclusivity and hierarchy in relationships that we would seek to eliminate by utilizing the same basis of defining persons by what they do or have (e.g. talent, leadership skills, even spiritual gifting), thus reinforcing and further embedding persons in a reduced theological anthropology. We will keep cycling through the same issues until we deal with our autonomous efforts at self-determination for self-justification, which Letty Russell’s paradigm inadvertently seems to promote.

In spite of this gloomy caveat, the New Testament gives us much better news than anything we come up with. “My grace is sufficient for you” is the necessary relational basis by which anyone can come to the table, behind the veil, to enjoy the relational reality of having a permanent place in God’s family, his family marked by intimate and equalized relationships together (cf. Jn 8:35).

*One bread, one body, one Lord of all,
one cup of blessing which we bless.
And we, though many throughout the earth,
we are one body in this one Lord.*²⁴

Exposing Human Shaping

Of the few known worship practices in NT times, one is the Lord’s Supper, which was part of a meal shared by the earliest Christians in the mode of Jesus’ table fellowship (1 Cor 11:17-34). The earliest worship settings were private homes and the number of persons who could be accommodated at a meal varied depending on the size of the house,

²² For further discussion of the social dynamic of the “deficit model” (in which “different” means “less” or “inferior”), see T. Dave Matsuo’s, *The Relational Progression: A Relational Theology of Discipleship* (Discipleship Study, 2004). Online: <http://www.4X12.org>, ch.12; Section “Knowing Our Context.”

²³ Letty M. Russell. *Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1993.

²⁴ “One Bread, One Body” by John Foley, S.J. ©1978 John B. Foley, S.J., and North American Liturgy Resources, Phoenix, Arizona.

and extra room that could be opened up for such gatherings.²⁵ “The vision of the eucharist as fellowship was an important one to St. Paul” writes liturgical scholar Paul Bradshaw. What soon transpired in some places was not the disappearance of the Eucharist, but rather the substitution of it with something else. Notably, the primacy of its relational significance very soon was diminished. In the Corinthian church, for example, the meal became an end in itself, as when some of the Corinthian Christians indulged themselves (eating and getting drunk) while the poor members were left out, infuriating Paul (1 Cor 11:17-34). Thus Bradshaw writes, “What was happening was the exact opposite of the unity that the meal was supposed to express, so that Paul concludes, ‘it is not the Lord’s Supper that you eat (1 Cor 11:20).’”²⁶

Within two or three centuries, for varied reasons (mostly speculated), the Lord’s Supper was soon detached from the evening meal, and the meal was apparently dropped in most places, except for an occasional *agapē* meal together. Suggested reasons for this include the abuses such as at the Corinthian church, the groups grew too large to seat everyone at a house for a meal, and the Roman bans on gatherings of clubs (associations). Consider what was lost in terms of the intimacy once experienced by worshipers gathered for table fellowship, the legacy of which we experience to this day. In the subsequent history of the Eucharistic controversies and debates—about the theological understanding of the Lord’s Supper, and how to understand God’s presence or absence with the bread and cup—from the fourth to the twenty-first century, one can make a generalized observation that the disagreements have arisen from reading Jesus’ words and actions in referential language. Referential language speaks literally, so, for example, Jesus’ words “Take, eat; this is my body... this is my blood” (Mt 26:26-28) creates havoc in rationalistic minds as to how this can be (Jn 6:52,60; cf. Nicodemus’ inquiry about being born from above, Jn 3:4,9). The issue of referential language versus relational language becomes acute in such theological and pastoral attempts to understand the significance of many of Jesus’ words.

Communion today is barely recognizable as Jesus’ table fellowship in the new relational order of intimate and equalized relationships together of God’s whole family. We come instead with something less and some substitutes either shaped from our contemporary sociocultural context or the traditions of our own historical Christian elders. Inasmuch as Communion as we know it today belongs in our Secondary Sanctuary, the following are but some examples of the triumph of referential language and outer-in focus at the expense of the primacy of relationship ‘singing’ the new song in the new sanctuary.

Is Jesus in the bread and wine?

Historically, the Western theologians have argued over how to understand the bread and wine, and fall into one of two categories—sacramentalists or non-

²⁵ E.g. Roman villas “could have accommodated a group no larger than forty to fifty,” according to Larry W. Hurtado, *At the Origins of Christian Worship*, 41-42.

²⁶ Paul Bradshaw, *Early Christian Worship*, 40-41. This is an excellent brief resource that outlines what we know and do not know about worship practices in the first four centuries of the church(es), the varieties of practices and how they changed through these formative years.

sacramentalists.²⁷ Sacramentalism understands ‘presence’ of God to mean physical presence in the eucharistic elements, the bread and wine (or juice). These views include (1) *transubstantiation* in Roman Catholic Church belief that upon consecration of the elements, the substance of the bread and wine convert into the body and blood of Christ, though retaining the appearance of bread and wine; and (2) *consubstantiation* (especially for Lutherans) which holds that Christ’s body and blood coexist with the bread and wine.

Non-sacramental views include (1) the *memorialist* view (Zwingli, Anabaptists) that the elements are only symbolic of the risen Christ (theology of absence), but the Spirit joins worshipers with Christ who is in heaven; this view downplays the importance of the Eucharist; and (2) *transsignification*, in which communication through signs, words, and gestures, can contain presence, so that there is a changed significance; that is, bread and wine mean one thing, and when words are said, it changes the meaning. This was rejected by Vatican II because it was temporary, and sounded too Protestant. Calvin tried to negotiate between Luther and Zwingli. He affirmed that Christ is at God’s right hand in heaven and cannot be limited in the elements at so many churches; it is the Holy Spirit that mediates Christ’s presence in the elements.

Difficulty in understanding many of Jesus’ words comes whenever we think in referential language instead of relational language. Referential language, we have noted above, is associated with the left hemisphere of the brain, which generally seeks certainty by making generalizations from fragments of narrowed-down knowledge and information. This is in opposition to the right brain hemisphere that focuses on the whole, of relationships in a whole, and thus expresses itself in relational language. The debates over Christ’s literal presence in bread and wine have taken place largely in the sphere of left brain function, it seems to me, for certainty in the “face” of Jesus’ otherwise bewildering statements taken out of the context of Face-to-face relationship. Reader, think relationally as you reflect on Jesus’ words of institution together with his words in John 6 (“eat my flesh,” “drink my blood”), and listen to his deep relational messages.

Is water baptism a requirement for partaking in Communion?

My husband and I were shocked to hear this contingency made at the beginning of Communion in church because the New Testament makes no such requirement, and we do not recall ever having heard this said in any of the evangelical churches either of us have attended. The obvious problem arises from the difference between seeing baptism through the lens of the primacy of relationship, or in referential terms, giving primacy to the act of water baptism. Ancient post-biblical church orders place baptism chronologically before participation in the Eucharist for new believers.²⁸ Some of the earliest churches apparently made baptism requisite for participation in the Eucharist, as

²⁷ Books upon books have been written about every aspect of Communion one can think of, but none receives more attention than the question of whether Jesus is or is not present in the elements. For a glimpse of major controversies, see James F. White’s survey of the eucharistic practices and meanings in European and American Protestant churches from the Reformation forward, in James F. White, *The Sacraments in Protestant Practice and Faith* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 73-118.

²⁸ For a survey of these post-biblical church orders, the so-called *Apostolic Tradition, the Apostolic Constitutions, the Canon of Hippolytus, Testamentum Domini*, see “The Apostolic Tradition” by Maxwell E. Johnson in *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*, Geoffrey Wainwright and Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 32-75.

noted in the earliest known church order, the *Didache*:

(And) let no one eat or drink from your eucharist except those baptized in the name of [the] Lord, for the Lord has likewise said concerning this: “Do not give what is holy to the dogs.”²⁹

Yet, the NT references to baptism stand distinguished from the ancient church orders in two ways. First, the NT contains no prescriptions for baptism either as requisite to participate in the Eucharist, or how to perform baptism other than Jesus’ focus on the relationship, to baptize “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28:19). Sadly, however, these words have since been reduced to “a baptismal formula” or “trinitarian baptismal formula” in referential language, having lost the depth and weight of Jesus’ relational language. Second, the NT accounts do not provide any normative patterns (e.g. prebaptismal preparations, alternatives for the water depending on availability).³⁰ In qualitative contrast, what we receive from the Gospels and Acts are narratives of relational dynamics in which baptism takes place, and Paul’s letters provide us with theological understanding of baptism. Except for baptism by John the Baptist “for repentance” (Mt 3:11; Acts 18:25; 19:4), most NT accounts tell of water baptism and baptism with the Spirit taking place together as persons responded to Jesus, which implied their repentance from (turning from, dying to) sin (Mt 3:11; Mk 1:4; Jn 3:5; Acts 1:5; 2:38; 9:17-18). The NT accounts focus on persons’ relational response of trusting in Jesus (believed in him), and baptism is only in this relational process. Some examples are: While Cornelius’ family and friends were listening to Peter’s message about Jesus Christ, the “Holy Spirit fell on all who heard,” and they were baptized (Acts 10:45-47); the Lord opened Lydia’s heart to respond to Paul’s message, and “she and her household were baptized” (Acts 16:14-15); a synagogue ruler, Crispus, “together with all his household,” and many other Corinthians “became believers and were baptized” (18:8).

Baptism with water and the Spirit are inseparable in relational language (the former enabled by the Spirit in relational work). Their relational significance was deeply experienced and given theological expression by Paul (Rom 6:3-4; Col 2:12; Ti 3:5) who wrote of the Spirit’s presence “living in” believers for reciprocal relational function, “because all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God” (Rom 8:14-15), and the Spirit interacts with our inner being (spirit) to intimately call out to God as “Abba,” (v.15), and the Spirit’s essential function for the corporate body of believers to function together in the relationships together that constitute the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12-13). The Spirit’s involvement is necessary for this process of conviction and dying to the old

²⁹ The *Didache* was an anonymous document—dated by scholars between the mid-first century to the early second century—that has preserved an oral tradition circulating among of some churches for instructing and nurturing new believers. See Aaron Milavec, *The Didache: Text, Translation, Analysis, and Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), ix, 23. If the *Didache*’s linkage of baptism and participation in the Eucharist was perceived in referential language, this would demonstrate the subtle influence of reductionism that understood baptism (and hence possibly the Eucharist also) in outer-in terms—with negative consequences. At best, it would have confused persons, and at worst it formulated a “different gospel” such as Paul warned against (Gal 1:6-7).

³⁰ In fact, we simply do not know with certainty if the well-studied early church orders are prescriptive, descriptive, or merely wishful thinking. See Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1-20.

and the conjoint action of being raised up in reciprocal relationship with the Spirit.

Apart from this whole relational understanding, water baptism becomes an outer-in action that is assumed to be efficacious of an inner-out change evident in practices such as in infant baptism, which overlooks the necessity of the person's reciprocal relational response to God's response, or any insistence on *how* the baptizand gets wet—total immersion, pouring, or sprinkling. That is a wrong assumption from a theological anthropology that functions from outer in. Jesus refutes such practice of the Pharisees and teachers of the law: “You clean the outside of the cup and the plate.... First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, so that the outside also may become clean” (Mt 23:25-26). Peter, showing his own transformation, also refutes an outer-in view of baptism for the inner-out change when he wrote about the flood in Noah's time: “and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the response of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 3:21, NIV). Peter's words here echo his own previous outer-in focus when Jesus washed his feet (“not my feet only but also my hands and my head!” (Jn 13:9), the old quantitative focus from which Peter apparently finally shifted by the time he wrote his first letter.

Apparently baptism in the Corinthian church had become perceived wrongly, separated from the Spirit's function for relationships as God's equalized people. In his first letter to the church at Corinth, which was being fragmented by reductionism (1 Cor 1:10-31), Paul vehemently decried their reductionism evidenced in their view of baptism (v.13-17). Significant to this discussion also is the fact that Paul's letters, where baptism is mentioned, wrote of baptism in relational language of persons' redemptive relationship with Christ (Gal 3:26-7; Rom 6:3; Col 2:12). He clearly wanted his readers to focus on baptism from the inner out, not as an outer-in end in itself (“so that none of you can say that you were baptized in my name,” 1 Cor 1:15).

Paul was engaged in an ongoing and conjoint fight against reductionism and for wholeness. The Corinthians reduction of baptism to an outer-in ritual is precisely parallel to Judaism's difficulty with circumcision. God had instituted circumcision with Abraham (Gen 17:10) as a “sign of the covenant” between them; this sign continued throughout Israel's history into NT Judaism (Second Temple) as well. Genital circumcision was only a secondary sign of the primacy of persons' heart 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 draws the distinction between outer-in and inner-out circumcision (see Rom 2:28-29), and relativizes 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 restates what is primary to God—“neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything”—in whom he boasts as one transformed, a “new creation” and made whole (6:15-16).

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

person's heart and relational involvement with God, neither do being baptized with water or not baptized with water determine a person's heart and relationship with God. Water baptism should never be a requirement for participation in Communion, but a new heart should be required; and that may preclude some who have been water baptized. God knows the heart.³¹

Noteworthy for a theology of *worship* is what Scripture *does* include (the primary) and what it is silent about (the secondary or unimportant). The fact is that the NT says so little about secondary aspects about baptism, the eucharist, and worship. Primacy is given in the NT to the relational significance to God, and relationships together in wholeness. This fact alone challenges us for making the secondary matter primary, which stems from defining our person by outer-in secondary criteria of what we do or have. Our theological anthropology keeps emerging in its determining influence to get us out of tune.

Triumph of the secondary and substitutes

Imagine the effect on persons' hearts to celebrate Communion at a meal with others sitting at table together, face-to-face-Face with God through the Spirit's relational work, and enjoying the intimate fellowship in well-being and wholeness (peace). This seems to have been the experience for some during Jesus' time, perhaps during Paul's time as well. Then consider the two common practices today. In one type of church, once a month servers pass of trays through the pews and worshipers taking a bit of pre-fractured bread or cracker and a little cup of juice. Or consider another type of church in which the weekly Eucharist is (rightly) the center of worship; the liturgy consists largely of set prayers ensuring expression of right belief, a clearly defined *ordo*, and deliberateness of gesture demonstrating the sacredness of the time. Persons come up to the servers to receive the elements. Both these practices are done with minimal relational connection among worshipers, verbal or nonverbal except for a rare smile or nod. However these patterns have come down to us, and for whatever reasons, we have replaced Jesus' table fellowship with something of our own shaping. Our current pattern is likely justified by efficiency of time and logistics. I am not proposing a sit-down meal ('what to do'), but questioning the triumph of a secondary matter—efficiency (a corollary of 'what to do'), or doctrinal correctness (constructing certainty for 'what we have').

As long as we approach Communion giving primacy to secondary aspects of what to do, this opens a dangerous door. Wherever, whenever, and however form and style prevail over qualitative content and substance, the relational grace of Communion to define us has been replaced by self-determination as the basis and source for our ongoing ontology and function. The consequence, a relational consequence, has far-reaching implications and influences throughout church life and practice. It cannot be stated strongly enough.

³¹ As a side note, a thought-provoking theory by Martin Connell suggests that early Johannine communities practiced an alternative to baptism—footwashing, “hence the possibility emerges that many of the ceremonies that came to be attached to baptism as additional or supplementary rites of initiation (e.g., handlaying, anointing, foot washing) once constituted complete rites, perhaps even without the water bath, in some early communities.” Martin Connell, “*Nisi Pedes*, Except for the Feet: Footwashing in the Community of John's Gospel,” *Worship* 70 (1996), 20-30, quoted in *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*, 37.

To give further understanding to the consequences of the primacy of the secondary, in which *we* define and determine our ontological identity and function, this is the issue underlying three persistent areas of at least some tension: “worship wars,” multicultural worship (contextualization), and racial-ethnic separation, all of which fragment God’s new creation family.

