

The Gender Equation in Human Identity & Function:

Examining Our Theology and Practice,
and Their Essential Equation

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Chapter 1 The Gender Equation in Human Contexts

**They do not belong to the world (*the human context*)
just as I do not belong to the world.**

John 17:16¹

Since my life as a Christian didn't start until I was in college, my thoughts and perceptions about females were already formed without theological input, though not necessarily without some church influence. At that stage, I was somewhat aware of how my biological family shaped how I felt about being a female. For example, I knew that I didn't like having an identity as 'daughter'. Any further self-awareness had yet to unfold. I didn't pay as much attention to how my immediate social contexts shaped me, much less society at large.

The gendered society, however, was essential to forming my thoughts and perceptions about females, most of which were *incompatible* with God's design and purpose for me/us as persons in God's image. I have no doubt that this is true for most if not all of us. It is thus critical for us to account for **the gender equation** we use in our lives, that is, both for how we feel about being a female and how we address gender issues as Christians in our theology and practice. The gender equation is a composite of how we see, think, and act on what it means to be female (or male) in terms of identity and function in everyday life, and the result this equation produces. For us to sufficiently address the issues surrounding gender and get to the heart of the underlying person, we urgently need to examine the gender equation we use; this means unavoidably that we must challenge lifelong assumptions about gender. This examination is imperative because in God's view, females in the church overtly or covertly experience inherent injustice involved in those assumptions. With such a gender equation, God's global church will continue to founder without its distinguished witness to the world until we take this bull by the horns.

This is all to say that where God's global church family should have been the unmistakable light and leader against prevailing discrimination in all its forms against females, the church has utterly failed. Not only has the church failed, but its gender equation further reinforces and sustains the human condition underlying any and all discrimination. Later in the study, we'll hear Jesus' words rebuking us, holding us accountable for our individual and corporate responsibility for the condition of fragmentation (both of persons and relationships) of his church. Awareness of this fragmentation is directly correlated to our theological anthropology and view of sin, both of which are key component in our gender equation. Moreover, the existence of this fragmentation is the consequence in large part of an obstinate refusal or benign resistance to address the gender equation used, all the while entertaining the illusion that we abide by his commands concerning women. Due to gender discrimination against females, in a very real sense girls and women have become 'lost' in the church, though still in it.

¹ This study uses the NRSV unless noted otherwise. Italicized words are my renderings.

It is indispensable for us to understand the gender equation that informs our theology and shapes our practice. The first and thus **primary gender equation** emerged at creation (Gen 1:26-27; 2:18,25). The **prevailing gender equation**, however, evolved from the dynamics of reductionism in the primordial garden, as a consequence of the inaugural persons reducing their identity and function in the primary gender equation (Gen 3:7,10,16). From this beginning, gender distinction and discrimination have prevailed throughout all human history, and the scope of gender discrimination has pervaded our human contexts. If we cannot clearly distinguish the primary gender equation in our theology and practice, how can we be confident that we aren't involved in the prevailing gender equation? No, if we cannot clearly distinguish the primary gender equation in our life (individually and corporately), by default we will continue to reinforce and sustain the other one, the prevailing gender equation that is a distorted, reduced identity and function in our persons (female and male), relationships, and churches. This default mode becomes a bias that is easily mistaken for the truth of God's design and purpose.

This study unfolds uncomfortably, because God holds us accountable for the gender equation we use; and being held accountable by God upsets the status quo and our comfort zones, and requires us to change. Jesus consistently challenged persons' assumptions about the bases on which they shaped their identity and function, thus Chapter 2 specifically addresses us to the gender equation we use for this purpose. This is the intrusive and disrupting effect of Jesus' vulnerable involvement with persons while he lived in our human context. Therefore, as we follow him today on his intrusive relational path, we should expect and welcome the Spirit's intimate involvement with us as well for his relational outcome. My sisters and brothers, if the church is ever to undergo turn-around change *from* its practice of discrimination based on gender, and be transformed *to* practice that is new and whole, now is the time.

Why Another Study about Women and Gender?

You may have wondered: What more is there to say about gender issues in the church that hasn't already been said? What we should all be earnestly asking instead is: Why haven't things turned around for the significance of women in the church after over two thousand years? That is to say, why haven't gender identity and function been transformed in both Christian women and men? Jesus already accomplished the relational work necessary that broke down barriers between all persons, and equalized us all (as Paul made conclusive, Eph 2:14-22; Col 3:10-11). Why are we still dealing with gender distinction and discrimination in the church? There is something deep that we have been missing.

For starters, church leadership urgently needs to become much more sensitized to the prevailing gender equation that permeates our society and churches, and how this is so common that we assume it's just normal—like a habit in our brains that we don't think about and thus aren't even aware of its presence. Church leaders, especially men but also women, need to come to terms in their churches with their operating gender equation. It

is undeniable that the prevailing gender equation, in both society at large and churches in particular, is constituted by *sexism*.

Sexism encompasses attitudes and behaviors of prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination against persons based on their gender, usually against girls and women. This discrimination against females takes place as **hostile sexism** and **benevolent sexism**. Hostile sexism is the overt verbal and physical treatment of girls and women that demeans us, such as physical sexual assault (unwanted sexual groping, attempted and completed rape) and verbal assault using sexualized names and innuendo. Hostile sexism is obvious.

Less obvious, however, is benevolent sexism, which encompasses patronizing attitudes and expressions toward girls and women that we are by virtue of our female gender weaker (needing protection from males), submissive, passive, and deferring to males (as in the prevailing gender equation). There's a vast difference between being patronizing, on the one hand, and being sensitive to females' real needs and capabilities, on the other hand. Male pastors are often patronizing toward females, in my opinion and experience. Recognizing benevolent sexism is especially critical in Christian contexts because it is justified in much practice, if not in theology—and this includes acting paternalistic and serving as benefactors. While we need to become much more vocal against hostile sexism in the church, I suspect there is more benevolent sexism in churches than we realize. This includes recognizing the gender distinctions we make and understanding what underlies those distinctions.

Wherever we encounter gender discrimination, we must clearly name and call out the obvious situations and circumstances of gender discrimination against girls and women, such as unequal opportunities for girls and women, unequal pay for equal work, and sexual misconduct against females. But that is just the first phase in the process of our own transformation to wholeness. That process of becoming aware of gender discrimination (the process of conscientization) is a necessary starting point, and from there we can then examine more deeply the roots of the prevailing gender equation that never get sufficiently addressed.

The biological basis upon which prevailing gender equations are formed is only one aspect of persons, females and males; yet on account of that one difference, femininity and masculinity have assumed great importance to our self-understanding. The bad news is that to essentially construct a gender equation on this singular basis of gender both fragments females from our integrated wholeness (as God created all persons), and reduces females to less than whole persons (as created in God's image). Narrow and constraining stereotypes are inculcated in us from childhood (both females and males), and those stereotypes continue to be internalized, expressed and perpetuated—even unintentionally or unknowingly. This prevailing gender equation we use comes from outside our person, yet we internalized it, and treat ourselves and others according to its norms for females and males.

Being feminine means dressing a certain way, smiling a lot, being “nice and kind, calm and quiet,”² and being attractive and submissive to males—to name a few cultural norms (read requirements) for us. Being masculine means having physical strength, being

² Nancy Lammers Gross, *Women's Voices and the Practice of Preaching* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2017, 63.

fearless, not showing emotions (emotions signaling weakness)—and, especially, not being feminine. Norms such as these shape our identity, that is, our self-understanding of who we are supposed to be (how we define our self), together with our function in how we are supposed to behave, notably how we engage in relationships with others. Under this determination, females essentially surrender their will to be different, or are stigmatized for exercising their person to the contrary.

Reduced identity and function comprise our *theological anthropology* (TA). Therefore, we need to think about how our TA is largely defined by the prevailing gender equation, and not God’s primary gender equation. This is why we need another study on women and gender. Specifically, we need to be more honest than we have been willing to be about just how this reduction of females subtly manifests itself in our persons (even among feminists and egalitarians) and the negative impact this reductionism has on our self-worth and perception of our integrity and capabilities as persons. Critically for us as Jesus’ followers, we need to ask ourselves vulnerably: How does the prevailing gender equation diminish our relationships with God and others, and our place in the church? And face: How is God affected? The next chapter addresses this question.

I strongly encourage you, as you go through this study, to stop as often as necessary along the way and think about your own experiences growing up. Using a “lens” focused on gender, think about what you felt and thought about being a girl (or boy), how your perceptions of yourself and others might have changed during your pre-teens, teenage years, and so on. Even though some of this study might seem conceptual, it is meant to get us to think about our everyday life and practice. Some of this examining will be uncomfortable, at times painful, bringing up feelings of shame, guilt, sadness, and anger. These are the feelings we need to ask the Spirit’s help to be honest about and share with our Father.

Historically (and even theologically), efforts at changing the prevailing gender equation so that females are treated and able to live as equal to males have failed to correct the existing human order—notwithstanding important but hard-won gains along the way (e.g. women’s right to vote in the U.S.). This is why we need another study on gender and women: We obviously need to address the issue of gender discrimination with a different lens and deeper understanding, or, as Albert Einstein might say: “We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.” Chapter three examines the theology that shaped much of current thinking, thinking that has been both insufficient for God’s family to undergo the redemptive change necessary for all persons to become whole together in the image and likeness of the Trinity—as Jesus prayed for us to be (Jn 17:11,21-23), and as Paul clarified as the redemptive change of transformation (Rom 12:2).

The theology discussion includes a critique of the complementarian-egalitarian debate, both sides of which promote the prevailing gender equation. I think egalitarians will be more surprised at the critique (and I am not a complementarian). That discussion then articulates a whole theology for our practice to be and live whole our identity and function as whole male and female persons in whole relationships together in the Trinity’s likeness—defined and determined by nothing less than and no substitutes for our whole persons (or ‘*nothing less and no substitutes*’ for short in this study).

Before focusing on the church and other Christian contexts and concerns (Chaps. 2 and 5)—including examining and critiquing our prevailing theology (Chap. 3) and practice (Chap. 4), it's necessary to get a firm handle on our prevailing sociocultural context—our human context—which Jesus referred to as “the world” in the opening Scripture of this chapter. We need deeper understanding of the human context and its fragmented human order in order to fully understand God's opposing relational context and contrary relational process. This distinction between the *common* “of the world” and God's *uncommon* (holy, i.e. set apart from common usage for God) is critical to hear and receive Jesus' words and what he fervently prayed to the Father for (Jn 17:14-26). What does it mean to “belong to” or “not belong to” our human context as it relates to the gender equation we use? While most of this discussion focuses on Western society (and especially in the U.S.), the general themes are pertinent to the Majority World's global contexts, both general societies and the church in those contexts.

Gendered Society

The notion of the gendered society means that when we are born into this society, we enter a life context that uses gender distinction between females and males in nearly every aspect of life. That is, the everyday life we experience in family, education, employment, politics, culture, and religion is ordered according to terms defined by what belongs to the categories of feminine and masculine. In variable ways, every society has these categories to define persons, so who can claim to not be from a gendered context? The prevailing gender equation from the primordial garden simply nullifies any such claim. The binary categories of feminine and masculine dominate our society, although there is some blurring of these categories with the growing visibility of LGBTQ persons. This study focuses on the feminine-masculine binary because it is still the dominant fissure in human relations that pervades the human condition—including our condition in the church.

Life in human contexts worldwide is for girls and women a complex mix of experiences of gender distinction (difference) which leads to discrimination. *Difference* in our societies always connotes *less* for persons considered different, as in less in worth and importance; therefore, in comparison, girls and women are less deserving than boys and men of opportunities (privilege), respect (prestige), and authority (power) in countless areas of life. This notion (i.e. stigma) that difference means *less* is called the *deficit model* in a comparative process, and its use in Western society applies to any minority group vis-à-vis the white male dominant majority (i.e. not necessarily the majority in number but having majority control over others). The deficit model is the gender equation prevailing in all human contexts, and is, simply, a lie—a lie composed and perpetuated by reductionism. I grew up having internalized this perception of me as *less*, and it has taken me ongoing effort to reject this lie and embrace God's truth about me. Engaging in this sin of reductionism (to be discussed in depth in the next chap.) may seem normal and will not be apparent to Christians unless their view of sin encompasses reductionism. Thus, in contrast and likely in conflict with the status quo, dealing with the

lie of the prevailing gender equation is what all of Jesus' followers—both females and males—must face with the Spirit in order to 'not belong to the world' just as Jesus does not.

Clarifying Some Words

As we begin this study, let's clarify some key terms. I have most often heard the words **gender** and **sex** used interchangeably, where 'gender' seems more polite or less embarrassing. 'Sex' in our overly sexualized modern culture often denotes sexual intercourse (or related). Therefore, in everyday conversation, I use 'gender' to mean female or male. But for this study, I also use the following distinction by sociologist and gender expert Michael S. Kimmel:

Sex refers to the biological apparatus, the male and the female—our chromosomal, chemical, anatomical organization. Gender refers to the meanings that are attached to those differences within a culture. Sex is male and female; gender is masculinity and femininity—what it means to be a man or a woman.... And while biological sex varies very little, gender varies enormously. What it means to possess the anatomical configuration of male or female means very different things depending on where you are, who you are, and when you are living.³

The purpose for distinguishing the difference between sex and gender in this study is simply to highlight the fact that gender distinctions are constructed in and by our human sociocultural contexts, and define the attributes that get ascribed to persons.

Gender combines with other attributes of what persons have (e.g. other physical features, possessions) and what they do (e.g. roles in family, in jobs, in church) to form and thereby define their identity (ontology) and determine their daily behaviors as they carry out their roles (e.g. function). Gendered attributes are defined as essentially feminine or masculine, and are reinforced by cultures and societies. But these gender distinctions are not neutral, as Kimmel states here:

Gender is not simply a system of classification by which biological males and biological females are sorted, separated, and socialized into equivalent sex roles. Gender also expresses the universal inequality between men and women. When we speak about gender we also speak about *hierarchy, power, and inequality*, not simply difference.⁴

These assumptions and ascriptions are biases by which we define persons from birth—or even before—in our families and among friends. Parents may try to intentionally raise their children apart from *genderized* cultural norms, but it is contradictory to do so if the parents themselves unknowingly practice gender distinctions for themselves. It is also impossible to counter children's peer pressure and other forms of genderized socialization—including genderized technology and social media. And,

³ Michael S. Kimmel, *The Gendered Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 3.

⁴ Kimmel, 1 (my italics).

although there are variations from culture to culture about what is feminine or masculine, as well as diversity of sexuality, “virtually every single society differentiates people on the basis of gender” and “virtually every known society is also based on male dominance.”⁵

Genderization refers to making unjustified distinctions falsely based on the physiological makeup that we are each born with, such as our chromosomes, genitalia, hormones. These are the distinctions that classify persons into narrow categories of feminine and masculine, which unfold in the inevitable comparative process with the deficit model. Gender distinction segregates females and males into separate groupings, such as female-dominated jobs like nursing and housekeeping over against male-dominated jobs like public officials and construction. In particular, gendered distinctions have to be critically examined for all the ways those distinctions are used to compose gender discrimination (sexism), the universal consequences for girls and women. The dynamics are outlined as follows:

- (1) Gender distinctions carry a value of *better* or *less* measured on a comparative scale, where female gender is ‘less’ and male gender is ‘more’, thereby creating unequal relationships.
- (2) Unequal relationships by nature function with relational barriers and relational distance, countering intimacy of heart-to-heart connection between equal persons. Unequal relationships between males and females prevail at all levels of the human order of life in personal relationships, families, within tribes/communities, cultures, and in societies’ institutions.
- (3) The result is the gendered social hierarchy that ensures preference, power, and privilege for males (in families, cultures, and institutions) kept in place by males exerting power through dominance and control (e.g. suppressing females through physical, emotional, and economic coercion/violence). Not all males are prejudiced against females, nor do all males discriminate against females. That is, some boys and men may not be sexist or practice sexism in their personal relationships, but they are complicit by going along with, participating in and benefiting from gendered institutional contexts—and remaining silent.
- (4) Gender discrimination has created this inequality that is practiced universally as patriarchy in families, cultures, and institutions (including religions). All of human life is gendered; this world is a gendered world. The only good news is that this genderized-ness of the world is not what Jesus belongs to, nor should we—but the church hasn’t yet been redeemed from it in most of our theology and practice.

In this study, I use gender discrimination and **sexism** interchangeably. The following is a thorough definition of sexism from the Encyclopedia Britannica:

Sexism, prejudice or discrimination based on sex or gender, especially against women and girls.... Sexism can be a belief that one sex is superior to or more valuable than another sex. It imposes limits on what men and boys can and should do and what women and girls can and should do. The concept of sexism was originally

⁵ Kimmel, 2.

formulated to raise consciousness about the oppression of girls and women, although by the early 21st century it had sometimes been expanded to include the oppression of any sex, including men and boys, intersexual people, and transgender people.

Sexism in a society is most commonly applied against women and girls. It functions to maintain patriarchy, or male domination, through ideological and material practices of individuals, collectives, and institutions that oppress women and girls on the basis of sex or gender. Such oppression usually takes the forms of economic exploitation and social domination. Sexist behaviours, conditions, and attitudes perpetuate stereotypes of social (gender) roles based on one's biological sex.⁶

Misogyny literally means hatred toward women. Much of recent news about sexual harassment, abuse, and sexual misconduct in general has brought to light the blatant disregard on the part of males toward females as persons of equal value and equal stature. Are these instances of misogyny? My perception of misogyny used to be that hatred toward women was restricted to the extreme expressions of violence against women, such as rape and sadomasochism. My understanding has since broadened and deepened, however, to now view misogyny as any dehumanization (i.e. fragmenting reductionism) of females, as any expressions that treat females as less than the whole persons that God creates us to be and seeks to redeem us to. By the same reasoning, **misandry** (the hatred of males) covers all forms of dehumanizing of males to less than the whole persons that God sees. In this sense, it can be said with significance that males who practice misogyny also engage in misandry; and this subtle hatred of persons is inherent in the prevailing gender equation.

Some Aspects of the Gendered Society

Several examples from current events are worth noting to illustrate how women, along with their voices, get diminished, or put another way, their whole persons get 'lost' due to prejudice, discrimination, and suppression. Women have to strive against the status quo that favors males across the sociocultural spectrum of everyday life.

The first example was illuminated in the movie "Flint," about the still-current problem of contaminated water in Flint, Michigan. The movie showed in condensed form the process that some Flint women residents undertook to bring change to a dire situation. Children and adults were getting seriously sick as a result of bad decisions by government officials about Flint's water supply. A group of mothers spearheaded community action to correct the severe health crisis caused by those decisions, which meant also to hold officials—mostly men—accountable for their ill-intentioned decisions. In key scenes where mothers testified about illnesses caused by Flint's contaminated water supply, the male officials simply dismissed the women, offering them excuses disguised as their responsible choices.

In one scene at a public meeting, the officials dismissed the women's statements, but listened to a male pastor supporting the women. And it wasn't until a male scientist

⁶ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/sexism> Britannica.com.

(and his assistants) gathered and presented evidence of widespread evidence and high levels of contaminated water among Flint households that things began to change. The dynamic to notice here is the dismissiveness with which the women were treated by the men in positions of power and authority. By being ignored, this is how the women got *lost* initially. The women's concerns were of critical importance and clearly were in the right, but the men were content with the status quo that disregarded others' lives.

The women's voices were initially silenced, but finally found expression and got results. Fortunately for the citizens of Flint, the women persisted and are now getting some results. I have no doubt that the male officials in power didn't suddenly become dismissive of women in this situation. Rather, the situation merely exposed their previously formed attitude of dismissiveness.

The second example is also from current events in the U.S., and illustrates a double whammy against women—women being sexually assaulted in the workplace, then further demeaned or threatened to be fired when they protest. A number of prominent men in politics, entertainment, and tech (who possess both power and privilege) have been publicly accused of sexual harassment, abuse, assault, or rape. Certain of these men flatly deny the women's accounts, calling them liars, or simply claiming that the sexual relations were consensual. Many of the accused men dismiss and disparage the women's voices who “tell truth to power,” again calling the women liars, thereby publicly demeaning and silencing the women. One of the aspiring politicians, judge Roy Moore, identifies himself as a Christian, and other Christian leaders openly supported him—or at least remained silent (implying agreement) on the matter. In all the cases, the women (and girls) who have been victimized are sacrificed for men's political and egotistical aspirations and goals. How common a behavior is it for accused men to try to silence the women who accuse them, by publicly disparaging them or by paying them to keep quiet? Even the current U.S. president has done so.

Part of the status quo treatment of women is when women speak up against sexual abusers, they are ignored, disparaged, threatened, and retaliated against (i.e. ostracized). It remains to be seen how well this current #MeToo movement will help bring very basic change to our male-dominated society. Or will this moment fade away and women continue to be silenced by those in power?

Gender discrimination against women in the workplace includes all the ways women are treated unequally and unfairly. In addition to unequal pay for equal work, workplace discrimination favors men over women in hiring, reserves promotions and other career-enhancing opportunities for men, and sustains the ‘old boys club’ which is vital to building social networks—evidence of male privilege and power. A notable example is evidenced in the recent lawsuits made by three female scientists at the reputable Salk Institute for Biological Studies. The issue at the Salk Institute is particularly stunning because the three women are full professors (there are only five women senior professors to twenty-eight men), and have garnered much more grant money than have the men. Yet gender discrimination has continued to persist there in spite of two studies on gender disparities (2003 and 2016) that found the institute's practices alarmingly discriminatory.⁷

⁷ For further reading, see Michael Hiltzik, “An ugly problem in the ivory tower,” *Los Angeles Times*, Business, February 4, 2018; Meredith Wadman, “Salk Institute hit with discrimination lawsuit by third

The sexual harassment of untold numbers of women in the workplace is not publicized, as it has been for Hollywood celebrities, politicians, high level scientists, and academics, or even reported. A current survey of Los Angeles city workers found that 18% of the females experienced sexual harassment and that nearly half of them never reported it.⁸ Many women are in minimum wage (or below minimum wage) jobs in service industries (waitresses, hotel housekeepers, and room cleaners), but even well-paid truckers. So many of these women are often just getting by financially and are desperate to keep their jobs, making them vulnerable to abuse.⁹ It is usually men who are managers and supervisors holding power over women, and who intimidate the women into either going along with sexual, physical, or emotional abuse, and not reporting the abuse. There are certainly male co-workers who witness abuse, but many don't say anything because they are also afraid for their jobs. The women in these jobs are also sexually harassed by customers in addition to their work superiors. Other vulnerable women are domestic workers, (nannies, house cleaners), garment workers, fast-food workers, and farmworkers.

The third current example is the sexual abuse of U.S. young female gymnasts by their doctor. Larry Nasser regularly abused hundreds of girls and young women under the guise of medical treatment. Nasser would tell the girls not to disclose to others the "treatment" he was performing. Whenever one of them complained, they weren't just ignored, they were silenced by Nasser's employers (Michigan State University and the USA Gymnastics).¹⁰ How many other so-called doctors are abusing girls and women under the guise of medical care? Part of the problem with much of sexual assault is that the victims don't know they're being abused, yet they feel guilt or shame, and they fear some form of consequence if they came forward.

Another entire chapter can be written about sexual abuse of girls and women globally concerning sex trafficking and prostitution, girl infanticide, genital mutilation, honor killings, and slave labor to name the most visible cases. Traditional cultures typically render girls and women to inferior status in their families, in marriage, and in their communities. Men continue to dictate how women must live, as in South Asia and the Middle Eastern countries. Even in Sweden, whose reputation as egalitarian is well-known, the curtain on sexism is now being pulled back; the recent turmoil over sexual abuse and male abuse of power in the Nobel literature prize body is only the most prominent evidence of the illusion that Scandinavia is nobly egalitarian. This study focuses more on sexism in the West, specifically in the Western church, because that is what I'm most aware of. But the dynamics of what gender equation we use apply universally to God's global family.

The problem of sexual harassment and abuse, including domestic violence, also exists in Christian contexts, but receives much less general news coverage, although there is some reporting in Christian publications. One prominent case involved revered

female scientist," July 20, 2017 at <http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2017/07/salk-institute-hit-discrimination-lawsuit-third-female-scientist>

⁸ The survey was reported in the *Los Angeles Times*, April 24, 2018.

⁹ Refer to "My Reality: A Hidden America," 20/20 with Diane Sawyer (aired 4/20/18).

¹⁰ See the full victim impact statement by Rachael Denhollander, www.cnn.com/2018/01/24/us/rachael-denhollander-full-statement/

Anabaptist theologian, John Howard Yoder; only after decades did the Mennonite seminary (where Yoder sexually abused and harassed many women) take full responsibility for its failure to deal with Yoder appropriately.¹¹ Sexual misconduct by male leaders against women in the church by church and ministry leaders must be exposed for its dehumanizing—again, the subtle hatred of persons by fragmenting reductionism—and hurtful consequences on females (and males), and on the integrity and identity of God’s church. Such practices expose the presence of the prevailing gender equation.

Importantly, Christian women recently have begun to speak up more publicly about their experiences (e.g. #ChurchToo and #SilenceIsNotSpiritual), but it is not yet clear what the church as a whole will do about it. Alarming absent is the Christian academy’s forceful, just and compassionate response and action, thereby failing to heed Jesus’ admonition not only to not look down on females, but to challenge and correct shameful treatment of God’s own daughters. The next chapter will expand on this disgraceful condition.

The prevailing gender equation indeed exerts a stranglehold on Western society. Gender stereotypes that define femininity and masculinity have become extremely polarized in overt sexual terms. Women are constantly portrayed as sex objects across the cultural board, on the internet (e.g. pornography), in music (e.g. much of rap music), in movies and television, in fashion, and in advertising. Parents of little girls involve their daughters in the problematic activity of child beauty pageants, where the girls are made up to look like adult women and act “sexy.” As counterpart to the hyper-sexualized female, masculinity is portrayed as “hyper-masculinity” as sexually dominating, warriors, violent, and disregarding the humanity of females. Pornography is included in this dynamic of objectifying women.

According to recent studies, porn consumption not only interferes in relationships, but also “‘pornography consumption [is] associated with an increased probability of the use of threat of force to obtain sex’, and that both violent and nonviolent porn are implicated.”¹² Pornography also becomes addictive as it rearranges neural connections and behaviors in users, thereby seriously biasing those persons’ perceptions of females as sex objects. Females become further dehumanized, and it’s important to grasp that as men objectify women, they are also objectifying their own person by giving primacy to their sexual impulses.

This problem exists in the church, including in seminaries and among pastors. Porn addiction’s effects aren’t only on the individual, but porn users’ engagement in porn involves reducing others to sex objects. With this bias wired in their brain, how does that engagement, especially as it becomes an addiction for pastors, not affect how they treat other persons in their church?

¹¹ <https://www.ambs.edu/about/ambs-response-to-victims-of-yoder-abuse>.

¹² Zac Crippen, “Another sex crisis: the consumption of porn,” *Los Angeles Times*, Op-ed, November 26, 2017.

Bias and Stereotypes

We all live with biases, our own and others. There is no human person who has no biases—including scientists—although persons may insist they are not biased in any way (as one friend of my husband and mine believes, who also served as a judge!). It is obviously a critical issue when anyone doesn't recognize and acknowledge their bias. But it is also problematic when our perceptual-interpretive lens is subconsciously controlled even by biases we are aware of.

Consider your own gender bias. What are your biases, your assumptions about girls and boys, women and men? What do you assume to be inherently feminine and inherently masculine? I grew up with the bias that males were overall smarter than females, therefore I wasn't smart—at least not as smart as males. This life lie influenced my choice of major in college, notably that I chose a humanities major (English), then later switched to linguistics (considered either a humanities or a social sciences major, depending on its emphasis) over one in biology, although I was acutely interested in biology as long as I can remember. This is one area where I didn't pay attention to my father (a physician) who wanted me to become a doctor. I now think that the thought of going into medicine was intimidating, and I was really avoiding failure more than anything. It's difficult to tease out how much my inferiority complex was due to being female, and perhaps also bearing the double jeopardy as a woman of color, but I have no doubt that my life lie affected me deeply.

Gender bias (prejudice against an individual because of their gender) and gender stereotyping (ascribing limited characteristics to females and males) begins in early childhood and even despite parents' best efforts at raising their children without the feminine and masculine assumptions. To counter traditional sociocultural ideals, modern parents often try to help girls grow up to be independent, strong, and self-confident, and boys to be sensitive to others, nurturing, and to express emotions. However, children's perceptions of themselves and others will become genderized by virtue of living in our gendered society. And countering this genderized lens is an ongoing process, which even progressives must address in themselves.

One enduring gender stereotype is that boys and men are more likely than girls and women to be 'brilliant' (as in a genius stereotype)—and more likely than females to succeed in careers requiring high intelligence, say neuroscience or astrophysics. When does this bias start to form? A recent study showed that 5-year-old girls and boys are equally likely to think that people of their own gender can be "really, really smart," (the study's kid-level vocabulary to mean 'brilliant'), but by age 6, girls are 20-30% less likely to believe their gender can be brilliant. Also at age 6, girls were less likely than boys to show interest in "smart" games, but were equally likely to be interested if the games required working hard. Interestingly, girls believed that their gender did better than boys in school achievement and grades. The study established the age at which gender bias about intelligence emerges, but cannot pinpoint the factors that cause girls to change their self-perception. As they conclude:

It will be important to test whether these findings extend beyond a middle-class, majority-white U.S. cultural context and to comprehensively investigate the sources of the "brilliance = males" stereotype in children's environments. Nevertheless, the

present results suggest a sobering conclusion: Many children assimilate the idea that brilliance is a male quality at a young age. This stereotype begins to shape children's interests as soon as it is acquired and is thus likely to narrow the range of careers they will one day contemplate.¹³

The disturbing fact remains clear, that girls internalize inferiority about their intelligence at an early age, even now when there are women excelling in fields requiring being really, really smart.

In spite of much focus in education on steering more girls into science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) tracks, the number of females in high-paying STEM jobs as of 2017 has decreased from 25% to 20%. Of further added concern is that females in Generation X (born between 1965 and 1981) are faring worse than baby boomer women, and that millennial women fare even worse than Gen X women in overall well-being measured by a number of categories, including earnings, education and health.¹⁴ More women aged 30-34 are living in poverty (12% for Gen X women, and 17% for millennial women). These generations in the U.S. have to deal with economic recession, which is a factor for decreased well-being of women. Yet we can be certain that persistent gender bias has exacerbated their lives, certainly imposed on them by others, but perhaps also self-imposed.

Awareness of one's gender bias, as with other biases, is curiously *invisible* to whoever is in the majority group. I mentioned earlier that a friend believes strongly that he has no biases, none at all. He (a white male) is a former judge and truly believes he's always right in his judgments, including about himself; therefore, he has neither gender bias nor racial bias. Consider what sociologist and expert in gender studies, Michael S. Kimmel, discovered about himself as he writes of this experience in a seminar on feminism. During that discussion, the question was raised "When you...look in the mirror, what do you see?" Kimmel's response was telling:

"Well,...I see a human being. I'm universally generalizable. As a middle-class white man, I have no class, no race, no gender. I'm a generic person!"¹⁵

Kimmel learned in that moment that he "enjoyed the privilege of invisibility." He further concluded:

The very processes that confer privilege to one group and not another group are often invisible to those upon whom that privilege is conferred. What makes us marginal or powerless are the processes we see. Invisibility is a privilege in another sense—as luxury. Only white people in our society have the luxury not to think about race every minute of their lives. And only men have the luxury to pretend that gender does not matter.

¹³ For the study findings, go to <http://science.sciencemag.org/content/355/6323/389.full>

You can sign up for a free AAAS membership to access the article by scrolling down to the link "You can sign up for free to access this article."

¹⁴ According to a report by the non-profit Population Reference Bureau cited by Ann M. Simmons, "Young Women are losing ground," *Los Angeles Times*, June 7, 2017.

¹⁵ Kimmel, 7.

These are important insights to consider as Christians, along with the operation of bias—gender bias, race bias, and all others. We need to honestly address the gendered biases we’ve internalized and project onto others. These genderized biases reinforce gender stereotypes that form not just our own identity and determine our function in fragmented and reduced terms, but that also form assumptions and expectations of others that diminish their wholeness. Again, reduced persons are not fully present to experience deep meaningful relationships with others, including with God; and this consequence exposes the underlying root dynamics of what is primary and thus most significant in human life. The existing and often subtle consequences of so much genderization is that our society is full of relational orphans (the human condition), lacking meaningful relational connections that we all deeply need to fulfill our inherent need as persons. We bring our overly genderized selves to church, and together form the gendered church, which in many ways simply mirrors the gendered societies we come from. Yet, this gender equation eludes our notice or simply is ignored by misled conviction or misguided convenience (discussed further in following chapters).

Language and Images

Compare these two newspaper headlines for articles that both addressed sexual harassment in government:

“Sacramento’s women problem”¹⁶

“Harassment isn’t a partisan issue—it’s a man problem”¹⁷

These two articles both discussed the problem of sexual harassment by men against women among government leaders in California state government and in federal government, respectively. Notice the subtle difference in the headlines. *Who* is the problem, that is, the perpetrators in most cases of sexual harassment? Males are. The first article focused on sexual harassment in Sacramento (CA state capitol) in order to widen our view of the issue beyond Hollywood. Why then does its headline (the title of a *Los Angeles Times* editorial) use the words “women problem”? This is a common use of language that misleadingly connotes that the women, not the men, are the problem, and thus inadvertently reinforces the subtle lens of gender bias. Compare the difference in meaning that would have been conveyed by reworking that title to “Sacramento’s man problem.” The article did go on to state that “sexual harassment and intimidation in the workplace” is a “human problem,” but that statement still fails to name the problem, namely, the men who perpetuate it. I would be surprised if this article (and editorial) were written by a female editor.

In the second newspaper article headline, the contrast isn’t between ‘a woman problem’ and ‘a man problem’, but rather between ‘a partisan problem’ and a ‘man problem’. The writer presses the point that in politics, men on both sides of the aisle are guilty of sexual assault and other forms of harassment. Thus, the headline correctly names the problem as a male problem.

¹⁶ Editorial, *Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 19, 2017. This headline was quite jarring given the usual liberal bent of the newspaper.

¹⁷ Robin Abcarian, *Los Angeles Times*, Californian Section, November 21, 2017.

Language creates bias, reinforces bias, hurts feelings, and abuses persons. The reality is that:

Language matters because language both forms thought and makes functional any thought (notably human consciousness) antecedent to language. It has become increasingly apparent to modern scientific research that the language we speak shapes the way we see the world and even the way we think (not necessarily producing thought). This points to the function of language not merely as a means of expression but also as a template imposing a constraint limiting what we see and the way we think.¹⁸

Think of your experiences—either giving or receiving—about messages related to gender. “Just a girl” and “like a girl” are used by boys to disparage others, as if it is a bad thing to be a girl. A girl may not run or throw a baseball very well, but with a little coaching she can learn. And “boys will be boys” has excused male sexual misconduct against females. Some people say admiringly, “he’s all boy,” and “he’s a man’s man,” but no one says “she’s all girl” and only rarely “she’s a woman’s woman.” Why is that? How has the language we speak shaped the way we see and even think about gender?

A common example of the biased/biasing use of language is blaming the victims of sexual assaults, as when a perpetrator and their supporters blame the women on the grounds that the assault was essentially the fault of the woman’s attire and flirting, going into men’s fraternity or hotel rooms. Perpetrators use words like “she was asking for it,” “she liked it,” “it was consensual sex” in order to exonerate themselves. These are overt examples of common language by which males have long constructed and perpetuated the storyline of women (as opposed to themselves) having questionable morals. In doing so, they thereby refocus others’ perception from perpetrator to victim, but not only redirecting the focus but justifying that trickery by recasting victim in an unfavorable light. To qualify these comments, I am not excusing women who are irresponsible in their behaviors and their suggestive/seductive appearance, and who must be accountable for their own complicity in sexual misconduct, but I believe the greater part of the blame lies with the men and sociocultural context we live in.

Everyday use of language is often thus gendered to paint a verbal portrait that demeans girls and women while it shields or promotes boys and men. One very contemporary vehicle for such language is popular music. Music is everywhere in society, and we need to become more aware of and sensitive to how pervasive sexist lyrics are across genres. The major criticism that I have of some rap lyrics is the abundance of misogynist, violent and dehumanizing language against women. Such language is an example of hostile sexism. As for both hostile and benevolent sexism in other music genres, they are just as easy to find.

¹⁸ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Person in Complete Context: The Whole of Theological Anthropology Distinguished* (Theological Anthropology Study, 2014), online at <http://4X12.org>, 16. These insights are discussed in depth in Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Modern World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

The influence of the language of music must not be minimized. Music consumption, especially in our formative years, easily is internalized and mixed in with our emotions and even the understanding of our *self*. This process gets wired in our brains and has subconscious consequences. We grow up with soundtracks in our psyches, and these soundtracks influence our identity, whether we are conscious of it or not. For girls growing up hearing misogynist lyrics, how can this not affect how they view themselves as objects for men's pleasure or violent displays of domination? Or for girls hearing through their favorite songs that they need to be sexually attractive to males, or weak beings needing protection, or needing to be everything to another person, or that a male needs to be everything to them?

This dynamic in language reflects the embeddedness of sexism in U.S. society, in which women are automatically blamed for misbehavior of men, however subtly that blame is issued. This blaming is not new (cf. Gen 3:12), but has historic ecclesial backing from the early Church Fathers, which is discussed in the next chapter. Many modern feminists have laid a lot of blame for sexism against women at the feet of these revered Christian brothers, because they were foundational for much of Western Christianity and Western values.

When boys and men use derogatory language to define girls and women, they perpetuate not just prejudice against females but outright misogyny (hatred of females). This includes the way that boys and men ridicule other males by stigmatizing them with so-called feminine qualities—as if being female were the ultimate put-down. Such attitudes of scorn are passed on and embedded as biases, the sum of which encompasses misandry and the subtle hatred of all persons. The important point here is the power of language and its misuse, which is expanded on for the church in following chapters.

Visual images—whether projected by the media, in the arts, or as personal expression—are just nonverbal communication of ideas, composing language for the eyes. I had a male seminary classmate whose shirt pattern included those silhouettes of busty women in sexy poses you often see on pickup truck bumpers. What does that convey about his view of women? We have to address the ubiquitous reality facing all of us that our sociocultural environment is saturated with highly genderized-sexualized images, especially advertisements for products and movies. These images drive the polarization between highly sexualized females and hyper-masculinized males. And this defining reality makes everyone (including small children) subject to their presence everywhere. But this is just the norm in our gendered society, which keeps updating the 'new normal' for the gender equation in use.

Think about the images you see all around you, and consider what the purpose of those images is. Because females are socialized to place great importance on appearance as a prime measure of our self-worth, we are especially vulnerable to the power of genderized images conveying the measures of physical beauty and sexual attractiveness. We go through daily life trying to enhance and embellish our identity through our life so we can measure up to the images we see, often not questioning the validity of those images and the illusion of their importance to us as persons. That's what makes us females so vulnerable to genderized consumerism. We have also seen a change over the past decades of increased marketing aimed at males to embellish their physical appearance as well—notably to look young and cool. And many younger men in the church seem captivated by this focus.

Language and images are essential to everyday life, including our lives as Jesus' followers (individually and corporately). It becomes second nature (as a subconscious brain) to use language and images that we hear and see all around us, defaulting to gendered expressions without thinking about gendered stereotypes that we may communicate or reinforce. As we will see through this study, however, language is so vital, so critical to who, what, and how we are as God's daughters and sons, so that even our language needs to be redeemed and transformed into the language of God, which is the relational language expressing the whole person for the primacy of whole relationships together.

Double Jeopardy

This study doesn't examine racism per se, but it is necessary and unavoidable to at times draw the inseparable connection between the sexism and racism because of the fact that they result from the underlying dynamic of the same root sin. The above discussion about the invisibility of bias encompasses the invisibility of racial bias. Recall that bias functions as a lens which determines what we pay attention to and what we ignore. In Western society, white males are the dominant group over females and persons of color; their bias is the privilege of invisibility, so they don't see both gender and racial bias.

Woman of color in Western societies experience both gender bias and racial bias. Do we women of color really experience a double bias constituting a 'double jeopardy'? As a woman of color, I say matter-of-factly, "Of course we do. Let's make this double jeopardy in the church visible at last!" The double jeopardy bias that women of color experience may not seem like a real 'thing', but for those who don't perceive it, that lack reflects either gender bias or race bias or both.

Given Kimmel's experience of "the privilege of invisibility," it is likely that most white males would not perceive or understand this concept very well, or not at all. White women would understand the sexism part for women of color, but not perceive the racism part because white women are members of the dominant racial group. This is exactly what came out in the feminism discussion that Kimmel participated in. In Kimmel's description of an earlier interaction, he writes:

"A white woman and a black woman were discussing whether all women were, by definition, "sisters," because they all had essentially the same experiences and because all women faced a common oppression by men. The white woman asserted that the fact that they were both women bonded them, in spite of racial differences. The black woman disagreed.

"When you...look in the mirror, what do you see?" she asked.

"I see a woman," replied the white woman.

"That's precisely the problem," responded the black woman. "I see a *black* woman. To me, race is visible every day, because race is how I am *not* privileged in our culture. Race is invisible to you, because it's how you are privileged. It's why there will always be differences in our experience."¹⁹

¹⁹ Kimmel, 7.

By extension, men of color are aware of racial bias, because they don't belong to the racially privileged group of white persons. They do, however, belong to the privileged gender group, and often don't see gender bias in themselves, in their race, or in other males.

Double jeopardy is the real experience of most women of color. Yet, sexism and racism aren't equally yoked. Sexism trumps racism. Within racial/ethnic groups, women are discriminated against, clearly demonstrated by the sexism in the different civil rights movements for justice and racial equality of the 20th century—Civil Rights Movement, and Black Power, Chicano, Asian American and Native American movements. In all of these efforts, women were constantly relegated to the domestic functions in subservience to the men, or women leaders were pushed aside so that the men received more recognition.²⁰ More currently, women of color continue to experience double jeopardy in in workplaces, such as in the STEM fields.²¹

Sexism and racism aren't connected merely as similar outer behaviors of discrimination, but emerge from and reflect the same roots. We could include classism in our integrated discussion, because it too comes from the same roots, and disproportionately affects women.²² As we proceed into the study, understanding the integrated focus on identity and function (our theological anthropology) will help us understand the common root sin of reductionism shared by sexism and racism, the two prevailing -isms (as well as other false distinctions and discrimination we practice) plaguing the church (local and global) and society at large.

Institutional Gender Discrimination

The practice of institutional gender discrimination in the prevailing sociocultural context is vital for us to understand in general but also in particular, because it exists in Christian institutions and affects all females, whether or not we are aware of its operation. These practices also affect men, who are even less likely to be aware of the effects since male benefits come at the shrouded expense of females. It is important for us to understand that sexism isn't only an individual's problem, but that institutions have historically been built with discriminatory practices. What are the markers of institutional sexism?

All workplaces that hire and promote less qualified men over equally or more qualified deserving women, and pay women less for equal work—are institutions of gender discrimination. The latest Pew research reports that women earn 82 cents for every dollar that men earn for equal or comparable work.²³ Globally, the World Economic Forum recently reported that it will take 100 years to close the gender pay gap,

²⁰ See for example, Jennifer Holladay, "Sexism in the Civil Rights Movement: A Discussion Guide: A closer examination of heroes in our culture" July 7, 2009; online at <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/sexism-in-the-civil-rights-movement-a-discussion-guide>.

²¹ See for example the report by UC Hastings College of the Law, "Double Jeopardy? Gender Bias Against Women of Color." Published online at www.worklifelaw.org. © 2014 Joan C. Williams, Katherine W. Phillips & Erika V. Hall.

²² Discussed further in Maxine Baca Zinn and Bonnie Thornton Dill, eds., *Women of Color in U.S. Society* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1994).

²³ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/04/the-narrowing-but-persistent-gender-gap-in-pay>.

which had previously been reported to take 86 years.²⁴ Even when male leadership makes the conscious effort to promote equality for women, inequality persists because of the institution's systemic sexism. In other words, institutional discrimination can operate with or without the cooperation of individuals, which informs us that change cannot merely take place at the individual level.

Institutional sexism was highlighted in a recent 60 Minutes television interview, which also shed some light on the barriers to change at the institutional level.²⁵ The CEO (Marc Benioff) of a technology company called Salesforce was proud of its progressive policies to hire and promote women and men equally, which set the company apart from the typical male domination in the tech world. When he was urged by the female head of the company's human resources department to do an audit of the company's pay scale because she suspected a wage gap, he initially didn't believe that was necessary. Finally he relented and did the audit, and was shocked to discover that the women employees were paid less than the men doing equal jobs "just everywhere. It was through the whole company, every division, every department, every geography." He ordered the pay gap to be closed, and ended up paying out millions to the women. Closing the pay gap in the workplace has now become his new project, but has met with resistance from other CEOs.

We get three further important takeaways from this conversation. One, the wage gap persists in part due to the unconscious bias (implicit bias) against women that is increasingly coming to light. For example, the fact that women bear children gives rise to assumptions that they will be more tired and less able to concentrate on the job (the "mommy penalty"), and are assigned less challenging tasks, which reduces their chances for advancement and promotion. Two, women are afraid to ask for raises for fear of being labeled complainers. Three, as with any challenge to the status quo, there is pushback, as Benioff said, "There is a lot of resistance" from fellow male CEOs. Benioff is now crusading for these changes: "There's never been an easier time to make this change. CEOs with one button on one computer can pay every man and every woman equally. We have the data. We know what everyone makes. There's no excuse. Everybody can easily do this now."