To whatever extent the so-called worship wars continue, and whatever compromises have been made, they shape God’s family on our terms. The gaps in music preferences and dividing lines between generations of worshipers characterize the conflicts, driven by personal preference, comfort zones, sense of entitlement, and other self-concerns. Lacking is sensitivity to and responsiveness to others who are different from ourselves. For example, in a multigenerational corporate worship, the younger generations want the music volume amped up (they are the ones controlling the audio-visual technology), but this physically bothers older persons, some of whom wear hearing aids. In this case, deference to the latter is called for out of compassion, not to mention that high decibel levels harm everyone’s hearing over time.

On the other hand, there is a musical snobbery expressed by persons with classical music training toward the “lesser” quality of contemporary music, in a distinctly outer-in focus on form over relational clarity and significance. It is so sad that church leadership, and by implication seminary preparation, has failed to provide the nurturing, wisdom and guidance necessary to get back to the “first love” we have forsaken (Rev 2:2-4). There is a failure of vision of what is primary to God, lack of leadership in boldness and trust to make Jesus’ priorities more important than our shaping. Still, we must not approach this from outer in as ‘what to do’, which would only perpetuate the usual way we function from outer in, not to mention reinforce a reduced theological anthropology.

This caveat extends to emerging churches, the new monasticism, new house churches—and any other recent church alternatives, particularly by younger, enthusiastic, serious Christians seeking deeper and more qualitative ways to live out their commitment to Christ. Too often, however, their experimentation remains only about outward forms (*metaschematizō*), however creative they may be. The novelty or sensory experience can easily be mistaken for relational depth. Some of these younger “movements” have also been criticized for reinforcing the ‘homogeneous unit principle’ of reaching out to persons from the same demographic groups as themselves. Paul’s admonition to the wealthier Christians at Corinth who stuffed themselves at the Lord’s Supper to the exclusion of others (1 Cor 11:35), leads into his momentous statement for family love (1 Cor 13). Functioning in family love could mean we still end up with multiple services, yet if love is prevailing, then that is what is primary. As Paul writes, “The only thing that counts is faith working through love” (Gal 5:6). And as involvement deepens in the primacy of relationship, the new family of God has opportunity to emerge (Gal 6:15).

As churches in the US have been undergoing demographic changes from globalization and immigration in recent decades, church and worship leaders address multicultural contextualization issues in various ways and to varying degrees. Multicultural forms for the liturgy are sometimes incorporated with sincere intentions, for example, substituting the bread with rice, tortillas, or fry bread. Songs in different languages are included in the music set to reflect the diverse church membership. Merely incorporating these symbols of others’ cultures without relational involvement with each other, however, is to remain at a shallow level, and can be patronizing—though

unintentional—all reflecting the inadequacy, even harm, of an outer-in approach. The forms in themselves become secondary substitutes for the primacy of qualitative relational involvement of family love with persons of racial and ethnic groups different from the dominant group.³²

This discussion further applies to all other human differences—e.g. generational, gender, race, class, disability and the like. Having grown up as a minority female in the US, I am aware of feeling marginalized in the prevailing white sociocultural context of this country. Yet, I have come to the conviction that churches that identify themselves on the basis of race are functioning from an outer-in anthropology at the expense of God’s relational response of grace to redefine us from inner out. Their separation, as with any homogeneous unit, may find success in constructing a church organization or even community, but the implied relational barriers and underlying relational distance cannot build up God’s family of relationship together in wholeness. The outer-in lens is also functioning when a church intentionally tries to be multicultural (e.g. “we need to be multicultural”), which is different from being open to and extending family love to anyone, without regard to outer-in criteria. Greater failure has no church leadership—and the Christian academy that produces theologians and church leaders—than this, that as a whole, churches in the US define themselves from outer in, and this from self-determination for self-justification.

Church leaders and the Christian academy engage in secondary (even tertiary) pursuits even while we fail to listen to Jesus’ relational language to receive his person on whole relational terms and not fragmentary referential terms, and thus to be equalized in Christ who redefines us from inner out. Functionally, I suggest, the church in the US does not live out and therefore cannot witness to the gospel of wholeness, the good news embodied by Jesus in wholeness. Thus our church life, ministries and evangelistic missions take place primarily from outer in, in a sense disembodied though we be physically present and extremely active. The presence of much activity, a high reputation, and purity of doctrine do not suffice for Jesus to identify a church as his own. For example, in his post-ascension words in the Book of Revelation, he told the dedicated and persevering church at Ephesus that, in spite of all their church work, they had forsaken God’s primacy of relationship (“your first love,” Rev 2:4 NIV); and, “If you do not repent [and return to your first love], I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place” (v.5). The lampstand signified status as his church, so to remove it is Jesus’ relational language to indicate the church was essentially no longer his. Jesus’ post-ascension words to the seven churches admonish whatever life and practice they engaged in apart from his whole terms for what is primary (see Rev 1:20-3:22).³³ And we cannot ignore the application of his critique to churches today.

I do not know if it is still true that the 11 o’clock hour Sunday mornings is the most segregated time in the country, yet our corporate worship—with our unrecognizable Communion—surely grieves the person of the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:30; Isa 63:10), and

³² I have witnessed at a predominantly white seminary a strange recurring dynamic in its weekly chapel time. Any time the chapel is led by Latinos or Blacks, either as speakers or musicians, those gathered at chapel give them a standing ovation. Yet, with some exceptions, of course, this campus remains socially racially segregated in spite of its reputation as a multicultural school. Thus I find the enthusiastic applause at chapel to be patronizing.

³³ For a discussion of Jesus’ words to these churches, see T. Dave Matsuo, *The Person, the Trinity, the Church*, ch.5, section “Incompatibility of Church Practice.”

quenches the Spirit's relational involvement in reciprocal relationship to build us up as God's daughters and sons in family together ("Do not quench the Spirit," 1 Thes 5:19). As Jesus continues to call, "Follow me," he expects a relational response that necessitates listening to his relational language and transposing to thinking relationally (perceptual-interpretive framework and lens, *phronēma* and *phroneō*, respectively) and to make relationship primary also. Our vocation is this relational work of being Jesus' disciples; it takes "in spirit and truth," the vulnerability of our whole person from inner out in relational involvement face to Face with the whole of God—no veil allowed. Thankfully, Jesus has not left us on our own as relational orphans, but has provided the Spirit to be present as his relational replacement for this reciprocal relational work together, as Paul made unmistakable (2 Cor 3:16-18).

The following paradigm is offered here to help worship planners put and keep the primary primary. While trying to contextualize worship for their worship contexts, we need to keep first things first, treating all worshipers as whole persons from inner out and still be sensitive to all our human diversity:

If worship expression is a social construction (of that particular context) without *relational clarity*, then that form, style, mode of worship is merely a *product of culture* rather than *the relational outcome* of those unique persons in relational involvement and response to God in the primacy of relationship together.

Whereas form, style, mode of worship should have *cultural relativity* and thus be culturally-specific, the *absolute necessity* of all worship is two-fold based on Jesus' critique (Mt 15:8-9): (1) it has to have relational clarity to be relationally-specific to God, not referentially-specific about God; and (2) it has to be "in spirit and truth" to have the relational involvement of persons from inner out, and thus be relationally significant to God.

The new creation family that Jesus began at his table fellowship is focused on transformation from the inner out (*metamorphōō*), and on whole theological anthropology, in contrast and conflict with change only from outer in (*metaschematizō*) and a reduced theological anthropology. The important process of change involving transformation is the matter of becoming holy, sanctified (theologically, "sanctification," *hagiazmos*), that some raised as a purity issue in the context above at Jesus' table fellowship about his disciples. "They do not wash their hands before they eat" (Mt 15:2). To be holy (*hagios*) signifies being different from what is ordinary or common, that is, to be essentially uncommon from what prevails in order to be compatible with God. Here Jesus distinguishes between the common focus of purity from outer in, and the uncommon understanding from inner out (15:10-11), and the critical implication for the person and its consequence for relationships (15:17-20). Change merely from outer in is ordinary and common, compatible and even congruent with what prevails. To be transformed and thus sanctified is to be changed from inner out and, therefore, to be uncommon from what prevails, and even incompatible and incongruent with what commonly exists or with the common way to do things. This raises the question about our worship: Is it common worship or uncommon worship?

The church today is faced with whether it is involved in the uncommon process of transformation and functions in sanctification for uncommon worship with no veil, or

whether it is engaged in common processes for ontological simulations of outer-in changes for common worship. We now turn to address this matter.

Transforming Communion to Transform Worshipers

In the Western church, theologians, pastors, worship leaders, and probably congregants expect that participating in worship transforms persons (sanctification). Along with studying the Bible and prayer, the track for new believers is to attend worship services. Some churches push new members to immediately get involved in ministries. This transformation hope is expressed through a variety of lenses: (1) the discipleship lens: worship forms us as Jesus' disciples; (2) the spirituality lens: worship is a spiritual discipline that brings us closer to God; (3) the social science lens: involvement in the relationships as a community of God provides a new identity and life narrative; (4) the neuroscience lens: regular involvement in worship and church life (within a nest of relationships) develops new patterns of neural mapping informing our thinking and behaviors.³⁴ Participating in the Lord's Supper is singled out for its efficaciousness to bring forth transformation of hearts. There are meaningful hopes and intentions involved here, but does anyone thoughtfully wonder how this change takes place by virtue of eating bread and drinking juice that has been prayed over?

The manner in which we celebrate Communion today is challenged by Jesus' table fellowship, both its plan and persons' participation in it. I have no doubts that the practice of Communion *as* Jesus' intimate table fellowship would make many Christians uncomfortable; we prefer our own shaping of Communion. Like many Pharisees Jesus exposed, we prefer comfortable conformity to the traditions of our elders (or even those younger) that provide proven boundaries. Like Peter, we prefer to keep Jesus in his role and on a pedestal so that we can maintain our own control in relational distance. Like Martha, we allow our own embeddedness in cultural constraints by fulfilling expected roles and serving in the secondary. Letting Jesus wash our feet signifies our openness to his person and thus to change in order to remove these 'veils'.

The implication of reducing Communion to less than Jesus' table fellowship as the new creation family is the relational consequence of remaining as relational orphans, perhaps in the same room, but relationally distant—the contrast between an orphanage and a family. A common expression of our own shaping is to dismiss our adoption as mere metaphor or consign adoption to the 'not yet.' We have done that by the shift from Communion's relational language to referential language, from inner out to outer in, from involvement of our whole person (nothing less and no substitutes) to spiritual (read disembodied) therapy.

This issue brings us back to the first assumption noted in the beginning of this study that we must challenge, that is, our theological anthropology. Our theological anthropology determines how we understand transformation—from outer in or inner out, as noted in the discussion above about the two perspectives on baptism and circumcision. The areas of growth mentioned above cannot be approached from outer in

³⁴ Joel B. Green, lecture Jan 17, 2008. Joel Green stresses the formative influence of social relationships for embodied (trans)formation of new believers, which distinguishes him from neuroscientists' tendency to study only individuals.

(*metaschematizō*), but only from inner out (*metamorphoō*), as the following further explains:

In order to compensate for the absence of inner substance, what is displayed outwardly must simulate that substance as close as possible. This process of [ontological] simulation is what the Bible calls “**masquerade**” (Gk. *metaschematizō*, to take on or change the outward form or appearance without the inner change).³⁵

We can appear holy (e.g. by “washing our hands,” as noted above), but that does not make us sanctified, as Paul exposed in the church (2 Cor 11:13-15). The transformation that Jesus speaks of is redemptive change from inner out, from reductionism to wholeness in whole relationship with him. According to Jesus, to grow in relationship with God means that we must be “born from above” (Jn 3:3), which involves knowing him, the Truth, to “set you free” (Jn 8:32) in order to be redefined in relationship with God on his relational terms of grace (8:34-36), and further engaged in the reciprocal relational work with the Spirit (Jn 15:26-27). As discussed earlier in this study, this change must start with our perceptual-interpretive framework and how we define our own person, which was the change Nicodemus needed to understand about being “born again” (Jn 3:4,9-10). This is ongoing rigorous relational work of sanctification.

Paul wrote definitively of the need to change from inner out (*metamorphoō*, Rom 12:2; 2 Cor 3:18). Outer-in change of *metaschematizō* may be indistinguishable from inner-out of *metamorphoō*, since, as Paul warns, “Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light” (2 Cor 11:14 NIV) and his servants also “masquerade as servants of righteousness” (v.15); yet *metaschematizō* is only ontological simulation. For *metamorphoō* to take place, the “old” (all symptoms of self-determination in our relationship with God) must die so that we can be raised up ‘born from above’ as ‘new creation’ defined by grace from inner out (2 Cor 5:12,16-17; Rom 6:1-14). This process of sanctification is engaged in reciprocal relationship with the Spirit (Rom 15:16) and must include transforming our perceptual-interpretive framework (*phronēma*) and lens (*phroneō*, Rom 8:5-6).

As noted above, the Greek word for “sanctify” is *hagiazō* (“to make or treat as holy”) and denotes setting apart from common usage for divine, or uncommon, usage. The following two excerpts summarize sanctification and its functional significance:

We must be aware of not reducing the theology of sanctification to a static attribute by which to categorize a person in a condition or identity as “holy”....The process of a person or some aspect of that person being sanctified implies undergoing a significant change. What this change involves directs us to the purpose of Jesus’ sanctified life and practice; and the significance of his purpose always directs us to relationship—first and foremost with the whole of God, then with the whole of each other together as the church and the new creation, and then with the whole of all creation.³⁶

³⁵ T. Dave Matsuo examines further the difference between *metamorphoō* (inner-out change) and *metaschematizō* (outer-in change) in *The Relational Progression: A Relational Theology of Discipleship*, ch.11, section “Reductionist Alternatives.”

³⁶ T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology*, Intro, section “The Purpose of This Study.”

When Jesus said in his formative family prayer “I sanctify myself” (Jn 17:19), this was not about sanctifying his ontology but about sanctifying his identity to function clearly in the whole of his ontology. Since Jesus’ ontology was always holy (*hagios*), this was mainly in order that his followers’ ontology and identity may be sanctified (*hagiazō*) in the truth of his full identity (as Jesus prayed). Moreover, since Jesus’ embodied identity did not function in a vacuum, it is vital to grasp his sanctified identity for the experiential truth of our identity to be in his likeness and our ontology to be in the image of the whole of God (as Jesus further prayed).³⁷

Just as Jesus challenged some Pharisees and the priority they gave to “the tradition of the elders” over God’s priorities (Mt 15:1-9; Mk 7:1-9), so also does he challenge our traditions; they are not sacrosanct. Whose traditions are these? Corporate liturgy in the churches in the West today come to us from long histories of traditions—Roman Catholic, Reformed, Free Church, Pentecostal, and, increasingly, Eastern Orthodox. If we embrace that primacy of relationship is God’s design and purpose, it behooves us to ask these questions: Are the various rituals and sacraments of worship and practices of piety primarily about relational involvement with God engaged with nothing less and no substitutes for our whole person from inner out—or substitute traditions and “rules taught by men” in referential terms, performed from outer in? What lens (*phroneō*) are we using? What are persons transformed from and transformed to (saved from and to)? If worship transforms persons, how does that happen? What does transformation look like?³⁸

During his long discourse at the last meal, as he prepared his disciples for his departure, Jesus made definitive what would distinguish his disciples, their relational involvement of family love with each other, the same love Jesus receives from the Father and that he shared with them (Jn 13:34-35; 15:9-17). “Just as I have loved you, so you also should love one another. By this everyone will know you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” In contrast and conflict with reducing Jesus’ relational words to referential information about what to do, this same relational involvement—nothing less and no substitutes—is the same relational involvement of those worshipers who worship in spirit and truth. And this all integrally involves (1) the person we present, (2) the integrity and content of our communication, and (3) the depth of relational involvement we engage with others—the three critical issues for all our practice that indicate whether we are changing from the inside out, or not. Based on his table fellowship, Jesus holds us accountable for how we are engaged with each other in our church, giving our church family relationships priority over other ones, most notably composed and enacted by our relational involvement in Communion for uncommon worship.

If we Christians were really honest with ourselves, I think most of us would have to admit we do not often experience heart-to-heart involvement in face-to-face relationship with God and each other. It could be that we are hard workers, rigorous

³⁷ T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology*, ch.5, section “Jesus’ Sanctified Identity.”

³⁸ These questions are not mere academic exercises for me. From my college years forward when I was convinced of the need to change from deep within, such issues have been driving my discipleship for many years. I have written about my personal journey with Christ in an essay “My Ongoing Journey to Wholeness in Christ” (Wholeness Essay). Online: <http://4X12.org>.

servants, excellent worship leaders and musicians. Perhaps we have even exhibited new and different behaviors, but deep inside something is missing, notably evidenced in the limits of our relationships with God and each other among his people. If this is a present reality in our churches—and I believe it exists more than is acknowledged—then we can only conclude that mere participation in the liturgy as we know it does not in fact transform persons; behaviors may change, but not the person. Simply put, redemptive change can not take place in narrowed-down terms at the referential level from outer in by virtue of participating in liturgy.

If we are not engaged in relationship with God on his whole terms of grace, then it makes no difference whether we maintain or change our worship traditions and habits. We cannot make our worship practices whole if we do not function from wholeness ourselves. Only common worship can emerge from our common function. For us to grow individually and corporately, we need to undergo redemptive change intentionally as a relational matter, and none of us is exempt! The process of *metamorphoō* is solely a relational process, because it involves our relationship with God and on whose terms we engage with him. We need to first acknowledge, reject and repent of the *old* (primarily the dynamic of self-determination and defining ourselves from the outer in criteria of what we do or have) in order to be freed to embrace the *new* of being redefined from inner out by grace; in relational terms, we need to let Jesus wash our feet and equalize us through his intimate involvement at our core. This process of redemptive change can only be a relational one that we do not engage in alone—alone we are inadequate. The Spirit dwells in us for the cooperative relational work necessary to be transformed (2 Cor 3:17-18). It is a lifelong relational process of participating in God's very life.

These redemptive changes entail major shifts of transposing from referential to relational language, from the prevalence of the secondary to the primacy of relationship, and from outer-in substitutes of what to do to the inner-out depth of involvement of our person, nothing less and no substitutes. In Jesus' family language, it is the shift from being functional slaves and relational orphans to adoption into family (daughters and sons) as full heirs with Christ (Jn 8:34-35; cf. Rom 8:14-17,29; Gal 4:6-7). Nothing less than redemptive change, therefore, is called for in our traditional and routine practices of Communion; otherwise, our participation in and our experience of worship remain contextualized in the common, even while bearing the adjective sacred.

Even after Jesus' resurrection, Peter still needed to be fully redeemed from the old of defining himself by what he did/had and paying attention to the secondary, as we see in his last recorded interaction with Jesus (Jn 21:15-22). Yet, Jesus' last words to Peter continue to focus Peter on the primacy of relationship, directly communicating twice, "Follow me!" (vv.19, 22). Peter's life has helped me to identify for myself deeper issues I have needed to address. In the past I have made excuses for Peter, but it was really to excuse myself. For worship thinkers, planners and leaders, we must be chastened by the fact that Peter's offer to build tents at the transfiguration was about *what to do*, and went disregarded by God (Mk 9:5-6). Undoubtedly we have our own versions of worship tents, focusing also on *what to do*, and falling back onto default modes (tradition), or on the way we have always done things, from our sociocultural context, possibly from personal preference and even fear of failure (a self-concern from outer in).

Historically we have approached Jesus' table using referential language, so that we treat the LORD's Supper as a tradition about what to do, a theological position to

define a doctrinal identity, or a sacramental mystery. The extensive theologizing in referential language to explain Jesus' presence or absence at his Table, to describe whether the bread and wine are really Jesus' body and blood, is finally put to rest with the shift to listen to Jesus' relational language focused on the whole of God behind the veil. The sacrifice and its elements are secondary to the persons involved in this dynamic. Referential language has resulted in essentially ignoring or denying the Spirit's presence and involvement within us for reciprocal relationship, as Jesus promised (Jn 14:15-21, 23-27): "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth." Our reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit is the same as with Jesus:

The term "another" (*allos*) means another of equal quality, not another of different quality (*heteros*). The Spirit then is defined by the Son as of the same qualitative substance and as equal to himself, that is, as whole person in full personhood; this is *who* replaces [the Son]. The Spirit's person as truth needs to be understood in function as the Son's relational replacement whom the Father gave as "another" in lieu of the Son; Paul later described them in a relational sense as interchangeable (2 Cor 3:17-18).³⁹

To "do this in remembrance" of Jesus is not to merely recall what he did on the cross as a past event (*anamnesis*, even for its theological relevance for us today), but to relationally receive his person present in the Spirit who went behind the veil to remove its relational barrier. Therefore, we can openly celebrate this relational reality and experiential truth by involving ourselves in his sacrifice *with* him, thanking him for his relational response of grace that removed the relational barrier to reconcile us to himself as his own family, and ongoingly enables us to grow further and deeper together with God as his adopted beloved daughters and sons, and with each other as sisters and brothers in reciprocal relationship together. To remain relationally distant (stay in front of the veil) sends hurtful relational messages to God; as the writer of Hebrews bluntly puts it: "How much more worse punishment do you think will be deserved by those who have spurned the Son of God, profaned the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace?" (Heb 10:29). It is a joy to relationally take our place as daughters and sons in the new creation family that was ordained since before creation (Rom 8:29; Eph 1:4-14), inaugurated and embodied by Jesus, nothing less and no substitutes, and for which the Spirit is present to bring to completion. To have Communion like this would be to finally make the primary primary—indeed, to transpose the uncommon, that in common has been played off-key, into the uncommon key of Jesus.

It is a profound and stirring mystery (not hidden, yet not fully known) that we can partake together in the whole of God as his family, and with all of God's people past, present and future. Relational language enables us to embrace our place in the life (*zōē*) of God, just as Jesus disclosed about eternal life in only relational language when he said in his formative family prayer, "And this is eternal life (*zōē*), that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (Jn 17:3). *Zōē* is this depth and quality in God's relational context and process, distinguished from the quantitative

³⁹ T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology*, ch.9, section "Integral Pneumatology: the Forgotten Person."

criteria of *bios* (the daily aspects of living). God's *zōē* is not bound by linear time (*chronos*), but exists in God's time of opportunity (*kairos*). It impoverishes the Lord's Table to participate in it as an individual and private time only to repent and receive forgiveness because it is a corporate relational affirmation and giving thanks (the meaning of verb *eucharisteō*) to the whole of God for his work of family love in response to our relational condition apart, and the celebration and enjoyment of who we are and whose we are with Christ in the primacy of relationship together in wholeness. If we have responded to his call to follow him in relationship together, we are expected by God to function with openness and vulnerability—nothing less and no substitutes—those who worship in spirit and truth.⁴⁰ When we have experienced God's grace and forgiveness, we have been loved by God, and have experienced heart-to-heart connection of relational intimacy with God's heart, the only experience that can make us whole from inner out to become those who worship the Father in spirit and truth. And this is *what* the new song is and *how* we sing it to the LORD with the Spirit.

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

*'The Spirit lives with you'
'We make our home with you'
dwelling whole as family
"Abba Father, Abba Father!"⁴¹*

Chorus:

'Singing' a new song to the LORD: Jesus is the key for 'singing' in tune from inner out the new song he composes for his family in the primacy of whole relationships together at table fellowship in the new sanctuary. Jesus' table fellowship embodies intimate and equalized relationships in his family love. By washing our feet he redefines us by his relational response of grace, from inner out, in intimate relational connection he makes with us as family, not as teacher, master, or Messiah. This is the full relational significance of his last supper with his brothers ("my brothers," cf. Mt 28:10) that needs to redefine how we practice Communion today—as his new creation family behind the curtain, who emerge in the primacy of relationship together in wholeness without the

⁴⁰ Just as true worshipers worship the Father from the inner out (in spirit and truth), on the corporate level as church family our service to God in the world must also be from inner out. That is, when our relationships together function in wholeness (equalized and intimately involved in family love to build each other up), this is the light we are able to extend to the world around us. Anything else functions from outer in (unknowingly and inadvertently), and lacks the relational substance in likeness of the Trinity's relational ontology. This study does not explore those areas of corporate life, but I acknowledge that they are integral aspects of church life. Please see the discussion of the church's life within itself and in its involvement into the world in *The Person, the Trinity, the Church*, chs.7-8.

⁴¹ "The Spirit of the Word" ©2011 T. Dave Matsuo and Kary A. Kambara

veil. This is the necessary transformation that composes both *what* the new song is and *how* the new song is sung—nothing less and no substitutes! Uncommon whole persons together in uncommon worship of the uncommon and whole God!

Verse 4 ‘Singing’ a New Song in Relational Language

*Sing joyfully to the LORD, you righteous;
it is fitting for the upright to praise him.
Praise the LORD with the harp;
make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre.
Sing to him a new song.*

Psalm 33:1-3 NIV

I imagine most Christians today believe that music is a necessary feature of corporate worship, and could not fathom a worship service without music—Christians from high liturgical church traditions to the simplest gathering, from community gatherings to private devotion. Worshiping God through music is axiomatic, universal and cosmological. The ancient Hebrew poets call forth cosmological worship in music: “Sing to the LORD, all the earth....Let the heavens be glad...let the sea roar...let the fields exult....all the trees of the forest sing for joy” (Ps 96:1,11-12). In the New Testament, Paul makes imperative for the young churches to be engaged in relational work with God and together, the alternative to being defined by their surrounding human contexts:

...but be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times (Eph 5:18-19).

“The Christian church was born in song,” says one writer.¹ The links between music and religion have existed from ancient times. What is it about music that we embrace it so automatically? And, with an eye on the opening verses of Psalm 33 above, what does it mean to “‘sing’ a new song”? A sufficient response to these questions by necessity takes us beyond worship back to creation and our theological anthropology.

There are two important issues about music that are important to distinguish since music is an integral aspect of worship: music’s qualitative nature and music’s unique function for relational communication from inner out, with or without words. They are not one and the same, though inseparable. A problem occurs from confusing them, however, and especially by mistaking the former for the latter. These two keys of music are inseparable because their composition emerges from the human person created in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole God. Without this whole understanding of theological anthropology, the human person, relationship with God, worship, music and singing all become reduced to secondary aspects which fragment their wholeness.

When singing is not fragmented to the secondary, we are not talking about merely singing. ‘Singing’ signifies the whole of life and involves all the relational dynamics of

¹ Ralph Martin, *Worship in the Early Church*, rev. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1975), quoted in Edward Foley, *From Age to Age: How Christians have Celebrated the Eucharist* (Chicago: Liturgical Training Publications, 1991), 9.

life in its wholeness. Though the immediate focus of this study is worship, this necessarily involves the primary focus on the whole of our relationship with God and thus on relationship together in wholeness. When worship is not fragmented to the secondary, we cannot discuss worship in its wholeness apart from relationship with God. It is indispensable to understand in any discussion on worship this definition:

Worship is the integrating focus and the integral relational convergence of our (both individual and corporate) reciprocal relational response and vulnerable involvement in relationship together with the whole of God.

Therefore, this Verse addresses ‘singing’ in its wholeness. This wholeness is addressed in the following working understanding:

‘Singing’ is the integral relational dynamic of life in the tune of the new song composed in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God; and worship is the chorus of this new song of life in wholeness.

The following parts of music and singing are discussed and must be understood in this wholeness.

Music’s Qualitative Nature and Unique Relational Function

Music has a *qualitative nature* evident in its universal ability to stir and attach to the core of our identity. Rare is the person who does not have favorite music, or specific music associated with particular times in their lives. Music’s profound influence on persons is well-documented. “It lies so deep in human nature that one is tempted to think of it as innate.”² Unlike any other form of art—poetry or visual arts—that qualitative nature of music touches our innermost being, the “eternity” that God has planted in the human heart (Ecc 3:11), which my husband Dave refers to as “eternity substance,” that qualitative substance which God created in us to be connected with the whole of his creation and relational purpose in human history:

In God’s big picture plan, all the parts of it are wonderfully put together into this perfect *whole*. Though humans can’t fully take in or imagine this *whole*, we can experience and enjoy the beauty of some of its parts. We can because God has made us with the substance of this *whole* in us; he implanted his eternity-substance in our heart. So, though our mind can’t comprehend or imagine his big picture plan, our heart has definite understanding of it.³

Eternity substance is that deep longing for connection with the transcendent, for the presence of Other, that longing of hunger and thirst for wholeness, to which Augustine’s beloved words speak: “You made us for yourself, and our hearts find no

² Oliver Sachs, *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain*, rev. (New York: Vintage Books, 2008), x.

³ T. Dave Matsuo, *Following Jesus, Knowing Christ: Engaging the Intimate Relational Process* (Spirituality Study). Online: <http://www.4X12.org>, ch.3, section “Eternity Substance.”

peace until they rest in you.”⁴ Music touches here and stimulates expectation and hope. Very often it is first the music that touches persons’ hearts, and attracts them to church or other group of Christians, and then to Christ. I recall intensely feeling “I want what they have” when my search for meaning in life during my college days took me to some worship gatherings where I heard songs about new life, the free living water, and significance in life with Jesus. I was deeply stirred singing those songs, and more so singing together with equally moved persons than had I sung alone. Music is universal (indeed cosmological), a primal form of human communication that hopes we are not alone. So, says ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl, “it is a feature of music in every known culture that it is used to communicate with the supernatural, with whatever is by definition above, beyond, ‘Other than’ our selves.”⁵

Not surprisingly then, music’s qualitative nature is a key to theological anthropology, to what it means to be human, as studied in liturgical history, linguistics, science (neuroscience, evolutionary biology, psychology), philosophy, and by musicians themselves. These varied voices link music’s qualitative nature to its *unique relational function*. In fact it is thought that in human evolution a tonal, musical “language” as relational language came earlier than referential language. “Ultimately music is the communication of emotion, the most fundamental form of communication, which in phylogeny [in the evolution of the human species], as well as ontogeny [for each individual person, from birth], came and comes first,” writes neuroscience researcher Iain McGilchrist.⁶ This explains why babies melodiously coo before speaking their family’s language, like the baby we know who sings profusely but does not yet talk.⁷ Babies also can produce a universal range of phonetic sounds that they lose only as they begin to learn their families’ spoken tongues. It also helps us understand why parents communicate with their babies (as well as with adorable animals) in a melodic, higher-pitched voice than they use in normal discourse. Inner-out relational communication is taking place in a sort of wholesome (right hemisphere) way.⁸

Of the connections between music, relational communication, and the right brain hemisphere where neuroscience has located qualitative functions and music’s communicative quality, McGilchrist observes:

It is not just because [music] exists in betweenness [in relation] that music is the concern of the right hemisphere. Its indivisible nature, the necessity of experiencing the whole at any one time, though it is forever unfolding in time, a thing that is ever changing, never static or fixed, constantly evolving, with the subtle pulse of a living

⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (New York: Penguin Books, 1961), 21.

⁵ Bruno Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Twenty-Nine Issues and Concepts* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1983), quoted by Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Modern World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 77.

⁶ Iain McGilchrist, 103.