What is behind the resistance to change, the change so that girls and women are treated with the same respect and value given to boys and men? It isn't just the obvious economics; of course businesses are always protecting their bottom line. But there is also an absence of moral and ethical urgency, allowing to prevail the resistance to change—change that will certainly create discomfort by rearranging the status quo. Even with a moral imperative, the church has been resistant or slow to change its gender status quo.

The church always has the opportunity to show that major change is possible, that it doesn't need to take a long time. Rather, it takes willingness to be vulnerable to whatever change is required of us, and whatever is necessary to deconstruct the church (or "clean it out" as Jesus did with the temple), and reconstruct it whole. Yes, vulnerable—vulnerable to individual change and corporate change. This unavoidable

²⁴ See <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/01/closing-the-pay-gap-for-good/>.

²⁵ See transcript of the 60 Minutes interview by Leslie Stahl with Marc Benioff, CEO of Salesforce "Leading by example to close the gender pay gap." <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/salesforce-ceo-marc-benioff-leading-by-example-to-close-the-gender-pay-gap/>. The interview aired April 15, 2018.

process must take place integrally by redemptive change in which the old order of human relations—namely the prevailing gender equation—must die so that the new relational order can emerge whole in God’s primary gender equation. This is necessary for the church to distinguish itself as not belonging to the world, but distinguished as God’s own new creation family, as Jesus prayed for (Jn 17:16,21,23; cf. Mt 5:13-14).

According to Shareforce’s Benioff during the 60 Minutes interview, achieving gender equality involves four doors:

“This is part of a total package. You can't look at one of these things independent of the other. You know, at some point you're gonna ask me about #MeToo [sexual harassment in the workplace]. Because that's the fourth door. You know, you can say equal opportunity is one critical part of gender equality. Then you can say equal advancement, that's a critical part of gender equality. Then you can say equal pay, that's the third door. And the fourth door is preventing sexual harassment. All of these things together is gender equality.”

These four doors must be opened, entered, and resolved in order to achieve gender parity in the workplace. It might be tempting to apply the four-door model to the church to resolve gender inequality, given the church’s willingness to apply lessons from the human context to church practice. There may be some value to Benioff’s total package, but it is insufficient for the transformation of the church. Certainly equitable status and relations are necessary, and Christians should work for these, but God’s primary gender equation goes further and deeper than equity for women in the workplace. This unfolds in the discussion ahead.

Transition to the Gendered Church

The question—What gender equation do you use?—is more urgently critical than I realized before I started this study. Through listening with the Spirit to God’s Word, reflecting on my life experiences and those around me, by hearing others’ stories, and during conversations with my husband, the overall picture that emerges regarding gender is startling; and I’m convinced that many of Jesus’ words (and Paul’s) have gone unheeded. Contrary to and in conflict with Jesus’ prayer, we function as those who ‘belong to this world’. The prevailing gender equation from our human contexts is incompatible with the primary gender equation in which God created all persons for intimate and equalized relationships—whole persons for whole relationship together. Since the sin of reductionism composes the prevailing gender equation, both persons and relationships have needed to be redeemed and thereby transformed to the wholeness necessary to be one (whole) in the image and likeness of the Trinity. The relational outcome of the Trinity’s relational response of grace is the new creation of persons and relationships as the Trinity’s family, which is distinguished in the world only when *whole* and *uncommon* (holy)—distinguished *whole-ly* just as Jesus prayed for his family.

Based on the gender equation in use, the relational outcome of the Trinity's relational response has eluded churches and their persons and relationships. This is not surprising when we are not clearly distinguished from the world. Our churches, persons and relationships are gendered, and will remain gendered until we are distinguished according to Jesus' prayer. The startling reality is, however, that in our surrounding human contexts (both locally and globally) there is no basis for the necessary turn-around change to constitute the significance of intimacy and lasting equality among persons we long for and may even work for as peacemakers and justice activists. Some remedial steps may be accomplished, like participating in implicit bias training for workplaces. Yet, if persons in the dominant groups are resistant, they may only show politically correct outward behaviors; but this doesn't address the deeper biases that will inevitably leak out because they haven't undergone the inner-out, turn-around change of real transformation.

The same dynamic will hold true in our churches, and we should not be misguided and misled by reforms in theology and practice. The prevailing gender equation of discrimination and male dominance will continue in some way in our practice (if not in our theology) as long as we don't intentionally undergo inner-out turn-around change necessary to restore our persons (female and male) to the primary gender equation of God's design and purpose for all human beings. Therefore, we are faced with the significant truth of this unavoidable reality: the gender equation we use will be the person and relationships we get, and it will be obvious whose gender equation we embrace.

Chapter 2

Lost Lambs

**See that you do not look down on one of these....
Your Father in heaven is not willing that any one of
these *persons* should be lost.**

Matthew 18:10,14, NIV

In the gene pool, no person has the freedom to choose their own sex. Do you like the sex you were assigned when you were conceived? I had a difficult relationship with being female for a long time. My issue wasn't that I questioned my sex, but that being female meant that I was a "just a girl," for which I—like all other girls—incur negative messages about my worth and constraints imposed on my person. Coming to terms with what it means in everyday life that I emerged as a girl, and growing up in a world (family, culture, society, and church) and time that favors males over females, has been a difficult process of sorting out the good from the bad, including recognizing that some of the bad seemed good.

At what point in your life did you become aware that you were a girl or boy? I cannot pinpoint any particular age or any 'aha' moment. Did my sense of who I was (my identity) as a girl begin when I kept being told that I, like my sisters and girl neighbors, were 'girls'? Was it when I realized that my sisters and I were somehow like my mother and different from my father and brother? Why did my brother wear pants all the time and we girls had to wear dresses? I can even recall playing the word 'girl' over and over in my child mind, wondering what meaning it had for me, not to mention its weird sound. I can *feel* my childhood socialization process, but not identify any single defining moment. And as far back as I can remember, becoming a girl was something I had to learn, likely because it didn't come naturally: how to dress, how to groom, how to sit and walk, how to present myself to others, and what *not* to do. These were facts of life to conform to, and any latitude from the facts was unacceptable.

Much of this process unfolds routinely, wiring our brains with minimal consciousness.¹ Yet, with each conforming step in this formative process of genderization, we are inculcated and self-inoculated with the *prevailing gender equation*, its biases and stereotypes shaping our everyday reality. To briefly review from the previous chapter, we all have biases and stereotypes about sex and gender by which we define our own person and define others. These biases and stereotypes have been burned into our brains, formed by repeated input from our families and cultures, along with language and images all around us. Consider how much input into your gender equation has come from church influence, besides from all your other human contexts (family, friends, school, TV, movies, social media).

¹ The workings of the human brain must not be overlooked by Christians. Mark Cosgrove provides perspective in *The Brain, the Mind, and the Person Within: The Enduring Mystery of the Soul* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2018). Further understanding of our brains is found in Dr. Ski Chilton, with Dr. Margaret Rukstalis and A.J. Gregory, *The Rewired Brain: Free Yourself of Negative Behaviors and Release Your Best Self* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016).

Because the church teaches us about God and represents God to the rest of the world, we urgently need to critically examine the church's gender equation and expose any false narrative of male superiority/dominance that largely defines the church as well—in *practice*, if not in *theology*. The first step we need to grapple with is the presence of the prevailing gender equation reinforced in the church, thereby instilling in us the following defining, common gendered notions of persons:

- (1) **female/feminine** = less than males; the dominated sex (less power and privilege), the weaker sex, needs male protection, passive (object, not subject), less capable of leadership, takes fewer risks, timid, less inclined toward STEM fields [science, technology, engineering, mathematics], better in verbal skills, sexually attractive, girly, 'nice and kind, calm and quiet'
- (2) **male/masculine** = better than females; the dominant sex (having power and privilege), the physically stronger sex, protector and provider, active (subject, not object), more capable of leadership, takes risks, brave, 'brilliant' in STEM fields, less verbally inclined, sexually macho, not emotional but okay to show anger

While we may not consciously promote these notions, our brains have been conditioned to see, think, and act in accordance subconsciously. Thus, these are the societal expectations that both have shaped (1) who we believe we are (identity) and (2) how we are supposed to behave in life (function)—an identity and function exposing a reduced theological anthropology. We as a church have been alarmingly accepting of the fact that the church's prevailing gender equation and all its forms of discrimination against females is indistinguishable from the prevailing gender equations in our sociocultural contexts—a fact exposing a weak view of sin. Moreover, not only does the church conform to this prevailing gender equation, Christianity has perpetuated it in society by giving it biblical justification based on fragmented biblical interpretation of God's Word—as complementarians do, but also egalitarians counter on a similar basis.

My American Baptist church experiences from kindergarten through high school in no way countered the prevailing gender equation as summarized above; implicitly, the visual images were of male pastors and high school teachers, while women taught younger kids. Moreover, my church never provided me with a narrative of any significance for forming my identity other than a traditional, spiritualized one. That detached narrative about God, Jesus and the Bible was impossible for me to understand, too far "out there" to connect with in my heart, much less to embrace to form my identity from inner out, or to meet my inherent relational need for belonging to the Father. Furthermore, that spiritualized narrative wasn't something that my brain learned, whereby it would make a different connection to counter how it was conditioned to see, think, and act. Therefore, in this supposedly nurturing gathering, I was lost in the church for the twelve years I attended—lost like the lost lamb in Jesus' parable (Mt 18:10-14). By the end of high school, I was an avowed agnostic. I've wondered how many of my Sunday school peers fared in relationship to God.

At first glance, it wouldn't seem that gender distinction would have anything to do with one's lack of spiritual development at church, but it does most critically. Our gender equation is a dominating factor in how we define our person, either our whole person from inner out, or only parts of our person from outer in. Gender is integral to how we each understand our *self*, and the gender equation we use is immeasurably consequential to our identity and how we function out of this identity. The encompassing issue here is this: The basis and source of our identity (who and what we are) directly shapes how we function in life, notably in relationships, which in turn determines our involvement in church. Thus, the gender equation we use is directly related to who and what we are as Jesus' followers—individually and corporately as God's church family.

Therefore, we need to examine with critical eyes the prevailing gender equation that exists in the church: not if it does, but how, to what extent, and to what effect. The previous chapter gave a very brief summary of the ways males dominate and discriminate against females in all of our sociocultural contexts. This chapter focuses on church and other Christian contexts, and how God is affected.

The Gendered Church and Other Christian Contexts

Jesus' parable about lost sheep sharply identifies the critical condition that all females have experienced (aware of it or not), the experiences of gender distinction and gender discrimination in the church. Keep in mind that our sex is created by God but gender is a human construction. This is the everyday reality associated with gender distinctions, the gender bias and stereotyping involving prejudice and discrimination against persons based solely on their gender, and almost always directed against females. The experiences of discrimination for girls and women in the church constitutes for us the condition of a *lost lamb*. How did the lost lamb in Jesus' parable get lost?

As Jesus spoke about the lost lamb, our usual thinking is that a lost lamb means a sinner, a non-believer, or a church stray/leaver, whom God would pursue to bring back into the fold. That is the message that comes from the good shepherd parable in Luke's Gospel (Lk 15:4-7). Most female church-goers probably don't think of themselves as lost lambs, since they aren't "lost" in that way. Let's look deeper into Jesus' words.

Consider, then, that the lost sheep that Jesus spoke about were persons who were already in the fold comprising God's people—not persons to bring into the fold for the first time. In Matthew's version of the parable, the one lamb (sheep) has "gone astray" (Mt 18:12-13; "wanders away," NIV). Jesus is, I assert, speaking to the lost lambs in the church today, those who are in the relational condition of being relationally 'apart' from the whole, even though they may actively exist in the church. These are women and girls *in* the church; that is, even when we are present in the church, often actively engaged, we females are in the relational condition of being marginalized as *relational orphans*. Relational orphans can be physically present and active, even in the middle of a church's life. How can women be lost sheep, that is, relational orphans in this case?

Recall that just moments before Jesus referred to the sheep gone astray, he made it imperative that the disciples “not despise [look down on] one of these little ones” (18:10). Here Jesus points to the relational treatment of certain persons as less. This raises the urgent question: Who treats others as less in the church? Related, also important to ask is, Who functions *as if* they are less?

To be lost while still in the church means that our *whole* persons are missing, while only fragmented versions of ourselves are “allowed” to remain, whether due to others’ actions or our own choices, likely both. Jesus’ language for ‘go astray’ or ‘wander’ (*planaō*) is in passive forms, meaning that persons are acted upon, or ‘led astray’ or ‘caused to wander’. But his usage can also connote that persons acted on their own volition, though their brains may not have been conscious of their choice. Women and girls still in church, by conforming to the gender equation that constrains their function are acted upon and also choose to conform because of messages or circumstances they received. Either way, their whole person is missing, gone astray, lost to the church. They can be very active in church programs and ministries, yet limited in *who* and *what* they present of themselves, and *how* they are involved, especially in relationships. Any lacks in who, what, and how we are directly affect our righteousness, the integrity of which is defined by the whole of who, what, and how a person is and thereby can be counted on to be in relationships. This relational condition is not limited to the lack of women pastors and other leaders in the church, but includes all females who are in any church. And it is a fair generalization to make that in the global church women and girls as a whole are lost.

Females have been looked down on by males throughout church history, and continue to be so treated to this day. Why this scandal hasn’t sparked outrage on par with the #MeToo movement, or over other so-called Christian concerns (e.g. abortion) is a reality that grieves God’s heart. There is indeed #ChurchToo and #SilenceIsNotSpiritual, but it is evident that any movement against sexism in the church meets deep resistance. It is not surprising that Jesus’ words—comprising a direct challenge to Christian brothers (notably church leaders and the academy), and to their power, prestige, and privilege—are still being conveniently ignored.

It is vital also to understand that just as females have become the lost lambs in the church, many males have also. The prevailing gender equation, as it defines masculinity in narrow stereotypical terms, also throws males into the comparative process. Those males who don’t measure up are made to feel less, and their whole person goes missing in a further consequence on their righteousness. While the focus of this study is on females, keep in mind that the lost sheep includes some males, and that God holds the shepherds responsible for all of us (as in Ezek 34:1-10).

Jesus doesn’t mince his words: “Do not look down on one of these *persons*.” The word Jesus used for “look down on” (“despise” in the NRSV) is *kataphroneō* and also connotes ‘to scorn’ and ‘show contempt’. How do males show contempt toward women in the Christian contexts (including the church)? Mirroring our sociocultural contexts in more subtle ways, males look down on females through discrimination, physical/sexual domination, sexual harassment, and silencing. These are, as mentioned earlier, overt expressions of how **hostile sexism** works, whether intentional or not.

On the other side of the same coin are expressions of **benevolent sexism**, which are paternalistic, and can even appear to be loving on the part of males; indeed, it may even be the males' intention to be loving. The following pages give an overview of the extent of sexism perpetrated in Christian contexts, and covered up by persons in positions of authority, usually men. Keep in mind as you read these examples that we're not talking about only situations and circumstances, but the deep effects that the lost sheep have incurred such that their whole person is lost to the church. This affects God deeply, to see his daughters diminished by others in the church family.

Hostile Sexism

There's a range of hostile sexism that affects females in all Christian contexts. A few examples here highlight the various ways hostile sexism has 'despised' females. The most obvious are examples of sexual assault on females. The following is a brief synopsis of some of them. There are many more instances of sexual abuse by Christian leaders and cover up by their institutions, and we can expect more to come to light in the months ahead. Presented here is only a small representative sampling:

Sexual abuse, denial, cover up, domestic violence

- While working for the Association of Baptists for World Evangelism (ABWE), missionary doctor Donn Ketcham and his wife worked at missionary compound in Bangladesh. Ketcham had extra-marital affairs with women, and sexually assaulted and/or raped 18 girls (missionary kids [MKs]) of missionary families stationed there (from 1961-1989), but the ABWE actively engaged in cover up because of the doctor's value to the medical work at the missionary hospital. ABWE valued their reputation over the well-being of the girls.² The 13-year-old girl, Kim, who first raised the issue of being sexually assaulted (including rape) by the doctor was portrayed by ABWE staffers as being complicit in the abuse and at fault.

As Kim struggled to answer their questions, the [two ABWE investigators] became convinced that she was telling them the truth about Ketcham touching her. What they couldn't believe, given fundamentalist precepts about the nature of sex and women, was that she was an innocent party. "It was lust in its most base form, uncontrolled in the body of a spiritually immature woman," [one investigator] wrote of the 13-year-old in his diary. Ketcham, he wrote, had become Kim's "secret lover."³

² Read the account as reported by Kathryn Joyce, "The Silence of the Lambs: Are Protestants concealing a Catholic-size sexual abuse scandal?" <https://newrepublic.com/article/142999/silence-lambs-protestants-concealing-catholic-size-sexual-abuse-scandal>, June 20, 2017; see also blog created by some of the other MK victims at <https://bangladeshmksspeak.wordpress.com/>. From their blog you can download the final report (April 15, 2016) by Professional Investigators International (PII), a third party that was hired by ABWE to investigate the MKs allegations against Ketcham.

³ Kathryn Joyce.

Her parents weren't notified of the abuse (including rape) until much later. They learned all the facts only when 17 other MK girls who also were abused by the Ketcham created a blog, making the abuse public—which they did out of frustration with ABWE's covering up the abuse. Moreover, after Ketcham was removed from that compound, the other missionaries blamed Kim and her family for Ketcham's removal. Ketcham was never reported to the police by ABWE for his pedophilia.

- Increasing numbers of cases of sexual abuse and sexual misconduct by church leaders of large churches have been coming to light.
 - Bill Hybels, founder of Willow Creek Church, is accused by seven women of sexual misconduct and abuse of power, such as unwanted sexual advances with women in ministry (e.g. teaching pastor, worship leader); Hybels has denied any wrongdoing, but resigned earlier this year.⁴
 - Andy Savage, pastor of Highpoint Church (Tennessee) abused a 17-year-old girl twenty years ago when he was her youth pastor; Savage recently resigned (March 2018).
 - Sovereign Grace Churches, a network of evangelical Reformed churches, have been accused of failing to respond to charges of child and sexual abuse, charges starting in 2012. There hasn't been any resolution to the charges due to statute of limitations, but Christianity Today is calling for a new independent investigation.
- Conservative evangelicalism, with its traditional views of gender roles and marriage, is implicated for misguided views of male entitlement and young girls as future marriage material. The following are excerpts about a common dynamic related to conservative/fundamentalist Christianity:

Much of the sexual abuse that takes place in Independent Fundamentalist Baptist churches involves adult men targeting 14- to 16-year-old girls. If caught, the teenage victim may be forced to repent the “sin” of having seduced an adult man. Former IFB megachurch pastor Jack Schaap argued that he should be released from prison after being convicted of molesting a 16-year-old girl, asserting that the “aggressiveness” of his victim “inhibited (his) impulse control.” In the wake of the Schaap case, numerous other stories emerged of sexual abuse cover-ups involving teenage girls at IFB churches. In another high-profile case, pregnant 15-year-old Tina Anderson, who was raped by a church deacon twice her age, was forced to confess her “sin” to the congregation....

Prominent conservative Reformed theologian Doug Wilson has a documented history of mishandling sexual abuse cases within his congregation. Nevertheless, he continues to be promoted by evangelical leaders such as John Piper, whose Desiring God site still publishes Wilson's work. When a 13-year-old girl in Wilson's congregation was sexually abused, Wilson argued that she and her abuser

⁴ Bob Smietana, “Willow Creek Promises Investigation Amid New Allegations Against Bill Hybels,” <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2018/april/bill-hybels-willow-creek-promises-investigation-allegations.html>. Accessed May 9, 2018.

were in a parent-sanctioned courtship, and that this was a mitigating factor.... The allegations against Roy Moore are merely a symptom of a larger problem. It's not a Southern problem or an Alabama problem. It's a Christian fundamentalist problem. Billy Graham's grandson, Boz Tchividjian, who leads the organization GRACE (Godly Response to Abuse in a Christian Environment), believes that the sexual abuse problem in Protestant communities is on par with that in the Catholic Church.⁵

- It was recently revealed that Paige Patterson, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, has made comments that he would only rarely counsel female victims of domestic violence to seek divorce; he has counseled battered women to submit to their husbands and pray for them. Patterson also has made objectifying comments about a 16-year-old girl's body during a sermon. The following excerpts from a recent article illustrate Patterson's sexist attitude toward females:

The controversy surrounding Patterson's comments began...when a site called the Baptist Blogger posted a video of Patterson's sermon from 2000, in which he told a story about a woman who told him she was being abused by her husband. He told her to pray, and she came back with two black eyes. "She said: 'I hope you're happy,'" Patterson said in his sermon. "And I said, 'Yes . . . I'm very happy,'" because her husband had heard her prayers and come to church for the first time the next day.

.... In 2010, Patterson called out female seminary students for not doing enough to make themselves pretty, saying, "It shouldn't be any wonder why some of you don't get a second look."

In an article published in 1997...about Wake Forest University's plan to open a divinity school, its former dean, Bill Leonard, said he thinks women should be ordained as ministers because he believes the Christian act of baptism "means everybody is free," including women who want to preach.

"I think everybody should own at least one," Patterson quipped when asked about women, according to the article.⁶

Given all these revelations, Southern Baptist women are currently gathering signatures for an open letter to SWBTS Board of Trustees stating Patterson's unfitness to serve as president, and urging his removal.⁷ Southern Baptist men have also issued an open letter to the Board to affirm and support the women's statement.⁸

⁵ Kathryn Brightbill, "Commentary: The larger problem of sexual abuse in evangelical circles," November 14, 2017, online at <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/opinion/commentary/ct-perspec-evangelical-roy-moore-girls-1115-20171114-story.html>. Brightbill is a legislative policy analyst at the nonprofit Coalition for Responsible Home Education, advocating for the interests of home-schooled children.

⁶ Sarah Pulliam Bailey, "Southern Baptist leader apologizes for sermon example about teenage girl's physical appearance" May 10, 2018; https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2018/05/10/southern-baptist-leader-apologizes-for-sermon-example-about-teenage-girls-physical-appearance/?utm_term=.3241790878c6.

⁷ See the full text of their letter at <https://swbtsletter.com/>.

⁸ The full text of the men's letter is available at <https://swbtsletter-men.com/>.

- Christian institutions of higher education are not necessarily safe places free of sexual assault, harassment, and other misconduct such as unwanted touching, comments about women’s bodies, sexual innuendo, and on the part of professors, abuse of their position. The example of Anabaptist theologian John Howard Yoder (mentioned in Chap. 1) illustrates how an institution (Goshen Biblical Seminary) failed to discipline the perpetrator, thereby failing to protect other females from future sexual assaults.⁹ Only after decades of allegations were made by many victims (estimates are from 50 to 100), including women overseas, the Mennonite church asked peace historian Rachel Goossen to examine and report on all pertinent documents relating to allegations about Yoder. Goossen’s report came out in *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 89 (January 2015). Yoder’s close friend, Stanley Hauerwas, Professor Emeritus of Divinity and Law at Duke Divinity School, was urged to respond after the report came out. Hauerwas wrote in response “to those who have wondered about what I think about ‘all this’ because they worry that I have not appreciated the seriousness of what John did.” In his response, Hauerwas admitted that he was part of the problem:

I was too anxious to have John resume his place as one of the crucial theologians of our time. I thought I knew what was going on, but in fact I did not have a clue. In my defence...I simply did not understand what was going on. However, in truth, I probably did not want to know what was going on.¹⁰

Yoder never admitted to any wrongdoing. Importantly, Goossen’s report exposed the wrong steps and wrong priorities of persons who could have intervened and stopped the abuse, notably of Marlin Miller, the president of Goshen Biblical Seminary:

As Marlin Miller and other Mennonite leaders learned of Yoder’s behavior, the tendency to protect institutional interests—rather than seeking redress for women reporting sexual violation—was amplified because of Yoder’s status as the foremost Mennonite theologian and because he conceptualized his behavior as an experimental form of sexual ethics.¹¹

- Over the past two years, Baylor University was investigated for its handling of sexual assaults. The investigation found that nineteen football players had been accused of sexual assault by seventeen women. A recent lawsuit filed by a female who claims she was raped by a football player includes information about “52 [other] sexual assaults by at least 31 players over four years.”¹² Several football players just recently were suspended from the team for sexual assault. The firm conducting the investigation wrote in 2016 that Baylor didn’t appropriately “respond to the reports of sexual assaults and dating violence reportedly committed by football players.” Further implicating Baylor, the report states that they:

⁹ Rachel Waltner Goossen, “Defanging the Beast”: Mennonite Responses to John Howard Yoder’s Sexual Abuse,” http://www.bishop-accountability.org/news5/2015_01_Goossen_Defanging_the_Beast.pdf.

¹⁰ Stanley Hauerwas, “In Defence of ‘Our Respectable Culture’: Trying to Make Sense of John Howard Yoder’s Sexual Abuse”, online at <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2017/10/18/4751367.htm>.

¹¹ Goossen, 10.

¹² Marc Tracy and Dan Barry, “The Rise, the Shame, of Baylor Nation,” March 9, 2017; online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/09/sports/baylor-football-sexual-assault.html>.

“found examples of actions by University administrators that directly discouraged complainants from reporting or participating in student conduct process, or that contributed to or accommodated a hostile environment.... In one instance those actions constituted retaliation against a complainant for reporting sexual assault.”¹³

Mark Galli, editor in chief of *Christianity Today* has voiced a growing wondering about evangelical churches:

“if there has been a habit of covering up and denying child and sexual abuse in evangelical churches in general—if there is something in the evangelical DNA that makes us hesitant to deal with accusations quickly, openly, and truthfully when there is the suspicion of grave sin in our midst.”¹⁴

“Evangelical DNA” in this case is nothing but an ideology of biblically based male dominance, control, and abuse of power at the expense of God’s daughters. The reality is that the gender equation used by males in positions of authority in Christian contexts is no different from “the male will dominate the female”—that is, no different at all from the *consequence* of sin (to paraphrase Gen 3:16), running counter to Jesus’ gospel of wholeness. Men commit sexual sins against girls and women, and men cover up the abuse for each other.

Microaggressions

Very often, however, the treatment of being looked down on is more subtle. These are the subtle experiences called **microaggressions**, defined as follows:

Microaggressions are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership. In many cases, these hidden messages may invalidate the group identity or experiential reality of target persons, demean them on a personal or group level, communicate they are lesser human beings, suggest they do not belong with the majority group, threaten and intimidate, or relegate them to inferior status and treatment.¹⁵

Microaggressions inflict their harm insidiously in that the perpetrator could claim ignorance, or claim to be joking, which only deepens the insult. Just because some expressions of sexism are not overtly hostile doesn’t mean they don’t inflict wounds to the inherent value and worth of females. Microaggressions include any of the following:

¹³ Des Bieler, “Baylor suspends four football players amid new sexual assault investigation,” March 15, 2018; online at https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/early-lead/wp/2018/03/15/baylor-suspends-four-football-players-amid-new-sexual-assault-investigation/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.bb3007fcd833.

¹⁴ Mark Galli, “We Need an Independent Investigation of Sovereign Grace Ministries,” March 22, 2018, Online at <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2018/march-web-only/sovereign-grace-need-investigation-sgm-mahaney-denhollander.html>. Mark Galli is editor in chief of *Christianity Today*.

¹⁵ Derald Wing Sue, “Microaggressions: More than Just Race: Can microaggressions be directed at women or gay people? Online at <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/microaggressions-in-everyday-life/201011/microaggressions-more-just-race>.

- In any instance where a male is chosen over a more qualified female, or when all things are equal and males are chosen more often than females. Speaking of mainline denominations, Fuller Theological Seminary Mark Labberton said that 35% of MDivs (Masters of Divinity grads) are women, but that the national average of women in positions of senior/lead pastor is at a mere 9%, and that on any given Sunday, only 5% of pulpits are filled by women.¹⁶ This difficulty for women is called the “stained glass ceiling” and “sticky floor” reality for potential women church leaders.¹⁷
- Whenever girls’ or women’s ideas, input, and contributions are ignored, or dismissed. Very often when females are expressing something, males interrupt. In my experience, I have rarely heard females interrupt the males, though I’m sure it happens. Men also ‘talk over’ females, more than females talk over males.
- When incorrect assumptions are made about females as being less capable than they are. Obviously there are times when females do have less physical strength or size for certain tasks; thus, it is not a microaggression when this difference is correctly determined. But it’s incumbent upon churches to know their members intimately enough (functioning as a family) to understand everyone’s capabilities and limitations, including when females need to be challenged to go beyond their self-imposed limitations.
- Any time males are patronizing or condescending toward females. A common expression of this condescension towards females is what is now called ‘mansplaining’, referring to when a male explains something to a female in a condescending manner as if talking to a child. This kind of microaggression can also be instances of benevolent sexism, discussed more fully below.

Microaggressions in church lead girls and women into the condition of being ‘lost’, such that the reality of their person eludes them. Of critical urgency is the fact that because these messages are communicated in church, and often by church leaders, there is an implicit message that at the very least God tolerates such behavior. For the females receiving these messages, this constructs for them, at best, a picture of God in which God sees females as less important than males, though maybe a little important; at worst, that God only created them to be objects who are subservient to males.

Microaggressions are so common that the church needs to be sensitized to these individual and corporate dimensions of ‘looking down on’ not only females but all human differences considered ‘less’ in a comparative process. Because microaggressions are so commonplace in the prevailing sociocultural contexts, it is easy to assume these behaviors are just normal. Microaggressions, along with overt hostile sexism and benevolent sexism, are common to other contexts, but they are not acceptable for God’s church family. They are not normal for what counts as Jesus’ essential justice—to be discussed shortly.

¹⁶ Comments by Mark Labberton in an interview of Tara Beth Leach (senior pastor of First Church of the Nazarene of Pasadena (PazNaz), Fuller Studio, April 2018, available online at <https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/tara-beth-leach-on-women-in-ministry/>.

¹⁷ According to Roberta Hestenes, “Stained Glass Ceilings and Sticky Floors,” *Fuller Magazine*, 2015 Issue #3 Women, 58-62.

Benevolent Sexism

It may seem that hostile sexism is worse than **benevolent sexism**, and in some ways it is, especially in terms of traumatic physical and emotional harm, and matters of the human rights and civil rights of women and girls. At the same time, it may seem to some persons that benevolent sexism is relatively harmless and that talking about it is a kind of overkill or oversensitivity on our part. These are assumptions we need to challenge. Many males aren't aware of benevolent sexism, nor are many females.

It's very probable that benevolent sexism is more common than hostile sexism in Christian contexts (including church, campus groups, missions, Christian social services, peace and justice organizations). Indeed, benevolent sexism is normative for Christians. Expressions of benevolent sexism are expressions from males to females that appear to be well-intentioned, positive—that is, beneficial for females. Having been socialized in this way by their Christian upbringing, males try to be kind, thoughtful (e.g. chivalrous), and idealize us (“women were sacred and looked upon with great honor”¹⁸), or perceive us as the weaker sex (like children) who need a man's protection, which many females welcome.

Males who practice benevolent sexism are likely to believe their benevolent attitude toward women is based in Scripture (e.g. Eph 5:25; 1 Pet 3:7). In the next chapter we examine Scriptures that speak to gender relations, so for now it is necessary to understand that benevolent sexism operates from the same prevailing gender equation as hostile sexism: that females are less and males are better. Any kind or “loving” expressions from the prevailing gender equation—with its assumptions and stereotypes that reduce females to less than whole persons created in the image of God—are paternalistic messages to and treatment of females. The disconcerting reality is that they are expressions of ‘looking down on these’.

Paternalism may feel loving to those males, but we need to challenge that bias, as Christian clinical psychologist and psychology professor Elizabeth Lewis Hall explains:

The intent of benevolent sexism is often loving, aimed at the well-being of the woman in question. The problem is that the behaviors motivated by this kind of sexism do, in fact, lead to harm....

Benevolent sexism produces self-doubt about competence and decreased self-esteem, lowers women's performance on cognitive tasks, causes them to define their worth on gender-stereotypical traits rather than on their actual abilities, makes them less likely to protect themselves and to speak out against injustices, etc. In other words, benevolent sexism undermines women's competence, fostering feelings of helplessness, and contributing to their victimization. ¹⁹

¹⁸ From a statement by current White House Chief of Staff John Kelly, reminiscing about a past time when many things were “sacred” in the U.S., <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/10/the-anguish-of-john-kelly/543474/>.

¹⁹ Elizabeth Lewis Hall, “When Love Damages: The Case of Benevolent Sexism,” February 20, 2017; online at <https://cct.biola.edu/benevolent-sexism>. Elizabeth Lewis Hall is Professor of Psychology at Rosemead School of Psychology, Biola University. Accessed May 1, 2018.k=333i

We females need to understand the penetrating reality that benevolent sexism is never without harmful effect, for such messages and treatment reduce our whole person to deficit stereotypes as much as hostile sexism does, if not more. That is, many of us females like being protected, we prefer to be a passive follower (like an object-person) rather than taking the lead in relationships and in church life (as a subject-person); and we are too willing to be let off the hook for taking more responsibility for ourselves. But we must understand that this bias has persisted hand-in-glove with false male superiority. Paternalism reinforces the false belief of male superiority implied by males by ‘looking down on these’, even if the male’s demeanor appears humble and sincere.

Benevolent sexism is deceitful, fooling both male perpetrator and the female receiving the ‘benefit’. Importantly—and this is discussed below—the “love” from benevolent sexism is an illusion that violates God’s justice. Both males and females need to understand how love and justice are integrated because it is basic to our integral identity as created by God in God’s own image.

It’s also notable that persons who endorse hostile sexism also endorse benevolent sexism, and vice versa, which indicates that they are really two sides of the same coin, or of the prevailing gender equation. This is the reported conclusion of social psychologist Susan Fiske and social scientist Peter Glick, who coined the term ‘benevolent sexism’:

[They] went on to determine the extent to which 15,000 men and women across 19 different countries endorse both hostile and benevolently sexist statements. First of all, they found that hostile and benevolent sexism tend to correlate highly across nations. So, it is *not* the case that people who endorse hostile sexism don’t tend to endorse benevolent sexism, whereas those who endorse benevolent sexism look nothing like the “real” sexists. On the contrary, those who endorsed benevolent sexism were likely to admit that they *also* held explicit, hostile attitudes towards women (although one does not necessarily *have* to endorse these hostile attitudes in order to engage in benevolent sexism).

Secondly, they discovered that benevolent sexism was a significant predictor of nationwide gender inequality, **independent of the effects of hostile sexism**. In countries where the men were more likely to endorse benevolent sexism, *even when controlling for hostile sexism*, men also lived longer, were more educated, had higher literacy rates, made significantly more money, and actively participated in the political and economic spheres more than their female counterparts. The warm, fuzzy feelings surrounding benevolent sexism come at a cost, and that cost is often actual, objective gender equality.^{20,21}

How are females supposed to oppose such kindness? It seems they don’t:

²⁰ Writes science communications consultant, Melanie Tannenbaum, “The Problem When Sexism Just Sounds So Dam Friendly...”; online at <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/psysociety/benevolent-sexism/> April 2, 2013. Accessed May 11, 2018.

²¹ For the full study, see Peter Glick and Susan T. Fiske, “Hostile and Benevolent Sexism: Measuring Ambivalent Sexist Attitudes Toward Women, online at https://www.academia.edu/login?post_login_redirect_url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.academia.edu%2F28644060%2FHostile_and_Benevolent_Sexism%3Fauto%3Ddownload.

A recent paper by Julia Becker and Stephen Wright details even more of the insidious ways that benevolent sexism might be harmful for both women and social activism. In a series of experiments, women were exposed to statements that either illustrated hostile sexism (e.g. “Women are too easily offended”) or benevolent sexism (e.g. “Women have a way of caring that men are not capable of in the same way.”) The results are quite discouraging; when the women read statements illustrating benevolent sexism, they were less willing to engage in anti-sexist collective action, such as signing a petition, participating in a rally, or generally “acting against sexism.” Not only that, but this effect was partially mediated by the fact that women who were exposed to benevolent sexism were more likely to think that there are many advantages to being a woman and were also more likely to engage in *system justification*, a process by which people justify the status quo and believe that there are no longer problems facing disadvantaged groups (such as women) in modern day society. Furthermore, women who were exposed to hostile sexism actually displayed the opposite effect – they were *more* likely to intend to engage in collective action, and *more* willing to fight against sexism in their everyday lives.²²

What unfolds from the above examples is the **norm**-alization of a gender equation that reduces females from the person created by God. The norms in these contexts construct generalized patterns that do not create dissonance in our brains, thus we routinely go with the flow of norm-ality. Unless challenged and confronted, these gendered patterns become embedded in the institutions, structures, and systems of our surrounding contexts. encompassed by such norm-alization in Christian contexts, female persons get lost.

The Gendered Academy

The Christian academy trains potential leaders for various Christian capacities. Even at an evangelical seminary such as Fuller Theological Seminary that prides itself on being egalitarian (biblically and theologically),²³ its own practice on behalf of God’s daughters has had a spotty track record. Before I even contemplated attending Fuller, I had heard of the surging numbers of females enrolling in seminaries in the 1970s, especially at Fuller. It was a time of great expectation and hope for women seeking to fulfill their call to church leadership. Roberta Hestenes became known for being the first tenured female professor, and served as a strong advocate for women in leadership. Some female students demanded and got established the Office of Women’s Concerns. Also, Fuller co-sponsored the Evangelical Women’s Caucus conference in 1978. During the next decades many thousands of women have attained positions of leadership in churches and denominational bodies.

It was my impression then, given the above, that Fuller would have a master’s degree (or some kind of specialty certificate) in women’s studies. How naïve I was. By

²² Melanie Tannenbaum.

²³ To see a summary of Fuller’s biblical basis and position statement for “Women in Ministry” go to <https://www.fuller.edu/womeninministry/>.

the time I was taking classes (2001), a nationwide backlash against women in church leadership was already in full swing. It seems that this backlash occurred at Fuller as well, though it's difficult to pinpoint. By 2005, the Office of Women's Concerns was closed, and nobody I asked seemed to know what happened to it or even when it closed. One of the most popular electives in the School of Theology was 'Women, the Bible, and Church', taught by New Testament professor David Scholer, and offered once every five quarters. Some persons were trying to get that class approved for core Masters of Divinity credit, but that never happened. That class terminated with David Scholer's passing in 2008. I was told that no one else was qualified to teach it.

In the recent interview noted earlier, Mark Labberton, Fuller's current president, sees an "undulation" in Fuller's history on the gender issue, where ground is won then lost, and "entropy comes." He further noted that Roberta Hestenes recently told him that "it doesn't feel like the gains that seem to be quietly coming are actually standing. It feels to me like we're starting the conversation all over again." Now that Fuller, like many seminaries, is faced with dropping enrollment and institutional crises, it appears that women's concerns will not be given priority—certainly not the same priority that race/ethnic issues in the church are given.

Other seminaries and Christian institutions of higher education—regardless of how much priority they currently give to addressing gender discrimination, and regardless of how liberal or conservative they are—must address the gender equation they use, or else we'll keep experiencing 'ground won then lost'. This must include examining their theological anthropology and understanding the sin of reductionism—which get to the heart of the basis we use for our identity and function. Until these schools do, at best they will likely engage in trying to improve things for women in basically the same ways that have been tried before. That is not a hopeful picture.

Lost Voices

In so many of the above examples of gender discrimination, a critical common thread is that girls and women are silenced, either by ignoring their complaints, blaming them, inducing guilt, or by covering up for the male perpetrator (motivated by secondary priorities of avoiding collateral damage). But this loss of voice doesn't exist only when females report abuses. Simply, females often have very little voice, very little input in church life together, very little say in the priorities or structures that the church is built on and functions by. Women's voices get lost either by being marginalized by males in power, or by our own suppression of our voices (even by dutiful submission).

Women aspiring to become senior/lead pastors commonly experience "the stained-glass ceiling" in the church (noted above), keeping them from attaining that coveted church role. As noted earlier, about 35% of Masters of Divinity graduates in the U.S. are women, but nationally only about 9% attain the position of senior pastor. Moreover, on any given Sunday nationwide, only 5% of pulpits are filled by women. The unembellished reality is that men continue to dominate church leadership; this unequivocally means that it is men's voices being heard at the expense of women's voices. This male dominance in the pulpit composes a fragmented message in that male viewpoints reach the ears of congregations, but female viewpoints rarely do.

The case can be made that as long as God’s viewpoint is being expressed to the local church, gender doesn’t matter—and so it *should* be. But the reality is that because the church is a gendered institution in its present condition, messages from the pulpit will communicate gender bias by implication, as well as unedifying examples of gender discrimination. The example of Paige Patterson’s comments that objectified a 16-year old girl is a gross example. Reflect on the stereotypes about women you have heard from male preachers. How often have you heard a male preacher make gender-stereotyped jokes about their wives and other females? About females’ obsession with shopping, or love of jewelry or flowers? About being clueless as to “what women want” (implying that women are fickle or inarticulate)? These stereotype jokes or similar stories are normative, and though it is true that there is always some truth to stereotypes, stereotypes fragment and reduce females from their wholeness as persons. But what does Jesus say? “Do not look down on these,” which is what stereotypes do. Having said this, I must also note that gender-stereotyped jokes about men are also unedifying, also reducing males from their wholeness. Yet, this is the unsurprising consequence that should be expected from making such distinctions.

The loss of women’s voices is highlighted in a study of benevolent sexism conducted at an evangelical university in 2012.²⁴ In the study, female faculty reported feeling undermined by implicit bias (assumptions) based on traditional definitions of femininity and masculinity. They received limited support, such as not being included in the information-sharing networking among faculty, less access to resources such as housing allowances, sabbaticals, funding, and course release for research. Females’ voices are thus minimized in Christian higher education. They did, however, report high levels of job satisfaction due to friendly relationships with male faculty and students.

Another cause of our voice to be lost is illustrated well by a female preaching instructor, Nancy Lammers Gross, who shares the following observations about women in the church, some of whom were preparing for ministry:

I know women who can sing powerfully, but when it is time to speak, especially to speak the Word of God, their voices can barely make it to the microphone.

I know women who, when they are in the company of other women, have voices that are full: full of laughter, full of body, full of personality. But when they are in the company of men, their voices are small, subdued, without mirth, and seem to fade into the background to avoid attracting attention.

.... I know women who have fire for the gospel...but since they are not allowed to preach from the pulpits of their own churches, they have shrunk their voices to fit the size of their assigned roles.

.... I know women who have insightful and important things to say, but who cannot say them with the conviction they feel.²⁵

²⁴ As reported by Karen Swallow Prior, “The ‘Benevolent Sexism’ at Christian Colleges,” online at <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2012/november-web-only/benevolent-sexism-at-christian-colleges.html>. The full study is by Brad Christerson, Hall, Elizabeth, Cunningham, Shelly, “Female Faculty at an Evangelical University: The Paradox of Gender Inequality and High Job Satisfaction,” *Religion and Education*, Vol. 39, Issue 2, 202-229. Published online: 02 Jul 2012 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15507394.2012.648574>.

²⁵ Nancy Lammers Gross, *Women’s Voices and the Practice of Preaching* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017), xviii-xix. She teaches speech communication in ministry at

This instructor is addressing how women have come to feel about themselves, and how their physical voices reflect a diminished view of self. This gender stereotype is not a modern phenomenon, and it also affects male self-image. When God chose Moses to lead the Exodus of God's people, Moses used his poor speech as an excuse not to act (Ex 4:10-13). Paul was also judged by the strength (i.e. weakness) of his voice (2 Cor 10:10), but he didn't define himself by this male stereotype (2 Cor 11:6; 1 Cor 2:4). But how did we females come to feel so insecure about our voices?

In any formula of the gender equation, our voice is a significant aspect to express our *selves*, that is, of our *identity* as persons. Our voice is central in relationships and life situations, thus our voice is important to our *function* as persons distinguished by the image of God. Our voice is important to focus on because it represents how well we are able to be involved in church life and practice, as well as in all our other life situations and contexts. To clarify for this study, in discussing women's voice, 'voice' encompasses women's perspectives and input as integrated with (and inseparable from) our physical voice.²⁶ When our voice is lost to the church, we are all diminished.

I suggest that more females in the church have been fragmented, reduced, and thus silenced by acts of benevolent sexism and microaggressions than have been affected by the more overt acts of hostile sexism. There is no doubt that girls and women who hear subtle or hidden demeaning messages in church or other Christian contexts internalize those messages in the wiring of their brains and the refuge of their hearts.

The fact that we receive those messages in church—where we are supposed to be nurtured as God's daughters makes it highly likely that females will continue to internalize the notion of being less because of gender. At this point, consider Jesus' relational words to Peter to "feed my lambs...tend my sheep" (Jn 21:15-17). What have church leaders in particular been doing with the flock? As long as church leaders reinforce the gender equation that makes gender distinctions, then they are leading the lambs astray, apart from the rest. Many in church leadership have functioned contrary to God's desires, like the false shepherds in the Old Testament who did not take care of God's people but served only their self-interests in the name of serving God (Ezek 34:1-10).

Gendered Worship

Finally, we need to expose the prevailing gender equation in our worship gatherings. The distinctions based on gender in the church are perhaps most visible and audible here. Every Sunday, male voices are amplified while female voices are regularly muted when God's people gather together to worship him; and don't be misled by the sound of female vocalists. When the church gathers to worship God, there are a set of gendered habits that church families engage in. Most worship services in the Western church are highly genderized—in both traditional and contemporary worship, and especially in evangelical worship. Worship services are patterned—'structured' if you will—according to certain roles and functions which are roughly taken up according to

Princeton Theological Seminary.