⁷ Babies are born with the innate capacities of absolute pitch and ability to make phonetic sounds of all languages. It is only as they learn the language of their particular culture that they lose these universal communicative capacities. Acquiring referential language is one of the dynamics where in order for the left brain hemisphere to function it needs to ‘blot out’ functions of the right hemisphere. See McGilchrist, 132 and Sachs, 138-39.

⁸ One professor I know will occasionally and spontaneously utter a few words in falsetto when he is excited or emphasizing a point. People find that endearing because such emotion is rare in that context!

thing (remember, even musical instruments are present to the brain as living things), the fact that its communication is by its nature implicit, profoundly emotive, working through our embodied nature – everything about music, in short, makes it the natural ‘language’ of the right hemisphere.⁹

Here McGilchrist suggests the qualitative function of music as relational language for human life, and that in human evolution and development, music preceded referential (discursive) language of words and syntax. The order of development parallels the earlier development of poetry (relational language) before prose (referential language). Moreover, to double the qualitative emphasis, we previously noted that early poetry was sung.¹⁰ For the qualitative nature of music to serve its whole function, it is inseparable from its relational purpose of communication with ‘Other’. This discussion should not only enlighten, but also chasten how we have come to use and misuse music in our modern worship contexts. It underlies the composition of whole worship—that which is the integral relational convergence of our reciprocal relational response and vulnerable involvement in relationship together with God.

From Christian liturgical studies we have learned that ancient Hebrew and Greek have no separate words for music, because speech and song were conflated. Writes liturgical scholar Edward Foley:

Many ancient peoples did not make a clear distinction between singing and speaking. The audible nature of all reading, for example, presumed rhythmic and melodic features that today would be more quickly classified as music rather than as speech. Public speaking, too, presumed a kind of chanting in cadence that fell someplace between modern categories of speech and song. Though many religions did have specially trained musicians, the ritual music of the ancient world was not confined to their performance. In Judaism and emerging Christianity especially, to the extent that there was audible worship, that worship was lyrical. Furthermore, liturgical leadership was not separate from musical leadership; every leader of public prayer in Israel would have rendered that prayer in a musical manner.¹¹

The Old Testament Book of Psalms exemplifies this lyricism, pointing to the intended primacy of relational communication of the psalms. As a whole, the psalms were, in the words of Bernhard W. Anderson, “intended to be recited and sung to musical accompaniment, [therefore] it is not surprising that they are cast into a poetic form, whose exalted style, rhythmic cadences, interplay of imagery, and emotional overtones are evident even in English translation.”¹² Anderson here is focused on technical elements of the psalms as poetry, yet it is often said that the psalms speak for us, which is to recognize that they are not just poetry for art’s sake. Rather, they are relational language directed to God, earning for them the descriptive name of sung prayer, used in

⁹ Iain McGilchrist, 73.

¹⁰ Iain McGilchrist, 102-105.

¹¹ Edward Foley, 9.

¹² Bernhard W. Anderson, *Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak for Us Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 21. This volume discusses the Psalms from form-critical method (i.e. literary form and liturgical function), and rhetorical (stylistic) features of ancient Hebrew poetry.

liturgical settings in ancient Israel.¹³ Of OT worship, Walter Brueggemann refers to this interactive nature of Israel’s worship as “covenantal conversation” and “*dialogic interaction* in which both parties are fully present.”¹⁴ Oh, but so much more takes place than Brueggemann’s terms suggest. The psalms have their own way of describing what it is that takes place as God’s people are engaged with God in the primacy as ones created in and functioning in his image and likeness for his relational design and purpose: the new song. In other words, theirs is the primacy of the qualitative and the relational, that are composed in the very qualitative image and relational likeness of God.

The Psalms are a far cry from the measured communication we engage in today in our worship services. As sung prayers they spill over with the breadth and depth of human communication from inner out, demonstrating the three major issues for all practice: the integrity of person presented, the integrity and quality of one’s communication, and the depth of relational involvement with God—reflections all of God in whose image and likeness we are created. One psalm deserves special attention here because it illuminates the specific aim of this study—‘singing’ a new song to the Lord.

In Psalm 15:1, David asks, “LORD, who may abide in your tent [’*ōhel*, home]? Who may dwell on your holy hill?” “Tent” and “holy hill” echo back to the place God brought Israel out from Egypt to, to establish them as his people:

*You brought them in and planted them on the mountain of your own possession,
the place, O LORD, that you made your abode,
the sanctuary, O LORD, that your hands established*

Ex 15:17 from the Song of Moses

The Hebrew word in Moses’ song for “sanctuary” (*miqdāš*, from the verb *qādaš*, “to consecrate, set apart”) refers to places where God’s presence and glory were manifested (e.g. tabernacle and temple). During David’s reign, that meant the tabernacle because the temple had not yet been built. To dwell and live in God’s sanctuary and on his holy hill means to remain in God’s presence, in God’s relational context. David knows from his own experience that the answer to his questions is only “He whose walk is blameless, and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart” (v.2). The word rendered “blameless” is *tāmiym* and means “complete” or “whole.”¹⁵ The word group for

¹³ Concordant with McGilchrist and others’ observations about referential language achieving dominance over relational language, Anderson notes, quoting others: “Although [the psalms] may have originated primarily within the liturgical life of ancient Israel and Judah, [they] were finally appropriated, preserved, and transmitted as instruction to the faithful” (J. Clinton McCann Jr., “The Psalms as Instruction,” *Interpretation* 46:118; 202). “At this final stage...the Psalter was a book to be read rather than performed, meditated over rather than recited from” (Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, SBL Dissertation Series 76 [Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985]; 202). “The shift from liturgical use to religious education corresponds to a profound institutional change that occurred in the pre-Christian centuries: from temple to synagogue” (Anderson, 202). Here is a clear example of the shift from relational language to a reduced function in referential language.

¹⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *Worship in Ancient Israel: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 9, 25.

¹⁵ *Tāmiym* is central to a deeper understanding of theological anthropology; see T. Dave Matsuo’s discussion in *The Whole of Paul and the Whole in his Theology: Theological Interpretation in Relational Epistemic Process* (Paul Study). Online: <http://www.4X12.org>, ch.1, section “Related Issues in Hermeneutical Impasse, Flow and Outcomes” and ch.2, section “The Journey Begins.”

“righteous” (*ṣēdāqâh*, *ṣedeq*, *ṣaddiyq*) functionally denotes the parties in a covenant relationship can be counted on to be the persons they claim to be, and to do what they promise. This understanding of righteousness exceeds our common notion of the static juridical condition of “being justified” (i.e. by Jesus’ work of atonement) that dominates much of Christian theology and function. *Tāmiym* and *ṣēdāqâh* are both qualitative functions of relationship with God that must be taken seriously if we are to have relational significance to God; they assume the person presented to God is a person functioning in wholeness from inner out—“who speaks the truth from his heart”—which is about the content and quality of our communication, and depth of relationship engaged with God (and each other), the same person the Father seeks (Jn 4:23).

David’s question is not “what worship shall I bring (what do you want me to do)?” but “what do you expect of my whole person in relationship with you?” His question anticipates our question “who are those who worship in spirit and truth?” The whole person whose communication is qualitative from inner out is the person whose involvement has relational significance to God, just as Jesus said of those “who worship in spirit and truth” (Jn 4:23-24). David knew and experienced God’s presence with him in God’s relational context and he engaged in the relational process of *tāmiym* and *ṣēdāqâh*, the inner-out involvement of his whole person, nothing less and no substitutes. So even as we “pray the psalms” with David and the other ancient poets, we are also challenged and perhaps confronted to present nothing less and no substitutes for our whole person before God in order to be congruent in relationship together.

The God of heart who is relational and vulnerably present for reciprocal relationship, has given us music for the inner-out communication for this relationship together. Music is an inner-out idiom integral to communicating the ‘eternity substance’ that God has planted in each of us (Eccl 3:11). That would explain why every culture has music.¹⁶ Music, poetry and song *can* help take us deeper in communication by pointing us to whole ontology and function.

Where music lifts our awareness to transcendence, if that transcendence lacks clarity or is defined by us ‘from below’ as opposed to self-disclosed ‘from above’, then music is apart from the relational context and function of God. That is, this music, though qualitative, does not serve its unique relational function for relational connection, and thus it leaves us as relational orphans. This would explain the view of some that “music, like poetry, is inherently sad.”¹⁷ Moreover, “It is what we would expect in view of the emotional timbre of the right hemisphere; and there is a stronger affinity between the right hemisphere [focuses on its relation to “Other”] and the minor key, as well as the left hemisphere and the major key.”¹⁸ “Perhaps to feel at all is to suffer,” muses McGilchrist. The implication of what McGilchrist and others are saying, it seems to me, is that when we are relationally apart from our Creator, music touches that depth of our human relational condition, and brings forth the deepest loneliness and longing (cf. eternity substance), interpreted as sadness, which might otherwise remain below our awareness.

¹⁶ Neurologist Oliver Sachs writes “This propensity to music—this ‘musicophilia’—shows itself in infancy, *is manifest and central in every culture*, and probably goes back to the very beginnings of our species,” x (my emphasis).

¹⁷ Suzuki, M., Okamura, M., Kawachi, Y., et al., “Discrete cortical regions associated with the musical beauty of major and minor chords,” *Cognitive Affective and Behavioral Neuroscience*, 2008, quoted in McGilchrist, 73.

¹⁸ Iain McGilchrist, 85.

Left here, we cannot yet sing a new song. However, as discussed earlier in Psalm 15, David the worshiper helps us understand what level is necessary on our part to be involved reciprocally with God, with our whole person from inner out, functioning whole, nothing less and no substitutes.

‘Singing’ a new song to the Lord can only be based on and composed by the following:

Music’s unique relational function for ‘singing’ a new song to the LORD is qualitative communication with God from the heart of the person, whose ontology is redeemed to be whole (*tāmiym*) from inner out, and whose function is righteous (*ṣaddiyq*) in relationship on God’s terms by grace.

We have just defined music’s primary purpose as relational communication made whole for intimate connection first with God.¹⁹ This is relational significance of true worshipers whose hearts are no longer “far from me” (Mt 15:8; Isa 29:13), but who worship the Father in spirit and truth—‘singing’ a new song!

‘Singing’, as this study finds, is not limited to technically singing an actual song because ‘singing’ is relational language, verbal and nonverbal, from God to us, from us to God, and to each other. It includes but is not limited to Augustine’s jubilation. The OT is, of course, full of relational language, especially disclosing God’s heart, presence and involvement with his people, but it is the Psalms that provide a rich trove of relational language composing a new song for his people to ‘sing’ back to him in reciprocal relational response for corporate worship (although appropriate for private devotions too). One might sniff that the psalms, being poetry, speak only metaphorically. Rather, we contend, the psalms speak relational language in contrast to referential language.

Food for thought in this regard is a difference between ancient and modern senses for “thanks.” The OT Hebrew *tōdāh* is often translated as “give thanks” and “thanksgiving” (e.g. Ps 100), as in giving thanks to God for something he has done, which today is the main focus of thanks. In ancient Hebrew and Greek, however, no distinction was made between praise and thanksgiving. Claus Westermann tells us:

“We are compelled to imagine a world in which petition plays a thoroughly essential and noteworthy role, but where the antithesis of petition is not primarily thanks but praise. And this praise is a stronger, more lively, broader concept which includes our ‘thanksgiving’ in it. Thanking is here included entirely within praise.”²⁰

¹⁹ Oliver Sachs provides an interesting quote from French writer Marcel Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past* (1913-27) in which a character wonders “whether music might not be the unique example of what might have been—if the invention of [referential] language, the formation of words, the analysis of ideas had not intervened—the means of communication between souls. It is like a possibility that has come to nothing; humanity has developed along other lines.” *Musicophilia*, 139. His words are prescient of current studies in neuroscience and evolutionary biology of the dominance of the left brain hemisphere in referential language development. McGilchrist has stressed that the left hemisphere, in order to excel in its functions, needs to suppress the right hemisphere.

²⁰ Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, trans. Keith R. Crim et al. (Edinburgh: Clark, 1981), quoted in Bernhard Lang, *Sacred Games: A History of Christian Worship* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 9.

Tôdāh is a larger relational frame than our “thanks.” Praising God focuses on who God is, and, accordingly, praising him for how he has relationally responded to us recognizes his faithfulness to his covenant terms that he bound himself to on our behalf; thanking in our modern sense bends the focus a bit more on us. It makes sense, then, that thanksgiving is included in the ancient Hebrew praise of who, what and how God is. Relationally this is parallel to Psalm 34:2: “My soul [*nepes̄*, soul, innermost being] makes its boast in the LORD” (cf. Ps 44:6-8; Jer 9:23-24; 1 Cor 1:31; 2 Cor 10:17). The word for “boast,” *hālāl*, means also to celebrate and denotes rejoicing and praising God, and is the word in the imperative *hallelujah*, “give glory to God.” “Boast” is given its basis most clearly in Jeremiah: “Thus says the LORD: “Do not let the wise boast in their wisdom, do not let the mighty boast in their might, do not let the wealthy boast in their wealth; *but let those who boast boast in this, that they understand and know me, that I am the LORD*” (Jer 9:23-24). This is not the shallow boast of cognitive information about God. To boast is to ‘sing’ as a person who is qualitatively *tāmiym* and who functions in the primacy of relationship with *šedāqāh*—made new from inner out because God loved first (“first” as primacy and in the order of action).

‘Singing’ takes in other words of relational language. Here are a few of them from the Psalms. *Zāmar* is translated as “sing praise” and “making melody/music,” always in the relational context of singing to God. The psalmist declares, “I will sing and make melody (*zāmar*) to the LORD” (Ps 27:6; cf. 33:2; 57:7). In the NT, Paul encourages “singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts” (Eph 5:19). *Yādah* covers a range in relational terms—to confess, speak out, praise, sing, give thanks. Psalm 32:5 says, “I will confess [*yādah*] my transgressions to the LORD,” and in the next psalm, “Praise [*yādah*] the LORD with the harp” (33:2). I am especially attracted to *rûa* ‘, which occurs in the phrase “shout for joy,” and denotes making noise by shouting or playing an instrument. “Shout [*rûa*] to the LORD, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music” (Ps 98:4-6; cf. 100:1 NIV). In much of evangelical worship, we only shout and make noise for the LORD when prompted; we make even more noise for performers.

Modern sensibility quashes shouting for joy in polite company, but I have no doubt that God would prefer our shouting to him out of heart-felt joy in him than the constrained singing we offer him. The issue is our created composition, not our sociocultural make-up. After all, nature shouts for joy and sings (see Ps 65); and children shout when they recognize who Jesus is (see Mt 21:15). In another sense leaping for joy and dancing is like shouting with our bodies in unrestrained expression from inner out. When God’s ark returned to Jerusalem, David was so full of joy that he “danced before the LORD with all his might” in his underwear (“dance,” *kārar*, 2 Sam 6:14-16). And when Jesus’ disciples returned from a mission, Jesus “rejoiced in the Holy Spirit” and praised the Father (Lk 10:21). The Greek for “rejoice” is *agalliaō* and means to express one’s joy by skipping and leaping ebulliently. Jesus’ whole person was fully and freely bursting out ‘singing’ in stirring relational language, rejoicing in Father’s intimate relational involvement with his disciples.²¹

²¹ In this passage Jesus also makes definitive our necessary ontology and function to relationally know and understand God by engaging his self-disclosures with epistemic humility, for which “infants” (*nēpios*, v.21) is a key metaphor. Please see T. Dave Matsuo’s helpful discussion in *Sanctified Christology: A Theological and Functional Study of the Whole of Jesus* (Christology Study, 2008). Online at <http://4X12.org>, Introduction, section “The Approach of this Study.”