²⁶ Lammers Gross' book deals more with women's physical voice, or as she calls it, an "embodied voice" and "full-body instrument."

persons' gender. Consider the interplay between these roles/functions, and how these inform persons' identity. For example, who tends to lead a particular part of the worship program, and who sings a particular kind of song? In very large part, the roles/functions that define persons are traditionally gendered roles. To even consider interchanging these roles would likely encounter much resistance, because that would threaten persons' very identity, sense of purpose, and worth.

Surely you have noticed in most Christian worship settings that worship leaders are males, not females. This is the case particularly for large churches. Small churches have fewer available persons to lead worship, which may open up opportunities by default for females. Females are usually among the singers, but aren't usually at front and center leading everyone in singing. I am in no way promoting the 'front-and-center' style of leading worship—in fact, I strongly oppose all such performance-oriented worship²⁷—but only mention it here to highlight the dearth of female lead worshipers. Similarly, females are rarely the guitar players or the drummers. I notice this because I play the guitar, and long to see more females doing so. Talk about a gendered stereotype from our sociocultural context's rock bands—male guitar players and drummers in worship!

In traditional worship, there are likely more female musicians, mostly playing violin, cello, and flute. And I have only rarely seen women leading worship sitting at a piano (are musical instruments gendered too?) And all the church choirs I have seen have always been composed of more women than men, which also always seemed to be commensurate with the higher numbers of females involved in the church to begin with.

Think about who preaches. Mostly men, and much less often women—unless you attend the rare church where the lead pastor and primary preacher is a woman. It bears repeating the dim reality that though there continue to be around 30-35% women students in theological education, yet, as noted above, on any given Sunday nationwide, only 5% of pulpits are filled by women preachers.²⁸ This reflects the systemic silencing of women's voices at the church leadership level. Even when a church or denomination explicitly states that both women and men can be senior/lead pastors (e.g. the United Methodist Church ordains about 50% women), women still aren't being hired in equal numbers for the top position.

This practice is the outworking of implicit bias, as the common explanation goes, whereby those who make such decisions hire persons who are just like themselves. Such practiced bias parallels the 'mirrortocracy' label applied to Silicon Valley's lack of diversity. Silicon Valley is well-known to be predominantly white/Asian male, and is notorious for having a strong ethos to hire persons just like themselves to compose this mirrortocracy.²⁹ What mirrortocracy in the church reveals is the unresolved cause of gender distinction-making—who and what defines persons.

Most churches I've attended or visited had male ushers and offering collectors, although there were more women than men in the pews. The young children's Sunday

²⁷ I have written several studies on worship, notably about the primacy of relational involvement with God on God's relational terms (not our terms) in worship. These worship studies are available at <http://4X12.org>.

²⁸ Eliza Smith Brown, "150 theological educators celebrate 20th anniversary of Women in Leadership," Association of Theological Schools (ATS), Colloquy Online March 2018, online at <http://www.ats.edu/search/google/women%20students>.

²⁹ The term apparently originated with Mitch Kapor, founder of Lotus, and currently supports inclusivity in the technology world.

School is taught by young women, whereas teens, college, and young adults are usually taught by males—unless students are segregated by gender. Coffee and refreshments are the domain of females, although at one Baptist church my husband and I attended, there were a couple of men who regularly helped, which was refreshing to see.

This gender segregation is part of the old normal; it is simply second nature to many of us to self-segregate according to gender. I recall that at an informal gathering of a seminary class at a male professor's home, as a teaching assistant I wanted to interact with the students. Many seminarians aren't very comfortable in such informal social settings. At one point, I noticed that the group I was standing with were all males; most of the women (and only women except for the professor) were in the kitchen preparing refreshments, which the professor then served. It was not necessary for the women to do this, but I'm sure it was where they felt most comfortable. I had to make the conscious choice not to do the 'woman's work' but to give priority to talk with the students (i.e. to give primacy to relationships, as God does). On the other hand, how common is it to see men take charge of the kitchen duties ("hospitality") in Christian contexts, not out of obligation but because it's second nature to them? As well, how often do you see women volunteer, for example, to move tables and chairs? These are not big deals—someone has to do these tasks; it only illustrates how embedded we are to genderized assumptions. Unfortunately, along with these assumptions is the deficit model applied to females and males who don't measure up to the masculine yardstick.

How did our worship and church practices get like this? *Why* is it like this? To further our collective examination, consider the following. The above scenario reflects the typical complementarian church,³⁰ specifically the preacher and lead pastor being a man. But many egalitarian churches (so called) do not look much different in actual practice. Egalitarians want women to have equal access and opportunity to be in that pulpit, but don't usually comment about all the other aspects of genderized roles that compose the weekly church gathering. Why is that? Yet, even having noted the self-segregation, merely mixing up who does what on Sunday morning isn't the issue we need to address.

What all this gender distinction making in worship (and in all church practice) reveals is just how narrow and constrained we are in our persons; and this fragmentation and reduction of our persons—by which we define our identity and function—exposes our incompatibility with the image of God. Any such incompatibility creates an injustice that is imposed on God's creation, which then subtly becomes norm-alized among God's people. This variable lack of justice is evident in how the Sabbath has been shaped by the theological anthropology of God's people throughout history, thereby also shaping God, the Lord of the Sabbath accordingly.

In the formative tradition of God's people, the Sabbath has been a key identity marker to distinguish them from other persons, peoples and nations. What should

³⁰ Complementarians believe Scripture establishes that females and males are created with equal worth, but that males are to be the heads of churches (senior or lead pastor) and families, while females serve secondary roles in submission to males. The most conservative segments of evangelicals believe and practice a highly genderized binary of what it means to be female or male. The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) is the flagship organization for complementarianism. For more information, go to <https://cbmw.org/>.

have been integral, however, for who, what and how they are as persons and in relationship together became fragmenting of their created ontology and function. Consider carefully the Sabbath in God's rule of law, which constituted the climax essential to creation (Gen 2:1-3). The Creator enacted the Subject God's righteousness in what is *right* and whole, and this is how human persons are to function in likeness—function contrary to the pressure and demands of self-determination to measure up and succeed, and that preoccupy us with secondary matters at the expense of the primary. This contrary function from the primordial garden got embedded in human tradition and became entrenched in the status quo of human life. As a consequence, the Sabbath has been converted into a mere day lacking justice.³¹

Likewise, in modern day church practice, the Sabbath lacks justice, and we ignore the injustice imposed on God's creation—and assume incorrectly that God can be rendered in our image. Our longstanding problem is that our theological anthropology is based more on the outer in of our gender and genderized roles in the church than on the inner out of who, what, and how God is. In light of the decades of trying to bring equality to women in the church and family (admittedly some gains have occurred in this area), our theological anthropology has not changed, thus the stained-glass ceiling has not changed, and thus male dominance in Christian institutions has not significantly changed. And the status quo keeps everything functioning smoothly and efficiently in a variable lack of justice. The status quo is rigorously defended because whenever there is any threat to the male gender's place of power, privilege and prestige (such as enjoyed by a male pastor and others in church and academic leadership), or threat to the female gender's comfort zone (such as inhabited by female 'hospitality' service)—these are threats to persons' very identity and sense of self-worth based on these distinctions. Of course, there will be resistance whenever there are perceived benefits to injustice. This was the very issue Jesus encountered with many Pharisees, as he consistently challenged their "theological" anthropology that was based on outer criteria of what they did and had—not on the primacy of their person from inner out, involved in relationship with God on only God's relational terms (e.g. Mt 15:8-9).

Shepherds of Injustice

The breadth of gender discrimination by males (and some females) that causes females in the church to be lost hurts my heart, as I know others' hearts hurt as well. Sadly, in the absence of concerted response, complicity in the church has allowed this condition to remain both pervasive and resistant to change. Imagine how God is affected that his beloved daughters have been caused to go astray and be lost to the church family and relegated to relational orphans. Even beyond God's daughters, the reality is that males also have gone astray or gone missing in the church. As Isaiah wrote, "We all, we like sheep, have gone astray" (Isa 53:6, NIV). That is because for all human life, when our person is defined and determined by the outer aspects of our person (both imposed by

³¹ T. Dave Matsuo, *Jesus' Gospel of Essential Justice: The Human Order from Creation through Complete Salvation* (Justice Study, 2018); online at <http://4X12.org>, 58.

others and self-imposed), our person is fragmented and reduced; our whole person goes missing, lost to God's family (i.e. God's new creation family). Whenever human distinctions prevail, not many of us measure up to the criteria and standards of the inevitable comparative process that define who's better and who's less, who's first and who's last.

As mentioned in these first chapters, what gets lost is our whole person for the primacy of whole relationships together (with God and each other). That is, rather than functioning from inner out, we function from outer in, thereby presenting only secondary aspects of our person to others in relationships that are shallow, even when the church characterizes itself as very relational. Indeed, many churches' theology may insist on the primacy of relationship that needs to define and determine all of God's daughters' and sons' identity and function. Yet in practice, the local and global church demonstrates that its practice emerges from competing priorities—secondary priorities which render primary theological truths to impractical ideals or inconvenient truth..

A shift in priority takes place whenever secondary outer aspects of what we do (jobs, roles in church and academy, and even the traditions we repeat in our worship gatherings) and have (outer aspects of gender, race, class, along with resources, power, prestige, privilege, and even spiritual gifts) are what *we* give primacy to. Whenever we give primacy to these secondary outer aspects of persons, we relegate relationships to secondary importance—or even no importance, by implication (e.g. as demonstrated on social media). This shift from God's relational priorities to ours is evidenced by showing partiality and favoritism—which are incongruent with the Trinity's nature and being, and incompatible with the Trinity's intimate relational involvement (e.g. Dt 10:17)—which even the Pharisees knew about, but only as referential information (Lk 20:21).

Who in church life establishes a church's priorities? This is the responsibility of church leadership, those entrusted by God to 'feed my lambs' by giving primacy to wholeness of persons and relationship together in the image and likeness of the whole-ly Trinity. However, in the global church, the shift in priorities has replaced the primacy of relationship on God's relational terms with illusions of unified relationships. How do we know this? Just look at the fragmentation and relational distance that characterizes the church—for example, within regions, or worldwide.

In the next chapter, we focus on the irreplaceable and nonnegotiable basis composed by the integral righteousness of who, what, and how the Trinity is, thereby constituting the whole integrity for who, what, and how we must be in order to be in the image and likeness of the Trinity. Anything less, and any substitutes of our own construction to form our identity and function—by theological illusions and simulations of whole relationships—are clearly challenged by God throughout Scripture, because they shape a righteousness that cannot be counted on to signify the whole person.

Jesus himself integrally embodied for us the theological anthropology necessary for the primacy of whole persons in whole relationships together to compose God's church family to be whole-ly (whole + holy) one, as the Trinity is one. However, rather than living whole-ly—that is, whole and uncommon in the common fragmentary world—the church has traditionally made distinctions on the basis of gender, race/ethnicity, class, age, etc.). The unavoidable consequence has been dis-integral-izing persons, relationships, and God's church family. Moreover, even though each of us individually are accountable for our complicity in this dis-integral-ized condition, God holds the

shepherds/pastors of his church(es) especially accountable for the lost lambs in the church, because they got that way through the shepherds' teaching, reinforcing, and sustaining this dis-integral-izing by the sin of reductionism (Mt 18:6-11).

After his resurrection, Jesus spoke directly with Peter (Jn 21:15-22). In a pivotal moment for Peter, Jesus called him on the relational basis of the primacy of love, and challenged him to "Take care of my sheep" (v.16 NIV). Peter could not fulfill this primary responsibility and relational purpose until he stopped making distinctions, as he did between Jews and Gentiles (e.g. Gal 2:11-14), which was the very action causing some, including Barnabas, to go astray (v.13). Even after Jesus' post-ascension correction of Peter's theological anthropology and view of sin (Acts 10-11:18), Peter still struggled to make the turn-around change necessary to be whole in his own person.

As the preeminent shepherd leading the early church, Peter's divisive actions have to be understood for creating relational distance in the church. Relational distance is the critical issue for all divisiveness and fragmentation, not merely as a structural or organizational concept. We cannot assume to love persons while maintaining relational distance; and relational distance is inescapable when we don't engage the whole person (both ours and others'). Anything less and any substitutes for the whole person engenders an injustice, which reduces the person to a condition lacking the inherent justice of God's creation. Therefore, just as Peter was, church leaders who cause, reinforce and sustain relational distance among persons become enablers of injustice; likewise, church leaders who cause, reinforce, and sustain relational distance among persons become disablers of justice. That is, God's design and purpose for his human creatures gives primacy to the wholeness and well-being (God's peace, *shalôm*) of all persons, and the relationships together that enable this *shalôm*. It is this primacy of wholeness that defines God's justice, and its violation is injustice—as illuminated here by T. Dave Matsuo (my husband):

Underlying all rights in human life is the inherent need to fulfill and to be fulfilled in the created make-up of the human person, functioning in the primacy of relationship together in likeness of the Creator. Contrary to the theory of evolution, persons don't merely survive as their fitness warrants, rather person thrive as their created make-up is fulfilled. This **integral human need** basic to all persons is at the heart of justice—the justice by which the human person is created, the created justice of all persons and their relationships. The need for fulfillment is the basis for the rights that all persons (individual and together) have legitimate reason to expect to experience in human contexts of interactions.

The inherent worth (neither ascribed nor achieved) of all persons constitutes the justice required for all persons (without distinctions) to experience their equal position in the human order; and the rights of persons belonging to the human community are determined by the fulfillment of their integral human need.³²

Understanding and enacting of God's justice underlies Jesus' call and challenge to church leaders and those in the academy, just as it was for Peter. Moreover, Jesus didn't merely call Peter to be a justice activist in the way peace and justice activists function

³² T, Dave Matsuo, *Jesus' Gospel of Essential Justice*, 51.

today. Even more challenging than that activity—which can be engaged merely as an outer-in activity without deeper relational involvement—God’s justice involves the whole person involved vulnerably from inner out. That is, enacting God’s justice is the relational involvement of one’s whole person in love, just as God was and is involved with us to fulfill our inherent human need for intimate relational connection. This vulnerable relational involvement of love is the responsibility of the shepherds, who must account for all the sheep in relational terms, and pursue their persons beyond merely in a role function.

In Jesus’ interaction with Peter, Jesus was calling and challenging Peter’s whole person, from inner out, to be vulnerably open to Jesus, for Peter’s reciprocal relational response. The basis for Jesus’ reciprocal expectations (the sum of discipleship) was simply *just as* Jesus was always involved with him, and just as the Father was involved with Jesus (Jn 15:9). This is how God is always involved with us because this is the righteousness of who, what, and how God is—nothing less, and no substitutes—and expects nothing less from us, and no substitutes for this depth of relational involvement, reciprocally and congruently in how we live in everyday life. If God cannot count on our whole person in relationship together to be in righteous likeness ‘just as’, what is the significance of our relationship?

It cannot be sugarcoated or euphemized, or stated in politically correct or irenic terms. God is displeased with shepherds who don’t take loving care of all his sheep, any shepherds who benefit from the flock at the sheep’s expense (“you eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool”), and who have abused them (“with force and harshness you have ruled them,” Ezek 34:1-10). Like the people of Israel, God’s church today is full of sheep who have gone astray because of the presence of making distinctions based on human differences; in fact, the church’s presence and influence in Europe and North America is minimal—and even negative—in our significance and much of our witness.

In contrast to the irresponsible shepherds, God informs church leaders and those in the academy what is necessary according to his justice and for taking care of his sheep (Ezek 34:11-22).

Church leaders and the academy need to grapple with these matters, with their part in the present condition of the church—locally and globally. Whenever and however these leaders function on the basis of making false distinctions in a comparative process—based on any human difference, physiologically or socioculturally defined—the consequence will always be erecting relational barriers that cause someone to go missing in the church. Therefore, these persons need to address their own theological anthropology (just as Peter was challenged by both Jesus and Paul), and their inadequate view of sin (that excludes reductionism). Furthermore, they will also need to address the entire church on these critical issues (Ezek 34:17-22), even at the cost of their positions of privilege, prestige, and power. Redemptive change does not allow ‘the old’ to remain. Anything less and any substitutes will continue to constitute them as enablers of injustice, and disablers of justice.

In the surrounding context, when females (and male supporters) work for justice, they are trying to turn inequality into equality, trying to get wage parity and equal access to opportunities, privileges, and power, get wrongs righted, get reparations paid to victims who were unfairly or illegally deprived of their human rights and civil rights.

Activists want males to stop abusing women, want females to be recognized and treated as persons (not objects for men's use), and be paid monetary restitution for harm they've incurred and for violation of their person. Females want males to take responsibility for their sexist perspective and actions. They're trying to flatten hierarchical human relations on the individual and institutional levels. Accomplishing these goals would be victories of justice, and would satisfy activists working only in our sociocultural contexts.

We who are Jesus' followers, however, need to recognize that achieving these goals addresses conditions that involve only premature justice. As important as these pursuits for justice are, they are not sufficient for the church to pursue. Our common notions of justice and injustice (the violation of justice) are only human constructs, and don't get to the heart of human needs, and therefore the complete rights of persons involved. God's justice encompasses the depth of the human condition, our needs, and the rights as humans bestowed on us by God, which are explained here:

Therefore, the integral human need—invariable for all persons (both individually and collectively)—composes the rights (**the human need-rights**) for all persons to have their inherent need, which is invariably designed by God and created in God's image, respected, honored and allowed to be fulfilled. The inherent human need antecedes what is considered 'human rights' and forms the irreducible and nonnegotiable basis for human need-rights.

Human need-rights emerge from the inherent human need in this relational dynamic:

1. **Vested rights** from God that are inherent to all persons created in God's image, irreducible rights which cannot be revoked to prevent fulfillment of the human need.
2. **Privileged rights** unique to all persons created in God's image, who can claim these nonnegotiable rights just in their created uniqueness, unless the rights are withdrawn or denied only by God.
3. **Permissible rights** available to all persons to the extent that their enactment either doesn't disrespect, abuse and prevent the fulfillment of their and others' human need, or that isn't allowed access to that fulfillment by the normative enforcement of others.³³

Reflect on the above rights with the Spirit; the rest of the study refers back to them as we focus on our theology and practice. At this stage, what rights has the church mainly focused on; and who do you think has incurred the most loss of their rights?

This discussion brings us back to God, in whose image all humans are created with a distinguished relational design and purpose. Unequivocally, as the following excerpt illuminates, ever since creation, God has revealed what is essential to the image of God, and therefore clarifies that God's justice is relationship together on just God's relational terms:

³³ T. Dave Matsuo, *Jesus' Gospel of Essential Justice*, 51-52,

The Sabbath signifies the most transparent stage in the creation of all life, in which we see God being God. In the context of the world, God’s whole ontology and function just *is*, without any other action or activity in this moment. On this unique day, God’s relational message is “Be still and know that I am God” (Ps 46:10). At this perspicacious point of just being God, God constituted whole-ly the relational context and process of what is primary *of* God and who is primary *to* God for the whole-ly relational outcome of all persons coming together in the primacy of face-to-face relationship. Subject God blessed the Sabbath with the definitive blessing of the Subject’s face (Num 6:24-26)—the primary *of* God for the primacy of face-to-face relationship with the persons primary *to* God. Only this relational outcome is the **just-nection** of creation, that is, the *right* order of relationship together created by the Subject for subjects having the right relational connection in his likeness. Accordingly, Subject God made the Sabbath holy in order to perspicuously distinguish the uncommon from the common prevailing—and notably preoccupying us in the secondary—in everyday human life.³⁴

Just-nection: this alone will fulfill all of us in our inherent human need-rights, regardless of our gender, race, or any other human difference. We Christians must not be satisfied with premature justice.

Church leaders and leaders in the academy concerned with gender equality share the view that despite important gains for women in the church, we have a long way to go, and that we keep covering the same ground over and over again. I agree completely. God is calling us all to the hard relational work that Jesus embodied while here among us. In spite of all the biblical study and conversations we’ve all been having about gender, there are critical gaps in our theology and practice to examine.

Therefore, we need to vulnerably and carefully listen to Jesus’ voice as he reveals the Father’s heart to us in our current time. As Jesus made paradigmatic for his followers, “the measure you use will be the measure you get,” (Mk 4:23-24); this paradigm is definitive for the gender equation in our theology and practice. As we move into the next chapter, focusing more deeply and vulnerably on God’s relational language—which is only for the primacy of relationship together with God and each other on God’s relational terms—Jesus tells us to “pay attention to how you listen”... and respond (Lk 8:18). Will we? That is, will we, in reciprocal response *just as* Jesus enacted?

³⁴ T. Dave Matsuo, *Jesus’ Gospel of Essential Justice*, 59.

Chapter 3 The Gender Equation in Our Theology

The measure you give *and thus use* will be the measure you get....

Mark 4:24

**Wherever this good news is proclaimed in the whole world,
what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.**

Matthew 26:6-13

This chapter is pivotal for the study of gender and will distinguish what is essential for both our theology and practice. As Jesus made definitive in the above statement for his followers' theology and practice, the measure of our person we give and thus use in the theological task will be the measure we get in our gender equation—nothing more, even though we have conviction that we do.

All Christians from all walks of life (at whatever age) who are trying to make sense of what they believe about God and their everyday life of faith are engaged in 'the theological task'—a task often mistakenly ascribed to only church pastors or academic folks. Now set this reality into the big picture of God's global church, which is more diverse and complex than in any other period of Christian history due to globalization. With the shift of the center of Christianity from the Global North to the Global South, Western Christianity's theological dominance is called into question, whether as the byproduct of worldwide missions, or due to postmodernism's breaking down of metanarratives.

The result is the emergence of a wide diversity of theological voices, causing no little consternation among white male Christian leaders and academics, with some digging in of the heels to preserve "biblical" (read their) viewpoints. But diversity indeed raises legitimate concerns and questions about how we are to understand the one true God, and God's design and purpose for us in this life. Whose interpretation of Scripture should we listen to? How do we know what *God* is really saying? Does God speak through such diversity that can end up being contradictory? Doesn't diversity in theology make impossible the idea of becoming 'one' as Jesus prayed for (Jn 17:11,21-23)?

Antecedent to these questions is the issue of whether God does indeed speak. Evangelicals, of course, assume that the Word of God is the primary authority, though they vary in emphasis on either 'the words of God' or 'the words from God'. The words of God have been routinely transposed to merely referential language, which becomes about the transmission of information about God that becomes definitive for our theological task. The words from God, however, are distinguished only in God's relational language, which signify the relational context and process of God's communication to human persons—communication not about mere information but for the primacy of relationship together on the integral basis of God's relational terms (e.g. as signified by God's law). This basis of communication was challenged in the primordial garden, in which persons pursued the question "Did God really say *that*?" in their theological task. Given that those words from God were communicated, the focus then

switched to “Well, then, what did God mean by those words?” This subtly opened the door to speculation in the theological task and the redefining of God’s words, whereby persons began speaking for God while using the words of God. And this theological engagement has evolved distinctly in adaptations of the gender equation.

The related questions pertinent to this study on gender are: How do we distinguish God’s voice from all the divergent voices and diversity of interpretations of Scripture regarding gender and gender relations—distinguished from the adaptation in the prevailing gender equation(s) that currently pervades the church, including egalitarian and complementarian versions? How do the workings of human biases in the theological task figure in all this? This chapter focuses on these questions from the position that God must speak for himself. And since the most compelling communicator of God is God himself, our examination of the gender equation in our theology must unfold with Jesus’ life, his words to us, and his relational involvement with particular women and men. No less than Jesus is the hermeneutical key to understanding and knowing the whole of God, the Trinity, which integrally also illuminates his whole person as the epistemological, functional, and relational keys for all life.¹ Furthermore, the Spirit is here to help us hear him in depth beyond human limits (Jn 16:13-14; 1 Cor 2:9-13). This examination also must become part of our ongoing journey (as individuals and corporately as church family) in the defining relationship of following Jesus, and not be undertaken merely as an intellectual pursuit so we can be right (and the other “side” wrong). Unavoidably, therefore, this journey centers on our own theological anthropology, which for all of us requires some chastening and correction as we engage this theological task.

During his earthly life, Jesus embodied the whole and uncommon (whole-ly) God—God’s being, nature, and involvement (all of which compose God’s glory)—for face-to-face relationship together (e.g. Jn 1:14,18; 2 Cor 4:6).² Jesus also embodied in his humanness the whole and uncommon theological anthropology (human ontology and function) necessary for the human person’s reciprocal response to be compatible with God’s whole-ly presence, and congruent with God’s vulnerable relational involvement with us. That is to say, “the Word became flesh” in historic relational terms, and only on this uncommon relational basis could persons receive and make significant connection with the Word (Jn 1:10-14). Therefore, on the Word’s terms, the vast majority who encountered Jesus didn’t make the necessary shift from the common to make relational connection necessary for their wholeness (cf. Mt 7:22-23); but the minority who did make the shift experienced transformation to wholeness that’s available to all of us (as in 2 Cor 3:18)—even now as we continue in this study.

Yet, for Jesus, *how* his followers would ‘see’ and also ‘hear’ was a critical issue that is addressed in all four Gospels—indeed throughout both Testaments. Just how vital ‘seeing’ and ‘hearing’ are for any of us who follow Jesus is summarized in the following:

These are the qualitative relational terms embodied by Jesus as the hermeneutical key for the relational epistemic process to the whole. God’s terms are clearly

¹ For an in-depth examination of Christ as these keys, see T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology A Theological & Functional Study of the Whole of Jesus* (Christology Study, 2008). Online at <http://4X12.org>, 11-12, and entire study.

² For further insightful and helpful examinations of Jesus’ life and practice, see various studies by T. Dave Matsuo, references in bibliography and also available online at www.4X12.org.

definitive, and thus irreducible and nonnegotiable, which is why the Father made it the key imperative: “Listen to my Son” (Mt 17:5). And why Jesus makes it the relational imperative: “Pay attention to how you listen” (Lk 8:18) and “Pay attention to what you hear; the *level of relational involvement* you give will be the *extent of reciprocal relationship together* you get” (Mk 4:24), and then “Follow me.” The imperative in Mark 4:24 needs to be integrated with Luke 10:21. The “measure” (*metron*) we give and get that Jesus refers to involves our perceptual-interpretive framework that we use, which determines (measures, limits) the level of participation in the epistemic process for God’s self-disclosures. The above difference in frameworks signified by the child-person and the wise and learned [stated in Lk 10:21] is clearly made definitive by Jesus for “the level of relational involvement you give will be the extent of reciprocal relationship you get, both in the relational epistemic process and in relationship together”—for either a relational outcome or relational consequence (Mk 4:24-25). Therefore, the relational context and process—that Jesus embodied for our participation in the relational epistemic process to the whole of God, God’s whole and our wholeness—cannot be diminished or minimalized by human shaping and construction without the loss of whole knowledge and understanding, as well as what it means to be whole. Nothing less and no substitutes are the irreducible and nonnegotiable terms the whole of God embodied.³

Thus, just as Jesus responded to two future disciples who asked Jesus where he was staying, “Come and see” (Jn 1:39), he invites us to ‘**come and see**’ what’s ahead for us together. May our journey into these next chapters encourage you, and even challenge you wherever you are in your journey with the Trinity. Part of this journey is to practice Jesus’ paradigm for our reciprocal involvement in the process, as paraphrased above: “the *level of relational involvement* you give will be the *extent of reciprocal relationship together* you get” (Mk 4:24), and then “Follow me.” Lead the way, whole-ly Spirit.

I. The Human Shaping of Theology

Facing all Christians today is the global reality routinely ignored: The diversity in theology is due to diversity of human biases, not due to the diverse meaning of the words from God. All of us have biases (whether you believe it or not), which have been shaped by our human contexts such as family, church, community, schools, culture (e.g. news, TV, movies, music, and social media), and society—as well as our experiences. These biases become embedded in our brains by repeated input and reinforcement through messages we hear, from what we observe, and from what we experience in everyday life. Our biases become so firmly entrenched that they *feel* as if they are absolute objective truth. That is, our brains become wired in patterns consonant with our bias, which the

³ T, Dave Matsuo, *Jesus into Paul: Embodying the Theology and Hermeneutic of the Whole Gospel* (Integration Study, 2012). Online at <http://4X12.org>, 9.

brain would interpret as normal (or natural) whereas dissonance would be abnormal (unnatural).

This leads us to our common susceptibility to *confirmation bias*, which functions like a filter for what we see, read, and hear. For example, when we read and hear a variety of news reports, our bias-filter focuses our attention on what supports our perspectives, and it subtly filters out (ignores or conveniently misses) whatever doesn't confirm our beliefs and values. This connection between bias and perception is important to understand, as together they form our perceptual-interpretive framework and lens for processing all input. Furthermore, we tend to feel connected on a deep level to others who share the same biases and viewpoints. When confirmation bias becomes the glue for a group of persons, it becomes further reinforced, especially when that group feels threatened; then we have *coalition instinct* (or *coalition psychology*), which accounts for the increasingly vitriolic tribalism in the U.S. of "I'm right and you're wrong" divisiveness over the very identity of the U.S.⁴

A recent op-ed article demonstrates this point. The writer pointed out how persons can listen to the same audio clip, but hear two different words—either "laurel" or "yanny."⁵ When I first heard the audio clip on TV, I heard "laurel," but when I listened on my computer, I heard "yanny" and my husband heard "laurel." I could not get over the fact of our different perceptions—two differing realities.⁶

Friedman uses this meme and the resulting polarity among people on the internet to make the point that "we're burrowed so deeply in our own beliefs it can be hard to conceptualize that there is another way of seeing [or hearing] the world." She laments about our "modern tendency to turn every dilemma into a binary—yes-or-no, good-bad—debate. As she makes the connection between contrasting perceptions to the sense that 'I'm right and you're wrong', the deeper issue is the connection of bias with 'who I understand myself to be'—that is, identity.

All of this strongly suggests that gender differences also feed into this coalition instinct, more so for males than for females. That is, there's an undeniable social dynamic about shared bias that influences even our identity based on gender. I suggest this is why the 'men are from Mars, women are from Venus' dichotomy was so popular, which merely reinforces those persons who make the greatest distinctions between femininity and masculinity. The greater the distinctions from others we make, after all, the clearer one's own identity. This distinction-making, however, has had dire consequences on our identity as God's daughters and sons, as this chapter illuminates.

But not everyone's biases can be right—unless we resign ourselves to diversity to allow everyone to be right and nobody wrong. Multiculturalism is important to affirm in order not to stratify human distinctions, but it cannot be the theological basis of our theology and theological anthropology, nor the primary determinant for church life and practice.

⁴ [Http://www.newyorker.com/science/maria-konnikova/the-psychological-research-that-helps-explain-the-election](http://www.newyorker.com/science/maria-konnikova/the-psychological-research-that-helps-explain-the-election). For a list of psychology articles on coalition thinking (or coalition psychology), see <https://www.cep.ucsb.edu/topics/coalition.htm>.

⁵ Ann Friedman, "Lessons in repeat listening," *Los Angeles Times*, Thursday, May 24, 2018. The New York Times has a tool that allows you to change the audio frequencies so you can hear the word you couldn't before, at <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/05/16/upshot/audio-clip-yanny-laurel-debate.html>.

⁶ The difference in auditory perception may be attributed to the sound wave frequencies involved.

We all have biases about gender that shape our theology and biblical interpretation—that is, our view of Jesus and the Father, and interpretation of what God says in Scripture. We usually see in Scripture what we want to see or have been taught what is there, and conveniently ignore what doesn't confirm our gender bias. Some persons believe they have no biases (like the judge I mentioned in Chap. 1). Sociologist Michael Kimmel observes that inequality of genders (certainly a bias) “is almost always invisible to those who benefit from it—in fact, that’s one of the chief benefits.”⁷ Males who believe they have no gender bias, and don’t perceive other males’ bias, are blind to it because they look from their position of privilege, not to mention the dominant pattern of their brains. This is also why many white persons in the U.S. have a hard time perceiving racism—their own, others’, and systemic racism.

Our biases, beliefs, and values shape our identity (our self-understanding), which then determines how we function in everyday life in relation to others. For Christians, there is the correct assumption that being a Christian involves change in our identity, although just what this change involves can be extremely variable, and in reality is usually an outer-in approach. There are also assumptions made as to who and what define those changes, and these assumptions need to be challenged. Jesus made conclusive that change must be redemptive, the redemptive change in which the old—the old normal, including the prevailing gender equation—must die in order for the new creation to emerge. Paul further clarified the difference between outer-in change (*metaschematizō*, 2 Cor 11:13-15) and inner-out change (*metamorphoō*, Rom 12:2; 2 Cor 3:18).

The difficulty is that redemptive change requires vulnerability on our part to change our biases, beliefs, values, and practices because that means changing one’s self-understanding. Having to change from one’s old *source* or *basis* for identity and function is quite threatening, particularly if we don’t have a significant alternative to base our new identity on. This is especially crucial for Christians, who supposedly find our *primary* identity in God and in our relationship together. Much of Christian practice manifests otherwise. Consider the following:

Identity formation is not a simple process. No single identity forms the whole of a person’s identity, which can include physical, family, social, cultural, ethnic, racial, class, age and gender identities. Yet, there are primary and secondary identities that go into defining who and what persons are. The determining process for our identities involves the extent and depth of our relationships. It is not only critical for any anthropology to understand this but vital in theological anthropology for who emerges and what develops and survives.⁸

Jesus knows all about our biases and preconceived notions, and that these serve as our default mindset which predisposes us to hearing him only in a limited and narrowed-down way. This mindset is what we can call our perceptual-interpretive framework and lens. As noted in the block quote above, Jesus pointed his disciples to this problem from early on, such as when they sought to understand his parables (see Mk 4:10-13): “Pay attention to what you hear *from me*; the measure you give *and thus use* will be the

⁷ Michael S. Kimmel, *The Gendered Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 199.

⁸ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Person in Complete Context: The Whole of Theological Anthropology Distinguished* (Theological Anthropology Study, 2014); online at <http://4X12.org>, 29.

measure you get” (Mk 4:24). Moreover, in addition to “what you hear,” Jesus said to “pay attention to *how* you listen” (Lk 8:18). For these first disciples, Jesus revealed the keys to what’s involved in relationship with him, which those disciples didn’t embrace to truly know him after their years together (Jn 14:9). Here Jesus points the way to the relational experience necessary as our significant alternative to integrally be the relational basis of a new identity and new function.

How we listen—that is “the measure you use”—critically determines the quality and depth of our involvement in relationship together with God. To paraphrase, Jesus tells us: “You have biases to recognize and reject before you can listen and hear what *I* say, not what you *think* I say, nor what you want me to say.” Individually and corporately, we all need to identify our current biases about gender (i.e. the prevailing gender equation) rooted in cultural definitions. We need to distinguish what we hear him saying from what we want to hear. We also need to reflect on our assumptions about the meanings of his words, and consider the possibility that these assumptions were wrong or distorted. Then we need to vulnerably and honestly lay our biases and preconceptions before the Lord to relinquish them, and ask him to correct us with his gender equation, and help us grow in our new identity as whole daughters and sons in his new creation family in likeness of the Trinity. This latter relational process to wholeness in our theological anthropology is how we will experientially grow into our uncommon identity and function in likeness of the uncommon Trinity.

Furthermore, the measure we use in *how* we listen to Jesus must undergo the shift from hearing God’s Word (the words of God) as referential information to collect in our brains; the measure we use to listen to Jesus must become congruent with the qualitative and relational depth of his communication as the Word from God. This brings us to a further related integral matter that Jesus makes definitive for us to embrace for deeper understanding: Whose language do we speak?

Primary Language Influences

It is well established now by science that language influences and shapes how we think (the dynamic referred to as *linguistic relativity*).⁹ Language, therefore, is directly related to informing our biases. The reality that language influences our thinking is extremely vital to understand as Christians, because language shapes our self-understanding, that is, our identity and how we define our person, and thereby determines our function in daily life and relationships.

Alongside the human language(s) we use in daily life, such as English or Spanish, there is another set of languages we need to become attuned to: **relational language** and **referential language**, both of which are present in all human tongues. All humans are able to speak referentially and relationally. In the Gospels, Jesus differentiated between these two incompatible languages that are involved in whether or not we can ‘hear’ God—that is, hear the words of God in referential language, or listen to the words from God in relational language, as noted earlier. Just as Jesus challenged persons’ biases, he also challenged which of these languages persons used (as in Jn 8:43).

⁹ For an informative TED Talk on this topic, listen to cognitive scientist Lera Boroditsky, at https://www.ted.com/talks/lera_boroditsky_how_language_shapes_the_way_we_think. Nov. 2017.

Referential language is any form of communication engaged merely for the purpose of transmitting information; there is no personal connection involved. Of course there's a place and use of referential language in performing certain tasks, in certain types of lectures, and giving instructions, notably in science and technology. However, for God's purposes, such as for sermons (i.e. to fulfill 'feed my sheep'), Bible study, and engaging in the theological task, using referential language just to transmit and receive information *about* God has no relational significance for either the speaker or the listeners. The use of referential language in theology reflects that the speaker is not vulnerably involved in the primacy of relationship with God to receive the words communicated from God distinguished only in relational language. Sermons delivered referentially assume to speak for God, but they are also in essence ontological simulations based on illusions of relationally knowing God (i.e. epistemological illusions, just as the early disciples practiced in their theological task, Jn 14:9).

In contrast, *relational* language is person-to-person communication in God's relational context for the purpose of making relational connection. Both the speaker and listener must be vulnerably engaged in the communication dynamic so that relational connection is made.

Relational language is simply communication which includes two interrelated levels of meaning: (1) the content aspect of the words themselves, and (2) the relationship aspect which can be expressed verbally or nonverbally, directly or indirectly, usually implied by the words yet a distinct part of the communication. Since relational messages are always attached to the content of messages and help us understand its significance or any deeper meaning the content may have or its message includes, it is consequential not to pay attention to them—as Jesus made conclusive (Mk 4:24). If just the content of messages is considered, the significance of the communication may not be fully understood—notably the relational significance conveying the further and deeper meaning of the communication....¹⁰

Relational language is qualitative in function and is composed of these relational messages:

- (1) What one is communicating about you, how one sees and feels about you (e.g. "you are important to me").
- (2) What one is saying about your relationship together, how that person sees and feels about the relationship (e.g. "our relationship is important to me").
- (3) What one is saying about one's own person in the relationship (e.g. "you can count on me").

The prevalence of referential language was the reality that Jesus encountered in the common human context. Relational language is what Jesus distinguished as "my language" (*lalian tēn emēn*, Jn 8:43), whereby Jesus vulnerably disclosed the intimate family relationships within the Trinity in only relational terms, from the Father (e.g. Mk 1:11; Mt 3:17; 17:5; Jn 12:28b) and the Son (e.g. Mt 6:9-13; Jn 11:41; 12:28; 17:1-26) to

¹⁰ T. Dave Matsuo, *Jesus into Paul: Embodying the Theology and Hermeneutic of the Whole Gospel* (Integration Study, 2012). Online at <http://4X12.org>, 93.

the Spirit (e.g. Lk 3:22; 4:1,4; Jn 15:26; 16:13-15). This is not some mysterious spiritual language that only mystics can understand, but relational language for everyday life that, notably, children readily digest (Lk 10:21). God's relational language (Jesus' family language, as in Mt 12:48-50) discloses the Trinity's intimate relational being and vulnerable involvement together for our benefit (e.g. Jn 12:30) because "my language" also defines the primacy of Jesus' relational work to make us whole together in relationship to compose his new creation family.¹¹ "My language" as Jesus illuminated, was the whole of the embodied Word, vulnerably present and intimately involved with persons, composing the self-revelation of the Trinity in this uncommon relational context and process that can be engaged only by his relational terms.

Moreover, the further language challenge for Jesus' disciples (including us today), also involved the necessity to listen and relationally reflect on what he communicated. For example, Jesus got frustrated with the disciples for failing to perceive and understand him (*syniēmi*, Mk 8:17,21). *Syniēmi* refers to the involved process of putting together pieces (as with a puzzle) to comprehend. The disciples' referential language lens narrowed their focus on the immediate situation, unable to put information pieces together with the qualitative sensitivity to perceive the bigger relational picture that was unfolding before their very eyes. That is, Jesus didn't come just to give information about the Father, but in his person he whole-ly embodied the whole and uncommon relational context of the Trinity and the trinitarian relational process of family love, thereby to vulnerably involve his disciples in intimate relationship together. This illustrates that the language we use will determine the depth of hearing and understanding God; and this is a pivotal issue for the church if it is to hear, receive, and respond to what God says about gender and genderization of his church family. Accordingly, language is an essential issue in our theological task and is necessary to address to clarify any theological fog, and to correct our biases.

Therefore, if we honestly want to make sense of God and our beliefs, then in the theological task we need to distinguish God's voice in God's relational language, and we need to *syniēmi* and put the pieces together using the relational language lens (certainly a bias) in order to understand God's big (read whole) picture purposes for us. This is particularly true for the processes that egalitarians and complementarians engage in as they pursue their good but short-sighted (self-interested?) intentions.

When we receive God's words merely as information, whether in personal Bible study or sermons, what part of us engages God? Only our intellect that processes information (cf. Jn 5:39-42; Lk 10:21), while it is unlikely any part of us is involved with God. But to understand and speak Jesus' relational language means we must be directly involved with Jesus on his relational terms of being vulnerable, to open ourselves to the whole-ly (whole + holy/uncommon) God. Why is it necessary to be vulnerable with God (cf. Jn 4:23-24)? This is Jesus' meaning when he told his disciples "unless you change and become like little children" and "humbles himself like a child" (Mt 18:3; cf. Lk 10:21). To be like a little child isn't to be childish, but to reject our grown-up masks, self-

¹¹ In two other studies, I examine more fully God's relational language as the key to worship that has relational significance to God, and to us as worshipers. See *Embodying New the Worship Relationship: Whole Theology and Practice Required* (Worship Study, 2015); and *Hermeneutic of Worship Language: Understanding Communion with the Whole of God* (Worship Language Study, 2013). Both studies are online at <http://4X12.org>.

importance, and relational barriers kept in place by our biases, including our old gender equations. In short, this is the theological anthropology of whole persons vulnerably involved with God on God's relational terms of grace, which renders human distinctions without significance and our identity and function based on them as insignificant to God and to those created in God's image.

This is how we must pay attention to how we listen, for 'the level of relational involvement you give will be the Jesus you get'. Nothing is more critical for our theological anthropology—that is, our identity and function—as we seek understanding about gender in our theology and practice. If we don't understand Jesus' relational language—indeed God's relational language throughout Scripture—we have no basis to be confident in our theology as relates to gender. How can we then respond in obedience to him? As long as we use a referential language lens—which is our default bias—we will remain stuck essentially where we are. This is why the complementarian-egalitarian divide persists despite decades of earnest Bible study, speaking with the words of God at the expense of the words from God in the primacy of relationship together.

Therefore, we all (individually and corporately) must ongoingly ask ourselves, *Whose* language do I use when listening to God? If referential language, then we may know a lot of information about God (good for static doctrines), but not really know God's heart and what matters most to God (as the early disciples lacked), including how to view his creation of us with gender. If relational language, then we will experientially know and understand God since God is able to reveal "these things", which pleases God (Lk 10:21). Furthermore, as God has stated unequivocally, knowing him with a relational depth of understanding is our only legitimate reason for boasting (Jer 9:23-24). The reality facing us is: The language we use will be the measure of depth we know God; and the depth level we know God will be the identity and function we live by as our everyday theological anthropology.

The primary underlying issue involved in referential language is that its lens sees only partially, in outer-focused, quantitative narrowed-down terms, all of which is fragmentary, lacking wholeness. Gender discrimination and other forms of reducing persons to less than the qualitative whole person created in God's image is this same underlying issue, defined next.

The Tap Root Sin of Reductionism

As noted earlier, my dad was a physician who wanted me to follow in his professional footsteps into medicine. On the one hand, he didn't define me by my gender and thereby discriminate against me by eliminating my person from such participation. On the other hand, however, he reduced my person to merely the abilities of what I could do. This was the bias he imposed on everyone, measuring all persons, groups, peoples, and so forth on this comparative basis. Our relationship didn't make me feel any better about myself as a female, but in reality consistently made me feel 'less' in a process of trying to measure up on his reduced terms. This points to the human dynamic common to gender issues.

Despite all the attention that sexual abuse is currently receiving (as important as it is in both the church and society), concerned Christians and the church must place

sexualized gender harassment and abuse into the two broader interrelated dynamics encompassing (1) all expressions of prejudice and discrimination against females (including microaggressions and benevolent sexism with its implicit bias), and also (2) place sexism in the even bigger picture that encompasses all forms of distinction-making and discrimination. This encompassing picture (see Fig. 1) helps us perceive and identify the shared root sin of these human dynamics, and this deeper context is not the sin of pride or fear, as is often taught in church. Many Christians sincerely don't want to be sexist, racist, or even "merely" prejudiced against any person or group; and it's likely that many of us have sincerely come before God to repent of pride or fear that makes us think we're better than others, or that makes us want to avoid associating with others—common patterns wired in our brains. Pride and fear certainly factor into these dynamics, but we have to dig deeper to the very tap root.