Getting back to literal singing, the word *šiyr* (to sing, singing, song, hymn, poetry) denotes celebrating in song, to sing of and to someone. In the Psalms *šiyr* is musical relational language that we ‘sing’ to God, the inner-out response of our whole person to God’s whole person, in his relational context and process. There are many more words of relational language used in the Psalms, and all of these relational words ‘sing’ in tune with creation and with the key Jesus composes in.

Jesus sang hymns with his disciples (see Mt 26:30; Mk 14:26). *Hymneō* is to sing hymns or praises and most likely refer back to the Psalms, songs of praise to God (Heb *tehillāh*, from *hālal*, to boast, praise), and is thought to have been a natural part of table fellowship in Jewish custom; certainly Jesus would have enjoyed singing to the Father at such times.²² Paul was clearly one who sang a new song from his heart, living in God’s primacy of relational involvement as he spent his life building up the church to be whole and to live whole:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts (Col 3:15-16).

In the 1980s, I participated in some unconventional worship gatherings in a house church. Worship was open, meaning that there were segments during which persons were free to express thanks, praises, read Scripture, lead the rest of us in song—as anyone felt led. We also were specifically encouraged to sing our hearts out, to get out of our nice controlled comfort zones, and not be constrained by self-consciousness. It was during these times of singing out to God from “my gut” that I often wept. Sometimes it was from pain, sometimes relief, but, I think in retrospect, mostly from the deep longing and yearning for connection with God that had been weighing on me for years. Those ‘singing’ times were important for me to get back in touch with my heart that had become numbed and hidden. God has faithfully pursued, healed and made my heart whole in relationship together. This relational process necessarily includes ongoingly being distinguished in the uncommon, a process of change (sanctification) that the Spirit’s reciprocal relational word is taking me further and deeper in.

Reduction of Music’s Unique Function

Sadly, today in contrast and conflict with its qualitative nature and unique relational function, we have reduced the gift of music to lesser secondary functions—entertainment, tradition, instruction, background ambiance—to the loss of the relational significance of our musical sounds when used in these ways in corporate worship. In no respect am I saying that there is no place in our lives for these uses of music. Music’s qualitative nature keeps us at least in touch with our eternity substance, but music for its own sake, as an end in itself, easily becomes merely self-referencing, fragmented, with relational significance obscured in worship—not to mention diminishing our theological

²² For further study of the Jewish background and influence on early Christian worship, see Paul F. Bradshaw. *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy*, 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

anthropology.

Psalm 137 achingly demonstrates the disconnection of song apart from its proper relational context. "How could we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land?" the psalmist laments among other captives in Babylon. "For there our captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion!'" The singers refused to "perform," they could not produce joy on demand. Their captors wanted entertainment. The reduction of communication to disembodied entertainment or a comfort-massage is depicted also in the LORD's words to Ezekiel, who had to prophesy to people who did not respond to God's communications:

My people come to you...to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice....Indeed, to them *you are nothing more than one who sings love songs, with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well*, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice (Eze 33:32 NIV, emphasis added).

When our own singing in corporate worship does not involve our whole person from inner out as our relational language in God's relational context and process, our singing amounts to drawing near to God with our lips, disembodied lips. The person we present and our communication lack the integrity for God to be able to count on who and what is being presented to him as whole and not merely fragments from outer in. We sing in a relational gap, as if in a foreign land, engaged in an activity unable to go beyond outer in, which has no significance to God, as he said in Isaiah 29:13. Thus, our perceptual-interpretive framework and related ontology and function need to undergo redemptive change in order for us to participate from inner out to involve our whole person in music as relational language. Otherwise, we engage music (along with poetry and art) composed from narrowed-down terms of reductionism. McGilchrist further brings our attention to the sad reduction of music in modernity through Nietzsche's critique in 1877:

"our ears have become increasingly intellectual [left hemisphere dominance to analyze]. Thus we can now endure much greater volume, much greater 'noise,' because we are much better trained...to listen for the *reason in it*. All our senses have in fact become somewhat dulled because we always inquire after the reason."

Nietzsche observes the consequence of this intellectualism (left hemisphere dominance) as the loss of joy in modern music and modern art:

"The more the eye and ear are capable of thought, the more they reach that boundary line where they become asensual. *Joy is transferred to the brain; the sense organs themselves become dull and weak. More and more, the symbolic replaces that which exists.*"²³

Reflecting on Nietzsche's critiques while also thinking about how music is assessed in worship today, I suggest that much of our critique of the music we dislike comes from an

²³ Nietzsche, quoted in Nicholas Humphrey, *Seeing Red: a Study in Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), p.3, quoted in McGilchrist, 418, italics in original.

outer-in assessment of secondary aspects—style, form, performance quality—without considering the primary—relational clarity and relational significance.

For the worship team in Psalm 137 and fellow captives in Babylon, songs of joy cannot be sung on demand, apart from the relational context and process that makes them whole, represented by Jerusalem. Fragmented persons, however, function as such persons. Joy that is transferred to the brain is joy once removed, and, as Nietzsche says so insightfully, merely symbolic. Although we cannot know whether or not Nietzsche was writing about relationship, he is pointing to an ontological simulation of a qualitative reality. I have engaged in such illusion myself, trying to sing with joy, trying so hard from outer in to experience something deeper. This is precisely where we confuse music's qualitative nature with music as inner-out relational communication, and substitute expressions of the former for the latter. Joy, we need to clarify, is not experienced apart from our face-to-face experience with God, the vulnerable presence of the uncommon Other as Subject who is relationally involved heart to heart.

Another issue related to music in worship is what we frequently speak of as “sacred” music. “Music speaks of God in its own language” according to religion professor and choir director Albert L. Blackwell, who also quotes Martin Luther's own high view: “Next to the Word of God, music deserves the highest praise.”²⁴ One person's “sacred hymn” is another person's fossil, however, so that our definitions of “sacred” are relative. What, then, qualifies music as sacred? I imagine most would call Handel's “Messiah” sacred because it is theologically and emotionally profound. Do theological profundity, emotional thrust, or gravitas make music sacred? Yet, it is difficult to sing congregationally, even while reading the score. A great many more persons can sing by heart “Jesus Loves Me”; does sing-ability and usage make music sacred? The former piece of music has that “quality” more than the latter, but consider what has relational significance to God.

The Hebrew words for “sacred” mean “holy” and “holiness” (*qādaš* and *qōdeš*), and signify “to consecrate to God.” The various words—sacred, holy, consecrate—and their related forms denote “to set apart” from ordinary or common usage specifically for God's “uncommon” purposes (cf. Gk. *hagios*, sacred, holy). Music's function for inner-out communication—God to us and we to God—serves the primacy of relationship and is music's sacred and holy and thus uncommon function.²⁵ A piece of music is not in itself ontologically holy, but as it is set apart from its common uses for its uncommon function, we might call it sacred/holy.

Unfortunately, we have come to think of particular music as inherently sacred, so that, for example, a choir's performance of it can take place without the relational engagement of the congregation, and it is assumed that this has some significance to God; the outcome is oxymoronic, “holy entertainment.” This is common use of music defined by human contextualization (cf. Eze 33:32). We engage with whatever depth, or lack thereof, of our person we please. Notwithstanding the qualitative importance in our human lives for music's common uses, we need to understand that worship integrally

²⁴ Albert L. Blackwell, *The Sacred in Music* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 226.

²⁵ In human contexts, where music facilitates relational connection between persons, or interacts with others, this is music pointing to God's design and purpose of his created relational whole, though not directly in communication with God. In contrast, music's function from outer in that focuses on drawing attention to itself, like modern art, is detached and reduced to ordinary or common function.

involves the Uncommon, not to be defined and determined in its primacy by our sociocultural contexts. It is imperative to distinguish between the common and uncommon in order to compose in tune the ‘singing’ of those worshipers the Father seeks. We thus come back, again, to the challenge to our theological anthropology.

Performing Out of Tune

Earliest Christian worship, though having some common elements with Jewish synagogue worship, is thought to have been more spontaneous and democratic. Edward Foley says of the first three centuries, “the whole of worship is musical, and to the extent that the worship belonged to the whole assembly, so did the music belong to them,” rather than, for example, limited to a few singers or a cantor.²⁶ How distant in time and different in the relational implications of such an image when compared with today’s format revolving around a handful of persons performing in corporate worship. Although we cannot go back to copy the earliest worship, we can question and make changes to our current attachment to those performing. This is most notable when one or more singer, the choir, instrumentalists, presents a music piece while the congregation listens or watches with passive involvement. This reduces both congregants and those up front to a relational condition in front of the veil that renders them to a performance. Corporate worship is not, is never, and should stop being treated as a sacred concert, even a concert performed before God.

There are five interrelated consequences that performance engenders in corporate worship. First, performance obscures relational clarity by making ambiguous *who* is being worshiped, thus diminishing relational significance—despite all references made about and to God. Second, performance creates or reinforces a congregation to be passive observers, turning worshipers into an audience dependent on those performing to “usher them into the presence of God,” so to speak, even though that presence is an ontological simulation taking place in front of the veil. Certainly, those who attend worship have their own relational responsibility for their own involvement with God, yet performance eliminates the opportunity and distracts those who want to worship God. Enthusiastic applause for the performers does not constitute a relational response to God. Dependence on liturgists and other worship leaders is not automatically the same as wanting to be entertained, but the passive posture and lack of relational involvement with God is the same—the condition called “spectatoritis.”²⁷ Performance ensures the reduction of all persons (including the performers) and fragmentation of the worshiping body. The worshiper who comes as a consumer, and the worship planner and leader who defines their person by a role focused on what to do (who then needs positive feedback from the consumer to feel OK), engage in a kind of self-reinforcing dance together; thus we get embedded, perhaps even “enslaved” to this unsatisfying program. Paul says there is no freedom with the veil present, our minds become unaware and our hearts become insensitive (2 Cor 3:14-17).

²⁶ Edward Foley, *Foundations of Christian Music* (Nottingham: Grove Books, 1992), quoted by James F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, rev. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 119.

²⁷ Ethnomusicologist Roberta R. King, “The Power of Worship,” article in “Kenya Church Growth Bulletin,” vol. 2, no. 4, 1992, 3.

Third, when worship leaders (including the whole team) create and draw worshipers into a context of performance and audience, the dynamic is essentially to assume a role of mediator in likeness of the high priest who went behind the veil to mediate connection with God in the tabernacle/temple—though the worship leaders in fact only function themselves in front of the veil. This mediator’s role, however, is critical because it becomes a substitute for Jesus, *the High Priest*, who went behind the veil to make the sacrifice to remove the veil for reciprocal relationship, heart-to-heart, together with the now vulnerably present and relationally involved whole of God.

The fourth consequence of performance in worship, worshipers are implicitly taught that God is also an observer of our worship, perhaps even a distant observer we can only assume to make connection with. This is the consequent reconstruction of God who has vulnerably disclosed himself in the incarnation for compatible relationship together “in spirit and truth.” The decision and effort to include the vulnerable presence and relationally involved God in corporate worship has to be made in reciprocal interaction with the Spirit, or else we are left to our own shaping of God. Fifth, for persons involved in performance, intentionally or inadvertently, their participation easily becomes a substitute for nothing less and no substitutes for their own person expressed to God.

I am not proposing to eliminate occasional special musical or dramatic pieces, for they can be edifying for the building up of the body relationally as God’s family. My husband and I appreciated the musical/dramatic rendering of Moses’ encounter with God at the burning bush. The message was edifying as it illuminated Moses’ honest and intimate exchange with God, ending with God’s tender touch on a humbled Moses. There was relational clarity and significance (being portrayed); and it challenged those present to be relationally involved with God at this level of depth. It is more often the case, however, that performance obscures the primacy of relationship with the primary focus on the secondary.

What is the role and function, then, of worship leaders, choirs, worship bands, drama and other creative expressions in worship? Persons who lead worship have a vital responsibility that comes with their own relational accountability before God for their own ontology and function in his qualitative image and relational likeness, nothing less and no substitutes. Therefore, their first relational responsibility is as worshiper who ‘sings’ a new song to the Lord, and in that relational response of their whole person, leads others together in joint response. An important note of caution is necessary here: a worship leader (e.g. lead singer) may function with relational clarity—being focused *on* the Lord, singing *to* him; yet, it is still possible to be relationally disengaged from him, and thus have no relational significance to him. This is the subtlety of outer-in function—the genius of reductionism. We cannot get away from performance—even if we want to and have made efforts toward that—as long as we define ourselves and thus each other by what we do and have. For leaders, and all participants in worship, to be out of tune and off-key involves the inescapable issue of our theological anthropology.

Here are some added thoughts about choirs from a Free Church perspective to take seriously that can be applied to the others. This writer explains that the entire congregation must come to worship prepared to participate in music, and, putting the choir in perspective, says:

“Musicians and choirs serve a questionable function (entertainment?) if the congregation does not sing. At College Church our choirs understand that first among their ministry responsibilities is leading the congregation in singing. This is foremost a heart matter, then one of earnest example.”²⁸

The perspectives in this study affirm this comment, along with another writer’s comment that “the choir is only a supplement to the congregation” and “choral music is never a substitute for congregational song.”²⁹

It cannot be stated enough: whenever worshipers are sitting listening to others perform music (this also includes dance and drama), be it the choir or worship band, relational clarity is obscured and relational significance to God is lost. Furthermore, there emerges a subtle “choir/band and the rest of us” distinction that fragments the church’s wholeness as God’s family, all of whom have a defined necessary function in relationally belonging to the body of Christ.

Related to the concern about performance is the question whether it is appropriate for churches to hire professional musicians, or have non-believing musicians leading worship (in the band, string quartet, pianist, etc.). That churches pay people to play a musical instrument or sing in worship (even their own members) exposes the high 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 this for us. Earlier we considered Psalm 33 for its abundant relational language. The poet also says something about musical skill in worship. Certainly the OT values skillfulness, and the quality of music itself, but the OT sense goes deeper than our notion of skillfulness today. We focus on the proficiency level of musicians or artists, persons who have refined their craft, and give primacy to the quality of the product over the person who created it. In Psalm 33, the psalmist proclaims, “Sing to him a new song; play skillfully, and shout for joy (Ps 33:3). The context is relationship with God, established from the opening words, “Sing joyfully to the LORD, you righteous... Praise the LORD.... Sing to him a new song; play skillfully, and shout for joy.” The Hebrew word for skillful is *yātab* and denotes to be good, pleasing, lovely, and favorable. *Yātab*, translated incompletely in English as “skillfully,” 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.

The OT uses another word group translated into English as skillful or skillfully—*hokmāh*, *hākām* 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 limited to the level of proficiency, but are inseparable from the involvement of the heart (*leb*, Ex 28:3) and the spirit (*rūah*, Ex 31:3,6)—pointing to the significance to God of the whole person who is engaged in

²⁸ R. Kent Hughes, “Free Church Worship: The Challenge of Freedom” in D. A. Carson, ed., *Worship by the Book* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 171.

²⁹ James F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, 114-115.

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 disembodied, thus 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 gives primacy to our outer-in terms from our human context of how good the music sounds. Consider that if the priority of the worshipers was 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. This discussion extends also to the practice of including non-Christian musicians in leading worship. 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 the thinking seems commendable, but it reflects an undeveloped understanding of the significance of corporate worship *as* God’s family, “family time.” 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 be treated with the depth of involvement that goes deeper than inclusion in the worship band/orchestra based on ability. If the function of the musician group is to lead the congregation in praise—which is only relational language—to God, then this requires the involvement of their whole person, from inner out, nothing less and no substitutes—no ontological simulations. 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.

With performance going on, the gathered worshipers depend on others to mediate their worship, by their choice or by the design of the worship service. The relational messages implied by the performance-audience dynamic in worship are also theological: “Jesus, I do not believe that you have eliminated the need for a mediator between us.” In other words, we have repaired and re-hung the damned curtain! More vividly in relational terms, the writer of Hebrews seemed to be scolding Christians, admonishing them to enter the Most Holy Place that Jesus opened up, to “draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith” through the curtain (see Heb 10:19-22). To engage in worship as if Jesus had not torn the curtain open is to “deliberately keep on sinning” (v.26); we have “trampled the Son of God under foot,” treated the blood of the covenant that sanctifies us “as an unholy thing,” and “insulted the Spirit of grace” (v.29).

Music itself has become a kind of mediator, particularly the use of contemporary worship music (CWM). In an interesting piece on CWM, Lester Ruth perceives a dependence on music as mediator between worshiper and Jesus:

This emphasis on the use of musical sets to facilitate an experience of God erodes a

classic understanding of Jesus Christ as the mediator between humans and God the Father. Typical use of CWM places expectations on music to mediate worshipers' approach to God. Perhaps displacing Christ as mediator with the Father goes hand-in-hand with the central focus on an exalted, divine Christ in CWM [overly christocentric perspective]. If worship's primary end is communion, or intimacy, with the Son, not with God the Father, the need for Christ as mediator is itself lessened. Mediation is shifted to the music. Thus prayer in CWM is not to the Father through the Son but to the Son through the music.³⁰

Although Ruth is focusing on trinitarian worship, he raises the theological and relational matter for how we use music as mediator in corporate worship. It is a subtle shift we have gotten into, but one that might explain why some worship leaders/planners also to strive for a sensory experience through music's volume and repetition (quantitative aspects). Contemporary worship music immediately comes to mind, but these emphases are not limited to contemporary music. Consider the blast of a pipe organ, or the repetition of Taizé songs. For effect, these work; for relational connection, they give us an outer-in experience that may really be an ontological simulation, a substitute from the secondary.

The relational issues addressed here for music in worship—the secondary and its substitutes—apply also to preaching and gesture. Preaching and teaching the Word are primary in evangelical churches, and do most of the “work” of a worship service. Sermons take up the bulk of the worship service's time frame, and preachers are clearly defined by secondary matter of what they do and have. What they *do* (“Great sermon, Pastor!”) and *have* (style, eloquence, wit) often seem to be valued more highly than any other criteria, notably sensitivity to what is qualitative and awareness of the relational. In principle this is similar to hiring professional musicians.

Gesture refers to the physical movements made by those who lead worship in its various elements (welcome, leading Communion, prayer, directions for standing and sitting, etc.). Whenever the focus of worship leaders and congregants is from outer in on how to do something properly, however “properly” is defined, gesture becomes fragmented from the whole person. Performing out of tune thus also entails making the secondary in preaching and gesture primary, keeping us “before God” in front of the veil.

Deeper Implications

Throughout this theology of worship, we have discussed contrasts and conflicts: uncommon and common, primary and secondary, inner out and outer in, qualitative and quantitative, relational language and referential language, intimate relational connection and relational distance, whole ontology and function and fragmented/reduced ontology and function, behind the veil and in front of the veil, ‘singing’ in tune and performing out of tune. These are not merely academic conceptual categories, but relational dynamics all pertaining to our theological anthropology, and on whose terms we live in relationship together—God's whole terms or our reduced terms. Our understanding of these contrasts

³⁰ Lester Ruth, "Lex Amandi, Lex Orandi: The Trinity in the Most Used Contemporary Christian Worship Songs" (unpublished paper, 2005).

and conflicts ongoingly sharpens and deepens as we grow in the primacy of relationship together with God.

The relational implications of the *who*, the *what*, and the *how* of our reciprocal relational response to the whole of God are critical for us to face up to and understand in order to listen to God's heart from inner out and receive his person vulnerably extended to us with our whole person. Though difficult to face, we need to become more sensitive to and take responsibility for how we relationally affect God negatively in order to go deeper with him in his relational response of grace to us. This dashes any false assumptions we have that we do not affect God negatively (e.g. Jn 14:9; Eph 4:30).

Music has been the main focus in this Verse to discuss 'singing' a new song. The underlying issue is our ontology and function and how we are involved with God. In this section, we examine more deeply the relational implications of our choices, which is illustrated by, but not limited to, music's place in our lives. Music only illustrates the broader issue of wholeness and reductionism.

Music, as mentioned above, strikes to the core of our identity, seemingly even to form it. Having grown up in the musically dynamic 1960-70s, like many other persons I have a soundtrack to my self-perception and identity, with a kind of developmental musical hermeneutical spiral. This interweaving of music and identity is symbiotic and strong. Christians identify deeply with specific music (hymns, songs) and styles (e.g. traditional hymns, gospel, contemporary worship music). In this sense music partly constitutes our identity, so when *my* music is challenged, I take it personally and will fight for it in some way, outwardly or internally as tension.

Underlying the fight/tension for my type of music is that I am engaged in secondary outer-in criteria to define my person, and thus define others. Many worship writers admit to having a bias for traditional and classical music over contemporary worship music (CWM), and by and large end up disparaging CWM on the basis of "quality," an assessment from human shaping. To their credit, some of these writers admit to their artistic snobbery, yet they still need to go further to understand the theological anthropology that snobbery emerges from and what snobbery does relationally. The dynamic is about making distinctions not unlike the false distinctions from human shaping that focus on outer-in criteria of what one does (e.g. musical and artistic education, training) or has (e.g. sophisticated knowledge)—the same type of false human distinctions Paul confronted (1 Cor 1:12; 3:3-4). As discussed much earlier in this study, based on those distinctions, we engage in a comparative process of better or less, assigning value, creating a stratification or hierarchy—however subtle—and not only making music primary, but by implication *my/our* music better and others' less (as Paul defined above).

It is the workings of reductionism and its counter-relational work, not music per se, that was behind the so-called worship wars. Churches have responded to the conflict by having either separate services (traditional and contemporary), or blended worship services. Yet, what a sad division we have allowed in God's family, similar to the divisions Paul confronted in the Corinthian church: "Has Christ been divided? (1 Cor 1:13). Music, while it receives primary focus, is wrongly blamed as the issue; rather, it is an issue of theological anthropology, just as Paul made this unmistakable (1 Cor 4:6-7; 2 Cor 10:12). That is, to make music the issue is an outer-in approach to the underlying problem that is about reductionism in conflict with wholeness from inner out.

From our own reduced ontology, we give secondary matter of outer-in criteria of music (form, style) primacy of place to compose worship, and thus to transpose church function by displacing the primacy of relationship disclosed by God to us. This exposes our theological anthropology whereby we mainly define ourselves, each other, and God, by secondary matter from outer in; the primacy of relationship is diminished, and the relational function of music for communication between us and God is reduced to personal preference and our sense of entitlement—all self-determined. We thus engage in reductionism and experience reductionism's counter-relational work of fragmenting the whole of God's family.

This dynamic from self-determination has had far-reaching divisive outcomes historically in God's family, for it includes also denominational fragmentation based on secondary criteria (e.g. *how* to baptize, *structure* of governance, *manifestations* of the Spirit, liturgical *traditions*), or even the priority of "doctrinal purity" over the primacy of relationship for which Jesus rebuked the church at Ephesus (see Rev 2:2-4). "You have forsaken your first love," Jesus could very well be saying these words to us right now, because what is missing is *agapē*, the depth of relational involvement of our whole persons in the primacy of relationship together with God and with each other as the family of God. The primacy of relationship is relegated to secondary (or lower) place in church and decisions about worship. The worship wars simply reflected what we are really about—what constitutes our identity to define us and determine how we live. Worship music is only one battleground in the true war between wholeness (God's whole) and reductionism. And none of it is on God's whole-relational terms.

If we do not embrace the primacy of relationship, what then is the significance of our following Jesus? What is the significance of the gospel we claim and proclaim? What is it that we are saved *to*, not merely saved *from*, if not adoption into God's family, the new creation? Adoption, according to Paul, has functional significance in the 'already' of now, in this life on earth. In fact, according to Jesus, 'eternal life' (what is commonly the answer to "what are we saved to?") is not merely some future state of bliss, but is the relational experience of relationally knowing the Father and the Son (Jn 17:3), and with each other (Rom 8:29) in reciprocal relationship with the Spirit (Rom 8:15-16; Gal 4:6). This is the good news of the gospel of Christ, the significance of a full soteriology (the new song) that is composed in syncopation with what we are saved *from* and *to*, and thus an ecclesiology to be whole (the new sanctuary).

The implications of our focus on secondary matter, of defining the human person from the outer in and presenting something less and some substitute for our whole person—especially in but not limited to worship—go so far as to challenge the gospel we profess. Most of us would deny that we are, for example, xenophobic, racist, sexist, or prejudiced in any other serious way, yet tension related to music has essentially the same basis (criteria from outer in and the inevitable comparative process) and relational consequence from the 'us vs. them' attitude that only repentance turns us from and baptism into the new creation ushers us into. All of this points to and involves the deeper conflict, even war, that persons knowingly or unknowingly struggle with between that which is whole and reductionism of it. This illuminates the integral fight in which Paul was engaged both for the whole gospel and against reductionism, as noted above in the

church at Corinth.³¹

Giving primacy to all secondary matter belongs only in Secondary Sanctuary. If we think deeply about God and what he receives through our music, our singing—disembodied lips, or whole person for heart-to-heart connection—we have to come to some rather unsettling conclusions. I raise the following examples in the chart below for reflection, for thinking in relational terms of what is primary to God, and about our relational messages to him, the person we present, the quality of our communication, and the depth of our relational involvement with him and each other, that is, our response of love.

When we...	Implied relational messages we give God...	Theological implications
Sing in the third person rather than second and first person (<i>about</i> God, not <i>to</i> God)	I want to keep relational distance from you	I/we do not wish to worship behind the veil in the Most Holy Place; I/we will stay in front of the veil
Listening to someone else sing—soloists, choirs, small ensembles.	You don't want to hear from me. I don't wish to communicate with you. Let someone else say it for me (substitute for my involvement). Our relationship is not important to me or to you. Forget "face to face."	I/we need "substitutionary worship," someone to mediate my/our worship to you. Jesus' function as "High Priest" is not sufficient.
Background music for a time of silent prayer.	We do not like silence, even to be with you.	We live by a different gospel without the primacy of relationship.
Songs that are led in a vocal range that strains the majority of worshipers	Lead singers are more important than the assembled worshipers praising you. Performance is primary to you.	No relational clarity or relational significance.
Repetition beyond two or three times of choruses or lines of song lyrics. High volume.	You desire quantity and volume over the quality of my/our communication to you.	Your relational response of grace is not sufficient; self-determination is a necessary supplement.
Performances: special music, dance, or drama that the congregation watches as an audience at a show.	You prefer to observe a few persons from a distance, as we also do. Or, you really are an observing 'audience of one'.	God is transcendent and incarnate, yet relationally inaccessible or distant, thus to be referenced to and not relationally involved with.

³¹ For a deeper study about Paul's conjoint fight for the whole gospel and against reductionism, see T. Dave Matsuo's *The Whole of Paul and the Whole in his Theology*.

Present anything less and any substitute of our whole persons involved in worship, e.g., non-Christian musicians and professional musicians playing in corporate worship.	The skill of musicians (outer in) matters to you more than the involvement of our whole person (inner out). You define persons by what we do, neither by primacy of reciprocal relationship with the Spirit nor your terms of grace “in spirit and truth.”	You are neither the qualitative God of heart vulnerably present, nor the relational God intimately involved, who has created us in our qualitative image and relational likeness.
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The unifying message of all the above messages to God is this: my/our terms over yours for relationship together. The relational messages inherent in these activities and conditions are from autonomous efforts of self-determination because they are contrary to the primacy of relationship of God on his whole terms. The relational consequence of our self-determination is that we give God something less and some substitute from outer in, in place of our whole person from the inner out (signified by the heart). In contrast and in conflict, the incarnation principle of ‘nothing less and no substitutes’ requires our compatible response in order to compose the *who* and *what* we ‘sing’ to God in worship from inner out—open, vulnerable, and unembellished by the secondary.

A strong word to remind us is ongoingly needed: the change we need does not come about by focusing on what we should do or not do, for example, to tell ourselves, “from now on, no more performing.” This is to think in outer-in terms, which does not get to the heart of the matter for redemptive change to emerge. We need to involve ourselves in the primary, the relational work with the Spirit to make the primary primary—the significance of ‘singing’ a new song to the Lord!

Chorus:

‘Singing’ a new song to the Lord: Music is relational language that has both a qualitative nature and a unique relational function, which emerges from the human person created in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God. Yet when we function from a fragmented ontology that focuses on the secondary, we reduce music’s integrated function at best to only the qualitative, and confuse the qualitative *for* music’s unique relational function. Such singing is off-key and remains out of tune with the new song.

In contrast and in conflict, ‘singing’ signifies the whole of life and involves all the relational dynamics of life in its wholeness. Worship is the integrating focus and the integral relational convergence of our (both individual and corporate) reciprocal relational response and vulnerable involvement in relationship together with God. Therefore, ‘singing’ is the integral relational dynamic of life in the tune of the new song composed in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God; and worship is the chorus of this new song of life in wholeness—all for which the Spirit is present to raise up with us in reciprocal relationship together.

Verse 5

...in the Key of Jesus

*As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.
Now remain in my love....Love each other as I have loved you.*

John 15:9,12 NIV

In this Verse, we look at some examples of tuning in to the key that Jesus relationally embodied, to ‘sing’ forth in the primacy of relationship as our response to God as worshipers who worship vulnerably in spirit and truth, nothing less and no substitutes. Since we all are ever susceptible to shifting back into the old of ‘what to do’ and substitutes from Secondary Sanctuary, I encourage readers to regularly check out with the Spirit in ongoing reciprocal relational work where one’s focus is. We need to ask the Spirit to clarify, “Am I making this more about myself?” Or, confess “Forgive me, Lord, for getting into the secondary things first.” This is part of the ongoing fight—joining together with Paul—against reductionism and for wholeness, starting in ourselves!

Remember, that corporate worship integrates our focus only for primacy of relationship—vertically with God and horizontally with one another—in vulnerable involvement together as God’s very own family. Worship is the integral convergence of our reciprocal relational response to God in his relational desires, in his purpose in creating us in his qualitative image and relational likeness, and in his first response to us in our human condition. The following are some examples of rethinking in relational language some aspects of corporate worship.

Tuning in to Relational Clarity and Relational Significance

To have relational clarity (the primary focus on God directly, not indirectly through someone else), we need to reduce relational ambiguity. It is God who is to receive our attention, our praise, thanksgivings, affection and petitions—the One to whom we submit (to his whole terms for relationship) and serve (share his family love, e.g. through caring for each other). The acronym PASS—Praise, Adoration (or Affection), Submission, Service—is helpful to our focus; worship is our PASS to intimate relationship with God; that is, worship integrally converges our relational response of PASS to God. Worshipers gather in the Father’s presence as his very own daughters and sons altogether, to integrate our focus on our God in whom we have new life, identity and purpose, and also to share in the intimate involvement with the whole of God together as family—without the veil, as celebrated integrally at Communion.

For relational clarity to be more compatibly keyed to this whole worship, two changes are relatively simple: (1) make simple changes to the wording of songs; (2) redefine the function of the worship band and choir.