To remove or destroy a tree completely, you have to dig up the tree roots, including the tap root, the main root that helps anchor the tree. Likewise, until the church

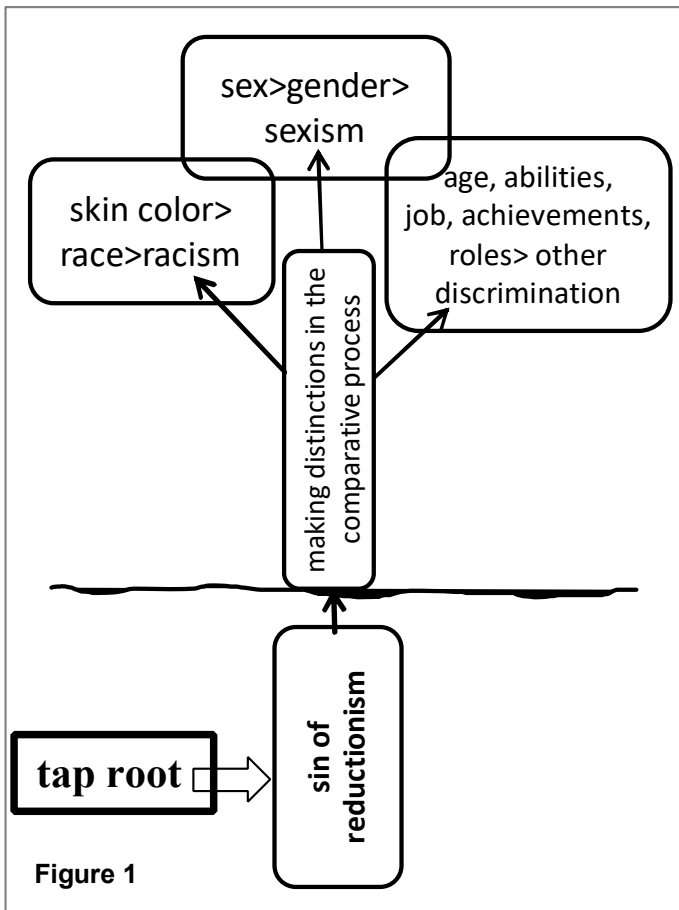


Figure 1

gets to the tap root, all our efforts to eliminate sexism (and racism, and all others types of discrimination against 'other') will fail; and sexism will resprout (cf. Mt 3:10; 7:18). Related, for egalitarians, it's futile to work for gender equality if they don't also recognize that racism and other discriminations all have the same roots and tap root, and can only be eliminated also at that source. Again, it's futile to try to lop off those forms of discrimination, because significant change must eliminate their tap root.

The tap root of sexism, racism, ageism, classism, ethnocentrism, and all other distinctions and divisions we humans make among ourselves—and that we perpetuate in the church—is the **sin of reductionism**. Reductionism is a process we all engage in, both unintentionally or intentionally, the

subtlety of which is rooted in a lack of *qualitative sensitivity* and *relational awareness*. It is the process of sin that fragments a whole person (who is created whole in God's image) into *outer* aspects or parts, and then uses one of those fragments to define that person on a reduced basis. Outer fragments or aspects can be summarized as **what we have** and **what we do**. What we have (and don't have) include our biological sex/gender, physical attributes, talents. What we do (and don't do) includes our jobs, roles in church and

family, accomplishments. These quantifiers are the human differences that we use to measure ourselves against others on a comparative scale—the inevitable comparative process in all human contexts and basic to the human condition. If we measure up, then we’re considered ‘better’, and if we don’t measure up, we’re considered ‘less’. You might want to review some gendered outer-in differences listed in the previous chapter (p. 24).

Reductionism defines persons from such ‘outer in’ criteria, giving primacy to the ‘outer in’ aspects which are the quantitative aspects of persons. At the same time, the sin of reductionism de-emphasizes, ignores, or masks the ‘inner out’ aspect of persons, which is the qualitative function of our heart (not only feelings and emotions) needed to integrate the ‘outer’ to compose the whole person, thus reducing our qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness. Consequently, we diminish relational awareness, and lack sensitivity of our hearts, whereby we do not make our hearts vulnerable to ourselves, God, or other persons. This simply extends the inner shame, dissatisfaction, and deception (the scope of *bôsh*) that emerged from reductionism in the primordial garden. Ostensibly or subtly, reductionism’s “fruit” is consequential to persons and relationships:

- Reduces our ontology to outer in, focused on secondary aspects of what persons (my *self*, God, others) do and have (e.g. 1 Sam 16:7; Jer 9:23-24).
- Reduces relationships to focus on what we do for each other and activities we do together, rather than making relational connection at the depth level of hearts (e.g. Mt 26:35)—reducing intimacy to sex and the ultimate intimate relationship to marriage.
- Renders persons to the condition of relational orphans (cf. Jn 14:18)—even if we are active in church, or are surrounded by other people, or are long-time Christians (cf. Mt 7:21-22).
- Reduces our identity to the outer aspects, which we then embellish to better define who we are in comparison to others; emphasizing gender distinctions becomes especially important for our identity (e.g. 1 Tim 2:9; 1 Pet 3:3), embellished by feminine and masculine characteristics, and enhanced features.
- Embeds (and enslaves) us in the comparative process with others, by which to measure our worth, namely to feel ‘better’ than others—to better define our person. Both Peter and Paul knew this enslavement from their own experience (Rom 6:16; 7:14-25; 2 Pet 2:19), all of which continues to evolve with ongoing adaptations in our practice confirmed by our theology—just as emerged from the primordial garden.

Reductionism, which pervades all of human life, shapes our gender identity and function—which many egalitarians have yet to recognize in their own persons—causing us to make distinctions based on the difference of our biological makeup. Reductionism not only wires our brains in these common patterns but it also desensitizes our hearts to the deeper implications of their practice, likely rendering us complicit to reductionism’s counter-relational workings. Unless our minds and related brain circuits are consciously intervened by the whole person, the reductionist process forms a gender equation that keeps women in a second-class place in God’s church, while men enjoy first class. Even in churches that may identify themselves as egalitarian, yet because of institutionalized

sexism and implicit bias, the prominence of men implies still holding greater power, privilege, and prestige in the church than women do. The sin of reductionism is the critical process that has birthed the genderization of persons, which in turn pervasively influences how we see, think, and act on who and what we are—that is, our identity (our nature, or ontology) and our function in everyday life. This prevailing reality can no longer be shrouded by human trappings, as witnessed from the beginning of human history.

Up until now, the church has typically ignored reductionism and therefore has not embraced a complete view of sin. This lack also exists in the theological academy. Therefore, it is time for the church, the academy, and all leaders to own up to this lack (intentional or unintentional), and finally deal with this most consequential dimension of sin that encompasses the breadth and depth of the human condition.

Reductionism’s Counter-relational Work

We know, at least intellectually, that our hearts are necessary for close relationships—specifically that without our hearts being vulnerable to another, there can be no deep relational connection. Such depth of relational connection—intimate relational connection of hearts vulnerable and coming together—is God’s quest for and with us (Jn 4:23-24; Rev 3:20). Both female and male persons were created for this purpose by God, and both our function and inherent human need are fulfilled when this wholeness in relationship becomes our experiential truth. This qualifies, critically and essentially, any quantification in the theological task.

Importantly, all these outer-in aspects are of only secondary importance to God (e.g. 1 Sam 16:7). God gives *primacy* to the inner-out aspect that defines the whole human person, our heart. Our heart’s function integrates our person from inner out (Prov 4:23; 14:30 NIV; 27:19); that is, the qualitative function of our person determines *who* and *what* we present to others and *how* we are involved with them in relationships, presenting nothing less and no substitutes for our whole person. Our heart’s qualitative-relational function is thus indispensable for our being the whole persons whom God created in his likeness for relational connection together; and this unmistakably composes our righteousness—defined as the whole of who, what, and how one is—to be compatible with the righteousness of God.

God is distinguished by his righteousness, whereby we can fully count on the whole of who, what, and how God is in relationship together—with nothing less than and no substitutes for the whole of God. In most theology, the righteousness of God is limited to an attribute, and thus relegated to a functional constraint. Yet, righteousness (Heb. *sedaqah*) is a legal term used to determine if someone can be counted on in relationship to function as defined. In other words, God’s righteousness has significance only in relationship together, involving God’s relational context and process (signifying on God’s relational terms); it must not be reduced to some abstract attribute about God.¹² Moreover, God seeks those whom he can count on—our righteousness—for face-to-face relationship together without the veil, that is, without relational barriers such as masks

¹² For a full and helpful discussion of the integration of God’s righteousness, peace, justice, and faithfulness, see T. Dave Matsuo, *Jesus’ Gospel of Essential Justice: The Human Order from Creation through Complete Salvation* (Justice Study, 2018); online at <http://4X12.org>, 45-51, 68, 93.

composed of secondary aspects of our person (cf. Mt 5:6,20). For example, when Mary of Bethany refused to define her relationship with Jesus by the secondary aspect (and constraints) of gender, she functioned in her righteousness, thereby being able to respond reciprocally to Jesus (to be discussed further below).

It is important to emphasize here that *the sin of reductionism always works in opposition to wholeness of persons and relationships, working against God's design and purpose for us*. So, as we continue our discussion about females (and males), keep in view that we are building the case both against reductionism and for wholeness. The journey to wholeness that we are faced with is an oppositional journey, a journey that distinctly unites us in a minority group vis-à-vis the common and popular—and identity and function that many Christians resist participating in. It cannot be stressed enough that we must recognize and “die to” the tap root sin of reductionism—individually and corporately as God's family—in order to be raised up whole in the image and relational likeness of the Trinity, equalized without sexism, racism, and all other false distinctions and divisions among us (cf. Rom 8:13; Col 3:10-11; Gal 3:26-28). Without this turn-around change, our gender equation will not yield the good fruit of wholeness (biblical peace) in our practice, even if our theology is qualified with intense bias training or adding female lead pastors.

For clarification, wholeness doesn't reduce us to asexual beings, does not eliminate skin color or ethnic differences, and does not make us all the same as each other. Rather, to be whole persons in the qualitative significance of God's image—that is, whole in who, what, and how we are—is to function without deference to distinctions in the primacy of relationship together, whereby our secondary individual differences (our 'outer' aspects) are integrated from inner out. That is, the secondary aspects about us are put into the perspective of God's wholeness for us, as the early church had to learn in order to change.¹³

The earlier discussion about language, bias, interpretive lenses, and sin of reductionism may sound conceptual at times, but their importance in the gender equation we use in everyday life and relationships can't be emphasized enough. Together they form our perceptual-interpretive framework and lens that shape our thoughts and understanding of ourselves, other persons, and the world around us. When we talk about our interpretive framework and lens in the process of reading and interpreting the Bible, this is our *hermeneutic*, which is our methodology of interpretation. It functions in the same way as our biased interpretive lens, that is, by determining what we pay attention to and what we ignore (intentionally or unintentionally)—notably whether we center on merely the words of God, or we embrace the words from God.

Genderized Hermeneutic of the Word

Our *default hermeneutic* is shaped by the sin of reductionism, which narrows down the perceptual field and focuses on certain things and ignores other things, depending on our bias. Thus influenced by reductionism, we pay attention to the outer-in matters of what persons do/have, including gender, while overlooking or ignoring their

¹³ For a deep study on wholeness, see T. Dave Matsuo, *The Person, the Trinity, the Church: The Call to Be Whole and the Lure of Reductionism* (Wholeness Study, 2006); online at <http://4X12.org>.

inner out; we also pay more attention to events, situations, and circumstances rather than any qualitative or relational significance taking place.

The hermeneutic commonly used by most Christians to perceive Jesus, the embodied Word, tends to be this default hermeneutic. The consequence has been that our main perception of Jesus gets narrowed down to what Jesus *does* and *has*. What Jesus *does* includes his role as rabbi, his miracles, having sacrificed his life; what Jesus *has* includes his teachings, his divine attributes of power and authority, together with his human attributes, including his male gender. Our gendered bias from our human context becomes the genderized hermeneutic for perceiving the Word, by which we impose our gendered stereotypes onto Jesus and others in Scripture as well. This interpretive process is not readily apparent to those using this hermeneutic because their bias skews the issues involved—for example, in a particular situation or interaction with Jesus—and thereby distorts what is significant or not.

Jesus encountered this genderized hermeneutic during his ministry on earth, whereby others tried to narrow down Jesus' whole person to fit into their common gendered stereotypes for men, as well as for his role as rabbi.

The Gospels include three narratives in particular in which religious men (notably including his disciples) imposed their genderized hermeneutic on Jesus as he interacted with women: the Samaritan woman, the former prostitute who washed Jesus' feet, and Mary of Bethany. It is critical for us to examine how the three parties engaged in these interactions: (1) how Jesus was involved with the women, (2) how the women were involved with Jesus, and (3) how the men perceived and were involved with the women and Jesus. Of particular note is how the men's genderized hermeneutic gave priority to the secondary aspect of persons' gender—Jesus' gender and that of the women—over the primacy of relational connection taking place in the interactions. We need to focus on both how the men objected to or were stymied by Jesus' involvement with women, and their expressed or unspoken true feelings about what they assumed was misguided or uninformed behavior by Jesus. What unfolds in these interactions is a specific interpretation of the Word. It becomes apparent that speculations are made about the words of God, because the words from God unmistakably communicated by the Word are not received and embraced. This hermeneutic process interpreting the Word keeps unfolding today in similar narratives.

These three women, furthermore, distinctly represent the spectrum of women's status in society, with Jewish religio-cultural human order representing the human context. The Samaritan woman was marginalized, the former prostitute was ostracized from society, and Mary belonged to the dominant group.

Samaritan Woman: God's Strategic Shift

The first of Jesus' interactions is the familiar narrative of the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn 4:4-31). By engaging with this woman, Jesus embodied the strategic shift in God's redemptive plan in response to the human condition,¹⁴ demonstrating his primary purpose to bring wholeness to persons in face-to-face relationship with persons together as family, regardless of their human distinctions of gender, race, ethnicity, and the like.

¹⁴ For a full discussion of God's theological trajectory involving his strategic shift, tactical shift, and functional shift, see T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology*, 78-97.

His whole person vulnerably present and relationally involved with the Samaritan woman broke down the ‘double jeopardy’ social barrier of gender and race discrimination that had been imposed on her. However, what the disciples saw in Jesus’ interaction with this woman was based on gender and ethnic taboos, notably for a Jewish (male) rabbi. The religious and cultural rules at that time prohibited men from talking with women in public, and prohibited Jews from involvement with Samaritans, so the disciples were astonished by Jesus, but apparently not moved, for example, with any compassion for her. That’s how they interpreted the Word in their theological task.

This passage exposes the disciples’ genderized hermeneutic being challenged—if not confronted; they were “astonished that he was speaking with a woman”, because they defined Jesus and the woman in the narrowed-down secondary terms of gender roles. Their genderized hermeneutic was obviously incompatible with Jesus’ hermeneutic. Jesus’ perceptual lens first and foremost saw a person created whole in the image of God, who also needed to be redeemed *from* her life as a doubly-reduced woman having questionable morals, and thus transformed *to* wholeness of her person made new from inner out by his relational grace in relationship together. What Jesus revealed to her wasn’t the mere plan of salvation in an evangelistic opportunity. Jesus enacted the whole of God to her face to face and vulnerably connected with her person to reveal who and what are important to God, and that anything less and any substitutes are insignificant to God (Jn 4:21-24).

The rest of their improbable interaction illuminates also the significance of the woman’s vulnerable and reciprocal involvement with Jesus—engaging Jesus on his relational terms at the risk of further social consequences on her. Jesus only sees whole persons and their inherent human need, whose place in the human order is diminished by prevailing genderized biases, and are made to live as relational orphans by the limits put in place by religion and culture. In this vulnerable relational connection with the Word, her person embraced the words from God as the experiential truth that now constituted her relational reality (4:25-26,28,39).

As the narrative continues, the issue of the disciples’ hermeneutic continued to be exposed—not only about gender here, but on their reduced identity and function, from which making gender distinctions sprouts. John’s Gospel records about the disciples that “no one said, ‘What do you want?’ or ‘Why are you speaking with her?’” which signals the strength of their discomfort and lack of honesty with Jesus. Instead of openly sharing their questions or feelings, they relationally hid in silence. Then they tried to change the subject by urging Jesus to eat something. Jesus claimed to have food “that you do not know about,” which prompted the disciples to wonder—not to Jesus but among themselves—if someone else had brought him food. Their narrowed-down hermeneutic could not understand the Word (as in Mk 8:17-18) and were thus unable to perceive the import of Jesus’ interaction with the woman. In their relational distance, they didn’t receive the words from God, and thus they failed to perceive God’s strategic shift in his coming vulnerably into their midst—which John later understood (Jn 1:10,14; 1 Jn 1:1-2), and Paul illuminated (2 Cor 4:4,6).

Patently Jesus clarified what he meant by having food to eat, pointing to the primacy of his relational purpose for coming, “to do the will of *my Father* and to complete his work *to make persons whole*” (v. 34). Three things are important to understand in this narrative: (1) the disciples’ genderized hermeneutic narrowed Jesus’

person and the Samaritan woman's person down to the common secondary aspect of their gender, thereby (2) exposing their condition of reduced identity and function, (3) with the consequence of not being able to perceive Jesus' uncommon relational involvement and the strategic shift in God's theological trajectory composing the gospel. Therefore, the genderized hermeneutic they used was the (lack of) relational experience with Jesus they got—to further apply Jesus' paradigm (Mk 4:24). In contrast with the Samaritan woman, they didn't receive the experiential truth of the words from God, and thus couldn't embrace the relational reality necessary to constitute their identity and function in wholeness.

The Former Prostitute Made Whole

The second situation involving a man's genderized hermeneutic took place at the home of Simon the Pharisee (Lk 7:36-50). Jesus was dining as Simon's dinner guest, when a woman known to be a prostitute (sinner) entered the house. She immediately began washing Jesus' feet with her tears, dry them with her hair, and kiss and pour perfume on them. Simon was appalled because he could only perceive the gendered taboos being ignored: this immoral woman was touching Jesus, a rabbi, with loosened hair (a moral no-no), using a tool of her immoral trade (perfume).

Jesus allowed her to do this, while Simon inwardly criticized Jesus for letting the prostitute touch him in what Simon saw as shameful display. Simon's genderized hermeneutic could see only in the gendered constraints from religion, culture, and morality—and judged Jesus with that biased lens. Coinciding with Simon's genderized hermeneutic is the relational distance Simon maintained with Jesus, just as the disciples did in the previous example. Jesus pointed out Simon's lack of even the minimal relational involvement with him (signified in their cultural norms, 7:44-46), as contrasted with the vulnerable involvement of the woman. This is an important two-pronged consequence of the sin of reductionism: reducing persons to secondary outer-in criteria, together with keeping relational distance from God and, by extension, others—resulting in a lack of qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness. It was on this reduced basis with a reductionist bias that Simon interpreted the Word.

As this remarkable narrative continued, the relational depth of redemptive reconciliation between God and a person, considered to be among 'the least', unfolded. When we reflect on intimacy as heart-to-heart depth of relational connection, it is undeniable that this is what took place between the woman and Jesus. But a genderized equation would sanction this intimacy by its reduced terms, interpreting the Word accordingly. This intimate relational connection, however, had nothing to do with gender or sexuality, rather only with the experiential reality for the woman of face-to-face connection with the embodied Word of God, being forgiven, redeemed, and reconciled to be one who "has shown great love" (v.47).

Having received God's relational grace was the experiential reality of her person being made whole ("go in peace") in this face-to-face connection with Jesus. This is the relational outcome distinguished in the words from God, which eludes the theological task composed by the words of God. There is a relational progression from the Samaritan woman to this former prostitute that is critical for us to experience also with Jesus. Yet, as witnessed in the next interaction, this is contingent on our interpretation of the Word.

The Equation of Whole-ly Mary

The third interaction is one of the most moving interactions involving any of his disciples with Jesus in the Gospels. It takes place between Jesus and whole-ly Mary, who is in this study not the whole-ly Mary in the Catholic Church, but the different Mary who was truly whole-ly, that is, uncommon in the significance of the gospel distinguished by Jesus. Six days before Jesus' last table fellowship, Jesus and the other disciples participated in a dinner in his honor (Jn 12:1-7; cf. Mt 26:6-13, Mk 14:3-9). Despite minor differences between John's Gospel account and that of Matthew's and Mark's Gospels, it is clear that the woman who anointed Jesus was Mary, Martha's sister. This is because in all three Gospel accounts, Jesus said that the woman saved the perfume to prepare him for his burial, and John's Gospel identifies this woman as Mary.

Previous to this defining interaction, Mary had a pivotal encounter with Jesus that interpreted the Word beyond what was common to the religious status quo (Lk 10:38-42). This established Mary as a true follower of Jesus' whole person, preparing her for an unlikely function of leadership among his disciples, as this next interaction implies.

While Jesus was reclining at the table, Mary anointed Jesus with expensive perfume to prepare Jesus for his burial. All the disciples were exposed to the fact that Jesus would be soon killed, but it was Mary who received Jesus' relational language, and responded to his person in reciprocal and vulnerable involvement with her whole person from inner out. I imagine that her heart was breaking knowing that her beloved Jesus was on his way to his suffering and death. Even so, she surely had also embraced Jesus' words that he would rise again on the third day following his death (e.g. Mt 16:21).

Meanwhile, the male disciples (including Judas) were indignant (as in 'holier than thou') that Mary hadn't sold the perfume so the money could be given to the poor. So they "rebuked her harshly" (Mk 14:5, NIV). They were undoubtedly using their genderized hermeneutic and viewed Mary as *less*, thus having no qualms about treating her this way. Consider, for example, if a male disciple had done what Mary did, would they have spoken so harshly to him? Their reductionist hermeneutic also interpreted the Word, and thus they assumed that serving the poor was a greater priority, exposing their reduced identity and function embedded in what they did. They unmistakably lacked qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness to be involved with both Jesus and Mary in the primacy of relationship together. Therefore, Jesus admonished them, saying "Let her alone; why do you trouble her?" (14:6). "Trouble her" signifies that they were hassling her and wearing her down, which suggests that this wasn't the first time the male disciples belittled Mary (or other women disciples) just because they were females.

Mary's hermeneutic of the Word was not influenced by gender, neither Jesus' male gender nor her female gender. Just as Mary had moved beyond the religio-cultural constraints for females that Martha was controlled by in the earlier interaction (Lk 10:38-42), Mary now ventured even further and deeper in her unconstrained involvement as a whole person (defined and determined from inner out), heart to heart with Jesus. It is highly imaginable that the male disciples felt threatened by, or even envious of, the contrast that Mary presented before their eyes, seeing the depth of relational connection that Mary experienced with Jesus. In reality, most gender equations don't allow for the qualitative sensitivity or relational awareness to be envious. We cannot talk about Mary's

interaction with Jesus in this moving scene without highlighting the pivotal significance Mary has for us today, especially Jesus' pronouncement about her. Jesus concluded his feedback to the male disciples by saying that "wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her" (Mt 26:13; Mk 14:9). Can Jesus be any clearer that Mary's vulnerable and intimate involvement with Jesus' whole person is the relational connection that illuminates the good news and its relational outcome? But Mary didn't say anything that to our ears sounds like proclaiming the gospel as we know it, did she? Obviously there is a strange dissonance and troubling incongruence between *our* gospel and the gospel that Mary 'proclaimed' without words. This points to the difference between a gospel composed by the words of God and the gospel composed by the words from God.

The gospel that Mary embodied and enacted in reciprocal response to Jesus is composed as follows:

1. The gospel confronts the scope of reductionism in human life in all its variations of sin.
2. The gospel restores the theological anthropology of the whole person created in God's image and likeness, redeemed from anything less and any substitutes for the whole person.
3. The gospel reconciles persons to wholeness in the primacy of relationship together integrally intimate and equalized—the nonnegotiable relational outcome of the gospel.

The above are what Mary distinguished in her relational response to and involvement with Jesus, which is the heart of the gospel. She witnesses to whole-ly theological anthropology (identity and function) whereby her person is defined in the primacy of relationship together, with the relational barrier of gender removed. That isn't to say she was no longer female; that would be a contradiction of creation. Yet, what Mary clearly demonstrated in her person is the paragender identity and function from creation, the equation of which will be discussed shortly. As a paragender, Mary's female gender became only a secondary aspect of her identity and function, which no longer could have the significance to distinguish her person, the Word, and the whole gospel.

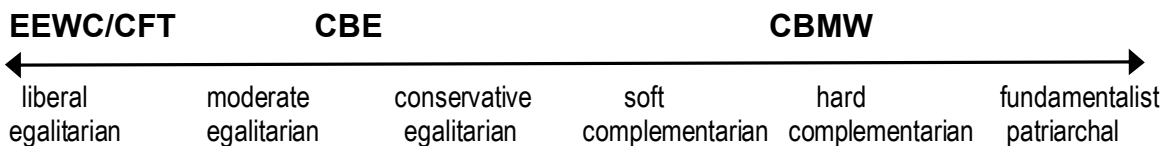
The relational outcome Mary experienced in her theological task signifies what Jesus highlighted in his pronouncement about her. This relational outcome is not unique to Mary, but is the outcome for all who interpret the Word, in their theological task, as the words from God communicated in relational language. Jesus unmistakably guarantees the outcome we get in our theological task directly from the measure we use for the Word (Mk 4:24).

From the composite of the above three interactions, these religious men—a Pharisee and the first disciples—demonstrated the *norm*-alization of a genderized hermeneutic of the Word. In very generalized terms, it is apparent that large conservative segments of Protestant Christianity (along with the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church) continue to use and thereby reinforce this genderized hermeneutic of the Word by their insistence on male-only clergy, or at least male-dominant clergy. The notion that males are somehow closer to the image of Christ on the basis of their maleness simply reflects the norm-alization of the genderization of the Word, which mistakenly assumes

the Word’s human gender as a primary aspect of his identity and thus would act according to the prevailing norm. Yet, those who critique male dominance of church leadership—while correctly using a hermeneutic of suspicion—have failed to provide the needed corrective to the genderized hermeneutic of the Word, since they continue to use the words of God in referential language as the norm for the theological task. It is not sufficient to merely add females to the clerical leadership to correct male dominance on the basis of alternative interpretations about the Word. As emerged from the primordial garden, (1) that hermeneutic further speculates about the words of God, which (2) misguides their theological task to be occupied by secondary matters at the expense of the primary. Thus, they don’t recognize the underlying cause of gender distinctions, namely the tap root sin of reductionism. This is why egalitarians aren’t able to adequately counter the norm-alized gender hermeneutic used by complementarians. In reality, egalitarians and complementarians have a basic similarity to them that renders their differences secondary, if not insignificant to the Word.

Egalitarians and Complementarians, the Same ‘Coin’

In a study on the gender equation in our theology, it is necessary to comment on both the complementarian or egalitarian viewpoints in terms of their biases (their hermeneutic interpretive lenses) and *whose* language they use. Bias and language most certainly are critical issues among evangelical complementarians and egalitarians, especially regarding Scripture. It should be noted that there aren’t only two “sides,” but a spectrum among those who self-identify as evangelicals; yet, for the purpose of this discussion, it’s reasonable to speak of two sides. The range of positions and the representative organizations can be depicted along this spectrum:



(Note: EEWC/Evangelical and Ecumenical Women’s Caucus; CFT/Christian Feminists Today; CBE/Christians for Biblical Equality International; CBMW/Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood)

On the one hand, complementarians and egalitarians are as different as heads is from tails on a coin. On the other hand, the two sides have a lot in common in critical ways, so much so that they are essentially bearing the same shape on two sides of the hermeneutical coin. While both sides insist that they give primacy to the authority of Scripture, they do approach Scripture using their respective biases, interests, and concerns—however well-intentioned they are. What follows next is a summary of the two sides and how they both bear the same shape in their respective theological tasks.

Egalitarian

The overt concern of egalitarians (biblical feminists) is to counter patriarchal traditions and elevate women's status all over the world to equal status with men. Equality is especially desired for women to gain positions of authority and leadership in church, family, and all of life—that is, to achieve equality with men.

Egalitarian theology emphasizes the equal personhood, worth, and roles for women and men; their view is most visibly represented by Christians for Biblical Equality International (CBE International)¹⁵:

CBE International (CBE) is a nonprofit organization of Christian men and women who believe that the Bible, properly interpreted, teaches the fundamental equality of men and women of all ethnic groups, all economic classes, and all age groups, based on the teachings of Scriptures such as Galatians 3:28.¹⁶

CBE's Mission Statement reads in part:

CBE exists to promote biblical justice and community by educating Christians that the Bible calls women and men to share authority equally in service and leadership in the home, church, and world.

Regarding women in church leadership, they promote the view that women who are so gifted should be able to become senior pastors as well as teach men. Among CBE's core values is the rejection of patriarchy (a result of sin), and "the unrestricted use of women's gifts is integral to the work of the Holy Spirit and essential for the advancement of the gospel in the world."

The egalitarian position is based on a combination of theological factors: (1) the creation account, which states that God created humanity "in the image of God...male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27; 5:1-2); (2) there were prominent women leaders in the OT (e.g. Miriam, Deborah, Huldah) and the NT (e.g. Mary Magdalene, Priscilla, others); (3) Jesus' affirmation of female disciples (e.g. Mary and Martha); and (4) the theology of equality in Paul (e.g. Eph 2:14; Gal 3:28). Their focus on women leaders of God's people emphasizes the view that God's spiritual gifts such as leadership, prophecy, and teaching qualify women equally to men for such roles and functions.

Egalitarians take a wide view of Scripture to highlight the significance of women's lives in God's overarching theological trajectory. They view the church and domestic instructions in Paul's letters and other epistles that appear to subordinate women to men in church and family as limited to those particular contexts, and not applicable to today. Rather, because egalitarians believe in the equality between women and men in all spheres of life, they promote the notion of mutuality (Eph 5:21), or

¹⁵ In 1974, the Evangelical Women's Caucus (EWC) was formed (part of Evangelicals for Social Action) to engage in equality and justice issues for women. In 1986, EWC affirmed same-sex couples (along with race and justice causes), causing some members to split off and form as CBE. EWC renamed itself Evangelical and Ecumenical Women's Caucus (EEWC, now called Christian Feminists Today, or CFT). Of these two biblical feminist organizations, CBE is the more conservative in upholding marriage between women and men, and CFT is the more liberal branch and include in their members practicing same-sex couples.

¹⁶ <https://www.cbeinternational.org/content/cbes-mission>.

complementarity without hierarchy, the latter phrase to emphasize that the two (primary) genders complement each other.¹⁷

CBE originated when some members of the Evangelical Women's Caucus (part of Evangelicals for Social Action) split off in disagreement over including supporting same-sex couples among other social action resolutions. This is to say that CBE has always leaned toward issues involving equal rights and justice for girls and women globally, not just in the church. Much of their language focuses on equality between females and males, and gender justice, but their particular emphasis centers on giftedness of women for leadership positions in the church.

Especially for the Western church, egalitarians focus on equality of leadership and authority, highlighting giftedness and the call of women to leadership. What egalitarians don't recognize is how this focus calls into question the critical issue of the theological anthropology being used in the theological task. Giving primacy to these areas renders egalitarians to be narrowly focused on and susceptible to (1) defining women, as well as men, based on the secondary outer criteria of what they do and have (incongruent with God's relational grace), which inadvertently (2) reinforces the root cause underlying human inequality—the tap root of reductionism (discussed above) which exposes how sexism and all other forms of discrimination have their roots in a reduced theological anthropology and weak view of sin not encompassing reductionism. Overlooking, ignoring, or not understanding reductionism is determinative for the theological task and has an impervious effect on those so engaged. Accordingly, a reduced theological anthropology includes the hermeneutic with which we perceive and interpret God's Word merely as the words of God in referential language to quantify the information used in our theological task. This common theological process is the 'coin' that represents both egalitarians and complementarians and reflects the measure they get in their theological task.

Complementarian

The complementarian theology of conservative evangelicals emerged to protect the church against the rising tide of secular feminism, and a nascent feminism in the church in the 1970s. Those persons perceived an erosion of the authority of Scripture and tradition family values. In this context, the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) was founded to champion fidelity to having male-only clergy, the traditional male-headed Christian family, subordination of women to men, along with opposition to homosexuality and abortion—all of which they feared evangelical feminism would change.¹⁸

In 1987, CBMW was established primarily to help the church defend against the accommodation of secular feminism. At this time many evangelicals were beginning to experiment with an ideology that would later become known as evangelical

¹⁷ For an exhaustive presentation of egalitarian views, see Ronald W. Pierce, Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, and Gordon D. Fee, eds., *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

¹⁸ <https://cbmw.org/>.

feminism. This was a significant departure from what the church had practiced from its beginning regarding the role of men and women in the home and local church. The effects of this departure have not been benign. As evangelical feminism continues to spread, the evangelical community needs to be aware that this debate reaches ultimately to the heart of the gospel.¹⁹

CBMW's mission statement states:

The mission of The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood is to set forth the teachings of the Bible about the complementary differences between men and women, created equally in the image of God, because these teachings are essential for obedience to Scripture and for the health of the family and the church.

CBMW's specific concerns as to what's at stake are: (1) the authority of Scripture; (2) the health of the home (Eph 5, 1 Pet 3, Col 3); (3) the health of the church (1 Tim 2, 1 Cor 11); (4) our worship; (5) Bible translations; and (6) the advance of the gospel (Eph 5).

Notably, CBMW perceives in Scripture prescriptions for structures that ensure the thriving of God's churches and biological families. Theologically, Christian complementarians claim the inherent equality of males and females, and hold fast to their position of women's subordinate complementary status to men in church and family. This position is based on a particular theology of the Trinity, which Wayne Grudem, co-founder of Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW), states thus:

"The Son is both subject to the authority of the Father and at the same time equal in every attribute and in value and in personhood forever. Equality in being and eternal differences in role exist together in the Trinity. Therefore equality in being and in value and in honor can exist together with differences in roles between husband and wife as well."²⁰

On the basis of the interpretation that the Son is equal to the Father, yet eternally subordinate in function (i.e. the Son's subordinate status "never began"), complementarians formulated their theological anthropology for females as equal in being yet subordinate in function in church and family. (This theology is responded to later in this chapter.)²¹ Hard complementarians believe that women are barred from the position of senior pastor and preacher, citing "I permit no woman to teach or have authority over a man" (1 Tim 2:12), while other soft complementarians allow for women to teach men in some situations, but are still subordinate to their husbands at home.²²

¹⁹ Each of these items is expanded upon on their website <https://cbmw.org/about/mission-vision/>.

²⁰ Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism & Biblical Faith: An Analysis of More Than 100 Disputed Questions* (Sister, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2004), 423.

²¹ For an insightful, compelling alternative theological discussion about the subordination of the Son in the economy of the Trinity's salvific action, see T. Dave Matsuo, *The Person, the Trinity, the Church*, 29-43.

²² For an alternative perspective on the controversial 1 Timothy 2 passage, see discussion in T. Dave Matsuo, *The Whole of Paul and the Whole in His Theology*, 288-91. See also soft complementarian articles

Complementarians interpret Paul's instructions to specific church settings (e.g. 1 Cor 11:3; 14:34), and domestic instructions in other epistles (Eph 5:22-24) as imperatives addressed to present day Christians, in keeping with the authority of Scripture; in contrast, egalitarians only affirm this as applying to the original texts. Regarding the instructions to wives and slaves, complementarians believe that Paul's instructions to wives are rooted to the created order in Genesis, but say Paul's instructions about slaves are limited to Paul's context and time (Eph 6:5; Col 3:18,20).

Complementarians are correct to be wary of using the lens of culture to interpret Scripture today. Yet, the complementarian approach doesn't account for its own shaping by the human context; that is, the prevailing language in all human contexts is referential language, which Christians readily use to transpose the words from God communicated in relational language to the words of God for the information needed to formulate doctrine. Furthermore, the prevailing anthropology in all human contexts is a reduced identity and function from creation, which emerges from the sin of reductionism that pervades Christian contexts as well as the world. Under this common influence, the complementarian view of gender roles gives primacy to maintaining Scriptural/doctrinal purity and church and family structures that ensure definitive roles based on gender. This process feeds into persons' "need" to know "what to do" to maintain biblical purity and moral purity, rather than "how to be involved" in relationships, with God and others—that is, rather than what is primary to God, God's purpose in creation, and for the gospel. The susceptibility inherent in an outer-in approach giving primacy to what to do in everyday life is consequential to persons' theological anthropology: (1) defines women and men, based on the secondary outer criteria of what they do and have (incongruent with God's relational grace), especially with respect to fulfilling assigned roles, which then (2) easily reinforces sexism in the practice of making gender distinctions of 'better' and 'less', despite the claim of equality of being in females and males. Such reinforcement equally sustains all discrimination based on distinctions of race, ethnicity, class, age, ability, and the like.

In a similar way, egalitarians also need to account for the cultural shaping of their theology and gender equation, its reinforcing of reduced identity and function by defining persons based on the fulfilling of roles, not to mention based on their giftedness. Consider it this way: men have authority and the positions of leadership in church and family, and egalitarians want women to have access to those in equal measure. But the measure egalitarians (and complementarians) use will be the measure they get. Therefore, the distinctions of persons (whether in church or family) based on a reduced theological anthropology focused on what persons do and have, will be reinforced in a comparative process that highlights those distinctions. The result will continue to sustain a measure of inequality (more gifted, less gifted), because you can't get equality when you use a measure of inequality. The so-called equality that egalitarians want to get continues to have the human shaping of a reduced identity and function. What this reveals underneath the theological fog about gender is that egalitarians bear the same shape as complementarians on two sides of the same coin.

in Mark Husbands and Timothy Larsen, eds., *Women, Ministry and the Gospel: Exploring New Paradigms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007).

What needs to be transformed is the entire theological system of how we understand church, so that the reductionist dynamic of “who is the greatest” (Mt 18:1) is deconstructed. We all need to forego dreams and turn from illusions that the measure we get will go beyond and be deeper than the measure we use. This requires that those persons in positions of authority and power (predominantly men) join in to work for transformation, beginning with their own theological anthropology. But whether they’re willing to do that is a big question mark because they would have to “change and become vulnerable like children” (Mt 18:3). And many males in positions of power, privilege, and prestige in the church (including those on church boards of trustees) don’t show such humbleness, even though it is an imperative from Jesus himself. At the same time, females need to be transformed in how they define their persons, and thereby be vulnerable to the primary as witnessed in Mary—the primary whose qualitative-relational terms are irreducible and nonnegotiable.

Stalemate, Middle Way, Compromise?

I believe that the complementarian and egalitarian camps have pretty much run their courses in terms of trying to change the other. They both generally suffer under some amount of illusion of being right and therefore the other side is wrong. What this theological divide reflects is simply that they function largely by their preferred interpretive lens without perceiving their own bias. The mutual consequence for both sides is that they (1) fail to put together the pieces of God’s self-revelation throughout Scripture in the interpretive process of *syniēmi*—which Jesus admonished his disciples for (Mk 8:17-18)—thereby to (2) miss, downplay, or even ignore the whole picture (not just big) of God’s theological trajectory and purpose for communicating his self-disclosures vulnerably in the human context, distinguishing the whole context for God’s purpose for creating us with gender. Not surprisingly, both sides have tried to construct God’s view of gender from ‘bottom up’ in their theological task; that is, they have assembled the gender-roles pieces of information in the words of God according to what they’re looking for, not unlike confirmation bias. They have defined persons’ identity and function for Christians using a genderized hermeneutic, just as persons did in Jesus’ time (demonstrated in the three interactions above). But such practice reflects the defining influence of our sociocultural context, which they bring into the theological task, into discipleship, and just generally into relationship with God, both individually and collectively.

As an ironic side note, not unexpected, this two-sides-of-the-same-coin status between complementarians and egalitarians mirrors the same hermeneutical coin represented by biblical patriarchalism and liberal biblical feminism. Biblical patriarchalism and liberal biblical feminism both use the same narrowed-down referential language and interpretive lens, which includes selective attention to Scripture. Patriarchal and liberal feminist interpretations alike also use experience and essentialism (our gender determines our ontological essence) to confirm their biases, while failing to ‘see’ and ‘hear’ the whole of the embodied Word, communicating the essential words from God that compose the experiential truth.

The existing theological fog raises the question: Is there a place for compromise between complementarians and egalitarians, and their related positions? Yes and no. There is room for theological compromise whenever God's words are transposed from relational language to referential language. As emerged from the primordial garden, referential language opened the door for theological speculation about what God meant by those words of God. Referential language allows for God's messages and meaning to be reduced to selective focus, which then (1) fragments God's whole message to incomplete or distorted parts, and (2) reduces God's meaning from primary to secondary significance open to variable interpretation. Referential language thus speaks for God with diverse voices; and to the extent that the words of God have been negotiated, there is compromise available among those who make this choice in the theological task.

No compromise is available, however, when relational language composes the words from God for communicating God's message and meaning in only relational terms. In the communication process of God's relational language, only God speaks for God. Of course, God's words are always subject to our interpretation, but our interpretation cannot be the determining key to God's message and meaning. Only God determines their primacy and significance, which renders the words from God irreducible to human shaping and nonnegotiable to human terms.

Therefore, there can be no compromise available for what is primary to God: the whole persons, whether female or male, created in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the Trinity for the primacy of relationship together—nothing less and no substitutes. And the significance of this primacy is now the new creation reconciling both females and males in relationship together of wholeness (2 Cor 5:17-18), which fulfills God's definitive blessing face to face, heart to heart (Num 6:24). This whole picture cannot be compromised in our theology and practice without reducing God's ontology and function, as well as fragmenting the essential identity and function of all human persons.

Compromise is indeed on the minds of some newer voices to the gender debate landscape. These persons call for complementarians and egalitarians to come together to find consensus as evangelicals, as "comembers in the body of Christ."²³ This call to a middle way turns the primary focus away from the key Scriptures dealing with gender roles, and turns to wider themes, such as unity, love, and inclusion. These voices want complementarians and egalitarians to come together for the sake of the gospel witness to outsiders, yet these newer voices also use referential language; and they have not made any significant impact since their theological anthropology and view of sin have not developed beyond the theological status quo to make the difference distinguished by the whole gospel—the only gospel embodied by the Word. And this status quo pervades both the church and the academy to sustain a theological fog, which has constrained significant change and rendered any apparent progress to epistemological illusion and ontological simulation.

To these middle-way seekers, along with complementarians and egalitarians, I strongly urge them to take up the challenge that Jesus makes to all his followers. As

²³ For example, Sarah Sumner, "Forging a Middle Way Between Complementarians and Egalitarians," in Mark Husbands and Timothy Larsen, eds., *Women, Ministry and the Gospel*, 257. Also, Michelle Lee-Barnewall, *Neither Complementarian nor Egalitarian: A Kingdom Corrective to the Evangelical Gender Debate* (Ada, MI: Baker Publishing Group: 2016).

evidenced in his three interactions above, Jesus challenges all of us to vulnerably examine: our genderized hermeneutic in the theological task, related assumptions about gender, the bases that define our identity and determine our function in everyday life, and understand the sin of reductionism, all of which requires obedience to the Father's imperative to Jesus' disciples to "Listen to my Son" (Mt 17:5), and Jesus' admonishment to "pay attention to how you listen" (Lk 8:18). In order to listen to Jesus, as Paul wrote, "remind them of this, and warn them before God that they are to stop wrangling over words, which does no good but only ruins those who are listening" (2 Tim 2:14), and "let the *wholeness* of Christ rule [be the only determinant] in your *inner-out person*, to which, indeed you were called to one body" (Col 3:15). These imperatives are relational imperatives for determining our theological task; and the results from our theological task are always governed by Jesus' paradigm of 'the measure we use equals the measure we get'.

There really is no other way forward for God's new creation family to emerge as 'one' just as the persons of the Trinity are one, as Jesus prayed (Jn 17:11,22-23). This challenge also goes out to church leaders and persons in the academy who wonder why we seem to keep starting the gender conversations over and over (e.g. Mark Labberton and Roberta Hestenes, mentioned in Chap.2).

The reality of human life is that there are females and males, with some persons having anatomical features of both. From this reality have evolved axioms, theories, and hypotheses that have formed fragmentary gender equations in our theology using that genderized hermeneutic:

- Theories of gender inequality have been based on gender differences, observed or assumed, which are used to support gender difference in the Bible.
- One axiom used by many or most Christians is that women and men are equal. This given, however, doesn't preclude the variable significance this has in our theology, which emerges with a differing gender equation in our practice.
- This points to the theological hypotheses used to support a gender equation focused more on the secondary differences of persons rather than what is primary *to* and *of* God as the Trinity, and thus what only has significance for God who doesn't make those distinctions of persons and between persons.

Therefore, complementarians and egalitarians must go beyond their hypotheses, theologically and biblically, and get to the depth of who, what, and how God is, and thereby to the qualitative relational significance of persons created in God's image and likeness. For this outcome there can be no compromise, but in reality requires the redemptive change from the Word for the old to die so that the new will rise.

II. Theological Essentials for the Primary Gender Equation

The gender equation composed integrally by the words from God—distinguished by and thus in relational language—unfolds from the interrelation of two primary theological realities: (1) the *who* and *what* that emerged from creation, that is, before any adaptations evolved, and (2) the *how* this person(s) is determined by the image and likeness of God, without variations adapted from human image and likeness. This theology is essential in order for our identity to be defined and our function to be determined by the primary gender equation integrated in the words from God.

Keeping this primary focus at the core of our theological task, there is an unmistakable and unbreakable theological trajectory between creation and Jesus' pivotal family prayer (Jn 17), when Jesus prayed to the Father that "they may be one as we are one" (17:11,21-23). "In the beginning, when God created" included "the Word was..." (Jn 1:1-4), and the strategic shift of God's improbable theological trajectory embodied by the Word (as the Samaritan woman learned). God's theological trajectory and relational path constitute the communication process that highlights why both Testaments expressing the words from God are needed to compose the irreducible whole of God's self-revelation—the sum of which compose biblical theology. Thus, consider what is essential for this theological task: Jesus is the necessary hermeneutical key to knowing the whole of God (the Trinity), as he embodied in his whole person what was only alluded to in the creation account about God; and, integrally, Jesus is also the relational and functional keys to the *who*, *what*, and *how* constituting the identity and function of persons created in the image and likeness of God. In other relational words, Jesus is indispensable for our identity as God's daughters and sons in order for our persons to relationally know through our own experiential truth, what is meant by "in our image, according to our likeness" (Gen 1:26) and thereby "be one as we are one." The theological basis for this experiential truth is essential for the relational reality of the primary gender equation from the Word.

During his time on earth and summarized in his pivotal prayer, Jesus vulnerably revealed, at least partially, both for our understanding, and for our reciprocal relational response, his intimate relationship with his Father and the Spirit. John's Gospel highlights Jesus' words revealing (1) the irreducible whole ontology (i.e. being and nature) of the trinitarian persons, and (2) the intimate relational function (whole relational involvement) within the Trinity, composing the "integrally *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity,"²⁴ expanded on here by T. Dave Matsuo:

In his formative family prayer, Jesus asked the Father that all his followers together may "be one as we are one" (Jn 17:11,21-22). To "be one" (*heis eimi*) is the same ontological oneness among his followers "just as" (*kathos*, in accordance with, have congruity with) God's ontological oneness (*heis eimi*); yet his followers' oneness does not include having ontological oneness *with* the triune God such that either they would be deified or God's being would become all of them (pantheism).

²⁴ For a full discussion of this understanding of the Trinity, see T. Dave Matsuo, *The Face of the Trinity: The Trinitarian Essential for the Whole of God & Life* (Trinity Study, 2016). Online at <http://4X12.org>, 127-165.

What Jesus prayed for that is included, however, involves his second declaration about his relationship with the Father that overlaps with their ontological oneness (*heis eimi*). “I am in the Father and the Father is in me” (*en eimi*, Jn 14:10-11) further reveals the ongoing existence (*eimi*) of their persons in the presence of and accompanied by (*en*) the other, thereby also signifying their essential relational oneness constituted by their intimate involvement with each other in full communion—just as their relationship demonstrated at his baptism, in his transfiguration, in the garden of Gethsemane and on the cross, along with the presence and function (*meno*) of the Spirit. This deep intimacy in relationship together (*en eimi*, their relational wholeness) is integrated in the integral qualitative substance of their ontological oneness (*heis eimi*) to constitute the trinitarian persons in the indivisible and interdependent *person*-al relationships together to be the whole of God, the Trinity as whole family. The integral reciprocating interaction of the ontological One and the relational Whole provides further functional understanding of *perichoresis*.²⁵

Here again, we can only come to this understanding in our theological task by receiving the words from God in their communicated form. Therefore, we need to hear Jesus’ words with the hermeneutic of his relational language, as when Jesus declared that the relationship between Jesus and the Father is so intimate that they are “one” (Jn 10:30,38; 17:20-26), such that to know Jesus is to know the Father, and to see Jesus is to see the Father (Jn 8:19; 12:45; 14:7,9). Jesus wasn’t conveying information for a static theology, or giving concepts for theological reference; rather, in contrast and even in conflict, he vulnerably revealed the primacy of relationship that integrally constituted who, what, and how the Trinity is: the ontological One and the relational Whole.

A short-hand term used throughout Scripture to refer to the presence of the whole of who, what, and how of the Trinity is “glory” (*kābôd* in the OT, *doxa* in the NT), defined further as:

- God’s being (the *who*) as the heart of God—not a mere part of God or some expression or conception of God but the very heart of God’s being—and nothing less, constituted in Jesus’ function with the primary importance of the heart signifying his whole person, with no substitutes.
- God’s nature (the *what*) as intimately relational, signified by the consistency of Jesus’ ongoing intimate relationship with the Father and intimate relational involvement with others.
- God’s presence (the *how*) as vulnerably involved, made evident by Jesus’ vulnerable disclosures of his person to others and willingness to be negatively affected by them, including by his disciples.

²⁵ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Face of the Trinity*, 118.

All of God's being, nature and presence function for relationship together. That which is God's glory is "his glory." Who, what and how God is is who, what and how Jesus is (Jn 10:38b; 12:45; 14:9).²⁶

The whole of the Trinity's glory is vulnerably presented for relationship in the face of Jesus (2 Cor 4:6; Jn 1:14). Accordingly, it is essential for the theological task that its theology emerge from the Trinity's theological trajectory and relational path based on the following: only the relational words from God compose the Word embodied, and the Word enacts only the words from God in relational language—nothing less and no substitutes.

In creation, this inter-*person*-al Trinity (not a static existence) extended the trinitarian relational context and relational process constituted by the Trinity's vulnerable presence and intimate relational involvement (Gen 1:2; Jn 1:1-5; 1 Jn 1:1-2). This is the whole of God (neither a mere concept nor merely an attribute) to whom Jesus came to reconcile us back as the Father's new creation family. The primacy of this trinitarian relational context and relational process (the whole of God) is what was "not good" for the original human person in God's likeness to "be apart" from, in the creation narrative in Genesis; and this primacy gives us the context of and perspective for gender in creation and what is essential for the new creation.

As we continue on this journey, it's important to keep in mind that wholeness of persons and relationships together were and are always primary to God. Their wholeness individually and together fulfills God's purpose and design for us in the Trinity's image and likeness, thus nothing in the theological task matters more or has more significance to God.

Gender in the Image and Likeness of God

Given what is primary in, for, and to the Word, this raises an important question: Is God a transgender? This is not to ask if God changed his sex/gender after she had begotten the Son; nor is it to suggest that God's sex/gender is ambiguous and exists in an equivocal state. What is implied by *trans*gender, however, is that (1) God is beyond gender, and (2) God does not give primacy to gender to distinguish the human person created in God's image. That is to better say, God **transcends** gender, and should never be reduced to its limits and constraints. Therefore, to be in God's image is to transcend gender also. And it is this person existing today whose identity must be defined *beyond* gender, and whose function must be determined further than gender. Thus, our persons must be transformed from the prevailing gender equation to the primary gender equation, namely, integral to the new creation (2 Cor 5:16-17).

However, we must qualify transcending gender for humans, since at creation, God did in fact create humans with the biological sex difference of male and female "in our image, according to our likeness" (Gen 1:26). God created persons *with* gender, but they also should not be reduced by it, just as God is not. Stated in the wholeness of creation:

²⁶ T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology*, 26-27.

Created in God's image, persons are *paragender*—that is, both (1) *beyond* gender like God (gender does not define the identity of persons), and (2) *beside* gender (gender is a secondary reality of life) in daily function always determined by the primacy of relationship together in God's likeness. The persons at creation originally were *paragenders*, in that they were persons created whole and uncommon (in God's whole-ly image and likeness); later, of course, they were reduced by giving primacy to gender to define their identity and determine their function—a shame that covered up their whole persons.

Significantly, in the creation account, God had defined everything he had made as “very good” (*tôv*, pleasing, beautiful, and right, Gen 1:31), but the one thing God said was “not good” was that the man was “apart” (*bad*, often translated as “alone,” Gen 2:18), illuminated as follows:

“To be alone”...is necessarily rendered “to be apart” in God's created order, because it illuminates the whole in creation from which “is not good to be apart.” The difference between “to be alone” and “to be apart” is immeasurable since for Adam it was not just the secondary matter of having no one to share space with, no one to keep him company or to do things with (particularly the work). “To be apart” is not just a situational condition but most importantly a relational condition. A person can be alone in a situation but also feel lonely in the company of others, at church, even in a family or marriage because of relational distance—“to be apart.” This rendering is more reflective of the dynamic process of relationship in God's created design and purpose—and needs to replace the conventional “to be alone” not only in our reading but in our theology and practice.²⁷

Therefore, in order to further enact in creation the primacy of God's relational context and relational process, God brought forth Eve to fill Adam's inherent relational need for a compatible person to be involved in the created context beyond merely a marriage arrangement. For the primary, these two persons more deeply formed whole relationship together in the image and likeness of God (Gen 2:18,25). Moreover, because God's creation of whole persons for whole relationship “in our image and likeness” defines God's creative purpose for Eve, this relegates the order of creation to having no significance affecting the status of Eve's person. Eve, along with Adam, in their primary significance were first and foremost persons, while having distinctions of only secondary significance.

God's creation revolved around the primacy of whole persons in whole relationship together reflecting God's definitive relational terms only for relationship together—relational terms as expressed in the words from God communicating various commands to them directly (Gen 2:16-17). Given the being, nature, and presence of the whole of God, God's image and likeness can never be fragmented and reduced to mere functional roles of ‘what one does or has’. To do so reduces the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity to a reduced identity constructed with a referential lens which in the theological task generates a theology (speaking for God) that essentially depicts God in our image, and thus determines how we will engage in relationship with God on our own terms, as

²⁷ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Person in Complete Context*, 90.

complementarians do overtly, and egalitarians do unknowingly (or perhaps intentionally). Whether engaged subtly or not, persons functioning ‘on our terms’ reflects, reinforces, and sustains the secondary significance of gender distinctions for their primary identity or related distinctions for their primary function. Either position exposes the dissatisfaction, disappointment, deception, or shame (*bôsh*) of persons and their relationships lacking wholeness, just as emerged from the primordial garden.

By enacting God’s relational response of grace to our human relational condition, Jesus illuminated for us God’s uncommon relational context and relational process for us to understand the image and likeness of God. This is the original relational order for human persons that became distorted through sin (Gen 3:16), and that Jesus redeemed and transformed anew to God’s original design. This understanding must chasten the usual debates between complementarians and egalitarians about Eve’s created purpose and function, including the place of males in God’s original relational order.

The Hebrew term used to describe Eve’s purpose, ‘*ezer kenegdo*, is translated in English as “a helper as his partner” (NRSV) and “a suitable helper” (NIV) for Adam. In referential terms, ‘*ezer kenegdo* reduces Eve’s function to relatively pragmatic purposes, including: God’s provision for Adam’s loneliness, helping Adam procreate, and help with all the other work that God gave them. Together they were to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth...” (Gen 1:28). Whether or not Eve’s function makes her subordinate, equal to, or even superior to Adam is much debated, and is variously interpreted according to one’s biased lens.

But to referentialize God’s creation of Eve has sad consequences. For one, her capability to bear children becomes defining for her usefulness, an ill-informed burden placed on many women. Referentializing Eve’s purpose also makes her complementary contribution to Adam in marriage one of convenience. Furthermore, this view of Eve, and of all women by extension, implicitly depicts God primarily as a pragmatic creator, maximizing Adam’s life situations and circumstances, which are images that limit or ignore the depth of God’s being, nature, and involvement with his creation. This all unfolds at the expense of what is primary.

In relational terms, however, when God declared it “not good” for Adam “to be apart,” God identified for us the inherent human relational need for *belonging* relationally to the whole of God, not merely membership in God’s kingdom or church. Thus, God’s enactment of bringing forth Eve was an action that communicated God’s nature as love, which is distinguished beyond comparison by the depth of God’s relational involvement. Just as God was intimately involved with his people in all their lives throughout the OT—in keeping his promises in the “covenant of love” (Dt 7:7-9,13, NIV)—God was thereby Israel’s ‘*ezer*, notably not leaving them as relational orphans (e.g. Dt 33:29; Ps 10:14). God’s presence came to dwell among the uncommon people of God so that they could relationally know and understand the whole of God (Ex 25:8; Lev 26:11-12; Jer 9:24; cf. Jn 14:9). This would indicate that Eve’s purpose as ‘*ezer kenegdo* was much deeper than merely being Adam’s equal work partner (as egalitarians suggest), a complementary marriage partner, or a womb to procreate. Indeed, “multiply and fill the earth” within the relational context of God’s created whole is first and foremost the relational work that all humans without distinctions are created for, as this except illuminates:

In God's purpose to "fill the earth" the term for "fill" (Heb. *malē*) denotes completion of something that was unfinished. With this in mind we need to understand what God started in creation that Eve and Adam were to work for its completion. Did God just create a man and a woman, male and female, with work to do? Did God merely create the human species to be the dominant conclusion to all of creation? Or did God create whole persons in the very image of God's being (constituted as the qualitative significance of heart) for the purpose of these persons having and building intimate relationships together in the likeness of the relational nature of God as constituted in the communion of the Trinity? The former emphasizes any secondary work engaged by persons in referential terms that fragment persons and relationships. The latter is focused only on persons engaged in the primacy of relational work that embodies the whole of these persons and their relationships together.²⁸

Therefore, to understand Eve's created function and original purpose for sex differentiation, we have to understand what matters most to the heart of God, above and beyond our limited preconceptions and assumptions. In other words, we are challenged, if not confronted, to transcend gender in relational response to God, and to go both beyond and beside gender in relational response to each other.

Eve's primary purpose was to enact with Adam whole relationship together, and together in whole function their persons without distinctions would continue to grow God's relational whole on earth. In the primacy of this relational context and relational process of intimate relationship together—in the image and relational likeness of the Trinity—the original persons' biological sex did not define their person, thus their persons "were not ashamed." Their sex was a secondary (not unimportant) aspect of their created being for the function of "building family" in the image and likeness of God. That is, while their created gender was necessary for procreation, it was the qualitative inner-out function of their whole persons (signified by their hearts) that integrated the more quantitative aspect of their sex difference, in the primacy of relationship together, whereby their persons constituted being in the image and relational likeness of the Trinity:

What God started in creation was an extension of the triune God's being and nature—not to be confused with pantheism. The person was created with the qualitative significance of God to have intimate reciprocal relationships with other persons, both of whom are undifferentiated (not reduced) by quantitative distinctions (such as gender or sexuality). Gender or sexuality does not distinguish the qualitative significance of human persons and relationships, though the whole person is certainly embodied in them irreducibly. This aspect of creation serves to illuminate in general the intimate relationships for which all persons are created, not to determine the ultimate context in which these intimate relationships can be experienced, that is, male-female relationships and marriage.²⁹

²⁸ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Person in Complete Context*, 94-95.

²⁹ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Person in Complete Context*, 95.

Intimacy in relationship as illuminated by the *person-al inter-person-al* Trinity, and which Jesus embodied, is heart-to-heart, face-to-face connection with nothing less than and no substitutes for the whole who, what, and how persons are—both trinitarian and human. This quality and depth of intimate relationship together challenges the misleading cultural definition of intimacy that has become norm-alized, including among Christians. Western culture in particular has commercialized human sexuality and sexual attraction—the secondary aspects which God created humans with—and has fragmented these aspects from their integration with the primary qualitative inner function of persons (notably the heart), thus constructing a dualism reinforced by Christians. The consequence is that sexuality is reduced to attractiveness and its sensuality, where the primary focus is on quantitative physical bodies (genderized sex objects). Western culture also has been the leading proponent of luring persons with the false yet norm-alized notion that “intimacy” *means* sexual intercourse and related activity between two persons. Believing this has had disastrous consequences for male-female relationships, especially for females, who are susceptible (e.g. Gen 3:16) to being misled by males pretending to want deeper involvement, but who really only want the reduced engagement of sex, and thereby use females as objects for sexual (and ego) gratification. What males need to realize is that functioning in this way reduces their persons also to fragmented sexual objects as well—with both parties not experiencing intimacy of their whole persons.

Intimacy between whole married persons who live inner out may involve sexual intercourse, yet married persons can experience relational intimacy without sex; and their failure to be this relationally involved limits and eventually reduces their love. Also, sexual intercourse in marriage doesn’t guarantee intimacy and is a reductionist substitute if it doesn’t involve the wife and husband functioning whole from inner out.

Although Genesis doesn’t reveal much more about Eve and Adam’s shameless relationship as paragenders, there are deeper implications we can infer based on what we do know from the narrative. Because they were paragenders, whose primary significance was their person in God’s image, not their gender, this composed their gender equation with ‘*arom* (naked) and without *bôsh* (shame). Certainly ‘*arom* would mean that they were without clothes, and they undoubtedly noticed physiological differences. Yet they didn’t feel self-conscious or shame about their bodies; could it be that making gender a distinction didn’t really occur to them? ‘*Arom* also signifies that at this point they were unconstrained with each other, vulnerably presenting their whole person to each other with nothing less and no substitutes for who and what they were—much like the vulnerableness and freedom from self-consciousness that little children are blessed with. And as whole persons, they had no reason to feel “shame” (*bôsh*, to feel disappointed, humiliated before another, dissatisfied or embarrassed when things don’t turn out as one expects, perhaps even deceived). Therefore, what was essential for Eve and Adam in order to experience intimate relationship together was for both of them to function from inner out, vulnerably presenting to each other nothing less and no substitutes for their whole persons—in the image and relational likeness of the *person-al inter-person-al* Trinity—and thereby illuminating the significance that they “were both naked and felt no shame” (2:25, NIV).

We are remiss, therefore, if we assume that the significance of Adam and Eve's relationship is that God gives primacy to marriage and raising a family—which most complementarians and egalitarians alike assume. Rather, to again emphasize, God's design and purpose integral for this relationship distinguishes God's original intent that the human persons “not be apart” from the whole of God, which includes also to extend the trinitarian relational context and process of God's family love. Thus, as is concluded here:

The ultimate quality of their [Eve and Adam's] persons and their relationship was not defined by nor experienced in marriage. If this were the ultimate of God's creation, there would be marriage in the new creation in heaven (Mt 22:29-30). In one sense, marriage can become a reductionist substitute that keeps us apart from the whole of God.³⁰

For persons whose identity and function are reduced to outer in, marriage indeed does become a reductionist substitute because those persons will unavoidably be biased to give primacy to what one has and/or does, in reduced function which extends into marriage. Marriage thus perceived with a referentializing bias creates illusions (e.g. “marital bliss”), and has led to idealizing marriage's benefits, with frustrating and distorted consequences—the same shame from the primordial garden: (1) creating false hope in marriage and in one's spouse in order to become “complete”—as in the notion “you complete me”; (2) sends the false messages to single persons (including homosexual persons, who are to remain single and celibate) of being less, and unable to fulfill God's purpose for them. Single women still carry the unfair stigma for being single.

These messages counter God's design and purpose for all persons—that is, God's response to the inherent human need “not to be apart” from the trinitarian relational context and process experienced in the human context. In God's relational design and purpose, single persons are needed, that is, all persons without distinctions must be able to be full participants. When God's daughters and sons—single and married—are transformed from the limits and constraints of the old gender equation to the wholeness and well-being as paragenders, then God's new creation family's identity and function will fulfill the image and likeness of the person-al inter-person-al Trinity.

Two further irreplaceable relational dynamics integrally also inform paragenderism in the Trinity's whole-ly image and relational likeness: submission in love (defining love not as ‘what to do’ but *agapē* love of ‘depth of relational involvement’), and reconciliation necessary for equalization of persons. These will be discussed later in this chapter and in the next chapter.

At this point, if you haven't already done so, ask yourself: Are you ashamed of your gender, or any other human distinction you bear? Are you disappointed by your gender, or confounded by the matter of gender? The human persons created in the primordial garden were not ashamed as long as they lived in their full identity from inner out—*arom* and without *bōsh*, as discussed above. Yet, they would soon know the same feeling of shame that has become the norm, and even accepted as natural.

³⁰ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Person, the Trinity, the Church*, 17.

Since persons were created male and female, gender seems natural. Paul identified the natural (*psychē, psychikos*) with Adam (1 Cor 15:45-46), and Jude defined natural function with those who reduce and fragment persons and relationships (Jude 19). In other words, what seems natural to us is a reduction of the whole person and the wholeness of persons in relationship together. Natural is what Eve and Adam became in the primordial garden, and ever since, gender has been the natural distinction defining human identity and determining human function. In other words, what's natural has become what's common in the human context; yet, the converse is also true, because the common of human life is composed by the sin of reductionism. Accordingly, in this pervasive process of the common, our feelings of shame and embarrassment about our gender (e.g. not measuring up to cultural standards of femininity and masculinity, or bodily functions such as menstruation, or size of genitals) are part of what's accepted as natural as well.

The natural gender equation of reductionism evolved from “Did God say *that*?” (Gen 3:1, discussed shortly). The natural condition has in effect become the *gender meme* transmitted from generation to generation just as human genes are, and that is embedded in our brains, ongoingly reinforced by messages and images in our cultures and societies. This gender meme finds expression in our theology and practice (individually and corporately in church), and will simply continue until what is natural is transformed by the new creation.

It is theologically essential, therefore, that we be able to distinguish God's original gender equation of paragenderism from these human adaptations of our created identity and function (that seem natural), thereby to counter the axiom embedded in our belief system that “you can't fight nature.” We surely can, and must. The gender meme, axioms, and other “realities” compete as alternate voices of authority to God's Word. This was the initial issue leading to the original fragmenting and reducing of the original persons, and that has reduced our theological anthropology. That is, once we take liberties with God's uncommon relational terms for relationship together by shifting to our natural reduced referential terms (e.g. for biblical inerrancy and doctrinal purity, or to know ‘what to do’), or to read Scripture selectively and partially, it will feel natural to speak of God and for God; yet, in this theological task we are unable to hear the words from or respond to God on God's nonnegotiable terms for relationship together. This common process is what unfolded in the primordial garden and prevails in our theology and practice.

The Shame of a Gender Equation

It took one choice by Eve and Adam to shift their whole identity and function from inner out to reduced identity and function from outer in. Human history has not recorded a comparable shift, yet its full significance has eluded many Christians and, thus, has eclipsed their understanding of the breadth and depth of the human condition. The usual narration of the Fall focuses on Satan tempting Eve into disobeying God and eating the forbidden fruit. But Satan's subtle agenda was initiated in the scene a moment earlier by raising the question to Eve, “Did God really say...?” (Gen 3:1). Satan's

seemingly harmless question was in fact Satan's hermeneutic challenge to God's presence and involvement with Eve and Adam. Once Eve engaged Satan in this exchange, Satan got Eve to shift her focus away from the primacy of God's relational context and relational process, which distinguishes those words from God communicating nonnegotiable terms for relationship together. This nuanced exchange is summarized as follows:

Even though Eve was created as a person in God's image to complete the relational context and process, she was not immune from reductionism because she was free to redefine her person—the human agency of her will. While making this choice does not change the created qualitative ontology of personness, it shifts the ontology to outer in, and thereby reduces how the person functions and constrains what the person experiences, thus effectively redefining personhood in human perception.

Satan tempted (tested) Eve with just such a reduction of her person. In their Garden encounter Satan redefined her person by appealing to her mind with knowledge (Gen 3:5)—the defining characteristic of the modern information age. Such an appeal subtly altered how Eve functionally defined her person, thus shifting her to a quantitative focus on secondary matter (for example, attributes about the fruit, 3:6a). From this quantitative perceptual framework, what she paid attention to and ignored became reordered from what God created and commanded, and inverted her priorities. This led to her pursuit to be a quantitatively better person (by gaining wisdom, intelligence, expertise, 3:6b). The further significance of this reduction and redefinition is how she functioned in her relationship with God and attempted to have this relationship on her terms (based on her response to Satan's reductionist appeal, 3:5). Adam fell to and labored under this same reductionism.³¹

It was the fateful choice by both Eve and Adam in self-determination (the exercise of their free will) that lured them to the reduction of their persons. At this critical juncture, they experienced the “not good to be apart” from God's relational context and relational process of intimate relationships, and were now on their own to determine what was primary for their identity and function. Not unlike the common focus today, they turned to focus on secondary outer aspects of their persons (e.g. knowledge, the difference of biological sex), thereby fragmenting their whole ontology, and reducing their identity and function in relationships. This quantitative focus engaged them in the inevitable comparative process—measuring who is better and who is less—that brought feelings of shame accompanied by fear (Gen 3:7,10). This is the sin of reductionism that was set into motion ever since, the dynamic by which their sex differences devolved into genderized distinction-making, the comparative process, and the human relational condition “to be apart.”

Whereas earlier in distinct contrast, they enjoyed being together as paragenders “naked and not ashamed,” they were now no longer secure about who and what they were, but insecure and self-conscious—in distinct conflict with their previous whole condition. And whereas they earlier functioned vulnerably in their wholeness in relationship with God and each other, now they hid behind a “mask” as a deception tactic

³¹ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Person, the Trinity, the Church*, 14.

for their fear and shame (v.7). In today's technology idiom, masks are like avatars, those personas that are used for online interaction in place of your real self. Thus they also hid from God (vv.8-10), not only physically, but relationally, as when Adam was not openly honest by vulnerably admitting his guilt and taking his own responsibility but instead blamed Eve (v.11). Establishing human precedent, these actions by Eve and Adam initiated the shift in how to be involved in relationships, from 'nothing less and no substitutes' to 'something less or some substitutes'—the former illuminating relational righteousness, and the latter lacking righteousness. Now God could no longer count on Eve and Adam to be vulnerable and honest with the whole of who, what, and how they are in relationship together. And the shift to anything less and any substitutes has become norm-alized in our gender equations.

These are ways in which we too function without righteousness on our own terms in self-autonomy, exercised in self-determining how to be involved in relationships; that is, we avoid being vulnerable in our innermost, and function relationally distant from God and others. This in turn embeds us in self-justification (e.g. rationalizing, making excuses, and blaming others). Eve and Adam's choices set all of us on the same path of self-determination in the comparative-competitive process to justify our *self*. These are all functions that fragmented human wholeness, reshaped relationships, and created relational distance with God and others—relegated to “not good to be apart.”

Such functions, just like the gender meme that now gets transmitted from generation to generation, seem natural to us (as in second nature). This generational transmission was immediately evident with Eve and Adam's sons, in that it was Cain's self-determination in reduced identity and function that led him to kill Abel (4:1-8), followed by Cain's effort to justify himself in his reply to God's query about Abel with “Am I my brother's keeper?” Shame and fear are natural in Paul's sense of *psychē* and *psychikos*, which fragmented the human person in the absence of wholeness. Self-justification is also made evident whenever we get defensive in the face of feedback or challenge to how we live (I know this from my own experience), making it difficult to be open to change, even for the sake of the Jesus' gospel. All these dynamics go into the composition of gender equations.

Since the original paragenders chose to reduce their identity and function (their theological anthropology) from inner out to outer in, they were relegated by God to those secondary distinctions, the most visible and therefore most obvious being their sex difference. This genderized their identity and function to be the norm for their gender equation (Gen 3:16-19). Identity and function based on human differences results in relational distance, first and foremost with God, extending to other personal relationships, and into church life and practice. The most encompassing of these relational consequences continues to prevail throughout human history: “Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you” (Gen 3:16).

So, is God really responsible for this common practice, since he's the one who gave the punishment in the first place? No! Humans choose to be defined by gender distinction, whether consciously or simply by being complicit with this norm, that is, allowing our brains to operate with a gender bias wiring patterns for everyday life assumed to be the acceptable norm. At the same time, any dissonance in our minds is always a clear indicator that something isn't right, that our conscience is telling us something (as in Rom 2:15), and it must be paid attention to, or be responsible for the

consequences (cf. Titus 1:15). Therefore, unequal relations between males and females is the consequence of sin, not its ordination by God. This is never what God wanted or intended for creating the human female, but is the result of humans determining who and what defines them, and how they choose to live. And even though our brains control many of our human functions, it doesn't control our will and the choices we make—that is, unless we submit to our brain.

The human condition emerging from the primordial garden includes this norm of genderized identity and function, with its limits and constraints on persons—especially felt by females. And this gender equation will continue to be the norm determining gender identity and function until the gender equation is changed and restored to its paragender origin—which requires the transformation from inner out for human identity and function to be whole in the new algorithm for all persons and their relationships together.

Of further necessity in our theological task, in order to understand God's design and purpose for gender and be transformed back to wholeness, we have to take into account Satan's hermeneutic challenge to God's words, which always creates theological fog. Satan's question distorted what God really said or meant (Gen 3:3) with "Did God really say *that*?" where *that* was not what God said (Gen 3:1). Satan's distortion unfolded further with the lie "you will not *be reduced*" (3:4), thereby directly challenging God's warning to Eve and Adam that they would be reduced (the theological significance of "die"). Subtly shifting Eve's thought process from God's relational terms (i.e. the relational function of God's commands throughout Scripture), to reduced referential terms by conjecturing about what God really meant, in this way Satan imposed theological fog. That is, the theological fog that predominates today (in church and academy)—including in the gender debates—emerged in the primordial garden when Satan influenced Eve and Adam as follows:

- (1) Transposed God's relational language and terms for communication in relationship together to referential language for the sake of information about God, thus speaking for God instead of God speaking.
- (2) Shifted the focus of persons created from inner out to outer in, thereby defining their identity and function by secondary matter, such as information, abilities, and resources they have as substitutes for the primary.
- (3) Reduced their perception, thinking, and action, which fragmented their wholeness and rendered them incomplete, unable to understand the whole picture of God now eluding them in this fog.

It is critical for us today to address theological fog, or we won't hear the words from God as the defining terms for relationship necessary for our identity and function to be whole as paragenders, in whole relationship together in the image and likeness of the whole-ly Trinity. The reduction or renegotiation of these relational terms was always the issue that Jesus had to confront. In the interaction between Jesus and some would-be disciples, they were evidently lost in this theological fog, causing them to misinterpret his words (Jn 8:31-47). And in Jesus' response to them, he appeared to refer back to Satan's original reduction of God's relational communication to referential language in the primordial garden:

“Why is my *relational* language not clear to you? Because...you are unable to hear.... You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire....He was a murderer [reducer of human persons] from the beginning....When he lies he speaks his native language for he is a liar and the father of lies” (8:43-45, NIV).

Jesus as the embodied Word here condemned the originator of reductionism, along with those who function to also create, reinforce, and sustain reductionism by imposing theological fog. This subtle yet engulfing process has had critical consequences on theological anthropology in general, and on paragenderism in particular.³²

This gender equation emerging from the primordial garden has evolved and adapted in human contexts with all its variations, including in Christian contexts. The shame of such a gender equation is the common experiential reality of feeling ‘less’ or insecure about one’s identity in reduced theological anthropology and determined by the norm-alized weak view of sin that ignores reductionism. In other words, shame and the relational distance (“to be apart”) from the whole of God constitute our identity and determine our function with norm-alization of anything less and any substitutes for the wholeness of *paragenders*. We just exchange “fig leaves” with other “masks” to create outer presentations of ourselves in daily life. Yet no matter how hard we try to measure up to feel better about ourselves, or how successful we are in these efforts, notably using genderized norms (though not limited to these alone), we will never fulfill our inherent relational need, nor can anyone else, including God.

Therefore, our gender equation will always be imbalanced, distorted, or fragmentary, thus less than whole, as long as our view of sin does not understand both the depth of sin as reductionism, and the breadth of sin as the norm-alization of *bōsh*—the scope of everyday human experience in disappointment, dissatisfaction, deception, and shame.

The Norm-alization of Shame in Gender Equations

The ongoing reality of the human distinction of gender as defining for humanity has prevailed both intentionally and unintentionally. The *bōsh* (the devolution of disappointment, dissatisfaction, deception, and shame) from the primordial garden continues to evolve into the norms of human contexts by human choice, on the one hand, not by accident. This has established brain circuits that sustain these genderized norms even when this choice is not consciously made. On the other hand, the gender distinction also becomes defining unintentionally, even when persons don’t want it to be or intend to use it.

Paul describes this latter function in his humanity (and ours) as follows: “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate”

³² For a full discussion about this issue of epistemology in this interaction, see T. Dave Matsuo’s studies, *The Gospel of Transformation: Distinguishing the Discipleship and Ecclesiology Integral to Salvation* (Transformation Study, 2015), and “*Did God Really Say That?*” *Theology in the Age of Reductionism* (Theology Study, 2013), both available online at <http://4X12.org>.

(Rom 7:15). Paul illuminated here the reality of sin as reductionism that pervades human function. Reductionism doesn't preclude human choice, but shapes it both ostensibly and subtly, and this human condition has norm-alized the *bôsh* of genderized distinctions—as a defining distinction even within other distinctions, such as race, class, and age. Such gender equations don't change easily but require transformation (as Paul illuminated further, 7:23-24; 12:2).

Another way to describe our humanity and understand the ambiguity of our actions is by the common condition of human handedness. Almost all individuals function with a dominant characteristic of either right-handedness or left-handedness, except for ambidextrous persons. We subconsciously or unconsciously do things by our dominant hand because our brains have been conditioned to favor this side (though there is some evidence that there may be genetic influence). Think about how you do things routinely every day. This implanted bias in our brains will continue to dominate our behavior unless we consciously choose to use both hands and become ambidextrous. That's neither a simple nor easy choice, as evident if you've tried doing routine tasks with your nondominant hand. It takes ongoing choices and disciplined work to become ambidextrous.

Did God create us with handedness? Perhaps, but if handedness is the natural genome for humans, we need to see its genetic makeup like our sex. That is, whatever physical differences we have were not created by God in order to define *who* and *what* we are, and to determine *how* we are to function as persons. These differences are only secondary, therefore they do not and cannot constitute the whole person God created. In the same way that handedness is partial, incomplete, and fragmentary unless we are ambidextrous, the same applies to genderized distinctions until we become paragender.

The primary identity and function of the person who God created are only whole, nothing less and no substitutes for the image and likeness of the Trinity. This wholeness takes our genome to its qualitative relational depth beyond the limits and constraints imposed by any distinctions we make based on human differences, physical or otherwise. And only this make up in wholeness from inner out transforms our gender equation.

Handedness is a working analogy for gender and the equation we use. Arguably, let's say egalitarians are left-handed and complementarians are right-handed. Regardless of how they're aligned, the reality is that they function with a bias that favors their side; and they both practice this partial, incomplete, and fragmentary function that fails to enact their whole person. In contrast and conflict, the whole person is ambidextrous who has consciously chosen not to be defined and determined by gender and related distinctions. This person becomes paragender by conscious choices and relational work with the Spirit to reject ('die to') their bias and embrace, affirm, and make specific choices in paragender wholeness.

Again applying Jesus' paradigm for our identity and function using human distinctions as the measure: "the distinctions you use and favor will be the identity and function you get, which will be partial, incomplete, and fragmentary, thus unable to determine the wholeness of our identity and function." The most obvious distinction where this applies and prevails in our everyday life is gender, and this predominant distinction maintains our shame even when not consciously chosen.

Old and New Algorithms for Gender

In the primordial garden, Satan influenced the persons with an appealing algorithm that changed the paragender equation of creation. This algorithm would provide the knowledge and wisdom to solve the problem of human life. It would provide the common denominator in the human genome that would simplify human function and “be like God” (Gen 3:5-6). Those early persons chose to embrace this algorithm, which reduced them from paragenders and set into motion the shame of gender equation, with its primary common denominator. Subtle variations of the old algorithm, having been norm-alized, continue to implement gender equations today.

We need to do “the math” in our gender equation to know its results with the old algorithm:

$$1 \text{ ♂} + 1 \text{ ♀} = 2 \text{ or more humans in likeness of the common denominator of their human genome as primary.}$$

For redemptive change (transformation) we need the *new* algorithm that implements the original algorithm of creation:

$$1 \text{ person} + 1 \text{ person} = \text{the wholeness of persons in the primacy of relationship together, which constitutes their common denominator in God’s image and likeness.}$$

The *paragender* equation uses only the original algorithm of creation, the integrity of which is pivotal for us to understand created human life, and then is re-created (redeemed) new as a major expression of the new creation. We all need to grow in paragender wholeness, and work for paragenderism in the fight against reductionism. Paragenderism is the primary gender equation that deconstructs the above old algorithm and confronts the prevailing gender equation that has burdened human persons up until the present. Conjointly, paragenderism transforms the old to the new algorithm, and in doing so illuminates the ambidextrousness of the redemptive transformation of gender constituted by the gospel. Chapter 4 expands on the “math” we need to do to grow in our practice as paragenders, and to help us in our practice as paragenders for redemptive change both in the church and in the world.

This discussion also sheds further light on Jesus, the Son, whose divine person transcends gender (cf. Phil 2:6). Yet because his incarnation form was male (2:7), he was a paragender—that is, neither his person defined by his male gender, nor his gender of greater significance than secondary to his identity. I expect this will be hard for persons using reductionist lenses and referential language to accept of the Son, not to mention the Father. There will be objections and/or incredulity like Nicodemus—asking the question “how can these things be?” (Jn 3:9) Whether this is good news or bad in your perception, the reality is that the gospel of Christ is the gospel of wholeness (Eph 6:15) as paragenders—no longer fragmented and reduced persons whose identity is constituted in gender distinctions, or in any other secondary distinctions.

Whole-ly Mary of Bethany embodied and enacted what the gospel of wholeness looks like in a human person (Mt 26:13), by functioning in her reciprocal relational response that was both (1) compatible with Jesus' whole person defined from inner out beyond gender distinction, and (2) congruent with Jesus' qualitative inner-out function vulnerably involved for heart-to-heart relational connection. We witness in her person the gospel embodied and enacted by Jesus. Thus, Mary's relationship with Jesus conclusively illustrates the original-new gender equation, which Jesus not only embraced but also made definitive for his whole gospel. The fact that Mary is not mentioned "wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world" at the very least corrects those who proclaim an apparently incomplete gospel.

Paul too was clearly a paragender, having his identity securely 'in Christ'. 'In Christ' was not a theological concept for Paul but the relational reality that was distinguished by only the relational outcome of the whole gospel. This is the whole and uncommon theological anthropology that he definitively expressed in his letter to the Galatians, that our primary identity is "one in Christ" (cf. Jn 17:11,21-23), and therefore "there is no longer male and female," (Gal 3:28). Paul did not propose eliminating genetic sex differences, because that would contradict creation.³³ But as with the other pairs of human-shaped distinctions, Paul clarified that sex difference was a secondary reality. And since sex differentiation existed from creation—"male and female"—that's why he used the wording from the Genesis account, whereas all the other pairs of distinctions Paul used the conjunction "nor." In other words, Paul affirmed God's creation of persons with sex difference (in the human genome), but clarified that "in Christ" the created distinctions no longer are valid to define Jesus' followers nor to determine their/our function. The relational reality 'in Christ' is that human distinctions have no significance, and the only relational outcome of Jesus' gospel is the new creation (Gal 6:15).

Whatever identity persons claimed based on old algorithms and gender equations is now gone, passed away (2 Cor 5:16-17). Therefore, now the identity of being "in Christ" is distinguished only by the new creation family—that is, the relational outcome when the old algorithm has died and the new has risen. In functional terms, those "in Christ" (as a relational reality, not just conceptually) are adopted as God's children who, in reciprocal relationship with the Spirit, make heart-to-heart relational connection with the Father without barriers (Gal 4:6-7; Rom 8:14-16). And we all belong together in his family as whole children without distinctions—"one in Christ Jesus," just as Jesus prayed in his pivotal prayer (Jn 17:11,21-23). The words from God communicate nothing less than this Word. Nevertheless, until this relational reality is distinguished as the experiential truth in our theology—which referential language can only compose as virtual reality and propositional truth—its defining relational outcome will neither determine our gender equation nor unfold in our practice.

³³ Peter mentioned to his readers that Paul's letters "contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures," (2 Pet 3:16). Gal 3:28 certainly could qualify as difficult to understand and easy to distort when using referential language and when reductionism defines persons. I speculate that Paul's fierce critics intentionally distorted Paul's meaning in Gal 3:28 in order to discredit him, and cause disruption of the gospel, which might explain why in his subsequent letters "male and female" are not included with other pairs of distinctions (e.g. 1 Cor 12:13 and Col 3:11).

Authority and Subordination in the Trinity

Have you been following the gender debates between complementarians and egalitarians over the years and wondered if there is still something essential that is missing? I hope this last section will stimulate not only your mind, but your innermost person as well, because gender issues touch us at that depth of both who we are and whose we are. Yet, the usual gender debates never get to that qualitative depth of our persons created in God's image and likeness and the relational depth of integrally belonging in God's family. It hasn't been helpful for the church that gender debates have remained largely at the level of academic mining of Scripture, leaving us still needing more than just guidelines to follow. If that's all persons want, well they've got what they want—and I'm sure many complementarians and egalitarians are satisfied with their theological tasks. God, however, has created us for much more for our persons and relationships together, which may be threatening to us in our practice or, at least, confronting to our theology.

This last section of theological essentials for the primary gender equation responds to the divisive gendered interpretations about (1) authority and submission between the Father and Son, and (2) the husband's authority in the family requiring the wife's submission. These points are central to the complementarian side of the gender equation, and inadequately addressed by the egalitarian side of the gender equation. The common interpretations by both sides (notably in referential language) regarding God's authority and the Son's submission to the Father are incompatible (complementarians) or inadequate (egalitarians) with the whole of the Trinity's self-revelation available to us. Both sides invariably exhibit an incomplete Christology which distorts and reduces the whole-ly Trinity's self-disclosures distinguished in uncommon relational terms from their common use of referential information. Additionally, the issues of submission and authority in marriage found in Paul's letters (1 Cor 11:3-16; Eph 5:22-24; 1 Tim 2:11-14) are variously interpreted by each side. Both interpretive approaches use a referential language lens that have negative consequences for the church's wholeness, which includes fragmenting our view of the Trinity.

Since both sides interpret Scripture apart from whole understanding of the Trinity's relational context and relational process due to their incomplete Christologies, their interpretations are at best inconclusive. However, what *is* conclusive is that only a complete Christology illuminates the *person-al* inter-*person-al* Trinity sufficiently for us to relationally know the Father, Son, and Spirit; and this relational truth is sufficient to understand Paul and his further illuminating of what all of Christ's relational work means for females and males together.

On a specific note, when we fragment the Word by selectively elevating only parts, this partiality neither encompasses the Truth nor puts together the whole embodied by his person. Complementarians (such as Wayne Grudem and Bruce Ware³⁴) have reinforced female subordination/submission to men and male authority as leaders in church and family based on (1) the notion of the Son's eternal subordination to the Father's eternal authority over the Son, and (2) Paul's writings about males as 'head' of females, and the wife's submission to her husband (1 Cor 11:3-16; Eph 5:22-24; 1 Tim

³⁴ Bruce Ware is a professor of theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and former president of the Evangelical Theological Society.

2:11-14). Grudem and his peers emphasize that Jesus claimed to do nothing on his own, but only said and did what the Father told him to, and that God created through the Son (not vice versa), and many similar examples. It is indisputable that the Son functioned in obedience to the Father, thereby establishing the Father's authority and the Son's submission. Yet, to reference this fact on the one hand, and to understand its relational reality and significance on the other hand, are essential to distinguish in the theological task. Thus, their conclusion for fixed role differences in the eternal hierarchy is speculative (again, Ps 2:7) and goes "beyond what is written" as Paul warned against (1 Cor 4:7).³⁵

Complete Christology, the Trinity, and Wholeness

At the beginning of this major section of the chapter, I discussed the vulnerable self-disclosures of the Trinity as embodied in Christ (please review if needed). Our understanding of the Trinity's interrelations can only be known from what has been revealed in Christ's life from his words and actions. Though all of the trinitarian relational actions enacted for our sake are beyond our understanding, it is clear from Scripture that at some point the Son was set apart or designated (Ps 2:7; Heb 1:5; 5:5) to fulfill God's promise (Acts 13:33) for God's salvific trajectory and path in the human context. That is, as far as Scripture tells us, this subordination of the Son began at some point in order to enact God's relational response of grace, negating the complementarian novelty of eternal subordination of the Son.

Given the irreducible nature of the holy-uncommon Trinity, we are faced with the reality that the Trinity is present and functions in two distinct contexts: partially in the human context (the economic Trinity), and totally in the unique context distinguishing only the whole-ly Trinity's relational whole (the immanent Trinity). Human experience and understanding of the Trinity can be only partial and provisional because we are finite beings in a finite context. Therefore we cannot make assumptions about the immanent Trinity in eternity based on the economic Trinity, except what the Son and Spirit reveal. The Son has revealed his subordination to the Father in God's relational response of grace that involves loving humanity in a "downwards" direction; but beyond this mission to love us downward, there is no Scriptural evidence that this action demonstrates what exists within the immanent Trinity. Consider the following:

God's self-disclosure is about how God does relationship. As disclosed in the persons of the Trinity: the Father is how God does relationship—not about authority and influence; the Son is how God does relationship vulnerably—not about being the obedient subordinate; the Spirit is how God does relationship in the *whole*—not about the helper or mediator. In their functional differences, God is always loving us

³⁵ Since June 2016, some complementarian pastors and scholars (including the current president of CBMW, Denny Burk) have rejected as incorrect theology of the Trinity Grudem and Ware's position about the eternal subordination of the Son. However, it doesn't appear that this "change" has any teeth, for example, as an official position of CBMW. Instead, CBMW is now focusing its attention to oppose alternative gender identities as unbiblical. I was unable to find any current information about the status of this matter and what, if any, application it has to the complementarian gender equation. Thus, this discussion proceeds under the impression that the view of functional hierarchy in the Trinity is still taught, thereby reinforcing husband-wife hierarchy in marriage.

downward. Yet we cannot utilize how each trinitarian person discloses an aspect of how God does relationship in loving downward in order to make reductionist distinctions between them by which to define their persons. Just as we reduce defining human persons (for example, to what we do) and relationships (for example, to role behavior), this becomes a reductionism of God. Likewise, reducing the whole of each trinitarian person to the particular function each one enacts in loving downward becomes a reduction of how God does relationship, thus reducing the primacy of God's desires, purpose and actions to reconcile us from our condition as well as ongoing tendency "to be apart." The emphasis on authority and roles does not give us this primacy for relationships nor is it sufficient to reconcile us from being apart—even if our condition "to be apart" only involves relational distance minimizing intimacy in our relationships.³⁶

Here we need to assume the relational posture of epistemic humility and acknowledge that we simply cannot know everything about the Trinity; this relational posture may first require our ontological humility. We can, however, relationally experience and know God, which is God's stated desire (Jer 9:24) and purpose (Jn 14:9; Lk 10:21). But this relational outcome unfolds only on God's relational terms of grace that defines persons from inner out and determines our function in the intimacy of face-to-face relationship. Epistemic humility reflects a paradigm shift in our interpretive framework and lens, which comes only with our vulnerableness like little children; Jesus clearly made imperative that we need to "change and become like children" (Mt 18:3), who are persons distinguished only without distinctions.