For the first type of change, in order to grow in thinking and functioning relationally in worship (corporate and private), I suggest that we sing as much as possible

in the second person directly addressing God as “you” (thou or thee) in place of singing in the third person “he.” This can greatly help us open our hearts further *to* him in relational language instead of singing *about* him in referential language. When you consider face-to-face communication, we never (at least I hope not) talk to the other in the third person. Many songs can be easily changed, if not in the PowerPoint (because of copyright issues, a questionable reason), worshipers can be encouraged to make the changes as they sing:

Example 1—simple changes in italics:

<i>“He is holy</i>	to	<i>You are holy</i>
Great <i>is the</i> LORD	to	Great <i>are You</i> LORD
And for <i>his</i> glory	to	And for <i>your</i> glory

Example 2—Not every line needs to be changed; it may feel odd at first to shift during a song, but the form is less significant than the relational messages we sing to him. God does not grade us on grammar issues¹:

The Lord is my strength and my song. <i>He has</i> become my salvation. Under the shadow of <i>his</i> wings I belong. I will give thanks to <i>the</i> Lord.	to	The Lord is my strength and my song. <i>You have</i> become my salvation. Under the shadow of <i>your</i> wings I belong. I will give thanks to <i>you</i> Lord. ²
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Note: Some songs are better left in the third person (he/him), but these should not comprise the majority of songs sung in a worship service; these include Call to Worship songs (e.g. the hymn “All Creatures of Our God and King”³).

Against these types of grammatical changes I have heard the rationale given that many of the Psalms are in the third person and are addressed to the gathered worshipers. Indeed many Psalms are in the third person, yet we cannot assume these were not also addressed to God, that I suggest was a given for those ancient worshipers. The relational clarity aided by singing *to* God over singing *about* God will help us grow as worshipers whose inner-out worship has relational significance only as we function in whole ontology of who we are as God’s daughters and sons. Contrast this with OT Judaism. Though we do not know when it started, the people did not address God directly by name, for fear of being disrespectful and using his name in vain. Hence, believing it was wrong to utter the name Yahweh, they instead used the substitute term Adonai (“LORD”). Yet God told Moses his name when asked (*hāyāh*, meaning Yahweh), and Moses enjoyed face-to-face connection with God (Ex 3:13-14; Num 12:8). The issue is not about

¹ I confess that as a former English teacher embedded in the form of a message over its relational content, it was difficult to shift at first, but a freeing shift to the primacy of relationship from an insistence on lexical correctness. Now I think, “What’s the big deal?” It was about how I defined myself from outer in, and consequently focused on the secondary.

² “The Lord is My Strength and My Song,” by Gerrit Gustafson ©1987 Integrity’s Hosanna!Music.

³ St. Francis of Assisi, melody from “Geistliche Kirchengesang,” ©J. Curwen & Sons, Ltd.

doctrinal form and purity but only relational clarity and significance. Isaiah was right indeed (Isa 29:13), just as Jesus said (Mt 15:7).

If we sing about Jesus' work on the cross, the outcome of which is to enter into his most intimate presence behind the torn curtain, then we dare not stay in front of it! The writer of Hebrews admonishes us about this: "My righteous one will live by faith. My soul takes no pleasure in anyone who shrinks back" (Heb 10:38; cf. Hab 2:4). The word for "shrink back" is *hypostellō* and also means to withdraw or hesitate. Relationally, it matters as great deal to God for us to function as if the curtain and veil still exist since there is no relational significance to our singing. It is not the new song in the key of Jesus (2 Cor 3:16-18; 5:17; Col 3:9-10).

On another note, I agree with those worship thinkers who advocate limiting "the use of the words I-Me-My" to counteract individualism and self-focus that have crept into Christian worship from the broader culture.⁴ I also believe, however, that these first person pronouns *can* help worshipers to be more direct relationally to make heart-to-heart connection with God; so let's understand what needs to be eliminated (self-focused narcissism and individualism) and what needs to be embraced (primacy of relationship together). As an alternative to counteract the individualism cultivating narcissism and its inherent counter-relational work, and to build on the relational reality that we are God's family, I suggest at times changing "I-me-my" to "we-us-our."

Of course, these suggestions in this first area of change are only of secondary importance, yet they may have primary value to help us in singing the new song to *our* Lord.

The second area of change to reduce relational ambiguity is to redefine the function of the worship band and choir. As discussed in Verse 4, this issue is inseparably a dual matter of performance-audience and how we define the human person. So enculturated are we in watching others perform that we have come to view worship with that lens and even to consider 'performance' as the correct practice ('what to do')—congruent for worship and compatible with God. God's worshipers, however, need help to grow in our relational responsibility in God's family. One way is to have the worship band and choir actually *lead* the congregational singing—that is, with everyone singing. New songs, of course, need more assistance, but songs should never be so complicated as to require protracted teaching. Keep special music to a minimum. In some churches special music is no longer special because it is routine. Having the children and youth participate by leading songs with the adults also singing is very edifying, more so than the adults watching (and taking pictures) of the children. Let's not build up the children as performers but as members of our church family.

A logistical matter is also a relational one. It is well worth the effort (and at the cost of ruffling some feathers) to reposition those who *lead* the singing (choir or worship team) so that they are not on stage, not in front and center of the congregation's view. The singers who lead can lead from the back, sides, or spread throughout the sanctuary. I have found it moving to have the choir positioned up and down the aisles as they sang a special song. The functional implication is that we lifted this music to God as a body. I have heard the argument against this suggestion that persons in the congregation want to have the leaders up front, but I suggest this is a personal preference, perhaps reflecting

⁴ Robert Webber. "I-Me-My Worship?" *Worship Leader Magazine*, 2005, 14(1):8.

the dependency on others to mediate for them. This gets back to our lens for worship and challenges our assumptions (including the status quo) in order to go further and deeper in relationship together with God. We can learn from a particular Taizé worship time I attended. The few instrumentalists and small choir sat together in the back of the chapel, and it seemed that a few of the choir members were scattered among the rest of us. The choir and instruments very simply and simultaneously both led and supported the congregational singing. They never dominated in volume or by arrangement, but enhanced the singing. This was an aspect of the service that I appreciated very much, and which I would strongly advocate for planning worship.

Certainly, the placement and structure of worship leaders are also only of secondary importance, yet, here again, these changes may have primary value if they help us together in ‘singing’ the new song to our LORD in the new sanctuary without the veil.

Discomfort with Intimacy

In the key of Jesus, the presence or absence of the veil is critical theologically and, more importantly, indicates the vital function of the life of God’s family in relationship together for worship. The issue of the veil determines our relational position (functionally and theologically) both before God and with God, and involves the relational distance in the relationship measured by the vital function of our heart.

The thought of intimacy (hearts connecting together openly and vulnerably) in worship makes most persons uncomfortable, I suspect. Our sociocultural context has added to that tension, unfortunately, by incorrectly equating intimacy with romantic relationships and sexual intercourse. Associating intimacy in such narrowed-down terms from outer in emerged with Adam and Eve (cf. Gen 2:25 and 3:7). And so intimacy in worship seems inappropriate, unimaginable and even undesirable. Moreover, intimacy in worship has become associated also with the individualistic view of worship captured in certain devotional “love songs,” giving birth to the phrase “Jesus is my boyfriend.” At least some of those songs have emerged, I believe, from the eternity substance that seeks the qualitative experience of deep connection with God that we all need and long for; after all, Scripture is so full of God’s intimate language that I used to feel uncomfortable myself. A prime example is found in the book Hosea, where God’s heart is vulnerably extended to unfaithful Israel using the language of a broken marriage relationship, yet still pursuing his beloved (Hos 2:1-20). And Jesus’ footwashing needs to be understood in relational terms of intimate involvement with each other, not reducing it to serving.

This is a critical matter to work through, to illuminate the relational language of Jesus and the whole of Scripture’s self-disclosures in order to distinguish it from that which comes from our own lens, whether that be referential language narrowing the terms to outer in, or any other bias from our context in limited connotations. For example, on the one hand, a self-centered focus and emotionalism in worship might be mistaken for an experience of intimacy, but self-centeredness is incompatible with having a relationship with Jesus on his terms. On the other hand, we need to ask ourselves if we might be mislabeling the discomfort of intimacy as something negative to be avoided—

like self-centeredness or emotionalism—as an excuse in order to justify remaining relationally distant, knowingly or unknowingly.

Underlying much of our discomfort with intimacy is, of course, fear of possible relational rejection that comes with making ourselves vulnerable in our innermost. Most, if not all, of us have fortified ourselves against relational rejection by presenting something less than our whole vulnerable person in the form of substitutes from secondary outer in criteria of what we do and have. Intimacy threatens these self-determined efforts, which was Peter's struggle in his refusal to let Jesus wash his feet (Jn 13:8, noted earlier). This is the precisely the critical point of relationally trusting Jesus: letting Jesus wash our feet to redefine our person from inner out by his relational response of grace. Like Peter, church leaders today are also challenged by Jesus' whole person to relationally trust him for such intimate connection together. And so let us be willing to find out what biases, hurts from past relationships, and fear that may underlie our discomfort. The church as family needs to grow in helping each other talk about these heart matters in a supportive and healing process of family love. We need to sensitively, patiently, and firmly address ourselves to these areas in order to grow in wholeness together.

All of Jesus' followers are called into deeper involvement through reciprocal relational work with the Spirit (Jn 15:26-27; Rom 8:15-16, 26-27); this is the purpose of discipleship and spirituality. Sadly, discipleship all too commonly gives priority to service and mission, and spirituality remains highly individual and private, and with questionable relational significance (I know!). Furthermore, they have become separated as if different vocations, a reflection of how fragmented our Christian practice has become, and also reflecting the need for the relational work that Jesus makes imperative (Jn 12:26). Worship and other church leaders are particularly accountable to God to be worshipers who worship in spirit (from inner out) and truth (honesty of heart) because how they relationally function in church witnesses to, and thus teaches others what the gospel is and thus what the church is. When church and worship leaders function with relational distance, they communicate something less than the gospel of God's family love and wholeness.

Intimate relational involvement is the love (*agapē* involvement) that Jesus extends to us, that will be the whole experience in church as family in relational likeness of the Father, Son and Spirit as we transpose our song into the depth of Jesus' relational key.

*The whole of God with us has shared
the whole of God with us is present
'that they may be one as we
that they may be one as we'
'I in them, you in me.'*⁵

⁵ "The Spirit of the Word" ©2011 T. Dave Matsuo and Kary A. Kambara

‘Singing’ the Lord’s Supper

Above all, forming a corporate identity without diminishing the individual requires the Spirit’s leading, and challenges our self-imposed limitations. There is no more important part of corporate worship for which we need a new song than celebrating Communion as the Lord’s Table Fellowship. As God’s new creation family ‘singing’ a new song to the Lord, Communion is the heart of gathered worship, the celebration behind the veil that affirms God’s gracious work embodied in the incarnation that emerges without the veil in relational wholeness as God’s family. As such, it means a shift (for non-liturgical churches) to celebrate Communion as family together, and weekly. Worship thinkers and planners in a church would creatively compose relational flow to ensure the intimate corporate dimension of Communion as much as possible. It is the integral time of intimate fellowship in likeness of Jesus’ intimate table fellowship, the sharing together in the new covenant instituted by Jesus. Even more important than reading or saying Jesus’ words of institution (1 Cor 11:24-26) is to *live* their relational significance for us—that is, to ‘sing’ Communion as “one,” just as Jesus prayed for us in his ‘formative family prayer’ (Jn 17:20-26). This is the crescendo of ‘singing’ as the integral relational dynamic of life in the tune of the new song of life together without the veil.

Being the family of God is an identity shared in together that is best expressed volitionally by having people get up and gather around the table(s) on which the bread and juice have been set. A whole loaf of bread (or loaves, depending on numbers of people) reflects the body of Christ better than pre-fragmented crackers, and could be passed from person to person to break off a piece. The cup could be passed for dipping, or a large bowl in the middle of the table would allow persons to dip their bread in together. The physicality of this manner affirms embodied, whole persons in relationship *together*.⁶ For those unable to walk, other caring options are possible, such as designating persons to bring the elements to them in small gatherings.

Because relationships based on God’s relational response of grace are necessarily equalized, the celebrants leading Communion need not be only senior pastors, the ordained, or only men.⁷ And provisions must be made for those who are unable to attend (e.g. home-bound) to affirm their personal significance in the family. This was a practice of the church at least at the time of Justin Martyr (mid-2nd C.), who wrote that after everyone had partaken of the bread and wine, “they [the elements] are sent through the deacons to those who are not present.”⁸ Glenn Weaver thoughtfully suggests the importance of the Lord’s Supper for believers suffering from dementia, as a way for the community to affirm these persons’ identity within the body of Christ.⁹

⁶ Logistics would vary for different sized congregations, yet efficiency, should not be the determining factor for sharing in this most integral Christian practice. Time is only secondary, relational significance is primary.

⁷ Catholic and other traditions hold the view that the celebrant (president) images Christ, and therefore must be a man, thus excluding women from this function. At Fuller Theological Seminary’s All Seminary Chapel only ordained ministers can lead the Lord’s Supper.

⁸ Quoted in Paul Bradshaw, *Early Christian Worship: A basic introduction to ideas and practice* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 41.

⁹ Glenn Weaver, “Embodied Spirituality.” In Malcolm Jeeves, ed., *From Cells to Souls—and Beyond* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 100.

The most meaningful Communion times I have experienced were in a small informal worship gathering. We were able to squeeze around the altar table on which was placed a loaf of bread and a wooden bowl of grape juice. The “leader” would say a thoughtful prayer of thanks to God (improvising), pick up the loaf, turn to another, make eye contact, take her hand and while passing the plate of bread say, “(name), we share in this together.” That person would then break a piece off the loaf, turn to the next person, repeat the connection and handing the bread, and so on around the table. After everyone got a piece of bread, we all dipped it in the juice and ate. Finally, we all hugged each other. These were simple, thoughtful, intimate times to share together as sisters and brothers, and there was a true sense of receiving Jesus’ person and presence with us as the Spirit touched our hearts.

The Lord’s Table Fellowship can be a significant aspect of our *metamorphoō* (inner-out change) as we are involved with the Spirit by grace with nothing less and no substitutes for our whole person. It is not merely a regular routine, or just a central liturgical practice, but is *the key of Jesus* to growing corporately together, to intimately experience each other as sisters and brothers in the same family—indeed “which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all” (Eph 1:23), for, as Paul says, “in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit” (2:22 NIV).

Proclamation of the Word

The sharing of God’s Word in worship is an area that needs much more discussion than this study can adequately address. I simply want to add my voice here to the view that God’s communicative Word in Scripture does not have to always be preached or taught in a sermon. Scripture is God’s relational language, and to render it into referential language, as too many sermons do, does not serve to build up the body as God’s family to be whole together in relationship with God and each other. The relational language of God can only be proclaimed relationally, ‘singing’ his new song in a new sanctuary; and this includes the gospel we claim and proclaim.

As mentioned earlier, a musical rendering of God’s interaction with Moses was deeply moving and edifying as it communicated God’s relational language through song and dramatization (solos and choir), distinguishing it from both a conventional sermon and a mere performance.¹⁰ In another example, for a seminary chapel service, a group of four readers presented a creative piece that interwove various Scriptures from both Testaments in a narrative of a postulant (a candidate for a religious order) asking questions of Jesus, and Jesus responding with his own questioning of the postulant. This example was a bit more cerebral than the Moses piece, but more qualitative than most discursive sermons.

As the embodied Word of God, Jesus is our theological, hermeneutical, and functional keys to the whole of God and whole relationship together. His whole life functioned relationally proclaiming, not in referential words (e.g. teachings for

¹⁰ “Moses” by Ken Medema ©1971 Word Music.

information about God) but only in ‘singing’ the new song of God’s relational whole. How can our “proclamation of the Word” also ‘sing’ like Jesus?