Integral to how the Trinity is involved in relationship is how the trinitarian persons function with each other without their trinitarian distinctions in order for their ontology to be One and to function as the relational Whole. As the embodied Word vulnerably disclosed: "The Father and I are one" (Jn 10:30), therefore, "whoever sees me sees him who sent me" (Jn 12:45), "whoever has seen me, *my person*, has seen the Father's *person*" (Jn 14:9), because there is no distinction in and between the trinitarian persons. For their persons to function with anything less and any substitutes would no longer distinguish the whole-ly Trinity, thereby reducing the Trinity's ontology and function. Jesus wouldn't negotiate such a reduction with his disciples—"How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe...?" (Jn 14:9-10). Without knowing the Trinity, their persons as One and their relationships as Whole, we cannot understand our persons and relationships in the Trinity's image and likeness. Therefore, only the personal inter-personal Trinity is essential for our theological anthropology and thereby to compose our gender equation.

The theological trajectory and relational path of the Son integrally involves for his followers in the relational progression of the following: from disciples, to friends (Jn 15:14-15), to adoption into the Father's new creation family (Jn 8:35; 14:2-3), for which the Spirit is given for reciprocal relationship (Jn 14:18,23,26). Jesus decisively consummated this relational progression with his death and resurrection to redeem us *from* the common fragmentation and reduction of our persons (based on human differences of gender, race, etc.) and the common's hierarchical or stratified

³⁶ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Person, the Trinity, the Church*, 37; I strongly suggest studying the full context from which this excerpt is taken. There isn't adequate space to include it here.

relationships; conjointly, he saved us *to* the new creation family raised up in uncommon identity and function—that is, whole persons for whole relationships together—integrally constituted in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the Trinity.

Moreover, as Paul would clarify, Christ’s relational work has **equalized** persons because he “has broken down the dividing wall” [relational barriers of hierarchical relationships, stratified relationships] between *those with distinctions*” for the sole relational purpose “that he create in *his person* one new humanity in place of the *hierarchy between them*, thus making wholeness, and might reconcile *those stratified to God* in one family...no longer *with distinctions* but *persons as full* members of the household of God” (Eph 2:14-19).

This, in relational summary, composes **complete Christology** for our whole understanding as well as for our experiential truth of the Son’s vulnerable presence and involvement necessary to respond to the human condition of “to be apart” from the Trinity’s family context. The heart of the Trinity is palpable in the person of Jesus (and continues in the Spirit), and we need to understand the depth of the Trinity’s desire and design for us. Unfortunately, the common Christology prevailing in much theological thinking focuses on Jesus’ birth, then sacrifice on the cross to “save us from our sins,” then his resurrection—the sum of which parts add up to incomplete Christology that sustains a theological fog eclipsing the Trinity’s wholeness.

Without complete Christology, we cannot understand the depth of the Father-Son relationship, and the gospel’s heart. This is where our focus needs to be regarding the Trinity: as the ontological One and relational Whole, in order to put into complete perspective the Son’s subordination to the Father during his mission on earth.

Complete Christology is also essential to understand Paul’s concerns. Paul in no way, as some have said, diverged from Jesus’ theological trajectory and relational path, nor did he invent Christianity or domesticate Jesus’ radical new life for believers. Incomplete Christology, referential language, reduced theological anthropology, and a weak view of sin (without reductionism) form the basis for such claims. Thus, just as we need to listen to Jesus’ relational language without our genderized hermeneutic, so too do we need to view Paul in this way. That is, our view of Paul needs to be redeemed from preconceptions and corrected before we can see and hear Paul’s desires and concerns for the church.

The Primacy of Wholeness for Paul

The depth of Paul’s whole person is usually overlooked in typical Pauline and NT studies, which focus on secondary historical and literary issues. How can we understand what Paul meant when we don’t adequately examine where Paul is coming from, that is, beyond merely his human contexts to his primary context? There is no question that Paul’s perspectives were the outcome of his face-to-face intimate personal relationship with God, having dramatically experienced being equalized from his very reduced theological anthropology (Acts 22; Phil 3:4-6).³⁷ His new life was fully defined and

³⁷ The perspectives on Paul summarized here are illuminated in greater depth in T. Dave Matsuo’s, *The Whole of Paul and the Whole in His Theology*, 283-292. This involves our own relational epistemic process for the theological task. For further study of the critical issues involved in the theological task, see T. Dave Matsuo, “*Did God Really Say That?*” *Theology in the Age of Reductionism*.

determined by his reciprocal relational response of love to the relational grace that touched his person to his core. This was Paul's experiential truth of the gospel of Christ, and that which he expressed in his conjoint fight *for* the wholeness of God's new creation family (Gal 6:15b; 2 Cor 5:16-17) and *against* reductionism of that wholeness in all its expressions in persons' identity and function (e.g. Gal 3:1-3,6:15a; 2 Cor 5:12).

Additionally, Paul functioned in two contexts just as Christ did: the Trinity's relational context and its trinitarian relational process of family love, and the human context. It was always the former that defined Paul's person and determined his function in the latter, in the dynamic of reciprocating contextualization, just as it was for Jesus. Although Paul was addressing persons in the human contexts, Paul spoke from beyond those contexts—that is, from the primary trinitarian relational context and process of family love—into the human contexts. Accordingly, Paul did not let the human context determine his involvement in the various churches—a common perspective that egalitarians incorrectly promote, and which is the defining perspective common to Pauline studies.

Furthermore, in matters of interpretation of Scripture, complementarians and egalitarians alike have taken liberties with Paul's letters, doing just what he warned against:

Paul, himself, had clarified for God's people the definitive basis necessary for operation in epistemology, hermeneutics, and thus theology: "Nothing beyond what is written" (1 Cor 4:1-7). This was a key statement about the source defining Paul's purpose and determining his practice and theology, as well as his reciprocal relational responsibility determining his fight against human shaping and construction ("who makes you different," 4:7), which reduced ("went beyond") the truth of the whole gospel (cf. Paul's functional clarity and distinction of the gospel, Gal 1:6-12).³⁸

The following are brief summaries of highly debated portions of three of Paul's letters addressed to women, for which we need to understand Paul's primary concerns. We need to keep in mind the context of Paul's dual fight for the gospel (for wholeness and against reductionism). Failure to take Paul's overarching concerns into account will always result in reduced understanding of both Paul and the gospel of wholeness (Eph 6:15). Additionally, Paul was clear about God's theological trajectory that includes creation, and he contextualized his responses about gender into the original creation of "male and female" (as paragenders) in the image and likeness of whole of God (Trinity). Notably, he makes the critical distinction between issues that are quantitative-functional and thus secondary, from those that are qualitative-relational and thus primary.

This discussion won't reiterate all the points of debate, but responds more broadly to some key points, and addresses the more critical issues of epistemology (how we know what we know) and hermeneutic lenses that are used by egalitarians and complementarians.³⁹

³⁸ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Whole of Paul and the Whole in His Theology*, 40.

³⁹ For those of you who aren't familiar with the complementarian case for eternal authority of the Father and eternal submission of the Son, it's quite easy to find sources online starting with the websites for CBMW and CBE International, the main evangelical complementarian and egalitarian organizations.

1 Cor 11:3-16 Just as Paul was concerned about slaves,⁴⁰ Paul cared about the whole inner-out identity and function of women, who ‘in the Lord’ (v.11) enjoyed the release from genderized limits and constraints on their persons. While there are statements made by Paul that appear to reinforce stratified social conditions (for slaves and women), this is how Paul has been misperceived (just as Jesus was) due to using a referentialized lens, especially by complementarians. Rather, Paul was urging both slaves and women to define their persons first and foremost from inner-out, to be whole and function whole in the primacy of the new creation—the outcome of redemptive reconciliation (2 Cor 5:17-18).

In the church at Corinth, there was disagreement about women covering their heads while praying or prophesying in their worship gatherings, which, in Christ, they were no longer bound to follow (v.16). Complementarians use this passage to justify husbands to have authority over wives. However, in his response to the Corinthians, Paul contextualized his response with creation, in which his use of “head” needs clarification, as follows:

In chronological and functional order, Christ participated in the creation of all things and its whole, as Paul later made definitive in the cosmology of his theological systemic framework (Col 1:16-17). Thus, “Christ is the head (*kephale*, principal or first) of every *created* man” (1 Cor 11:3). The embodied Christ also became the *kephale* “over all things for the church” (Eph 1:22) and the first to complete the dynamic of redemptive reconciliation as its functional key (Col 1:18). Whether Paul combines the embodied Christ with creator Christ as the *kephale* of man is not clear in 1 Cor 11:3. The creator Christ certainly has the qualitative significance of the embodied Christ, conversely, yet highlighting the chronological-functional order has a different emphasis in this context.

This quantitative difference is confirmed by “the head of Christ” is God. Since the Creator (the Father and the Son with the Spirit) precedes the creation, creator Christ is...first in order before Adam. It follows that Adam came first in the creation narrative before Eve, thus this husband (or man, *aner*) was created before his wife (or woman, *gyne*). This is only a quantitative significance Paul is highlighting. If Christ later became God, then there would be a qualitative significance to “God is the head of Christ.” Christ as the embodied God was neither less than God nor subordinate to God, yet in functional order the Son followed and fulfilled what the Father initiated (e.g., Jn 6:38-39; Acts 13:32-33).

The quantitative significance of this chronological-functional order has been misinterpreted by a different lens than Paul’s and misused apart from his intended purpose by concerns for the sake of self-autonomy and self-determination, even self-justification efforts—which have reduced human ontology and function and fragment relationships together. Paul expands on the quantitative significance with application to prayer and whether the head should have a covering or not (11:4-7).

⁴⁰ Please see discussion about Paul on slaves in T. Dave Matsuo, *The Whole of Paul and the Whole in His Theology*, 283-84.

The quantitative significance of head coverings during prayer is connected by Paul to the chronological-functional order in creation. While such practice is actually secondary (11:16), Paul uses it to illustrate an underlying issue. Apparently, for a man to cover his head was to void or deny that Christ is the head, who created man in the image and glory of God (11:7). For a woman to be uncovered implies her independence from the creative order, implying her self-determination, which in Paul's view she needed to be purified of (11:6; cf. Lev 14:8) because she was created from the qualitative substance of the first human person in the same image and glory of God (11:7). Her glory cannot be reduced to being "the glory of man" but nothing less and no substitutes of the man's glory, that is, in the same image and glory of God. This distinction of glory is critical for understanding the basis used for defining gender ontology and, more likely, for determining gender function in reductionism or wholeness. Yet, it would also be helpful for women to have for themselves a clear basis (*exousia*) for distinguishing their whole ontology and function to grasp their position and purpose in the created order (as angels needed, 11:10).⁴¹

Therefore, the matter of "head" needs to be understood in secondary quantitative terms of the chronological and functional order of creation (vv.8-9). Paul's qualitative-relational statement that "in the Lord" woman and man are not independent of each other, also ties back to the original paragender equation in primordial garden where God claimed it "not good to be apart" (Gen 2:18) and "naked without shame (2:25)—which is the qualitative and therefore primary significance in Paul's writing. Paul reminds his listeners that "all things come from God" (vv.11-12), who is the relational head of all in both authority and source/origin (Col 1:18-20).

Egalitarians generally understand "the husband is the head (*kephalē*) of the wife" in the non-authoritarian sense of "source" and "origin" (Eve was formed from Adam's rib). Complementarians understand this phrase to mean the husband's role is as the leader, having authority over his wife who submits to him, just as Christ has authority over the church. None of these understandings is conclusive from the text itself.⁴² Complementarians, who use a suspect interpretive method, elicit the authority-submission sense from 'head', and this interpretation needs to be accountable for promoting a hierarchical structure in marriage and how that teaching diminishes whole persons—males and females—and whole relationships together. Egalitarians also fragment persons and relationships by using other distinctions to define what they have and thus can do, whereby stratified persons and relationships are unavoidable. The reality from the primordial garden is that stratified and hierarchical relationships both preclude intimate relational connection, because they are structured by the relational distance ("to be apart") inherent to the shame of distinctions, and thereby, counter the reconciled and equalized relationships essential to the new creation family (2 Cor 5:17-18; Eph 2:13-22).

⁴¹ For the entire discussion of this passage, see T. Dave Matsuo, *The Whole of Paul and the Whole in His Theology*, 287.

⁴² For an expanded discussion on what 'head' isn't clearly indicated to mean in the passage, see NT professor emeritus Gordon D. Fee, "Praying and Prophesying in the Assemblies: 1 Corinthians 11:2-16" in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*, 144-160.

Eph 5:21-24 Paul's instructions to the Ephesian church on submission are regularly used by complementarians to justify male authority over females who submit, notably in marriage. Even though Paul opens this passage with "be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ," complementarians are quick to ignore this and point out that wives, not husbands, are told to submit to their spouses. And despite claims that this in no way demeans the wife (and many women are willing participants), this perspective reflects a reduced theological anthropology defining males and females by role functions, thereby employing the sin of reductionism.

Egalitarians stress mutual submission as equals ('mutuality' being their operative term), and in one sense, this reflects an equality between persons. Yet, egalitarians also use a default outer-in hermeneutic focusing on 'what to do', as shown by this statement on the CBE website: "The wife's submission is merely an example of mutual submission; so is the husband sacrificing his life for his wife."⁴³ This latter statement reflects in its writer the common incomplete Christology that defines Christ's love primarily in terms of his sacrifice, based on Jesus' statement "greater love has no one...but to lay down his life..." (Jn 15:13). Yet sacrifice is not God's definition of love (cf. Mt 9:13), nor does sacrifice define the love of the Son for the Father. Without having addressed theological anthropology and the sin of reductionism, egalitarians also reinforce reduction of all persons, inadvertently or simply by ignoring what's primary.

Submission for God is the expression of love that takes precedence over personal freedom that we each have in Christ, as described here (and to be expanded on in the next chapter):

Since family love is involvement of the whole person in reciprocal relationship together conjointly with each other and with the Spirit, another important necessity in this relational process is to submit one's person to one another (*hypotasso*, Eph 5:21). Paul does not make this an imperative because as a participle (*hypotassomenoi*) it directly defines the relational means by which his prior relational imperatives for the church are engaged (Eph 5:1-2,8,15,18b). *Hypotasso* makes definitive both the relational nature of the new creation and the relational primacy of God's new creation family before the individual, thus its priority over individual self-autonomy, self-determination or self-justification. *Hypotasso* becomes a reductionist act when taken out of the relational context of Paul's imperatives and engaged apart from the relational process of family love.⁴⁴

Hypotasso was an important operative dynamic for Paul, and husbands are just as accountable for this relational involvement as wives. However, in speaking to husbands about loving their wives as Christ loves the church, Paul appears to be addressing husbands specifically to their needed depth of relational involvement in the family. All persons need to understand that love (*agapē*) is not the common notion about what one does (even sacrifice), but the depth of relational involvement in relational likeness of the

⁴³ NT professor Craig Keener, "The Case for Mutual Submission in Ephesians 5," posted June 1, 2016, online at <https://www.cbeinternational.org/blogs/case-mutual-submission-ephesians-5>. Accessed July 6, 2018.

⁴⁴ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Whole of Paul and the Whole in His Theology*, 244.

trinitarian persons. This certainly requires husbands to be deeply sensitive to and aware of their wives' whole person, without gender stereotypes and without paternalism. Paul is edifying the men beyond their old gender equations to see their wives with the original paragender equation in the primordial garden (v.31). The men needing more help in their theological anthropology also seems to be the reason that Paul tells fathers, not mothers, how to be more deeply involved with their children (6:4). Certainly, there is shame for both genders in the old equation, but shifting to the paragender equation is likely more difficult for males—they have more to “lose.”

Whenever complementarians use their default gender hermeneutic that automatically places men as ‘better’ than women, they inevitably misinterpret Paul’s deeper meaning of *hypotasso* (Eph 5:1):

“Be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in *agapē*, as Christ loved us” are relational imperatives for the new creation church family, which by their very nature necessitate being submitted to one another based on experiencing the love from Christ’s submission.⁴⁵

What is being illuminated by Paul about submission “just as I have loved you” (Jn 13:34) is the need to be vulnerable with our whole person in order to be relationally involved in the depth of love. This then raises the urgent question: Who has more difficulty being vulnerable from inner out?

1 Tim 2:11-14 Paul’s concern in this portion of the letter to Timothy and the church at Ephesus is how persons—both men and women—were involved in prayer gatherings. It is helpful to be aware of three issues involved in our practice as Jesus’ followers: (1) the integrity (i.e. relational righteousness) of the person we present to others, (2) the quality of our communication expressed by the presentation of our person, and (3) the relational depth of our involvement while engaged with others, God and other persons.

Paul addressed both men and women about the persons they presented. Apparently the men were staying relationally distant by being argumentative instead of praying from their uncommon identity (“holy hands,” v.8). Women were focused on the secondary outer-in concern about clothes and hair, but Paul wanted them to focus on their qualitative inner-out function (“good works,” v.9-10). The following excerpts illuminate deeper understanding of a passage that corrects the biased reading by complementarians, and counters the egalitarian version of merely cultural accommodation by Paul to calm a chaotic situation:

The issue for Paul was not about dressing modestly and decently, with appropriateness. Again, Paul was not seeking the conformity of women to a behavioral code. While modesty is not the issue, highlighting one’s self to draw attention to what one has and does is only part of the issue. When Paul added “suitable” (NRSV) or “propriety” (NIV) to this matter and later added “modesty” (NRSV), “propriety” (NIV) to another matter (2:15), the same term, *sophrosyne*, is more clearly rendered “sound mindset.” That is, Paul was qualifying these matters by

⁴⁵ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Whole of Paul and the Whole in His Theology*, 244.

pointing to the necessary interpretive lens (*phroneo*) to distinguish reductionist practice from wholeness—the new interpretive framework (*phronema*) and lens (*phroneo*) from the dynamic of redemption and baptism into Christ (Rom 8:5-6). The underlying issue for Paul, therefore, is whole human ontology and function, or the only alternative of reduced human ontology and function. Paul’s initial focus on men clearly indicates that this issue equally applies to men.⁴⁶

.... This is also the lens and focus of the process of learning for women. Yet, Paul appears to constrain and conform women to keeping quiet (*hesychia*) as objects in the learning process. Rather, *hesychia* signifies ceasing from one’s human effort—specifically engaged in defining one’s self and notably to fill oneself with more knowledge to further define one’s self with what one has (cf. 1 Cor 8:1)—and, with Paul’s lens, to submit one’s person from inner out for vulnerable involvement in the relational epistemic process with God (further qualifying 1 Cor 14:35). Certainly, this learning process equally applies to men (cf. 1 Cor 2:13; Gal 1:11-12).

.... [H]is further communication to Timothy about women appears incongruent with God’s relational whole created in relational likeness to the whole of God: “no women to teach or to have authority” (1 Tim 2:12). The lens and focus of the relational epistemic process continued to apply in Paul’s directive for women. Information and knowledge about God gained from a conventional epistemic process from outer in do not have the depth of significance to teach in the church, that is, teach to God’s relational whole on the basis of God’s relational terms. Such information and knowledge may have functional significance to define those human persons by what they have but have no relational significance to God and qualitative significance for God’s family. The term for authority (*authenteō*) denotes one acting by her own authority or power, which in this context is based on the human effort to define one’s self further by the possession of more information and knowledge, even if about God. Therefore, Paul will not allow such women of reduced ontology and function to assume leadership in God’s family. Moreover, he would not advocate for Christian freedom for women to be the means for their self-autonomy and self-determination, because the consequence, at best, would be some form of ontological simulation and epistemological illusion, that is, only reduced ontology and function. He turns to the creation narrative to support this position (2:13-14).⁴⁷

Paul then closes this section with the seemingly reduced stereotype for women, “she will be saved through childbearing,” which is only a secondary function that relates back to creation. However, Paul frames this with the qualifier:

That is, women are *sozo* [saved] while they engage in secondary functions—as identified initially in the creative narrative by childbearing, but not limited solely to this secondary function—based not on the extent of their secondary functions but entirely on ongoing involvement in the relational contingency (“if they continue in,”

⁴⁶ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Whole of Paul and the Whole in His Theology*, 289.

⁴⁷ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Whole of Paul and the Whole in His Theology*, 290.

Gk active voice, subjunctive mood) of what is primary: the vulnerable relational response of trust (“faith”) and the vulnerable relational involvement with others in family love (“*agape*”) only on God’s relational terms from inner out (“holiness”) with a sound mindset (“*sophrosyne*”), the new *phronema*-framework and *phroneo*-lens from the dynamic of baptism into Christ and redemptive reconciliation. Women’s ontology and function pivot on this contingency.⁴⁸

Paul emphasizes the primacy of God’s uncommon relational context and process characterized by “they continue in faith and love and holiness, with *sophrosyne*” (v.15), in which the old measures of personhood for females (e.g. appearance, childbearing) no longer define them. Rather, it is their relational condition of having been saved that needs to be nurtured in the primacy of qualitative-relational identity and function. These were issues of the new gender equation in everyday life that the believers at Ephesus were dealing with, and that Paul was nurturing them in. For us today, similar matters related to transformation from genderized and fragmented persons to paragenders are addressed in the next chapter. And Paul provides us with whole theological understanding of all that we are conjointly saved from and saved to, for our theology and practice to be whole-ly.

Galatians 3:28 This is a key verse for egalitarians, where Paul declares that in Christ there is “no longer male and female.” This statement is clearly about equality between males and female, stemming from Jesus’ salvific work to break down the dividing walls between persons (Eph 2:13-17). Therefore, egalitarians correctly conclude that (1) women have equal access to the same roles and functions as men, specifically the position of senior/lead pastor; (2) wives and husbands are to function in mutual submission to each other in marriage and family, for the husband is no longer the authoritative ‘head’. Egalitarians also gather other evidence from Scripture, notably those depicting female leaders in the OT, and female disciples and early church leaders to back their claims for equality. Egalitarians write prodigiously showing that in the Bible, women fulfilled the same functions as their male counterparts, with the only difference being that there were fewer women in those functions. Based on these texts, egalitarians conclude for equality of status and authority for women. Yet this equality has to be extricated from its fragmented roots—and their tap root of sin as reductionism—which egalitarians haven’t recognized, in order to be transformed into true biblical equality signified by a whole theological anthropology.

The area of concern that egalitarians miss (or ignore) is the reduced identity and function inherent in their emphasis on what women do or have, notably “gifting” of leadership or teaching (e.g. Eph 4:8, 11-12). Paul certainly did write about gifts, but how gifts and gifting are understood is critical. When “gifting” is the defining matter for women’s identity and function, and church leadership is determined on the basis of this secondary criteria of what women have and thus can do, this is the dynamic of reductionism that ushers in stratified relations—not necessarily hierarchical, but at the very least, creating horizontal relational barriers. This lack demonstrates the lack of coherence for piecing together (*syniēmi*) the words from God in their version of biblical equality.

⁴⁸ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Whole of Paul and the Whole in His Theology*, 291.

A further example of egalitarians inadequately interpreting Paul is due to their referential lens, resulting in the absence of deeply understanding Paul's use of 'in Christ'. Whereas 'in Christ' was Paul's shorthand term to delineate a person's ongoing dynamic reciprocal relationship (with the Trinity), egalitarians merely assume the common understanding of a static spiritual status of having a relationship with Christ. For Paul "in Christ there is no longer male and female" is the relational reality that persons experience on the basis of (1) having undergone the turn-around change from the old to new gender algorithm as paragenders, and (2) functioning in everyday life in their new whole identity and function, no longer defined and determined by reduced parameters of *all* human differences (gender, race, ethnicity, social status), and no longer relating to others on the basis of those same criteria. Again, the only thing that mattered to Paul was for persons to live together as the new creation (Gal 6:15; 2 Cor 5:16-17) as persons without the veil of distinctions, transformed into the image and likeness of the whole-ly Trinity (2 Cor 3:18)—thereby connecting back to Paul's view of paragenders in creation. This is *why* and *how* we as individuals and corporately as church cannot choose only one human distinction (e.g. sexism) without also addressing the others (e.g. race).

In various ways, Paul also "critiques" what are the present egalitarian implications of equality, along with justice, for women, which will be expanded on in Chapter 5.

"Neither Complementarian nor Egalitarian...but a New Creation!"

Whether we are conscious of it or not in the theological task, any gender equation makes a statement about both its defining theological anthropology and its view of the image and likeness of God composing persons. When gender distinctions, or related human differences, are at the core of a gender equation, that gender equation uses a reduced theological anthropology fragmenting persons from their wholeness. Furthermore, this fragmentation of persons from their wholeness also unavoidably compromises the integrity of persons in the image and likeness of God. That is, that image and likeness are no longer whole, which then implies not only the reduction of human persons but also the trinitarian persons and thus the whole-ly Trinity. While this fragmentary theology may be inadvertent, nevertheless this is the inevitable consequence in a theological task using a reduced theological anthropology; and the variable distinctions emerging from such gender equations continue to reinforce and sustain the fragmentation of wholeness in human identity and function, as well as the constituting image and likeness of the Trinity.

Complementarians use gender distinctions (intentionally creating hierarchy of persons) and egalitarians use other human distinctions (unintentionally creating stratification between persons) in their respective gender equations. The consequence in their theological tasks is that neither has faced, transformed, or perhaps understood their reduced theological anthropology and view of the Trinity that has compromised their image and likeness in 'anything less and any substitutes' for the whole-ly Trinity. Therefore, neither follow Jesus' whole person in his paragender equation, nor have they fully understood his gospel of wholeness to the new creation.

It doesn't serve God or any person to continue in what amounts to the status quo for theology all these years. Despite the positive spin the complementarians use to promote their perspective, their teachings promote ontological equality but reinforce and sustain inferiority of females and superiority of males in hierarchical relationships—which can be either overt, as in sexual harassment/abuse and denial, or covert, as in implicit bias and paternalism—all of which sustains the condition of women and girls (and some males) as 'lost lambs' relationally "to be apart."

On the other side of the same coin, egalitarians put their own spin on their perspectives, promoting their equality of identity and function that is not based on God's relational terms of grace, but shaped by the human terms of what women have/do. Thus, egalitarians also reinforce and sustain comparative distinctions of 'better' and 'less', which fragment persons and reduce their relationships. Even though they oppose gendered hierarchy in human relations, egalitarians still indirectly promote (intentionally or unintentionally) the relational distance unavoidable in stratified relationships. They may succeed in the illusion of "flattening" church leadership structures, but they maintain dividing walls of secondary criteria in a comparative process, and this relational condition "to be apart" leads some lambs to wander far off, while female shepherds fall short of their whole function and relational purpose.

The diversity of views on gender, and other related human issues, indicate the theological fog enveloping our theology and the practice we exercise from it. Theological fog blurs the distinct line between theology and ideology. Ideology (or the more religious-sounding "tradition," as in "tradition of the elders," Mt 7:3-5) is conflated with theology, which then confuses the latter by the former (cf. 7:6-9). Ideology composes human ideas and thinking, namely as speculations and assumptions of "knowing good and evil—like God" (Gen 3:5), which simply extends the illusion from the primordial garden.

Ideology as theology is composed by 'the words of God' as referential information to express ideas about God. When the words of God displace 'the words from God', human referential terms transpose God's relational terms into theological ideas and thinking speaking in place of God. That is to say, 'theology as God speaking' is replaced by human shaping, biases and assumptions, the sum of which composes the ideology as theology that sustains the theological fog enveloping our theology and practice today. In theological studies, the historical theology of tradition should lend support for biblical theology but not determine it. However, any theological interpretation by both based on the words of God has not distinguished their theology from ideology in the surrounding fog. There is a fine line between the composition of the words of God in referential terms and the words from God in relational terms; their critical difference is subtly obscured by reductionism—a defining condition in the theological task that remains with a weak view of sin. Until we return to the words from God and let God speak without qualifications, the fog will not be lifted—and we will continue to support our ideology as if to "know good and evil, like God," and thereby maintain our current gender equations as norms in our practice, individually and corporately as church, including those in the academy preoccupied with the words of God. This is not only a challenge by the Word from God but his relational confrontation in love for the whole purpose of our primary identity and function.

Here we are in the 21st century, and the church has yet to fully comprehend and live the gospel of Christ—as Mary demonstrated for us and Paul clarified—to be redeemed and transformed new as paragenders composing the Father’s new creation family (2 Cor 5:17). We haven’t yet been redeemed to intimate and equalized relationships together that are integrally the image and likeness of the Trinity. Theological fog and ideology about gender are symptomatic of our failure to “Listen to my Son” as the Father instructed Jesus’ disciples (Mt 17:5), and to respond to Jesus’ imperative to “pay attention to how you listen” (Lk 8:18), heeding his paradigm “the measure of your person you give in relationship together and thus use in your theological task will be the measure of persons and relationships you get in your gender equation—nothing more” (Mk 4:24).

By not paying close attention to all of the embodied Word’s relational language, by not “changing and becoming *vulnerable in our innermost* like little children” (Mt 18:3; 19:14; cf. 1 Pet 2:1-2)—which Jesus makes imperative for a transformed relational epistemology (cf. Lk 10:21)—our theological anthropology remains embedded in the old gender algorithm, no matter where we stand on gender issues.

Oh, whole-ly Mary, where are you today? We deeply need your vulnerable new identity and function as a paragender proclaimed among us to clearly illuminate the whole gospel and its new creation relational outcome ‘already’. And my sisters and brothers, as God’s church family, we need to clear out the theological fog, and vulnerably turn from defining our self and others based on outer-in secondary criteria from reductionism, in order for us to emerge as our Father’s new creation family as one together in our created wholeness—persons and relationships together, nothing less and no substitutes for the image and likeness of the whole-ly Trinity.

Has your gender equation resolved the *bôsh* of anything less and any substitutes?

Chapter 4 The Gender Equation in Our Practice

Unless *my whole person vulnerably* washes you *from inner out*, your person is not involved in relationship together and thus you have no share with me.

John 13:8

**Do you love me *in the primacy of relationship together*?
Follow *my whole person*!**

John 21:15-22

At the very opening of this study, I noted the genderizing influences early in my life to be ‘just a girl’, and that I disliked the designation of ‘daughter’. My experiences were very common for females; that is, growing up by the old gender algorithm and its gender equation shaped me into a reduced person with fragmentary relationships, just like everyone else. My mother told me more than once that she just wanted us (kids) to have what others kids had, in order to not feel different (read less). Despite her good intentions and efforts for the latter, I grew up feeling as if I were less. Both of my parents could only reinforce the old gender algorithm because that’s all they knew, and which, like genes, they passed on to us.

Thankfully, this narrative wasn’t the determinant for my life. I decided to follow Jesus at the end of my junior year of college. This choice set me on the journey of discipleship that has increasingly challenged and corrected my old gender equation, a journey that continues even as I write this study. Discipleship (based on Jesus’ relational terms) is without question inseparable from growing as paragenders, that is, integral to growing in wholeness as persons and in relationships in the image and likeness of the Trinity. Throughout this chapter, I share from my experiences as Jesus’ disciple, from being greatly reduced by gender to becoming whole in paragender. The paragender narrative of discipleship is now defining for my life.

The previous chapter discussed the theological essentials for paragenders, but enacting them in our practice is made difficult by unseen roadblocks and potholes—for which our theology alone is insufficient to navigate this relational path. These include, again, assumptions and biases that determine our practice—even against our good intentions (as Paul illuminated, Rom 7:14-25). The purpose of this chapter is to further integrate our discipleship with our practice as paragenders, because they are, inseparably, about our identity and function as persons created in the image and likeness of God. And we need to continue to be consciously involved in reciprocal relationship with the Spirit, in the relational process of discovering and understanding matters vital to the transformation of the gender equation in our practice.

Redemptive change for inner-out transformation must involve the old dying (deconstructed) so that the new can rise (redeemed new and whole). Below is a brief narrative, followed by a discussion of the old algorithm and evolving gender equation needing to be deconstructed—areas directly affecting our identity and practice.

The Narrative of Paragender

Try to imagine a group of humans all over the world who discover that, except for some of their physical differences, they are exactly the same, *with the same genes* from the same source of origin. Some would consider them clones that aren't really human, perhaps aliens. Others might consider them stunted humans whose differences never evolved to the existing human stage of diversity today, and thus who are some peculiar species having no significance for human life and development.

As it turns out, however, this uncommon group of humans comes the closest to distinguishing the common origin of humanity. As different as their identity appears, their function reflects the image and likeness of the Creator of all human life. Therefore, on the one hand, their primary identity and function are beyond gender, just like their Creator. On the other hand, their secondary identity and function live beside one another in gender in the primacy of relationship together both equalized and intimate, just as their Creator, the Trinity, live in the primacy of relationship. This uncommon narrative emerged whole from the beginning, but it has since been common-ized by the human contexts all over the world. This process of commonization has been reducing and fragmenting human persons to secondary distinctions for their identity and function throughout human history. The consequence has been a genderized narrative that has prevailed over human life—countering the whole-ly narrative of paragender, and giving primacy to our genes or the distinctions connected to genetic makeup.

* * *

Gender in the Eye of the Beholder

Biological sex was created in the structure of the human genome. One's interpretive lens of this human reality, however, ascribes specific meaning to gender in the eye of the beholder. The first persons saw each other's sex in its most basic form and "were both naked and were not ashamed." By their own lens, they beheld each other and this was their interpretation; God didn't tell them about *bôsh*, nor that their sex had this specific meaning. While the first persons didn't dismiss their sex, they didn't pay attention to their secondary genetic makeup because their whole persons emerged as paragenders. The person they each beheld gave meaning to what was primary and who they were in the image and likeness of God.

Yet, after their interpretive lens shifted from the inner out to the outer in, they beheld their biological sex in a totally different way. Just as Satan lied to Eve, "your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God," (Gen 3:5), what happened was "the eyes of both were opened, and they knew they were naked" (3:7). Now their nakedness had a reduced meaning that fragmented their relationship, thus their persons were no longer beheld as primary and their gender became the most prominent in the eye of the beholder. As long as our interpretive lens operates with the same limits as theirs, only this gender equation will unfold in the eye of the beholder to determine our practice regardless of what our theology states. We also need to understand more clearly what it meant that they now knew "good and evil" because this will further clarify the relational primacy of our discipleship as paragenders.

When Eve and Adam’s eyes were opened—a two-part condition of both reality and illusion—they now had first-hand experiential knowledge of the “evil” that God warned them about: “you will *be reduced*” Gen 2:17). They didn’t physically die, which is the referential reading that diminishes the scope of the consequences. But in being reduced, something essential did cease for them; this point of cessation involved their identity and function as paragenders, because ‘naked without shame’ no longer composed the wholeness of their persons and their relationship together. Gender became primary in the eye of the beholder. Thus for all human life ever since, gender is in the eye of the beholder. This reality of our interpretive lens dominates our genderized condition. Furthermore, ‘gender in the eye of the beholder’ epitomizes the “evil” that stands in contrast to the “good” that is whole in relationship together in God’s relational context and relational process. Yet, this is not the “good and evil” promised by Satan when our eyes are supposedly opened. How to understand ‘good and evil’ becomes a critical issue, especially in light of assumptions we make about good and evil, often settling for vague and variable meanings.

In OT Hebrew, “good” (*tôv*) includes a range of meanings, notably righteous, correct, delightful, joyful, fruitful, and precious. In the Genesis narrative, “good” signifies God’s relational design and purpose for human creation (Gen 1:31) that distinguishes the primacy of whole persons in whole relationship together in the image and likeness of the Trinity—nothing less. Thus, this relational primacy and purpose constitutes *tôv*, and thus shapes the correct, even precious interpretive lens for the eye of the beholder.

‘Good’ goes beyond moral goodness (as contrasted with moral evil), which invariably gets reduced in our thinking to following a set of ethical rules likely having no relational significance to either God or us. ‘Good as moral goodness’ may be useful for keeping societies’ from falling into chaos and destruction, but the limits of this moral goodness often become constrained, distorted, or abused by the variable definitions of interpretive lenses. Consequently, this common perception easily gives the illusion of good because it seems right, but it lacks theological clarity according to God’s terms. Therefore, not all good, even promoted by Christians, is adequate to have relational clarity and significance in our practice as whole persons in whole relationships together.

Likewise, evil needs to be understood as nothing more than sin, which challenges the view of sin in the eye of the beholder. So, on the one hand, as sin, evil goes beyond the more extreme expressions commonly perceived as evil (e.g. war, genocide, human trafficking, sexual abuse), and, on the other hand, this sin (and therefore evil) encompasses various forms of what’s commonly considered “good”—that is, any illusion of ‘good’ that in reality has negative consequences on persons (e.g. self-determination, preoccupation with work or the internet). This understanding counters the ‘good and evil’ from the primordial garden that Satan composed by only reductionism. That is, Satan composed illusions of ‘good and evil’ (originally defined only in God’s relational terms) that persist today, not only in secular thinking, but also among Christians. Indeed, these illusions of ‘good and evil’ dominate Christian teaching in churches and in the academy. Therefore, if our view of sin isn’t the sin of reductionism, we will continue to sustain Satan’s version of ‘good and evil’.

In the narrative of the primordial garden, evil signifies the opposite of *tôv* (as discussed above). The OT Hebrew for “evil” (*ra’*) signifies the inability to measure up to a standard. That is, ‘evil’ is the reduction of the wholeness of both persons and relationships, and includes the substitutes persons present of themselves instead. We can state unequivocally in God’s whole relational terms, then, that ‘evil’ signifies whatever reduces persons and relationships, including the counter-relational dynamics of the deception involved in the presentation of gender as a mask to cover up the *bôsh* of gender distinctions.

Gender in the eye of the beholder epitomizes all the other human distinction-making based on the secondary genetic makeup of persons, the sum of which constitutes the human relational condition ‘to be apart’—encompassing more than merely “to be alone.” Just as Eve and Adam were the original persons, gender in the eye of the beholder is, I assert, the original ‘sin and evil’ reflecting the exercise of human self-determination beyond its common (even acceptable) practice down to its depth and breadth.

The far-reaching implications of ‘gender in the eye of the beholder’ as the original ‘evil’ seem to be confirmed by the cryptic narrative later in Genesis (Gen 6:1-7). In this short narrative, the focus centers on ‘gender in the eye of the beholder’ (“daughters...were fair”) and the egregiousness of the relationships between males and females—possibly including male abuse of females (“took wives of all they chose,” v.2,4). God was angered by “the wickedness of humankind” and “grieved...and his heart was filled with pain” (v.6) to such a depth that God wiped them all out (except for Noah and his family). It’s important to understand that the behaviors of those persons can only be speculated, yet the condition represented an extension of the good and evil from the primordial garden. Therefore, apart from the drama, we can understand that the Trinity so loved human creation that violating the created *tôv* has deeply aggrieved the Trinity up to today (cf. Isa 63:10; Lk 19:41-42; Eph 4:30). As we allow ourselves to be vulnerable to God’s pain, this helps us get in touch with our own and any related *bôsh* in our gender equation.

The norm-alized illusions constituting ‘evil’ today preclude the root sin of reductionism underlying gender distinctions. As a consequence, the subtle evil of gender distinctions has become so norm-alized as to seem even innocuous, for example, as compared to the overt evil of human trafficking. This reductionism is a strong bias that influences what we don’t pay attention to, in particular God’s grief over the lack of wholeness in all of us. Thus, while churches and the academy have, over recent decades, necessarily taken up the worthy fight against human trafficking (which affects women and children), there is an incongruent lack of outrage or grief over subtler forms of gender discrimination of females that by necessity involves the heart of God’s family and its whole-ly nature. God holds church leaders and the academy accountable, as discussed in Chapter 2 (Mt 18:1-14; Ezek 34:1-10).

In continuing to examine the gender equation in our practice, the gravity of ‘gender in the eye of the beholder’ and consequences on human life must be understood and even deeply felt, as God does. The discussions that follow are meant to help us think further about gender in our own practice individually and corporately as church. Just as God warns and admonishes his people in so many ways to distinguish between the uncommon of God’s whole relational ways, and the common referentialized and fragmentary ways (Lev 10:10), we need to pay attention to our practices and their

implications for our own persons, for how we relate to others, and for our relationships in church. Our practice will either become congruent in uncommon function, or remain incongruent in common function. And God is affected one way or the other.

The Evolving Gender Equation of the Old Algorithm

Understanding paragender (and its reduction to genderized distinctions) encompasses our human genome, since our genome determines our sex. Although research in genetics is fruitful for science and medicine, it is critical that we don't oversubscribe to the human genome to explain human life—not to mention determine future life. Every person is no less than our genome (as created by God), but all persons are also more than our genome—that is, beyond our sex as created in God's image and likeness. The influence ascribed to our genome varies according to our context, which shapes the priority and emphasis given to our sex. When our sex is made a primary distinction, our genome becomes the determining factor in our human development, taking precedence over who, what, and how we are in God's image and likeness, thereby limiting and constraining our identity and function from going beyond what's secondary for humans and insignificant to God.

The primary distinction of persons' sex gives human genetics significance to our identity and function that God never intended for his creation. Yet, human genetics often prevail, such as in the belief held by those claiming that “my genes made me do it” (that is, I'm at the mercy of my genes)—which is a reductionist position. Gender sociologists today argue about whether the genderized differences of femininity and masculinity are due to biology (genome, nature), or socialization (nurture). Yet, the ‘nature vs. nurture’ debate about gender cannot account for the whole human person created in God's image and likeness. Evolutionary science only reinforces this reductionism.

In evolution, adaptation is necessary for the survival of a group. How well a group adapts determines their survival, with the fittest surviving the most to persist and prevail, for example, by the evolutionary concept of the survival of the fittest, where fittest is seen as better or best, or most evolved. Gender identity and function have been at the center of evolutionary adaptations in human evolutionary history, which helps us understand how the gender equation evolving from the primordial garden has persisted and prevailed, even among Christians.

Male prominence has adapted overtly and covertly throughout human history to maintain female subordination, whether their persons are considered unequal or equal. Adapting as such has allowed this gender equation to keep evolving, whereby it counters and prevents the paragender equation of creation from being established in human contexts. Yet, it must be understood that female subordination has also adapted in order to survive in the face of male dominance. Whether by force, default, frustration, or out of despair, females have reflected, reinforced, and sustained this gender equation over the paragender equation. Rendered in their *bôsh*, Christian women have complied in one way or another, thereby countering and preventing their whole person in God's image from prominence.

The common denominator for both females and males is using the algorithm from reduced theological anthropology (illustrated in Chap. 3) to define their identity and function. Mary was different because as a paragon, she was no longer constrained, and her person was re-defined and made whole!

Consequences of the Old Algorithm

Another way to frame human life as a consequence of using the old algorithm (Gen 3:16-19) is with stress and anxiety, which amplifies the disappointment and discouragement (the shame of *bôsh*) internally experienced as allowed and acknowledged. This stress and anxiety then descend into inner depression, even in the midst of personal accomplishment, success, and related status and power—as prevails in everyday modern life.

For example, all of us experience the dual impact of gender, from outside us (gendered influences from family, church, cultures, and society), and from within us (what we've internalized and believed). The two-pronged experience of being nurtured and socialized in gender, together with internalizing genderized values instills in our innermost the same *bôsh* that emerged from the primordial garden affecting all humans—the shame of the gender equation.

Through most of my life I could only identify a vague feeling bad about my *self*, but I didn't allow myself to admit feeling shame. Instead, I compensated for my insecurity about my person by doing what everyone else does, namely try to prove my worth from outer in. Much of these efforts involved trying to measure up to the feminine ideals of my various contexts.¹

Ironically, the basis we use to feel better about ourselves (to compensate for shame) is the old gender equation, which amplifies gender distinctions. And the more “successful” we are at measuring up on a comparative scale to the feminine or masculine standards from human contexts, the ‘better’ we are, and the more entrenched we become in the old gender equation. This becomes “enslaving” in a circular process. The irony for females is that our gender makes us feel less, so in order to feel better we try to be ‘more’, but in genderized terms. Males often compensate for feeling shame (whether or not due to their gender) by demeaning females, even by simply not listening to them. Hyper masculinity (also known as toxic masculinity) is the extreme expression of this, especially by abusing and dominating females.

In other words, given the presence of the old algorithm, the created well-being and wholeness (*shalôm*) of the person and persons together are unattainable by human self-determination; the reality in conflict with any illusions about self-determination is that it counters their wholeness. This absence or lack of wholeness composes the inherent human need, which Christians and churches have inadequately addressed and thus ineffectively met, much less fulfilled, in themselves and for others.

¹ Eight years ago I wrote an essay about my ongoing journey as Jesus' disciple, in which I expanded on addressing some of these gender issues in my life: “My Ongoing Journey to Wholeness in Christ” (Essay on Wholeness), available online at <http://4X12.org>. Since that essay, I've come to even further understanding of the issues involved for me and, I believe, for all of us.

Do the Math!

When we examine our gender equation, we have to do the math in order to assess what the equation results in. For example:

- Any fraction of $1 \neq 1$, and can only $= 0$; this signifies the person in our equation
- A self-revolved/centered person $= 0$, who engages in relationships without significance: $1 \times 0 = 0$
- For persons in relationships, $1 + \frac{3}{4} \neq 2$; thus only whole persons can equal whole relationship: $1 + 1 = 2$
- Whole relationships together can grow when multiplied by whole persons: $2 \times 2 = 4$
But relationships together are reduced or fragmented by reduced persons:
 $2 \times \frac{3}{4} = 1\frac{1}{2}$

These are the results of what composes our gender equation, and the math is inescapable and nonnegotiable.

At the heart of the old algorithm is the common denominator of human distinctions from outer in, of which gender is the lowest common denominator. This human condition will remain until redemptive change to the new algorithm, which requires our transformation to the paragender equation of the original creation—as in the narrative of paragender, above. The most common and obvious expression of making distinctions from outer in that we practice in everyday life is in the ‘presentation of gender’.

The Presentation of Gender

When outer garments were used in the primordial garden to cover up the shame of gender (Gen 3:7,21), it set into motion a human dynamic of ‘the presentation of self’ in everyday life.² This dynamic generates a self-consciousness centered on the outer-in distinctions of self rather than on the person-consciousness of the whole person from inner out. To one degree or another, we are all self-conscious, with such concerns varying from one moment to the next. The scope of what emerged from the primordial garden continues to pervade our everyday life in ways that may surprise Christians.

With gender as the prominent distinction of self, the presentation of gender has evolved and driven both feminine and masculine body type and fashion. While our genes may limit the size and shape of our bodies, how we present that self has been a historical phenomenon still evolving. We all have been influenced in some way by what is fashionable. We haven’t, however, understood well this human dynamic in our everyday practice. For Christians, fashion in the presentation of gender is used to create the images

² A classic sociological account of this human dynamic in modern times is found in Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959).

of gender—that is, the feminine and the masculine—which are essentially substitutes for their wholeness in the image of God that replace person-consciousness with self-consciousness.

As exposed in the primordial garden, such a presentation is used to cover up the *bôsh* (which most of us are unaware of in ourselves) of a person in order to appear better or more than one is. Jesus exposed this dynamic in its basic process of self-determination, in which persons present a favorable-fashionable self to gain a good self-image in other's perception (Mt 6:1-7). A favorable self presented to others encompasses religious piety (the specific issue Jesus addressed), and other distinctions persons use to highlight and enhance their self-image: gender (femininity and masculinity), "knowledge/wisdom" (cf. Gen 2:17; 3:2-6), achievements (professional, academic, athletic). The primary issue central to such a presentation of a favorable-fashionable self is that the whole person is covered up, the real person is hidden by "fig leaves," whatever form those fig leaves take today, and in this way a virtual person is presented to deceive others. This presentation and its counter-relational dynamic must be exposed in our practice and consciously rejected so that our persons and relationships can be restored to wholeness.

So, for example, when egalitarians present their gender in fashionable feminine ways (i.e. to create a female-stereotyped image) or men in masculine ways (to create a male-stereotyped image), they abet the genderized presentation at the expense of their whole person, thereby becoming enablers of the gendered reduction of persons and their relationships. This is how egalitarians' practice exposes the lack of wholeness in their theological anthropology, and I believe this is a more widespread issue among women than men. It is important for females (starting with female church leaders and other role models) to be aware of how their fashion choices can be distracting by bringing attention to their outer-in appearance; and the same is true for males. Yet, the issue raised here also goes beyond sensuality versus modesty, and beyond 'what to wear' (as in 'what to do/have'); that is, the deeper issue is women presenting an outer-in version of self in the misguided effort of self-determination to construct one's identity and function.

This dynamic began in the primordial garden, and then further evolved in what appears to be a positive purpose in the narrative of the tower of Babel—the ongoing pursuit of persons functioning in self-determination to construct their own identity (Gen 11:1-9; cf. 12:2). We need to consider carefully the fact that from the opening of Scripture, the human shaping of human identity and function competed with God's design and purpose for our wholeness in the primacy of relationship together on only God's relational terms. Jesus reiterated this very same issue of competing sources for who, what, and how human persons will or will not be compatible and congruent with God's original design and purpose.

Therefore, merely telling females to dress modestly so as not to be sensual and thus cause their brothers to stumble, can easily become a moral dress code to follow—which is the usual approach in Christian cultures, yet that appears to have lost favor among U.S. Christians. A dress code can be helpful if it encourages females to consider deeply the presentation of gender in light of the wholeness of their person created in God's image. For the most part, however, the inadequacy of dress codes is that adhering to them is usually only an outer-in change (*metaschēmatisō*, to change the outer form, or suitably style, e.g. 2 Cor 11:12-15). To change one's behavior from outer in can indeed help change brain patterns, as well as break some habits; but, more important, persons

need to fully understand that the issue of masquerading behind the presentation of gender reflects their lack of wholeness, a qualitative condition which is only an inner-out function necessitating redemptive change from inner out (*metamorphoō*, to undergo an internal change, e.g. Rom 12:2; 2 Cor 3:18). An outer-in dress code by itself is an approach lacking substance and understanding, and doesn't speak to females' whole person created in God's image.

The same dynamics apply to men and suits, sport coats, and ties, and more recent millennial attire. These gender-specific fashion choices project images of power, authority, or success, along with relevance. Notice how many male pastors and professors still wear these, apparently following tradition (namely the tradition of presentation of masculinity), and the recent shift to a relevant presentation. But, just telling men to dress differently (e.g. more casually) without the deeper understanding of the presentation of gender is the shallow approach of *metaschematizō* without the significance of *metamorphoō* for wholeness of male persons. And even if some men don't enhance their self-image before others through fashion, they still practice the presentation of gender through other favorable means.

The presentation of gender by females was an issue for the early church. Paul addressed this for women in terms of fashion (1 Tim 1:9) as did Peter (1 Pet 3:3). The interpretation of these instructions using a referential lens sees these restrictions on females as inseparable from female submission (complementarian), or contextual issues (egalitarians). On the contrary, both Paul and Peter (finally) were addressing females' susceptibility to the presentation of gender in fashion based on the old gender algorithm (the outer-in distinctions from reductionism), because it was in conflict with their wholeness as persons expressed from inner out (1 Tim 2:10; 1 Pet 3:4-5).

Paul also addressed the presentation of gender by males not in terms of what they wore, but how they presented their gender in their function. It appears that men (not women) in their worship-prayer gatherings were staying relationally distant, uninvolved, or measured in their participation, indicated by Paul's admonition to "lift up holy hands" (1 Tim 2:8). At the same time, the men apparently were angry and argumentative, behavior which might have been more culturally comfortable for them (e.g. more masculine, domineering). This possibility can be backed up by Paul's admonitions to husbands to "love your wives and never treat them harshly" (Col 3:18), and to fathers, "do not provoke your children, or they may lose heart" (3:21), and "do not provoke your children to anger (Eph 6:4). Children lose heart and become embittered when fathers are relationally distant and uninvolved, or when fathers are domineering, bullying, impatient, and abusive.

All this converges in the reality that the presentation of self in gender distinction is now the default mode for human behavior. This default mode pervades our persons and relationships until willful turn-around change is exercised; and it prevails in our practice until transformed from inner out (as Paul made conclusive). Therefore, in whatever ways persons present gender as their primary identity, the old algorithm is reinforced and sustained, and passed on to the next generation. If Christians continue in the old algorithm, the status quo will continue to prevail and the church will not provide hope for others, let alone those seeking wholeness in its midst. In this default mode, the church cannot be distinguished from the human context in its whole-ly identity as the trinitarian new creation family, but only remains in its self-determined common shape—although

there can be ontological illusions of God's family. Most consequential of all, the Trinity cannot intimately dwell within us, because the church cannot be anything other than common and thus incompatible with (and for) the whole-ly Trinity. Meanwhile, in our default mode, we'll just keep having the complementarian-egalitarian debates along with seekers of compromise or middle way—whether with good intentions or without apology, nevertheless enabling the genderized presentation of *bôsh* and disabling the paragender identity, function, and equation.

The Habit of Gender

Our brains become wired in certain patterns formed by repeated behavior and/or exposure to prevailing experience. These neural connections become habits that our brains process without our having to consciously think about—for example, how we clean our teeth, put on our clothes, access the internet.³ Both how and what is experienced in daily life's prevailing practices also form habits that our brains process without further thought about their validity or value; these neural habits then express a bias about that particular practice without our conscious awareness of engagement. Handedness—whether we're left- or right-handed, or ambidextrous—is a good example, as discussed in the previous chapter. We have countless habits using our dominant hand. Yet we can teach our non-dominant hand to function in new ways and become ambidextrous, with a lot of resolute effort.

The habit of gender is one of those prevailing experiences in daily life that we are all exposed to, and that forms patterns in our brains to shape our thinking, feeling, and acting. Like all other habits, the habit of gender continues until we consciously exercise a different or contrary way for our brains to function with *new* habits, namely the new habits to form our practice as paragenders. If we don't commit ourselves with relational resolve as God's new children, then our practice (if not our theology) will continue to be determined by the gendered society, church, or any other influential human context—functioning by default. Habits (default function) passively rely on the patterns in our brains.

It is helpful simply to ask ourselves at times, such as while we are getting dressed, going shopping for clothes, grooming, or simply behaving certain ways that perhaps feel shallow: Why am I doing this? Why do I smile and laugh so much? Why do I comment on females' appearance? Why do I interrupt females when they're speaking? We have a great many genderized habits that reinforce and sustain gender distinctions in ourselves and in others. Even comparing ourselves to others is often habitual in our everyday practice—a self-consciousness that seems normal. Many Christians are aware of the comparative-competitive process and know there's something amiss. But merely trying to *not* get into comparing and competing with others is inadequate; the underlying reduced theological anthropology of defining ourselves by what we do and have from outer in has to be recognized, addressed, and rejected, and God's relational grace received and affirmed as sufficient to define our person in wholeness from inner out.

³ Neuroscientist Ski Chilton shares the problems of brain activity in his personal experiences and what has been necessary to change his patterns of life. See Dr. Ski Chilton, with Dr. Margaret Rukstalis and A.J. Gregory, *The ReWired Brain: Free Yourself of Negative Behaviors and Release Your Best Self* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016).

Like becoming ambidextrous in handedness for those of us who have a dominant hand, changing habits takes resolve, self-control, and self-discipline. Both Paul and Peter stressed the importance of taking everyday life matters seriously, and to work together with the Spirit to change (e.g. Acts 24:25; Gal 5:16-18,23-25; 2 Tim 1:7; 1 Pet 1:13).

Our habit of gender is our responsibility as Jesus' followers, for which we are held accountable. Having habits of gender might have originally come from outside us, having been socialized in gender distinctions. But habits are perpetuated by our choices, and that comes from within ourselves in our presentation of gender; we are the only ones who can change them. On a deeper level, habits expose the addiction of gender, which is not a disease but compulsion (stronger than habits) from self-determination (including self-justification).

The Addiction of Gender

Are you free from the limits and constraints on your person from your gender? I wasn't, but I didn't believe that I wasn't. Just like those above would-be disciples, I have insisted that I was already free from the lies of gender, because as an adult I "denied" the lie that I was inferior on account of my female gender; but that was just a delusion. For many years it would come up for me (through feedback) that I would still 'fight for my life'—that is, react to negative feedback, which included blaming others to reverse the feedback! How many more of us suffer under the same delusion? This delusion was a cover for what amounted to the addiction of gender. How many of us think they don't have a gender problem? Denial that we have the problem of gender distinction-making—by individuals (both males and females) and collectively as church—is a formidable barrier to transformation for our identity and function to become whole-ly, in the whole-ly image and likeness of the Trinity.

If you haven't paused enough to recognize the dominating influence of technology on everyday life today, then you are unaware of the pervasive addiction to technology (namely to the internet and social media) growing *among* us, *between* us and *in* us. How our persons and relationship have been reduced and rendered fragmentary by technology can be attributed to an addiction to efficiency and its resulting convenience, which is assumed to make our lives better. This assumption is certainly not a modern phenomenon; the history of technology goes back to the earliest tools made by humans to help them do things more efficiently and better for survival.

The current addiction to efficiency and convenience is also predated by the analogous dynamic influence of gender. As with technology, if we don't recognize the dominating influence of gender on our everyday life, then we are unaware of the prevailing addiction to gender existing among us, between us, and in us. At first glance, there doesn't seem to be any correlation between gender and technology at all. It is reasonable, then to ask: How do efficiency and convenience make gender an addiction, and why is it a bad assumption that we use gender as technology is used today?

There are two sides of the same coin underlying our addictions to both technology and gender. Our addiction to gender (as with technology) has these effects:

1. It reduces our person and relationships with a theological anthropology that shifts our focus to the outer in, thus quantifying us by the extent of what we do and have.
2. Accordingly, it is defined in a comparative human process, the measure of what we do and have is enhanced and elevated by as efficient a process as available, which would require a path of least resistance for the most convenient way possible; the end result is assumed to yield ‘more and better’ over ‘less’, and ‘good’ over ‘bad’ on this human scale.

These two sides reflect the same coin of reductionism—the sin emerging from the primordial garden by which the original humans made outer-in distinctions. Now giving primacy to outer-in distinctions—the most obvious being their physical sex differences—this condition made it difficult, stressful, and fearful to be the whole of who, what, and how they were created, that is, to be vulnerable (not distant) with their true persons (not apart). They were naked and burdened with *bôsh* (shame, disappointment, and dissatisfaction).

Genderized definitions of femininity and masculinity emerged and remain as the prevailing human distinction that we use to make our daily lives easier, more efficient and convenient, rather than face the stress and fear of being vulnerable with our whole person. These genderized definitions are religiously embraced and enhanced—to better define our identity and function—in the outer-in terms of what we have and what we do, thus making it easier to navigate comparisons and ascend its comparative process. Yet, this addiction to gender distinctions only masks the shame our gender bears, from which we are freed only by redemptive change.

The addiction of gender is tightly bound together with the presentation of gender and fashion (discussed previously), more so for females than for males, yet not excluding males in this addiction. The outward presentation of femininity is a consuming project for females, who compulsively spend huge amounts of effort, time, and money on appearance. The stereotype that women love shopping certainly has some truth to it, but it is not something to joke about (as I’ve heard a few times from male preachers about their wives). I can look back on my compulsions about my presentation of gender, and understand that fashion was indeed an efficient and convenient means to construct an identity for the purpose of masking my *bôsh*. Consider how true this is for so many females you know, pre-teens to elderly women, how common this near-obsession to go shopping that essentially enslaves females—not to mention the economic consequences. It is also deeply troubling to witness even younger girls being socialized into this trap so early in life—such as beauty pageants for little girls. Yet, girls are also presented in front of church gatherings with similar emphasis. ‘Cute’ has become a common substitute for *bôsh*.

Over the past few decades, it seems to me that males have quickly become nearly as involved in their presentation of gender in fashion terms. Whereas decades ago I thought boys and men were much less concerned about appearance in fashion terms—even free from it. Yet the matter of presentation of self for men has long been there. “The clothes make the man” accurately expresses the addiction of gender.

If you take notice in churches and other Christian contexts, it becomes obvious that many Christians are just like everyone else when it comes to fashion. Going to church in “our Sunday best” still applies in many churches. Of course there is a matter of propriety and respect when we go to church to worship God, but such a concern isn’t about God; in primary terms God only looks at the heart (clearly stated in 1 Sam 16:7 and conclusive in Jn 4:23-24). And the concern isn’t just about how others perceive us; what we wear also influences how we feel about ourselves.⁴ For example, why would a guest preacher in a hot climate still insist on wearing a suit coat and tie, even when invited to take them off to be more comfortable? Or why does the egalitarian female senior pastor wear low-cut blouses, which she has to keep adjusting throughout her sermon, and boast about wearing stilettos (which damage feet)?

I have no doubt that Jesus included the addiction of gender when he said that “it is not *those who are whole in righteousness* who need a doctor, but *those who are reduced by and enslaved to outer-in distinctions* (Mt 9:12, NIV). He was referring to persons who were considered to be *less* by the prevailing religious context that judged persons according to human distinctions, who undoubtedly were more aware of their *bôsh* than the Pharisees were. The point for us is that our practice in everyday life must see genderized distinctions in their negative consequences on persons (our own and others’) and on all relationships, just as Jesus does. This is nonnegotiable for Jesus’ followers and the church to be distinguished from the common that began in the primordial garden.

The reality we ongoingly face from the primordial garden is that the presentation of gender has relegated the secondary over the primary in our practice (cf. the boasts of the secondary and the primary in Jer 9:23-24). The reality now confronting us is that our practice has become preoccupied with the secondary, embedded in it, and enslaved to it—all at the expense of God’s primary design and purpose for persons and their primary function in likeness of the Trinity.

The secondary will continue to prevail until it is subordinated and integrated into the primary. This integration, however, unfolds only with paragenders, whose whole persons are vulnerably involved in reciprocal relationship together with the Trinity.

Competing and Conflicting Gender Equations

The issue between the secondary and the primary is the key for our gender equations. Jesus clarified and corrected the difference between them in his ongoing interactions, which helps us distinguish our competing and conflicting gender equations from his paragender equation.

The interactions in the narrative about the Samaritan woman at the well (highlighted in Chap. 3) reveals two competing and conflicting gender equations between Jesus and his disciples:

⁴ For a short interesting study on this topic, see Jordan Gaines Lewis, “Clothes Make the Man—Literally: What we wear affects how we perceive ourselves” posted Aug 24, 2012 on the Psychology Today website at <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/brain-babble/201208/clothes-make-the-man-literally>.

1. The disciples “were astonished that he was speaking with a woman” simply because for a man to be speaking alone with a woman went against the established norm of their time. The disciples held to, or at least observed, this norm-alized gender equation, which then competed with Jesus’ gender equation that was not shaped by the social and/or religious norm. Martha also competed with Jesus’ gender equation (Lk 10:40). But their gender equations not only competed with Jesus’ gender equation.
2. The disciples were also astounded because she was a Samaritan, who were discriminated against and marginalized even by Jewish women. This reveals how gender equations not only compete but also generalize into other human distinctions. This process both amplifies the competition and generates conflict between and within gender equations. Jesus was in conflict with both the norm and generalization of these gender equations.

Our practice unavoidably engages in competing and conflicting gender equations. The critical question for us is whether we function like the disciples, or “just as” Jesus was relationally involved. Moreover, by holding to the old gender equations, those disciples missed the depth of Jesus’ relational involvement with their own persons (cf. the depth of relationship that Mary experienced with Jesus, as discussed in the previous chapter).

The outworking of our gender equation by Christians involves the vital practice of our discipleship. Discipleship is inseparable from our gender equation, wherein the latter either allows for a diverse expression of the former, or is determined by an irreducible and nonnegotiable involvement for following Jesus. Paragenders don’t have latitude to be diverse since Jesus is definitive in his relational terms (e.g. Mt 7:13-14,22-23). To be congruent with Jesus’ relational terms means that discipleship on his terms determines our gender equation, and not conversely. In other words, for Jesus’ disciples to follow his whole person by nature is to be nothing less than paragender. Anything less creates relational barriers or distance in the primacy of relational involvement for discipleship distinguished by Jesus’ whole-ly terms.

What are the Word’s whole and uncommon terms? We come to whole understanding of his terms solely as our experiential reality and not by referential teachings, therefore only in the relationship of following Jesus on his theological trajectory and intrusive relational path. That is, Jesus’ whole-ly terms go beyond referential terms of information to inform our correct doctrine, and deeper than a rule of faith to have correct Christian ethics; moreover, Jesus’ relational terms for discipleship are neither limited to serving nor constrained by sacrifice. And Jesus’ relational path is intrusive because he challenges us out of our comfort zones, and makes us vulnerable to die to more than we feel comfortable about, and then is relationally involved to love us uncommonly, beyond what we can even imagine! Furthermore, without idealizing his love, Jesus unequivocally requires his followers to be vulnerable in the relational involvement of love (not as sacrifice) “just as I love you” (Jn 13:34).

Following Jesus as Paragenders

The unavoidable reality facing us at this point is this: the gender equation we use determines the discipleship we practice, and the discipleship we practice determines the depth or shallowness of our relationship with God. How we function in following Jesus and in our everyday situations and circumstances are both shaped by our gender equation. The interactions between Jesus and his disciples (notably with Peter, the other disciples, and Martha) revealed a variable discipleship shaped by either competing-conflicting gender equations, or the paragender equation compatible with Jesus (notably with Mary). The former equations maintain relational distance with Jesus, but the latter equation is intimately involved in reciprocal relationship together.

The relationship of following Jesus is foremost about females and males being restored to wholeness as paragenders, therefore persons (1) not defined by any secondary human distinction, (2) as created in the whole image and likeness of God, and (3) taking their place in God's new creation family. That is not to say that gender is the only issue in discipleship, yet gender is so basic to reductionism in the human context that the wholeness of Christ *must* involve resolving gender distinctions and its *bôsh*—just as Paul made conclusive our wholeness (Eph 2:14-17; Col 3:15).

Following Jesus on his uncommon relational path and on his relational terms are neither negotiable nor subject to compromise to our common terms, because they are whole, incomparably distinguished from the common, and transforming: “if you hold to my *relational terms*, you are really my disciples” (Jn 8:31, NIV), and “those who love me will keep my *relational terms*,” and the relational outcome is “my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them” (14:23)—which means that any other terms by which we practice our faith have no relational significance to God. Of course this contingency challenges our competing and conflicting gender equations that give primacy to what's only secondary to God. Even though the early disciples could not have known what was awaiting them when they first began following Jesus, he certainly kept disclosing his relational terms for discipleship. And after three intense years together, likely the most intrusive relational act on Jesus' part came with his footwashing.

“Unless I wash you...”

Have you let Jesus wash your feet? This might sound odd at first, but to let Jesus wash your feet signifies in relational language this essential message: the vulnerable relational response of submission to Jesus' relational terms, which requires rejecting our identity and function based on our terms, notably including our gender equation. What Jesus enacted by washing the disciples' feet is necessary for each of us in order for our relationship with Jesus to go further and deeper, and to more fully understand the new algorithm for the paragender equation. As Jesus prepared to wash the disciples' feet, John's Gospel notes that “Having loved his own...he now showed them the full extent of his love” ((Jn 13:1-8, NIV), illuminated here:

While Jesus demonstrates his humility (as the Teacher, Lord, Messiah) to assume the footwashing work himself, even more significant is “the full extent” of his relational involvement (signifying his family love). Nothing less and no substitutes of Jesus'

whole person than he personally assuming this footwashing would be sufficient to constitute his relational involvement of family love—that is, as the embodiment of God’s grace. Furthermore, grace demands nothing less and no substitutes of persons to constitute the intimate relationships of family.... Likewise, in relation to his disciples no household servant could substitute for Jesus and nothing less than Jesus’ whole person could make evident this family love....

Footwashing doesn’t represent so much how far (or “low”) Jesus is willing to go, as much as the feet are symbolic of the depth level of relational involvement Jesus engages with them. In other words, no level is too deep or beyond any limits for relationship together, which reductionism resists and tries to redefine. God’s grace demands this and constitutes this intimate relationship of God’s family. This not only makes Jesus’ whole person vulnerable but also makes his followers’ whole person vulnerable.⁵

Jesus demonstrated that he did not define his person by any secondary distinction, such as the role of (male) teacher, nor even the role of servant leader (a notion popular among evangelicals). In his vulnerable presence and intimate involvement with them, Jesus enacted with the disciples what was necessary for them to be made whole from inner out; he presented his whole person—not the presentation of self with distinctions—to each of his disciples for them to reciprocally respond vulnerably without any of their secondary distinctions. That is, Jesus enacted the depth of God’s relational grace for each of them to experience this relational reality in face-to-face relational connection together, not as mere referential information for their rule of faith. And their reciprocal response would signify how Jesus’ disciples function on his whole uncommon terms of being vulnerable with their whole person, without shame, no hiding behind “masks” from the secondary (including their presentation of gender), and trusting his whole person face to face.

This pivotal relational interaction is the necessary reciprocal response made with the *resolve* (steadfastness) of accepting God’s relational terms as the psalmist declared (as in Ps 108:1; 119:112), and that Mary exemplified (Jn 12:1-7; Mt 26:6-13). Nothing less and no substitutes compose this relational response of submission to Jesus—that is, the vulnerable submitting of one’s whole person to Jesus’ whole person.

Peter had difficulty submitting to Jesus’ terms in this relational choice, not yet willing to let go of his presentation of the secondary. Peter still functioned in his *bôsh*, and rather than submitting to Jesus’ relational terms, Peter still elevated Jesus the Lord in the role of teacher, thus as ‘better’ and therefore shouldn’t be lowered to wash Peter’s feet. Consequently, what could still not emerge at this point was Peter’s whole person in the qualitative image and relational likeness of God. This equation is the relational choice each of us are faced with also in our discipleship, which will require examining the theological anthropology underlying our presentation of gender.

After washing the disciples’ feet, Jesus communicated further in relational language: “If I, your Lord and Teacher, have *embodied for you the whole relational terms of paragender without any distinctions from the secondary*, so you also ought to *function*

⁵ T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology: A Theological and Functional Study of the Whole of Jesus* (Christology Study, 2008). Online at <http://4X12.org>, 64-65.

with one another.... If you know these things, you are blessed if you *function by* them” (Jn 13:14,17). Notably, then, Jesus was taking his disciples further and deeper for their wholeness, enacting the “full extent of his love” with and for them. Unfortunately, we miss the “full extent of his love” for our own persons because of the shallow misperception prevailing in discipleship today about ‘servant leadership’, which focuses primarily on distinctions of serving (what to do) that subtly makes the primacy of relationship secondary.

There is a significant connection between Jesus’ footwashing and Mary’s own prevenient involvement (in her whole-ly paragender identity and function) just earlier in John’s Gospel (Jn 12:1-8), as noted here:

Jesus’ footwashing directly overlaps both with Mary’s footwashing as the relational action of intimate involvement in family love and with the ex-prostitute’s footwashing as the relational act of love emerging from the experience of God’s grace. Contrary to reductionism, their involvement is the relational function of intimately engaging Jesus’ whole person in his relational context of family and by his relational process of family love. In that upper room with his disciples, Jesus functions with the same relational involvement to intimately engage these future leaders of his family with his relational context and relational process.⁶

In his intrusive relational path, Jesus’ person evokes the who, what, and how persons are in their most vulnerable condition. Our discipleship either relationally responds to his whole person in the primacy of relationship together, or resists his vulnerable involvement by deflecting the focus to secondary matter, even centered on his teaching or example (cf. the disciples in Mt 26:8-9).

“You will never wash my feet”

Along my journey of following Jesus I have been reluctant, even resistant to letting Jesus wash my feet, that is, resistant to being vulnerable with him face to face due to what amounts to my *bôsh*. Thus, I readily relate to Peter’s refusal of Jesus. In Peter’s inner tension underlying his presentation of self to Jesus, Peter deflected the focus to norms composing his gender equation. He imposed the secondary on Jesus, thinking that it would resolve this conflict between them about what was acceptable in their relationship. Yet, as Peter learned, it is nonnegotiable for each of us to submit to Jesus’ relational terms by letting him wash our feet; otherwise, as he told Peter, “you have no part with me” (v.8), the deep significance of which is illuminated here:

Jesus is making evident to Peter that to “Follow me” is a function only of relationship, not of confessions of faith or of serving, however devoted or well-intentioned. He told Peter his washing was necessary for Peter to have a “part with me” (Jn 13:8). “Part with” (*meros meta*) means to “share with me,” which involves the relational function of communion together. This is about ongoing intimate involvement in relationship together, not about forming the beginning of a relationship (cf. “in me”)—nor about so-called communion activity, which is how

⁶ T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology*, 64.

Holy Communion tends to be observed in church. “Follow me; and where I am, my [disciple] also will be” (Jn 12:26). Jesus’ whole person was vulnerably involved with Peter in this relational act; and that’s where Peter needed to be to participate in Jesus’ life, and how it was necessary for him to function in order to have intimate involvement together.⁷

We know that Peter eventually changed from inner out, and experienced the depth of God’s relational grace to transform his theological anthropology. Peter’s letters attest to his transformation by “a new birth into a living hope” to uncommon identity and function (1 Pet 1:3,14-16).

If, however, resistance to Jesus’ relational terms prevails, then there will be various results for would-be followers to experience. The first is to stop following Jesus, which happened with some would-be disciples (Jn 6:22-66). The second consequence is to actively turn against Jesus (Jn 8:31-36,59). The third is to create illusions (intentionally or unintentionally) of being Jesus’ disciples, or simulations of following him; but God isn’t fooled by our illusions or simulations, because God is the knower of our hearts and holds persons accountable, as Jesus made definitive (Mt 7:21-23; Acts 1:24; 15:8).

This puts the participants in the gender debates—complementarians and egalitarians—on notice for any illusions and simulations they perpetuate by giving the appearance of seeking what’s best for persons and speaking for God and God’s design for human persons. Yet, their prescriptions must always be put into the deeper context of discipleship; and their respective gender equations determine their discipleship. However their disciples may be described in referential terms, only Jesus’ relational terms distinguish the reality of discipleship from illusions and simulations.

Jesus promised some would-be disciples that “if you continue in my word *communicated in relational language*, you are truly my disciples; and you will *know the experiential truth*, and *this experiential truth* will make you free” (8:31-32). In response to Jesus’ statement, those persons declared that they were Abraham’s descendants and thus not slaves to anyone—implying they were free persons. Jesus then contrasted their being slaves to sin of reductionism as being incongruent with relationally belonging in family (the significance of “household”), thereby pointing to the Trinity’s relational context of family and relational process of family love.

Those would-be disciples claimed to be Abraham’s descendants, but they could do so only on the referentialized basis of their human ancestry. However, to Jesus (and Paul), to truly be Abraham’s descendants means that persons function in the relational righteousness of being involved with God with nothing less and no substitutes for their whole persons (Gen 17:1-5; Mt 5:20; Gal 3:6-9,29)—that is, being vulnerable like the original paragenders in the primordial garden before any human adaptations.

As Jesus’ disciples, all church leaders and those in the academy (who prepare future church leaders) are especially accountable for letting Jesus wash their feet and have their theological anthropology redeemed from reductionism—like the descendants of Abraham. Then the relational outcome of the whole gospel unfolds, so that their newness as paragenders can emerge, flow like new wine, and thereby, and only thereby, be able to love “my sheep” just as Jesus loved “his own”—which was Peter’s pivotal challenge in his discipleship (Jn 21:15-22). Such leaders and those in the academy need

⁷ T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology*, 66.

to address their old gender algorithm and prevailing gender equation, with the understanding that their own presentation of gender and other secondary criteria are relational barriers in their discipleship, the terms of which only Jesus can define.

Many persons will resist the either-or relational terms that Jesus presents; it offends persons' self-determination. Yet these either-or relational terms have existed from the beginning when God first communicated with the original humans at creation. God's commands, statutes, ordinances, and all those words from God are all relational language (not referential words of God), understood rightly only in the terms distinguishing the holiness (uncommonness) of God from the common of human contextualization (as in Ps 119:130). To embrace the whole-ly relational terms of God, therefore, also necessitates our submission by first letting Jesus wash our feet, followed by "*be vulnerably involved as I have done to you*" (Jn 13:15).

Submission and the Relational Involvement of Whole Persons

The tension between genders can only be resolved and reconciled by persons in the primacy of relationship together, enacted by the relational involvement of love. Love, however, even God's love, has been misperceived, misrepresented, and distorted by the secondary, and thus has been common-ized. The uncommon relational involvement of love requires the vulnerable submission of persons, not about gender, in order to relationally respond without the distinctions of secondary aspects of persons. In other words, uncommon love cannot be expressed with self-consciousness in the presentation of self, which is how much Christian love is expressed.

Jesus embodied and enacted this submission by the relational involvement of his whole trinitarian person, not merely as the Son who submitted to the Father. Anything less than this, or any substitutes from Jesus would not have fulfilled the whole of God's relational response of grace and love (the trinitarian relational process of family love) to our human condition. Jesus submitted to the Father as a full subject, not a passive object who simply does what someone in authority orders others to do; that is, his submission was the vulnerable submission of his whole person in the relational involvement of love, nothing less.

Our submission to each other is based on Jesus' submission to the Father, and enacts our relational posture and involvement of trust and obedience—that is, trusting God as subjects with our whole person. This submission involves the vulnerability of the whole person from inner out, just as Jesus told his disciples they must "change and become like children" (Mt 18:3); and vulnerability of one's whole person hinges on being humbled to the truth of one's inner-out person (v.4; cf. the first Beatitude "poor in spirit," Mt 5:3).⁸ These are relational dynamics that get to the depth of our theological anthropology, to not only *what* defines our identity and function, but more importantly, *who* defines the terms.

Only on this relational basis can we respond to Jesus' relational terms to "do as I have done to you" (Jn 13:15), which Paul reiterates as "Be subject to one another out of

⁸ The Beatitudes aren't discussed here, but they are essential to the identity formation of disciples on Jesus' relational terms. For a full and helpful discussion on this, see T. Dave Matsuo, *Jesus into Paul: Embodying the Theology and Hermeneutic of the Whole Gospel* (Integration Study, 2012). Online: <http://4X12.org>, 221-242.

reverence for Christ” (Eph 5:21). In other words, submission is a function of the same love which Jesus’ disciples have received, “the full extent of his love” as discussed above. Our submission is solely by Jesus’ whole relational terms and determined in likeness to his vulnerable submission, which conflict with the common’s notion of submission characterized by gender distinctions and slaves. Submission to the relational involvement of love takes all gender equations further and deeper than they are designed to function.

Think about Mary or the former prostitute, females for whom submission might have sounded too norm-alized and demeaning had they still been functioning by the old gender equation. However, they were free from the old, and free to be vulnerably involved with Jesus’ whole person—and the outcome for them was their integral experiential truth and relational reality of intimate relational connection with Jesus, the depth of love which the male disciples had yet to experience at this point in the Gospel narratives.

In congruence with Jesus’ relational terms, only paragenders submit their persons to each other in this relational involvement of love just as Christ loved. Persons who aren’t redeemed from their old gender equations still think of submission in narrow terms of subjugation based on gender, because they haven’t yet experienced the relational trustworthiness of the embodied Word. Complementarians insist that the wife “graciously” submits to the husband’s leadership and the husband “honors and respects” the wife; but without addressing theological anthropology and the sin of reductionism (which they don’t), their position can only be lived out in the relational distance of some degree of hierarchical relations—no matter how much complementarians try to mask their hierarchy with their lovely words. Egalitarians, who affirm “mutual submission” on the basis of the notion of equal personhood of women and men, also don’t address theological anthropology and the sin of reductionism, and therefore their focus tends to be on what married couples “do” (e.g. share chores and decision-making) without realizing that they still function in a comparative process of better and less. Both approaches and their equations diminish the significance of submission and limit or constrain love to secondary expressions in direct conflict with Jesus’ relational involvement of love. In this subtle process, both sustain in their discipleship practice that “you will never wash my feet.”

If all of us, females and males together composing God’s new creation family, are to learn to “be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ,” we have to take up the ongoing relational work to be reciprocally involved with the Spirit in order for our persons to mature in wholeness from inner out (as Paul outlines, Rom 8:6,11-16). Our essential identity and function must undergo the turn-around change that redeems and reconciles us in transformed relationships, both equalized and intimate—freed from the *bôsh* of our gender distinctions—to be vulnerably “naked and without shame” together in the original created and re-created primary gender equation. These are all relational matters that need to take primacy over all secondary matters and integrate personal and corporate relationships together, and church ministries and programs. For the relational outcome to be our relational reality, our persons must vulnerably submit in order to “let the wholeness of Christ’s *person* rule in *our* hearts” as the only determinant for our identity and function as paragenders integrated as the Trinity’s family (Col 3:15).

“As I have loved you....”

At the heart of the primary gender equation (distinguishing as paragenders) is the relational dynamic of love. Love is common in many gender equations, which should alert us that something is lacking in understanding love.

The psalmist states that “great *wholeness* have those who love your *terms for relationship together*; nothing can make them stumble” (Ps 119:165). How so? We easily stumble in the dark, which is caused by a theological fog. The psalmist also declared, “The unfolding of your words give light; it imparts understanding to the simple” (i.e. the childlike, Ps 119:130; as in Lk 10:21). The embodied Word—not referentialized—unfolded in only relational language to clarify and correct our understanding of God’s terms for relationship together. The Word summed up God’s relational terms with the relational dynamic of love, the primacy of which has two integral dimensions: (1) love God with your whole person, and (2) love others likewise (cf. Lk 10:26-28). Using Jesus as our example, this love is typically defined as sacrifice, and/or some type of caring for others. While these actions may be included in love, they are only secondary acts that don’t define and thus involve the primary response of our whole person. Why not?

The Word clarified the words from God’s relational terms for relationship, which correct the words of God used merely as reference to inform our practice. He illuminated two nonnegotiable terms primary for the relational dynamic of love:

1. “You, *your whole person*, love one another. Just as I have loved you *with my whole person*” (Jn 13:34; Jn 15:12). This relational term is also irreducible because it is based on the relational reality of experiencing the relational response of Jesus’ whole person. This relational reality cannot be a referential assumption or it becomes merely a virtual reality, which may be at the center of our belief system but really has no relationally significant practice. Christian practice of love may emulate what Jesus did in love, but this relational term is not a ‘how-to’ learned from Jesus’ example. Rather, it involves what is received from Jesus directly in relationship together, thus neither by indirect implication nor by informed assumption. “Just as” (*kathos*) by nature requires that our love be congruent with Jesus’ love. How does this congruence become a relational reality?
2. “Just as the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. *Be relationally involved* in my love. If you keep my *terms for relationship together*, you will *be relationally involved* in my love” (Jn 15:9-10). Based on the relational involvement of love disclosed in the Trinity that is extended to us, his second primary term corrects reduced understandings of love as sacrifice or merely some care. What is primary for love is the depth of relational involvement engaged by the whole person, without anything less and no substitutes for the whole person (both trinitarian and human). “Did *the Word* really say *that*?” Yes, indeed, and he vulnerably disclosed his intimate involvement of love in relationship with the Father. How is their relationship the basis that clarifies and even corrects our practice of love?

The relationship between the Father and the Son functions on the primary basis of their relational involvement with each other, with their titles and roles always secondary. The Son enacted obedience to the terms (“commands,” 15:10) for their relationship together. These relational terms are the only way that the Trinity does relationship together, both within the Trinity and with others (cf. Jn 14:31). Yet, those terms of relationship didn’t define love by sacrifice or care, as if the Father needed such action for himself. The only term for relationship that has any meaning and thus significance for the trinitarian persons is the depth of relational involvement that their whole persons have with each other. This relational involvement of love by nature required their whole person, not merely some function or role that each has to respond to us with the gospel of salvation. The depth of their whole persons relationally involved with each other relegated their distinctions as Father, Son, and Spirit to a secondary function, the distinctions that didn’t define their primary ontology and function as the whole of God, the Trinity. Without their secondary distinctions, as the Word embodied and enacted, “the Father is in me and I am in the Father (Jn 10:38)—they are ontologically One—and their oneness constitutes their identity without distinctions as Father and Son, so that “whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (14:9, cf. 12:45). And their One identity without secondary distinctions is integrated by their whole persons in the vulnerable depth of function only distinguished by their intimate relational involvement of love, which integrates their persons together as the relational Whole to constitute the ontological One integrally revealing the Trinity.

These relational terms essential for the Trinity are the only terms that give congruence for the relational dynamic of love essential for human persons to be in likeness to the “just as” of Jesus’ person. Persons without distinctions make up the primary gender equation, and the depth of their relational involvement of love as whole persons is the only relational dynamic that has the following irreducible and nonnegotiable outcome directly from the Word: “they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me and I am in you...so that they *will* be one, as we are one...so that the world may know that you have sent me *on our relational terms* and have loved them *on the basis of the same relational involvement* as you have loved me” Jn 17:21-23).

Anything less and any substitutes for love have these consequences: reduces the Trinity, thus reduces our persons; renegotiates the relational terms essential for the Trinity together, thus renegotiates the gender equation and its terms for defining our identity and determining our function—all with the relational consequence of persons and relationship together without wholeness, therefore no longer living in the primary significance of the image and likeness of the Trinity. Therefore, is it any mystery or even surprising that Jesus made his relational terms imperative for love, and nonnegotiable for discipleship?

A further word is in order to definitively correct the misleading notion of love as sacrifice, since Christians simply assume this. Certainly Jesus did sacrifice his life for us; but in John’s Gospel, when Jesus made his paradigmatic statement that “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (Jn 15:13), Jesus wasn’t commanding them to sacrifice themselves for each other. That would contradict his statement that “I desire mercy, not sacrifice” (Mt 9:13). Contrary to this entrenched assumption (creating theological fog about God’s love), Jesus defined “lay down” (*tithemi*, to set, place, put, lay down) just seconds earlier with “love one another *just as I*

have loved you.” To lay down one’s life in Jesus’ whole relational terms is to willfully make vulnerable one’s person to the primacy of their relationships together, with nothing less and no substitutes, such that not only could God count on their whole persons, but also so they could count on each other to be whole persons together in relational likeness of the Trinity. This uncommon practice of love is enacted by persons who are distinguished as paragenders and whose discipleship flows from the paragender equation embodied by Jesus.

“Do you love me in the primacy of relationship together?” After his resurrection, Jesus continued to lovingly pursue Peter, for Peter’s whole person, in order to focus Peter on the primacy of relationship together and away from secondary distinctions composing Peter’s gender equation (Jn 21:15-22). Even in this interaction, Peter functioned with the inner tension of his presentation of his self, evident in his responses to Jesus, most notably when he again deflected the focus elsewhere, this time in a comparative process (“Lord, what about him” v. 21). To this Jesus stated more emphatically **“You follow my whole person!”** so that Peter would change and become the person whom Jesus could count on to be relationally involved reciprocally, thus on his whole and uncommon relational terms.

As Jesus challenged and confronted Peter’s relational involvement of discipleship, I also experienced the palpable Word’s intrusive involvement in my discipleship journey—helping me to integrate the secondary into the essential priority of the primary. For God and others to be able to count on me for my whole person as a paragender—without secondary distinctions composing my old gender equation—this is my desire and commitment. To that end, I share a personal matter that the Spirit brought up earlier while writing this study, in hopes that you will be encouraged and edified. Just recently I had to face my own gender bias (again), because whenever certain men were covered in national news—men who have been accused of sexual assault/misconduct, and men in power who boast about themselves and put others down—I would have a visceral reaction of deep disgust. My reaction to these men was in part residual anger toward males in my past (notably my dad and brother) who treated me as less whether on the basis of gender, or by secondary criteria of what I did and had. Needless to say, my residual bias also still emerged as my over-reactions in interactions with my husband in our relationship over the years, which he didn’t tolerate (for which I’m thankful). All of this personal “stuff” had to be put into the primary context of following Jesus as a paragender; and that always clarified, confronted, and challenged my need for further transformation from inner out (not the mere outer in of *metaschēmatizō*).

Being Jesus’ disciple (which includes being my Father’s daughter) necessitates vulnerably facing my biases and underlying causes. Integrally, Jesus’ gospel of wholeness that I claim and proclaim, and being a worshiper of the whole-ly (whole and uncommon) Trinity also require me to deal with my biases. Why? Because these are issues of (1) the gender equation that defines my person and other persons (i.e. theological anthropology) and (2) the underlying sin of reductionism. Individually, this depth of involvement with God is about relationship together on his relational terms of ‘nothing less and no substitutes’ for my vulnerable person, without the limits and constraints of distinctions, just as the Samaritan woman learned face to face with Jesus;

that is, vulnerably face to face with God is our involvement “in spirit and truth” (Jn 4:23-24), constituting the worshipers the Father seeks.

In the past I’ve also had a negative gut reaction to liberal biblical feminists and post-Christian feminists who, for example, reshape Jesus to a female Sophia (Wisdom), who call Jesus’ death on the cross child abuse by the Father, or who dismiss Scripture as hopelessly androcentric, and thus prioritize women’s experience as the interpretive lens necessary to critique Scripture. These positions distort the words from God communicated for the primacy of relationship together. Being Jesus’ paragender disciple on the journey to wholeness has helped me to distinguish between those feminists’ legitimate concerns (e.g. patriarchy and androcentrism in biblical studies and church tradition) from how they interpret the words of God in referential language resulting in distortions of God. I deeply appreciate the Spirit’s involvement in reciprocal relationship to correct and sharpen my interpretive lens; and the palpable Word’s ongoing relational involvement of love needs to be counted on for us to grow as paragender in likeness.

Although God has healed my heart over the years about this, the recent negative reactions indicated to me to again reject the lies of gender distinctions that I’d internalized, and further affirm the relational reality of God’s truth of who I am as one created in the image and likeness of the Trinity. My experiential truth and relational reality deepen increasingly with understanding and knowing the Trinity. Accordingly, I find myself also increasingly grieving *with* the Word over the reductionism of human life (not just about me) due to the pervasive distinction-making among Christians and in churches that conflicts with the Trinity’s whole design and purpose for all human life—the original evil from the primordial garden.

Therefore, it is clear and undeniable that in reciprocal relationship with the Spirit, we must consistently use a hermeneutic of suspicion in our practice to distinguish the referential language of anyone’s claims about gender (and other human distinctions), just as Jesus did (e.g. Mt 18:1-3). We need to begin by challenging our own biases and assumptions, and vulnerably receive the Spirit’s correction as integral aspects of our discipleship—why, because these are necessary for our transformation to wholeness, which in turn is integral to knowing and understanding the Trinity in relationship together on the Word’s relational terms (Jn 4:24; Jer 9:23-24). Without vulnerably addressing these primary issues, we remain preoccupied with the secondary—with the relational consequence “and you still do not know me?” (Jn 14:9).

What is primary in our gender equation determines what is primary in our practice of discipleship. What is primary in our disciple practice determines the level of depth in our relationship with the Trinity—all of which unfolds conversely. Not surprisingly, then, if we listen carefully, we will continue to hear the Word asking for clarification and confirmation: “Do you still love me?”