*O—praise be to God, embodied God
only for relationship (with us)
the whole of God (whole of God)¹¹*

‘Singing’ More Verses

It is imperative to be aware (with the Spirit’s help here) of the important difference between that which is relational (makes heart-to-heart connection) and that which is qualitative (touches our ‘eternity substance’). In the discussion about music’s qualitative nature and unique relational function (Verse 4), it was stated that ‘the qualitative’ is inseparable from ‘the relational’ if it is to have significance to God, even though separated the qualitative may have value to us. Therefore, anything qualitative without also making relational connection becomes an end in itself; as an end in itself, it only makes us feel something, feel moved, stirred, uplifted. This does not edify us in relationship with God. Without relational connection with God, then, the qualitative can subtly seduce us into an ontological simulation, that is, an illusion, of having relational significance to God and ourselves as well.

Just as Jesus embodied the primacy of relationship in all of God’s self-disclosures to us, and just as Jesus’ own person functioned whole from inner out in this primacy, this is our lens to our own person as worshiper, corporate and private. ‘*Singing*’ a new song to the Lord is our new perceptual-interpretive lens to our whole person and involvement with the Spirit, to think about, plan, and lead corporate worship together. With this new qualitative-relational lens—the perception of our person in the qualitative image and relational likeness of God—we can evaluate each aspect and feature for worship by asking about relational significance through these questions:

- What are we saying relationally to God in that particular aspect?
- What does it “teach” the gathered persons in relational terms for knowing God, not in referential terms for information about God?
- Is it primary or merely secondary to God?
- Are we trying to figure out ‘what to do’ (from outer in) as opposed to ‘how to be involved’ (from inner out)?

Communion—What are we communicating concerning: Jesus’ presence in the Spirit without the veil; what he has accomplished behind the veil for us ‘already’; what is the good news in relational terms; and how do we relationally respond to him for the good news?

Baptism—As one’s public expression of unmistakable relational involvement with Jesus Christ, and as a corporate celebration of a new family member, how can these be expressed more fully? Accordingly, how do we distinguish baptism as a special

¹¹ “The Whole of God Embodied” ©2008 T. Dave Matsuo and Kary A. Kambara.

event for making a public announcement from baptism as an extension of table fellowship involving a relational statement by a new family member?

Songs—Are they relationally *to* or referentially *about* God? Is gender-inclusive language used to not leave any family members relationally distant, in front of the veil? Is the singing range best for most persons so as not to distract them with the secondary? Are the songs composed for congregational singing (accessible) or too musically complicated that only trained singers can be involved?

Prayers—Do liturgical prayers convey a fragmented God—e.g. only fragments of a transcendent and distant God, or only the God in *my* life. Do we convey our participation in God’s life? Do our prayers illuminate communication with the God who is present and intimately involved with us? Are prayers in the worship order (*ordo*) merely routine? Is there time set aside for spontaneous corporate prayer? When a moment for silent prayer is designated, is it only perfunctory, or is adequate time allowed for persons to actually communicate with God? Reexamine the purpose of background music during spoken and silent prayer—is it to create a mood, to make something happen?

Participation—Consider the level of participation of everyone, by how every aspect is planned and carried out. Is active participation nurtured, dampened or suppressed? In the format and process of worship, what do we communicate to God *and* to each person who is present? Is it possible to have participation during the sermon, that is, beyond adding an “amen” and “preach it”? For example, I have been in a small setting in which persons would ask the preacher questions. How can we distinguish between prompting the congregation for a conditioned response from outer in, and encouraging relational involvement of whole persons from inner out, the latter of which includes verbal and physical participation?

The **position** of singers, instrumentalists, choir—Talk out why we continue to place them front and center stage/platform. Do they draw attention to themselves or support the body of worshipers as part of the body? Is it about wanting recognition? Even if you answer no to the latter question, where do you want the gathered worshipers to focus the attention of their eyes and hearts? If, for example, lead singers have microphones to enable the congregation to hear in order to follow, why do they need to be in front?

Special music, drama, dance, art—What are we communicating through a piece? How are all the worshipers who are in attendance relationally engaged, or kept at a relational distance through performance to be observed? In this area especially (because music and art have qualitative value), it is imperative to check out relational significance, or if something is included as a qualitative end in itself.

Language used—Is language not only relational language but also relationally sensitive, for example, without unnecessary joking that reduces persons through stereotyping of women and men? Language is a huge area needing to be addressed

in its communication function; the use of relational language instead of referential language is an area for much needed change. We need to transpose into the key of Jesus!

Audio format—Is *priority* (beyond mere consideration) being given to what is best for persons over personal preferences? High volume that younger people favor physically bothers older persons, not to mention long-term hearing loss for everyone. Even high volume for postlude music makes it difficult to have conversation for those remaining in the sanctuary right after the service ends. What is primary here?

The **worship space** (sanctuary, chapel, gymnasium, etc.)—Are these inherently “holy ground?” If holiness, sacredness, and sanctified mean set apart for God’s use, given what is primary to him, how can we look at our church spaces with a new lens and transform them from the common to the uncommon? Think about the **placement** of a cross, visuals, furniture—What does the placement communicate relationally to God? In one worship setting, the large cross in the apse is obscured from view (the view from the center of the sanctuary) by a large set of stage spotlights. In another setting, the projection screen hangs in front, like a movie theater screen, and a large wooden cross stands in secondary place to the side. Do the visuals help touch ‘eternity substance’? Is a visual more about the individual artist? Do the visuals give primacy to traditions from the sociocultural context (e.g. American flag, Christmas tree)? Are visuals edifying for the building up the family? To ask these questions is not a rejection of visuals, but to put them in relational perspective.

All of the above requires much more from those who plan worship in whole terms of relational involvement with God and other persons. This involves the ongoing need to pray and think through these specific matters with the Spirit rather than to fall back on what we know, how we’ve always done it, or what is easier. But this is what composes ‘singing’ the new song of loving as we have been loved (Jn 15:9,12). It is how we become relationally involved with our whole selves for growing with our sisters and brothers as God’s family. This was how Jesus composed his family behind the veil and put them in tune in his key of table fellowship together without the veil. Paul, writing as one who had been transposed from Secondary Sanctuary to this new sanctuary, sums up our purpose as this:

“to *restore* God’s people for *their primary* work of ministry, *the primacy of whole relationship together*, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all come to *oneness together* in our faith and of the knowledge *in relationship* of the Son of God and become complete, *involved* to the full measure of the *whole* of Christ” (Eph 4:12, italics mine).

The following is included as one example of how to help worshipers orient themselves in a new way to focus relationally on God. It is an old worship announcement

given to persons arriving for a monthly Sunday evening worship service conducted by a campus ministry at UCLA in 1971.

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT: Read first!!!

This is an invitation. It's an invitation to worship God in Jesus Christ. Worship, however, is always connected with or related to the expressing of the worshipper's feelings toward the Person worshipped, Jesus Christ. This is a very active sharing and involves a very intimate relating with Jesus. Worship is not even being a part of anything. Above all it is not being with other people.

This is the invitation we would like to extend to you. If you would like to actively express your feelings to Jesus Christ and are willing to put yourself on the line to Him in front of other people, then we welcome you to this opportunity. But, the initiative is solely upon the individual for the whole evening is being devoted to open and free worship. In whatever way each individual would like to express his feelings to Jesus Christ, this is how we will worship tonight. Nothing is planned or structured. The opportunity is yours to praise Jesus.

Therefore, if you have come to observe something, to be part of something, to be with other people, or to be passive in any way to Jesus Christ, then we DO NOT invite you to join us in the chapel. However, if you want to remain in the LOUNGE to talk with others, to socialize, or to wait for others worshipping, please feel free to stay in this room. Please be straight and be honest with yourself. Our Lord knows our hearts, so make your decision sincerely & individually—not because others are going in to worship.

Tonight the chapel is for active worshippers only!

This worship time was not merely innovative but by the nature of worship necessarily holding worshipers relationally accountable to God and each other, as worship led to the involvement together in Communion.

The Need to Know

To 'sing' in the key of Jesus answers a particular issue that comes up in studies about Christian worship: the fact that the New Testament does not prescribe any how-to's or patterns for our worship, no outline or even general paradigm. In the past few decades or so, we have heard the call for evangelicals, particularly those of free church strands, to draw more deeply from ancient Christian liturgical tradition.¹² The quest for ancient Christian worship practices during biblical times yields little, for the New Testament and its contemporary resources do not answer our 'need' to know. The absence of information in the NT about worship practices has, I suggest, an important relational message from

¹² For example, Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999) and his Ancient-Future worship series; also *Worship Leader Magazine*.

the Spirit for us today: ‘How-tos’ for worship are lacking because they too easily become about ‘what to do’ and feed into the human susceptibility to make the secondary primary, thus reducing the primary issue of the relationship together with God. When we search the NT for clues to how the earliest churches worshiped, most likely what we are seeking is information for ‘what to do’ which in relational terms makes the secondary primary, and most likely at the expense of that which is primary to God. To have such information (knowledge, if you wish) is to then function as the “wise and learned” and not as the little children in the key of Jesus (Lk 10:21), who function in the relational openness and vulnerability the Father seeks.

Given the dearth of information from the NT itself, liturgical scholars and others search the non-biblical body of documents from the third and fourth centuries to find nourishment for our worship today. Yet, as liturgical scholar Paul F. Bradshaw reminds us, this effort yields only a meager crop of useful data. As of 2001, Bradshaw sums up the general state of scholarship of early Christian liturgy: “We know much, much less about the liturgical practices of the first three centuries of Christianity than we once thought.”¹³

Liturgical functions appear to have had many forms from the birth of the church, forms compromised, evolved, related to geographical location, and the passing of time. We have had available to us the earliest church order (the *Didache*, 1st/2nd C.), and ecclesiastical writings from the third and fourth centuries on (e.g. *Apostolic Tradition*, *Canons of Hippolytus*, *Didascalia Apostolorum*, *Apostolic Constitutions*) describing some liturgical functions. It is unknown whether these writings are descriptive of what was taking place in churches, or whether they were prescriptive, and if the latter, if anyone followed them. The fact that these do not appear in any form in the biblical canon (established in the fourth century) signifies, I believe, (1) they are only secondary matter, because Scripture self-discloses only the primacy of relationship to God (cf. Jesus’ words to Martha in Lk 10:41-42), and (2) that the Spirit-inspired process of canonization proscribed anything that would be embraced as ‘what to do’, and thus would make the secondary primary, therefore promoting reductionism and fragmenting God’s whole.

If the liturgical descriptions in the ecclesiastical writings are not clearly or definitively how the early church worshiped, then on what basis does the ancient-future quest for ancient practices have significance for the church today? It appears that the quest (or movement) is searching for deeper experience, and looks to the ancient rituals because they provide an affective experience, something that *feels* meaningful and real by virtue of their participatory nature or sensory stimulation, as opposed to a worship service that is dominated by dryness, shallowness, or passive participation. If the difference comes down to the choice between being an active participant or a spectator, give me the participatory worship anytime! And yet, to qualify that, as we noted earlier in this study, participation itself does not ensure that our focus and worship has the relational clarity needed to be directly on God; nor does it ensure that our participation has the relational significance necessary to make heart-to-heart connection with God in the qualitative function and relational involvement of our whole person.

Certain dynamics are necessary in the corporate worship of a local body of believers, most notably Communion and its extension in baptism. These are vital

¹³ Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), x.

dynamics of our shared life as God's family. Other dynamics, considered rituals,¹⁴ can be helpful as "tutors," to help persons get in touch with their hearts for the purpose of making intimate connection with God, to open ourselves vulnerably to receive God, to share our hearts back in praise, thanksgiving, deeper commitment of submission in trust and obedience to him. It should always be clarified that rituals are not to be engaged as ends in themselves, but to facilitate deeper connection between the worshiper and God. All of these are relational dynamics that converge with Jesus behind the curtain and emerge with the whole of God without the veil.

Corporate worship, therefore, is never *primarily* about rituals, elements, actions, and patterns because to think in these ways makes us susceptible to outer-in worship shaped by human contexts of culture and church tradition. This shaping reduces worship to "lips with distant hearts speaking human precepts that hold to human tradition" as exposed by the key of Jesus (Mk 7:6-8). In contrast and conflict, worship is always our corporate relational response to the whole of God—heart to heart, face to Face behind the curtain, in his relational context and by the intimate relational process by which he has vulnerably involved himself for relational connection, the quality and depth of which make us whole from inner out without the veil. All of this is the relational outcome of what we are saved *to*: the experiential reality of Jesus' relational work of redemption on the cross to be reconciled together in the ongoing relational progression together of redemptive change that composes our relational belonging into God's family in the key of adoption to be in tune as his very own daughters and sons.

Chorus:

'Singing' the new song to our Lord: By its nature, 'singing' can only be on key and in tune as composed in the new song of the whole of life and all the relational dynamics of life in its wholeness. As embodied by Jesus in God's primacy of relationship together, 'singing' the new song is our perceptual-interpretive key to worship. Though the intimacy necessary to grow in the new song (as his new creation family) discomforts us, Jesus pursues us for this primacy in worship, and the Spirit is present to transpose together with us. Accordingly, therefore, worship can have no substitute for its integrating focus of the above relational dynamics, and is nothing less than the integral relational convergence of these dynamics composing our (both individual and corporate) reciprocal relational response and vulnerable involvement in relationship together with the whole of God. No veil allowed!

¹⁴ I purposely chose not to specify what these rituals are. Rather, we need to examine our rituals for their purpose, not assuming that they have significance to God and build up his family together.

Finale

*As you, Father, are in me and I am in you,
may they also be one [relational wholeness] in us,
so that the world may believe that you have sent me.*

John 17:21

Jesus' Table Fellowship rings out in a clear tone of grace to make the primacy of relationship together primary in our worship gatherings! Only from his table do the secondary and substitutes easily fall into their proper place in front of the veil, and we emerge free to be involved in the intimate and equalized relationships with God and each other without the veil. All that Jesus embodied keys us to relationship together on God's whole terms, and our compatible response of relational trust and submission with our whole person, nothing less and no substitutes. This is the new life together in wholeness we are saved *to* and for which the Spirit is present and actively transposing with us in reciprocal (not unilateral) relationship. As those who have relationally joined with Jesus behind the veil, let us no longer give primacy to the secondary substitutes of 'what to do' for worship. We are keyed to rise and emerge with Jesus to compose the new sanctuary together with him with no veil, which is the family of God, constituted in the original score, the Trinity. It is therefore imperative that we enter into and live in his intimate presence 'singing' the new song to our Lord with hearts transposed from off-key referential language to the key of Jesus' relational language, the native tongue of the Word from God.

The issue of the veil is not only theological but inseparably functional. The fact of the veil and our relational position to it are critical for defining *who* we are in relation to God (our ontology) and for determining *what* and *how* we are *with* God (our function in relationship). Without clarity about the veil, our identity—and thus our song—strains for its primary definition and thus our function becomes occupied in secondary matters in search, simulation or illusion of what is primary. Accordingly, lack of clarity of the veil makes worship ambiguous, and lacking in relational significance. Worship, as commonly understood, can and often does take place in front of the veil, but this relational position renders our worship to a Secondary Sanctuary. Jesus challenges us to more than this.

By God's relational response of grace, those who have relationally joined with Jesus behind the veil experience redemptive change for whole understanding of God, of who, what and how they are, and of worship, and, therefore, emerge as whole persons without the veil reconciled in the primacy of relationship together with the whole of God for the relational significance of worship in the new sanctuary. Worship with the veil removed is irreducibly and nonnegotiable the integrating focus and the integral relational convergence of our (both individual and corporate) reciprocal relational response and vulnerable involvement of our whole person in relationship together with the whole of God—nothing less and no substitutes. Worship is the chorus for the new song composed in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God, sung only in this relational key and this qualitative tune—to be one in the whole of God.

The following song emerges for the new song to the Lord:

‘Singing’ the New Song¹

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

[embrace the whole of God]

[embrace the whole of God]

¹ 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.

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