Chapter 5 The Gender Equation in the Church

**You have abandoned *the primacy of relationship for the secondary....*
Wake up *church!* For I have not found your *identity and function*
whole in the *lens* of my God.**

Revelation 2:4; 3:2

**In Christ your *persons without distinctions* are built together to become
an *intimate dwelling* in which the Trinity lives by the Spirit.**

Eph 2:22

As witnessed in the primordial garden, the gender equation became the primary determinant for its persons and relationships, and continues to be in churches today. No other basis underlying church theology and practice has been as consequential for the church. Based on a church's gender equation—either paragender or with gendered distinctions—persons gather together in likeness (give or take some variation) of their identity and function from this gender equation, which they reflect, reinforce, promote, and sustain in gathered likeness. These church gatherings are not surprising or unexpected, because a church's gender equation encompasses a church's identity and function determined in likeness of what or who it is based on.

This final chapter of our current study addresses this key issue in the defining process for the church: Does the church gather together in likeness of human shaping, or in likeness of the Trinity? And whatever the variation of theological views, is the church's gender equation in likeness of human terms in variable referential language, or in likeness of God's relational terms in irreducible relational language? In other words, is the church known by its common distinctions, or by its uncommon wholeness?

The primary identity and function used by the church will determine its persons and relationships in likeness, which will gather together according to its gender equation. This process must be understood as axiomatic since Jesus stated unequivocally: The measure we use will always determine the measure we get (Mk 4:24). That's why Paul made imperative only one primary determinant for the church: "the wholeness of Christ" (Col 3:15). As mentioned in the previous chapter, for the relational outcome of our persons and relationships together to be "one as we are one" (Jn 17: 21-23), we must vulnerably submit in order to "let the wholeness of Christ's *person* rule in *our* hearts" as the only determinant for our identity and function as paragenders integrated as the Trinity's family.

Moreover, the calculation from any gender equation and its algorithm is directly intertwined with its gospel. That is, the results of a gender equation emerge from the gospel claimed and proclaimed by a church. This calculation is clearly understood when seen from the whole gospel. Assuming the whole gospel ("the gospel of peace," Eph 6:15), there is a gospel reality we need to be clear about:

- There is no salvation from sin without also the salvation to wholeness for both persons and their relationships together.
- There is no salvation to wholeness for persons and their relationships without also the salvation from sin as reductionism.

Wholeness and reductionism are antithetical and in ongoing conflict for our persons and relationships. One or the other composes the gospel claimed by churches today; and any hybrid that functions with reductionism always fragments wholeness to render it without salvation from sin—just as a little yeast leavens the whole dough, as Jesus’ warned against “the yeast of the Pharisees” (Lk 12:1; Mt 16:5-12; 1 Cor 5:6-7). The gospel of either wholeness or of some variation from reductionism underlies a church’s gender equation and that equation’s results, thereby shaping those persons and relationships of the church, and thus determining their identity and function according to the gospel claimed—which in turn reflects the God of that gospel. No other measure can be calculated; it’s either wholeness or reductionism, with the former irreducible and nonnegotiable to anything less and any substitutes.

Therefore, the church must set the eyes of its heart both beyond and deeper than the usual gender debates, both sides of which are incompatible and incongruent (i.e. merely common) with the wholeness and well-being (*shalôm*) of its persons and relationships in both creation and the new creation. Accordingly, the whole-ly Trinity cannot, as Jesus said, “come to them and make our home with them” (Jn 14:23) in a merely common context—no matter how doctrinally rigorous, inclusive, or “alive” that context is composed. *Help us Spirit, to further listen carefully; convict and correct us wherever and however you deem necessary—and raise us up as your whole-ly dwelling.*

Clearing Foggy Lenses

This is a pivotal and urgent time in church history for the church to distinguish itself by its true identity and function as God’s uncommon paragender family. But to be clearly distinguished we need to clear out the pervading theological fog that allows the primary human shaping of church locally and globally. Ever since the earliest church in biblical times, while some churches embraced and practiced God’s relational terms, others did not clearly identify the antithesis between wholeness and reductionism in their practice, but practiced a hybrid theology and fragmentary gospel. The latter churches are important for us to learn from, and an examination of them follows below. Having either intentionally or unintentionally turned a blind eye to the conflict between the wholeness or fragmentation of persons and relationships, the churches’ interpretive lenses gave primacy to secondary matters, due to referentializing the Word, which includes its incomplete or selective embracing.¹

This shift in focus away from the primacy of God’s whole qualitative-relational terms gave rise to theological relativity and thus fog, which in turn became norm-alized. The consequences have endured throughout the rest of church history, and are obvious in

¹ For a critical examination of the influence from reductionism in the church’s history, see T. Dave Matsuo, *The Global Church Engaging the Nature of Sin & the Human Condition: Reflecting, Reinforcing, Sustaining, or Transforming* (Global Church Study, 2016). Online at <http://www.4X12.org>.

church theology and practice today. Without question, the church and academy have failed to fight reductionism in its expressions of distinction-making based on gender and other secondary human distinctions, a condition more common than uncommon—that is, less and less distinguished (in their persons and relationships). This is the current state that the church must recognize and address. And this condition will continue until we take to heart Jesus axiomatic paradigm: “The distinctions you use will be the church you get”—which may require the same house cleaning by Jesus.

When Jesus cleansed his Father’s house, (Jn 2:14-17; Mt 21:12-13; Mk 11:15-17), he was redeeming it from its common-ized functions of (1) making distinctions among persons (by segregating worshipers on the basis of gender and race), and (2) giving priority to secondary concerns (e.g. crowding out worshipers’ space to make room for the marketplace within the temple courts, and likely exploiting the poor).² Jesus was outraged at these abuses from the sin of reductionism that replaced the temple’s whole relational purpose: “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations” (Mk 11:17). These dynamics promoted distinctions and fragmented relationships in comparative processes within God’s house, which is the most important issue that churches today must understand because “My church shall be the intimate family fellowship of all persons without distinctions.”

What are churches promoting? Consider the contrast made by the psalmist for God’s people:

The Psalmist declared joy for “the house of the LORD,” its condition of well-being in wholeness (*shalôm*), and, in relational terms over referential, that “For the *relational purpose* of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your good” (Ps 122). ‘Good’ (*tôb*) once again emerges with a subtle challenge to be defined either by God’s whole relational terms (as this psalmist is) or by our reduced referential terms (even well-established by tradition with good intentions). That is, the nature of the challenge is who defines what’s good for the church, and what determines who the church is. Without listening carefully to this subtle challenge and paying close attention to the subtlety of its counter-relational workings, such a perceptual-interpretive lens narrows down “good and evil” to a “good without wholeness” and an “evil *without* reductionism”—in other words, what was really promised in the primordial garden about “knowing good and evil.”³

In the primordial garden, the Creator declared the whole of creation as “very good,” yet Adam’s relational condition before Eve as “not good to be apart” from God’s relational whole context. God’s *good* is only about wholeness in God’s relational context and relational process, in the image and likeness of the whole-ly Trinity—nothing less. However, since the primordial garden, this wholeness has been fragmented. Nevertheless, humans continued to live and multiply and fill the earth, not to extend the Trinity’s relational context and relational process, but with what they themselves determined was good. With the influence of human shaping, ‘good’ evolved in many forms, yet all of them constitute ‘good without wholeness’ because they exist apart from God’s relational

² For a discussion on temple segregation in Jesus’ time, see Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary, New Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 165-166.

³ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Global Church Engaging the Nature of Sin & the Human Condition*, 22-23.

whole. Churches practice these forms of good—such as ‘the common good’ and other notions of good as defined by sociocultural norms. These all formulate good intentions as well, which, if not whole, are only illusions and thus in subtle practice don’t address the human condition “to be apart.” The common good is an apt description for good intentions of the church that appear or sound good but don’t get to the heart of “not good to be apart.”

Conjointly, the breadth of God’s ‘not good to be apart’ from God’s relational context and process, necessary for persons and relationships to be whole, constitutes the full significance of ‘evil’. As discussed in the previous chapters, gender distinction-making in the primordial garden was the original evil that fragmented the wholeness of persons and relationships. Thus sin must be understood as reductionism, so any view of ‘sin without reductionism’ is always incomplete and weak. Churches that hold to ‘good without wholeness’ and ‘sin without reductionism’ do not understand why God declared creation “very good,” and do not understand the human condition as “not good to be apart” from God’s relational context and process; and their theology and practice will reflect these lacks, most notably in how members are defined and their relationships function.

The antithesis between wholeness and reductionism has been present ever since the primordial garden, and is a common thread throughout Scripture because it is at the heart of God’s theological trajectory to respond to our inherent human need and the human condition. The wholeness-reductionism conflict constitutes the inherent conflict between the ‘holy’ (uncommon) of God, and ‘the common’ of human contexts. In all your Bible study and reading, you’ve likely perceived different terms of antithesis, such as ‘good and evil’, ‘life and death’, ‘light and dark’, ‘wisdom and folly’, God’s ways and humans’ ways; these word-pairs all refer to relationship with God on God’s terms or on human terms, and signify on whose terms persons live. Throughout Scripture, these terms integrally point to the one conflict between the wholeness of God and the fragmentation from human shaping—the whole + holy (whole-ly, i.e. uncommon) or the common—or, simply, between God and Satan, whose presence in the church is more covert than overt, as Paul exposed (2 Cor 11:14-15).

Ever since the primordial garden, human interpretive lenses narrowed down God’s relational language with the consequence of creating theological fog, obscuring what God really meant (Gen 3:1-5). The church has been existing in this theological fog that allows re-defining ‘good and evil’. Theological fog allows for churches to decide what’s good or sinful for our persons and relationships together based on biases, which allows for gender equations and other distinctions to pervade the church’s identity and function, thereby rendering the church undistinguished from the common. The consequences develop thus:

What existed in “my house” may seem obvious in the Gospels’ accounts, yet the underlying issues are composed subtly with a ‘good without wholeness’ and an ‘evil without reductionism’. This subtle dynamic continues to unfold in the global church today, along with assuming that churches can shape the Lord’s house on their renegotiated terms. Evidence of this in churches in the global North and South is indicated when a church professes what’s good and promotes that good with various aspects yet without its inherent wholeness—focused on only well-meaning parts, for

example, “good for food” and “to make one wise”—which then God would say “It is not good.” Conjointly, when churches proclaim salvation from ‘sin without reductionism’ and ignore sin as reductionism, or don’t pay attention to its counter-relational work reducing the primacy of relationship together in wholeness—for example, allowing relational distance, stratified relationships, preoccupation with the secondary (even by serving)—then such churches reflect, reinforce or sustain reductionism in their theology and practice, to which God would say “It is not good to be apart from wholeness.” What exists in the Lord’s house is critical for the global church to examine about its condition in order to clarify and/or correct its theology and practice in need of urgent care, perhaps emergency care for any subtle condition threatening its significance. Listening to the Word will provide the light and understanding needed to illuminate what exists, penetrating the fog of any illusions and getting down to the heart of any simulations.⁴

Because of our ongoing failure to perceive the uncommon qualitative-relational terms that compose God’s whole (the Trinity’s relational context and relational process of love), we are misguided and distracted by secondary or even false antitheses, for example, as when two seemingly oppositional positions (e.g. complementarians and egalitarians), are really two sides of the same coin—with the coin being the reductionism that is antithetical to God’s qualitative-relational whole. This consequence emerges less from our theological task and more from our experiential task in everyday living.

Therefore, living whole from inner out without gender distinctions (which indivisibly includes all other distinctions), or continuing to live fragmented by gender distinctions (and other distinctions) is the key issue for churches to address for their persons and relationships. In other words, does the relational involvement of God’s family love in intimate and equalized relationships together define the church’s identity and function—or does the current state of the church reflect all that we are and can ever be? This focus needs to be given precedence over ministries because it gives top priority to what constitutes the essential identity and function of persons involved in ministries, including evangelism or social service (Peter’s challenge in Jn 21:15-22). Churches need to cease operating under the illusion of embodying the gospel—for example, in evangelistic missions and community service projects—without having undergone the turn-around change of their gender equations. What churches use is all that churches get. Therefore, churches need to assess what constitutes the ‘good’ of their good news, along with the ‘sin’ that they battle against, and discern if ‘sin without reductionism’ resides hidden in their ‘good’ intentions. This self-examination unfolds by first understanding that:

The reality confronting the global church in its theology and practice is this undeniable reality: from the beginning the human self distinctly emerged with the perception of ‘good without wholeness’, and has been sustained and justified by sin without reductionism. The subtle choice defined by good without wholeness has unfolded to increasingly become the norm for human ontology and function—the default mode for Christians who don’t enact ongoingly the choice for whole

⁴ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Global Church Engaging the Nature of Sin & the Human Condition*, 22.

ontology and function.⁵

We know that God grieves or rejoices over God's people. Jesus wept over his people for failing to make the relational response to God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement necessary to be whole (Lk 19:41-42, cf. 13:34). Which is it for us today? Which gender equation characterizes the global church prevailing in the world—the church of gender and other human-shaped distinctions, or the whole paragender church family of the new creation on only the Trinity's whole relational terms? Can the uncommon Trinity dwell within us as we currently are?

I. The Church of Gender Distinctions

At this point in church history, theological fog in the church and academy has created an ambiguous identity and function in their human contexts, though of course even a referentialized Christian theology and ontological simulations or illusions of being the church (e.g. having their own vocabulary and religious rites) still mark them as different. As we saw in Chapter Two, the prevalence of gender distinctions (representing all other human distinctions) is the most damning evidence against the church today—ranging from overt sexual abuse to subtle benevolent sexism.

We might wish to attribute theological fog (and blindness) to biblical illiteracy. Biblical illiteracy in the U.S. church is steadily increasing, with religious education disappearing from church schedules. Yet illiteracy about the words of God is not the critical problem as some observe.⁶ The critical and primary problem for both the local and global church is the biblical insensitivity to the words from God and thus unawareness of (1) God's communication to us in relational language, and (2) the relational terms constituting the relational context and process of God's qualitative presence and relational involvement with us in the primacy of relationship together. This insensitivity and unawareness have been consequential for the church, and which have rendered the church, its persons and relationships to a gender equation based on, reinforcing, and sustaining qualitative insensitivity and relational unawareness. Since the church and academy are comprised, supposedly, of Jesus' disciples, then it is quite apparent that in their individual and collective discipleship (assuming they are Jesus' disciples), they have not paid attention to the Trinity's relational imperatives.

This condition for the church is not new for God, because God confronted the Israelites for the same condition. Insensitivity to the words from God and the lack of awareness of God's relational primacy and relational terms compose the hardness of heart (as in Zec 7:12; Heb 3:8,10,12-15; cf. Eph 4:19). Its opposite is the openness, humbleness, and vulnerable heart of childlikeness that Jesus makes requisite for his followers, notably for church leaders (Mt 18:3-5; cf. Lk 10:21), which has always been the relational imperative for relationship together with the uncommon God's whole relational terms. God communicated these terms to Israel in unmistakably relational language (Dt 7:8; 10:15-16; 11:13,18); and God's relational language composed the book of Deuteronomy as a love story and not about the law in referential terms as is commonly

⁵ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Global Church Engaging the Nature of Sin & the Human Condition*, 54.

⁶ Such as George Barna, *America at the Crossroads: Explosive Trends Shaping America's Future and What You Can Do about It* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016).

perceived (Dt 23:5; 33:3).

Despite God's imploring, disciplining, and ongoing vulnerable relational involvement with the Israelites, they kept reverting to their default mode of outer-in practice focused on secondary matters of what to do. Observing God's law in referential terms from outer in reduced their faith practices to ontological simulations, which God hated (Amos 5:21-24; Isa 29:13; Mt 15:6-9).

Incongruent and Incompatible Gender Equations

The relevant example in our discussion is, of course, the gender equations of complementarians and egalitarians. These gender equations (and their respective theologies) are the bases for separate churches filled with likeminded individuals. It seems obvious that the gender equations of complementarians and egalitarians are incompatible with each other, and that using both equations in church would not be functional. Yet, there is a congruence between them that makes each equation even more incongruent for the church, that is, the church family in likeness of the Trinity.

First, both equations highlight a human distinction that focuses on the *self* from outer in over the *person* from inner out. This limited focus creates an imbalanced consciousness about self as a substitute for person-consciousness—a self-conscious practice that is not often apparent because of how commonly and readily it is engaged. Self-consciousness, as discussed in the previous chapter, first emerged in the primordial garden as the shame of gender. For church relationships, self-consciousness prevents persons from being vulnerable with each other, which is antithetical to the depth of love with which Jesus loves us, just as the Father loved him, and in turn just as we are to love each other. To reiterate from the previous chapter, the uncommon relational involvement of love requires the vulnerable submission of persons, not about gender, in order to relationally respond without the distinctions of secondary aspects of persons. In other words, uncommon love cannot be expressed with self-consciousness in the presentation of self, which is how much Christian love is expressed.

Self-conscious egalitarians and complementarians are both (1) incongruent with the person created in God's image and incompatible with the relationship together of persons in the Trinity's likeness, and (2) thus, persons and relationships in either equation counter the identity and function that must distinguish the church in the Trinity's likeness.

Second, the priority given to *self* centers on the individual rather than the primacy of relationship together involving whole persons. This re-ordered priority of creation reflects, reinforces and sustains the human condition "to be apart," which is incongruent for the persons created and re-created in likeness of the Trinity. Therefore, all such individuals are incompatible for the church family and counter-relational to the church's practice.

Furthermore, trying to reconcile the two gender equations is ill-served by efforts to compromise, because even if they compromised, for example, by co-existing and holding their differences 'in tension', their persons and relationships composing their churches are still fragmentary, lacking wholeness. The result would be nothing more than some irenic illusion or simulation marked by harmony, a version of 'good without

wholeness'. However, illusions and simulations have negative consequences in that they fool persons into believing something that has no substance, like the metaphorical house that was built on sand that Jesus foresaw (Mt 7:24-27).

The inescapable reality from the primordial garden is that the default human mode for persons and relationships is “to be apart” from the whole created by the Trinity and recreated by the gospel. “To be apart” has become this default mode through normalization in all human contexts, including the church. While the condition “to be alone” may not be considered good in Christian gatherings, the deepest condition “to be apart” from the whole is the most basic issue facing the church. Thus, whether church members are complementarian or egalitarian, they have yet to address the human relational condition.

For the church to declare with creator God that “it is not good for the human person to be apart from the whole” (Gen 2:18), its view of the person and relationships must be congruent with God’s. This whole understanding requires that the church’s view of sin must be also congruent with God’s. “To be apart” from the whole is the human condition generated by reductionism; and the church is in the pivotal position (1) to embody the experiential reality that saves us from this condition, and (2) to enact the relational reality that saves us to the whole created by the Trinity and newly created by the gospel in whole-ly likeness of the Trinity.

Person-conscious Christians are needed for the church to go forth. But this turnaround change requires paragenders to rise up in the paragender equation in order to distinguish the church “whole-ly as we are in the Trinity.”

Illusions Shaping the Church

The early church’s persons and relationships, even with the benefit of experiencing the embodied Word in person, were often incongruent and incompatible with the Word’s relational terms—not least among whom was the prominent church leader, Peter (discussed in Chap. 4). As the earliest churches became established and grew (Acts 2:43-47; 4:32-37), how well they continued to function in the uncommon identity and function in the Trinity’s likeness is not clearly indicated from Scripture except for some affirming words from Jesus (e.g. Rev 2:6,13,24-25; 3:4,10-11) and Paul (e.g. 2 Cor 8:2-3; Phil 1:3-7,10,15; 1 Thes 1:6-10). We have more biblical witness to their critiques, especially in Paul’s letters and Jesus’ post-ascension correction for some churches in the Book of Revelation, the latter discussed next.

What the above ecclesial process keeps reinforcing and sustaining is how the church has been common-ized by the surrounding human context throughout its history. From its beginning, the common-ized church has been critiqued by Jesus’ post-ascension feedback (Rev 2-3). Four of the representative churches, and the modern counterparts, have their theology and practice clarified and corrected by the Spirit, in order to be transformed to the uncommon-ized church—both whole and uncommon in likeness of the Trinity. Common-ized churches exist and even thrive accordingly by criteria lacking the primacy of relationship, even when their particular church-speak includes relational-sounding words. But God, who sees persons hearts (as in Rev 2:23), can distinguish between illusions (like masquerades) and when churches “worship in spirit and truth” (Jn 4:23-24).

Most churches today probably have unmerited high estimations of themselves; otherwise, they would change. It is not overstating an important reality to say, however, that too often churches operate under illusions of who they serve and on whose terms. Three illusions shaping the churches addressed by Jesus (Rev 2-3) are helpful for us to examine our church practices today: biblical compliance by working against unbiblical views, popularity and success, and tolerance of differences.

The *first is the illusion of biblical compliance and persevering against contrary views*, as critiqued in the church at Ephesus (Rev 2:1-7). Jesus' critique of the Ephesian church highlights the primary issue for all the critiqued churches, with each church constructing alternative identities in varying ways. Jesus acknowledged this church's hard work and its strong stance against false teaching. Yet Jesus critiqued them for having "abandoned the love you had at first" (v.4; "forsaken your first love," NIV), that is, the primacy that God gives to relationship together. Lacking their qualitative and relational involvement on God's relational terms, this meant that their narrowed-down interpretive lens could only perceive the words of God in referential terms, and respond in those terms, as illuminated here:

The list of the Ephesian church's deeds is impressive: their "toil" ...their "endurance" ...they maintained the doctrinal purity of the church under trying circumstances and did not tolerate falsehood, unlike the Thyatira church and its hybrid theology; they even suffered repercussions for Christ's name and yet endured the hardships to remain constant in their faith.... [T]heir theological orthodoxy appeared uncompromising and spotless, maintaining their integrity in the surrounding context. This list forms a composite picture...which essentially was extremely dedicated in major church work, and which can also describe a number of successful churches today.

Jesus knew...about their deeds [and] the nature of them, and the extent of their functional significance. It may seem somewhat perplexing that Jesus was not impressed with this church and even felt to the contrary about their church practice: "You have abandoned the love you had at first" (v.4). We may wonder "how can a church so involved in church work abandon its first love?" Yet, his discourse here for the integrity of ecclesiology raised a serious issue of church function, which is crucial to account for in how we practice church ourselves. His critique makes conclusive the very heart of his desires for ecclesiology to be whole.

The term "abandoned" (*aphiemi*) means to forsake, abandon persons, to leave, let go from oneself or let alone; and this also includes functionally maintaining relational distance even while in close physical proximity or in mutual activity. *Aphiemi* is the same term Jesus used in his promise to "not leave *his followers* orphaned" (Jn 14:18). Connecting these relational messages provides the context and process for the function of ecclesiology to be God's whole family. In the church context at Ephesus this strongly describes not paying attention to the whole person and not giving primary priority to whole relationship together. They worked hard doing things *for* God but the relational process necessary for their "works" to have functional significance was deemphasized or misplaced in their effort. This often happens as churches develop and the goals of church growth become the priority of

church practice. In the process, as the Ephesian church demonstrated, there is a subtle shift in which the *means* become the *end* and its primary purpose for relationship together to be whole is abandoned or made secondary.⁷

The Ephesian church was essentially reduced to an ontological simulation of God's church because it no longer functioned in the primacy of relationship, which is God's irreducible and nonnegotiable relational imperative; instead, they substituted with an identity of 'what to do'. This first illusion of biblical compliance is propagated by many conservatives/complementarians. Notably, the primary determinant for their identity and practice is the self-perception that they are the truly—and, for some, the only—faithful keepers of God's word as authoritative for all of life. Such churches demonstrate, however, insensitivity to the qualitative and relational unawareness by virtue of their gender equation that renders both females and males to less than whole persons in reduced theological anthropology. Additionally, many of these churches' members are vocal opponents of others who are different from them—making distinctions as a norm-alized aspect of their self-determined identity.

The second illusion is the *illusion of popularity*, and its counterpart of *success in the status quo*, as critiqued in the churches at Sardis and Laodicea, respectively. The church at Sardis (Rev 3:1-3) had, according to Jesus' critique, "a name [*onoma*, reputation, brand] of being alive," indicating that it was likely a very popular church, but Jesus perceived them as "dead." The reasons are as follows:

Jesus exposed what actually existed beneath the outer layer (and *onoma*) of "being alive": the simple...truth was, "*contrary to your esteemed identity, you are dead*" (*nekros*, the condition of being separated from the source of life, thus being unaccompanied by something, i.e. "to be apart"); this reality based on the fact that "I have not found your *practice* complete [*pleroo*] in the sight of my God" (NIV); that is, their *ergon* (works denoting what defined them) was incomplete (contrary to *pleroo*, to make full, complete or whole) and fragmentary based on God's whole terms, not as defined by the surrounding context. This church assumed that 'the measure they used' for their ecclesiology and practice would not reduce or fragment their ontology and function; yet the often-ignored subtle reality is that such a consequence was 'the measure they got'—just as Jesus earlier made axiomatic as well as paradigmatic (Mk 4:24).

.... Since no explicit sins such as idol worship and sexual immorality were mentioned (as in Thyatira), their incomplete deeds point to something more subtle or lacking. Their activity was perceived as alive, yet likely in the quantitative aspects of *bios*, not the qualitative function of *zoe*. Their reputation signified only a substitute (*onoma*) of the integral identity of who, what and how [God's] church is, consequently lacked the integrity of wholeness. While Jesus' polemic about soiled and white (*leukos*, bright, gleaming) clothes described those incomplete and a remnant who weren't incomplete respectively, bright clothes symbolized those who participated in God's life (3:4). This is about reciprocal relationship and involvement together, which soiled clothes symbolized a barrier to, precluded or maintained with relational distance. Any type of "soiled" clothes—whether stained by blatant sin or

⁷ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Global Church Engaging the Nature of Sin & the Human Condition*, 33.

dirtied from subtle incomplete work, including preoccupation with the secondary—would have this relational consequence.⁸

The illusion of a popular church can be difficult to recognize in our social climate because our common-ized mindset places a high premium on quantitative comparative measures, such as numbers of attendees at church services. This is the illusion of church reputation propagated by megachurches (churches with an average weekly attendance of 2,000 or more). Yet, large or small, Jesus' critique is a 'wake-up alert' to all churches today.

A problem related to popular churches is that they usually emerge with the popularity of a celebrity preacher/pastor (usually a man). An obvious example is Willow Creek Church (WCC), which has become a 'brand' enjoying a reputation of being alive. However, WCC's popular founder Bill Hybels resigned this past April (2018) due to sexual misconduct. Moreover, WCC's leadership failed its members (notably the women targeted by Hybel's misconduct) by being more concerned about the brand than those women. Jesus' critique is pertinent to Willow Creek's leadership failures:

In spite of how well the Sardis church presented itself (its appearance) and how well it was perceived (its image), qualitative substance was lacking. This reflected a shift in how they defined themselves from the inner out to the outer-in aspects and functions (*metaschematizo*, change outward form). Their lack of deeper qualitative substance exposed the credibility of their reputation as essentially meaningless—though worth an image in comparative reductionists terms—while the validity of their work (apparent service and ministry) was relationally insignificant because they were separated (“to be apart”) from the substance primary to wholeness of life. These are severe critiques Jesus made of a church that at least was doing something to earn that reputation of being alive.... The choice essentially of style over substance is not unique to the church in Sardis. In fact, the distinction between style (for appearance and image) and substance is blurred in many current church practices. Yet, the credibility gap between what appears to be and what actually exists is not readily apparent to a church and observers, when a church relies on what it does to define itself. Reputation becomes one of those valued indicators of success that many churches depend on for feedback to evaluate their work—or value to validate their position in God's kingdom. Jesus asks, “What are we filling our churches with?” The above is not the dynamic of *pleroo* (making complete, whole) that distinguishes the *pleroma* (fullness, i.e. whole) of Christ (as Paul illuminated for the church's wholeness, Eph 1:23).⁹

As I was writing this chapter, the news broke just within this past week that Willow Creek's new co-pastors and entire elder board resigned in acknowledgement of their failure as the church's leaders to properly addressing the allegations, which included not believing the women who came forward. That is a step in the right direction, but how new leadership will address Willow Creek's failures moving ahead, and *what* they address, will be very telling. If any changes are only from outer-in—for example, only

⁸ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Global Church Engaging the Nature of Sin & the Human Condition*, 30-31.

⁹ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Global Church Engaging the Nature of Sin & the Human Condition*, 31-32

adding a layer of accountability in the face of any future sexual misconduct, which alone would constitute only a band-aid fix—that would be ‘good without wholeness’ and not the kind of inner out turn-around change that God’s church needs to address its root problems.

The second illusion of a successful church in the status quo was exemplified by the church at Laodicea. This church was the target of Jesus’ familiar critique about being lukewarm (Rev 3:14-22). This church thought of itself as successful “I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing,” and likely saw itself as a good model (like a ‘brand’); but using that criterion for their identity and function relegated the primacy of the Trinity’s qualitative-relational terms secondary, if considered at all, which rendered Laodicea distasteful—as explained further here:

This was a rich city known as a prosperous banking center, for its textile industry and its renowned medical school—cultivating great pride by their residents in their financial wealth, fine clothes and famous eye salve. The church there wasn’t isolated from this context but shaped by these secondary substitutes for the primary.... Whether or not they considered themselves “hot” as a church, they certainly thought they were a good church compared to a “cold” church. It is unlikely that anyone would consider them “not good,” particularly in comparative church history. In prevalent ecclesiastical terms, they were good indeed, yet measured only on the basis of outer-in quantitative terms focused on the secondary (cf. a marketplace). Their narrow lens and fragmentary basis reflected how they defined persons from outer in by what they did and possessed, which signified how they engaged each other in relationships, thereby determining the basis for how they practiced church. Underlying their practices was a theological anthropology of reduced ontology and function This was the fragmentary condition that the embodied Word...clarified and corrected to expose the true state of their church from inner out in qualitative relational terms, the reality of which composed an inconvenient truth for the church: “You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked,” which certainly then is “not good”—even by common comparative terms.

The strength of Jesus’ feedback—which doesn’t appear to be loving or, at least, irenic—was necessary to penetrate their self-assessment illusion shaped by reductionism and to expose their functional simulation with substitutes composed by reductionism. Since they were not paying attention to reductionism, he reminded them that “the measure they were using was the measure they were getting,” and that they could neither boast of nor even hope for having anything more. Just as their water supply turned lukewarm by the time it reached the city and was an inconvenience to their lifestyle, the reality for this church was the condition of being lukewarm. For Jesus, their lukewarm church practice was not only inconvenient but distasteful—if you’ve ever had lukewarm water on a hot day—“I am about to spit you out of my mouth.” Even if they were “cold,” at least they wouldn’t operate the church with illusions. Lukewarm, however, is a subtle practice from reductionism that promotes the status quo; it signifies what is *common* in the surrounding context and serves to maintain the status quo of the common—with no thought, desire or need to be distinguished as the uncommon.¹⁰

¹⁰ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Global Church Engaging the Nature of Sin & the Human Condition*, 28-29.

Laodicea could easily have been blended right into the contemporary U.S. church scene, much more at home in today's common context than in the uncommon relational context of the Trinity.

A modern-day church that also defined itself by its brand was Mars Hill, which despite its quick exponential growth as a network of churches in Seattle, officially disbanded as an organization in January 2015 (some of the individual churches continue to exist).¹¹ Under Mark Driscoll's authoritarian leadership—characterized by complementarian misogynist views accompanied by a toxic masculinity gender equation—Mars Hill became a multi-site mega-church. According to some pastors of the multi-site campuses, Driscoll kept pushing for financial efficiency through technology, reducing those other pastors' teaching responsibilities, and engaged in unethical actions to advance the church financially, leading to the church's ultimate demise. Driscoll's demands included prioritizing making new converts over maturing those already coming. And in general, the others went along. As noted in an article in the Atlantic.com:

And that's why Mars Hill's demise can be read as an object lesson in the dangers of building a church—or any brand—on a single magnetic leader. Lots of people liked Mark Driscoll, and they liked the idea of him even after his flaws began to show. But when he proved to be all too human, his church couldn't survive without him. Driscoll apparently once told staff, "I am the brand," and he turned out to be right.¹²

This was a case when it is better for a church to die than continue in its illusions. The church was too embedded in its common-ized practices—of which their gender equation was the most deplorable—to be saved, that is die in order to be raised new. It is heartbreaking to recognize that at some point(s) along the way, Jesus stood at Mars Hill's door and knocked to be let in (as in Rev 3:20)—but they didn't listen and thus couldn't hear his voice.

The *third illusion of tolerance and inclusion* was practiced by the church at Thyatira. This church was situated in the Greco-Roman economic context that required membership in trade guilds, which provided members with social and economic connections. Participating in these guilds involved eating food sacrificed to idols and prostitution, so it was challenging for Christians in this environment:

In the nature of this surrounding context, Jesus acknowledged this church's extensive Christian practice: love, faith, service, patient endurance, and that their "last works are greater than the first," indicating not a status-quo church but actually performing more practice than before. Yet, what Jesus clarified and corrected was that their practice also "tolerated" (*aphiemi*, to let pass, permit, allow, v.20) a

¹¹ For insiders' comments on the popularizing and monetizing dynamics leading to the demise of the Mars Hill organization, see "The Painful Lessons of Mars Hill: What can we learn from the collapse of Mark Driscoll's church?" by Ben Tertin, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2014/december-online-only/painful-lessons-of-mars-hill.html>, accessed August 6, 2018.

¹² <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2014/11/houston-mark-driscoll-megachurch-meltdown/382487/>, accessed August 6, 2018.

prevailing teaching and practice from the surrounding context (likely related to trade-guilds), which compromised the integrity of whole theology and practice. Significantly, their hybrid process was not simply an issue about syncretism, synthesizing competing ideologies, or even pluralism; and the issue also went beyond merely maintaining doctrinal purity...to the deeper issue about participation in (*en*) a surrounding context having the prevailing presence of reductionism and its subsequent influence on their perceptual-interpretive lens. Their lens, of course, determined what they ignored (or tolerated) and paid attention to, which shaped their practice.

Theologically, the Thyatira church demonstrated a weak view of sin, that is, sin without reductionism, consequently what they certainly must have considered good works was ‘good without wholeness’. Functionally, this exposes their lack of reciprocal relational involvement with God in the indispensable *ek-eis* [out of-into] reciprocating dynamic necessary to distinguish their whole identity as God’s family *en* the surrounding context without being fragmented by it in a hybrid process. What converges in a hybrid process is critical to listen to carefully and pay attention to closely: ‘sin without reductionism’ subtly composes ‘good without wholeness’, so that the church’s theology and practice are not distinguished whole in the world—though perhaps having longstanding, popular or uncompromising distinction in the surrounding context (as other churches demonstrated). To what extent does a hybrid process shape the global church today? Added attention needs to be paid to global South churches, who must adapt to a global economy, fixed cultural traditions, and even the spirit world. Yet, common practices by global North churches already demonstrate having absorbed the limits and constraints from the common into their theology and practice, although the hybrid process is much more subtle.¹³

A major claim made by complementarians against egalitarians is that the latter is influenced by Western culture’s emphasis on equality for females, rather than adhering to “biblical manhood and womanhood.” There’s a degree of truth in that claim, although complementarians also have no meaningful basis from which to judge. Still, churches embracing liberal and progressive views need to hear Jesus’ critiques to the church at Thyatira. The concerns for all marginalized groups and the need for radical change against all forms of discrimination are ones I certainly embrace, but not on the same basis as such churches. To be inclusive of persons who are ‘different’ and thus considered as less was Jesus’ practice, but there’s a critical difference to understand. Jesus only defined all persons in terms of their whole person from inner out created in the image of God—without partiality to any distinctions—whereas liberal and progressive churches define such persons *by* their non-gender human distinctions, which is a fragmentary theological anthropology. Conservative churches also define persons by their secondary human distinctions.

All the above churches receiving Jesus’ correction illustrate their focus on the secondary aspects of persons, thereby reflecting reduced theological anthropology and a weak view of sin, that is, sin without reductionism. Because of this, they all functioned in conflict with the Trinity’s whole ontology and function. Making the secondary the

¹³ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Global Church Engaging the Nature of Sin & the Human Condition*, 27-28.

primary determinant is antithetical to the wholeness and uncommonness of the whole-ly Trinity, which Jesus' wake-up alert to churches makes unmistakable. It is critical to churches today to understand that their practices are more likely than not merely illusions and simulations of the new creation church family. Even if the church uses many words such as relationships and intimacy, such language is mere 'churchspeak' without relational significance to God if their practice revolves around the secondary from outer in. Churches need unequivocal response to the relational imperative to listen to the Father's Son, and consider carefully what they hear; the Son's incisive words to the churches at Laodicea and Sardis are directly applicable for all the churches in existence today.

It's not surprising that many Christians' lenses don't pay attention to Jesus' critiques of the churches in Revelation 2-3—for example, there's much more interest in the heavenly worship scenes, from which many contemporary worship songwriters get their inspiration. At this urgent and pivotal time in church history, Jesus' relational language communicating the Trinity's family love needs to be heard, received and responded to. In light of current gender issues in the churches, consider why the church today needs to wake up:

Family love functions for the integrity of relationship together to be whole, and for accountability for anything less and any substitutes. Thus, Jesus' critiques were 'a critique of hope' in his call to be whole—a functional key in his involvement for ecclesiology to be God's whole family. When Jesus confronted them to “wake up,” the sense of this two-word combination (*gregoreuo* and *ginomai*, v.2) is to emerge as new, whole persons. This was not about self-determination but redemptive change—the relational imperative for transformation. They needed to be transformed in the inner-out aspects and functions (*metamorphoō*, the inward change of transformation) of the person and relationships, while being redeemed from the outer-in aspects and functions (*metaschēmatisō*) that did not give full importance to the qualitative function of the whole person (signified only by the heart) and the primacy of relationships together in likeness of “my God.” Their outer-in over inner-out way of defining themselves determined what they paid attention to in how they did relationships and how they practiced church—which were not complete but fragmentary and thus without wholeness. The Father makes it a relational imperative for us to “Listen to him *in his wake-up call.*”¹⁴

Illusions of Sacred Tradition and Good Intentions

From its inception, the early church combatted both heresy from outside and fragmentation (schism) from within, which the epistles address. This is relevant not as mere church history but for application to contemporary church practice. The second wave of church leaders, the Apostolic Fathers (1st-2nd C.) continued to face these challenges, and their writings attest to this constant conflict between the whole gospel of Christ and its reduction and distortion; the latter distorted theological anthropology by shifting the focus away from the primary to the secondary in the sin of reductionism (e.g.

¹⁴ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Global Church Engaging the Nature of Sin & the Human Condition*, 32.

by Gnosticism and Montanism).¹⁵ A few centuries later, the Church Fathers from roughly the 4th through 6th centuries wrote extensively to help the church continue to combat heresies, and here is where gender distinctions come to the fore with “theological” validation. These Fathers’ influence on the church’s gender equation has been immeasurable, and is sustained to this day. Patristic scholar Elizabeth A. Clark notes some context for their writings as pertain to women here:

Leaving aside other possible motivations for the Father’s exclusion of women from such offices [of priest or public teacher], we can note an historical one: from the second century on, various sects on the fringes of mainstream Christianity, often proclaimed to be heretical or schismatic by the Church, allowed women high leadership positions, including sacramental ones. Various Gnostic sects probably let women baptize. Charismatic movements that appealed to the Holy Spirit’s inspiration were also natural ones to allow women a larger role, for it could be argued that God did not discriminate sexually in distributing the *charismata*, the spiritual gifts. It is likely that the Catholic Church reacted to such sects, that were indeed a genuine danger to orthodox Christianity’s survival and power, by drawing firm lines of differentiation between the types of church office permitted to women in the sects and the offices and roles permitted women in the Catholic Church. When the Fathers cite Biblical verses depicting Jesus’ twelve male disciples as a justification for an all-male priesthood, we see that they are appealing to the norms of Palestinian Judaism as a sanction for the practices of later Christian churches in the larger Graeco-Roman world.¹⁶

These Fathers demonstrated both a bias from common-ization, and likewise made such distinctions against females—biases which I suggest they always had and were never redeemed from. Many of them strongly believed that the Fall was only Eve’s fault. One particularly negative statement came from Tertullian’s treatise addressed to women *On the Dress of Women*:

God’s judgment on this sex lives on in our age; the guilt necessarily lives on as well. *You* are the Devil’s gateway; *you* are the unsealer of that tree; *you* are the first foresaker of the divine law; *you* are the one who persuaded him whom the Devil was not brave enough to approach; *you* so lightly crushed the image of God, the man Adam; because of *your* punishment, that is, death, even the Son of God had to die. And you think to adorn yourself beyond your “tunics of skins” (Gen 3:21)?¹⁷

The Fathers believed that the order of creation constituted the basis for women’s submission to their husbands, a familiar argument made today by complementarians. As Clark notes:

¹⁵ For further study on these early Christian Fathers, see Cyril C. Richardson, ed., *Early Christian Fathers* (NY: Simon & Shuster, 1996).

¹⁶ Elizabeth A. Clark, *Women in the Early Church* (Collegeville, MN: 1983), 20-21.

¹⁷ Elizabeth A. Clark, *Women in the Early Church*, 39.

With the Fall, that subjection was only increased. The Fathers were nonetheless eager to assert that the subjection was actually for the good of human society and resulted in a happy complementarity of male and female roles.¹⁸

Also, some of these writers disparaged women as inferior in intellect and scholarly ability (notably Augustine).

The Fathers also had positive things to say about women, idealizing women in the NT who followed Jesus, as well as the Fathers' contemporaries who lived exemplary lives devoted to God—particularly some wealthy women who chose a life of asceticism. Asceticism was held out as a way that women could find freedom from the burden of marriage, yet, according to Clark, “the Fathers read the Scripture selectively to find legitimation for their advocacy of asceticism” for women.¹⁹

Because the Fathers highlighted these women, Clark allows that this reflected their ambivalence: “One undoubted manifestation of [their] ambivalence [toward women] lies in the Fathers’ selective appeal to the Bible.”²⁰ This fact—selective use of Scripture—exposes their bias in referentializing the Word from God to the Word of God, thereby ignoring the whole theological trajectory and relational path of the complete Christology of the gospel of wholeness. These Fathers vacillated widely in their comments (sounding like certain segments of the church practice today), as Clark summarizes:

Women who wholeheartedly dedicated their lives to such religious activities received extravagant accolades from the Fathers that provide a striking contrast to the denunciations many Fathers heaped on women in general.²¹

Their seemingly conflicting views about women (‘ambivalence’ is too irenic for the reality of the Fathers’ gender equation) are two sides of the same coin of gender-based distinctions, creating stereotypes of both females and males. Past and present, this conflicting position has rarely been apparent, much less resolved.

Because of the Fathers’ authority and influence on shaping the church, their misguided selectivity, and the gender distinctions they clearly made, this only further solidified the prevailing gender equation for females (and males) both throughout the church’s history and embedded in church tradition. The theological fog created by these early theologians has had disastrous effects for innumerable girls and women. These Fathers are indeed the forefathers of ‘the church of gender distinctions’, and the founders of church tradition that many churches today reinforce and sustain in likeness, whether intentionally or by default.

It is not surprising that complementarians appeal strongly to the Church Fathers to back up their own biases; it serves their interests to sustain the ancient theological fog created by selective appeal to Scripture. Complementarian churches (with their gender equation) try to be distinguished from the sociocultural context by adhering to inerrancy

¹⁸ Elizabeth A. Clark, *Women in the Early Church*, 21.

¹⁹ Elizabeth A. Clark, *Women in the Early Church*, 17.

²⁰ Elizabeth A. Clark, *Women in the Early Church*, 15.

²¹ Elizabeth A. Clark, *Women in the Early Church*, 17.

of the Bible for doctrinal purity. However, by reinforcing and sustaining gender distinctions in their male-dominated traditional gender equation, they have lost the primacy of relationship on God's relational terms (thus unaware of the relational) defined solely by God's relational terms of grace (thus biblical insensitivity). The insensitivity and unawareness of the primacy of whole persons and whole relationships is expressed by their gender equation that places females in subordinate status to males, which in the inevitable comparative process stratifies their persons and relationships.

In the Trinity's view, however, complementarians cannot continue to spin their fragmentary theological anthropology as the design and purpose for the creation of human persons. That is utterly false, incongruent, and incompatible with the original paragender equation of whole persons defined from inner out. What is true, however, is that biblical insensitivity and relational unawareness leaves those church members and relationships in the default relational condition, namely the inclusive sin of reductionism, which leaves persons in the inherent human condition "to be apart" from the whole of the Trinity.

Any appeal to preserving church tradition as sacred must be very specific about what is being affirmed, and what is to be rejected. Those segments of the global church who prioritize church tradition (as it includes gender distinctions, and any other secondary distinctions) are accountable for making human shaping the primary determinant for church identity and function. Therefore, when church leaders appeal to the sacred tradition of the church—whose founding Fathers established gender distinctions for the church—then those current leaders need to be held accountable for their incongruence and incompatibility with the whole gospel of Christ (not their version). In relational and functional terms, to call 'sacred' anything from human shaping that is incompatible and incongruent with God's relational whole is to be antithetical to the whole-ly Trinity's self-disclosures. In other words, 'holy' is often not synonymous with 'whole-ly' in church theology and practice.

As noted previously, egalitarians simply practice a more nuanced version of reduced human identity and function. Egalitarian intentions appear to be more in line with impartiality and against excluding persons as biblical principles. These good intentions—over against complementarian subordination of women—comprise the illusion of being more open to others who are 'different' and thus more loving. Simply stated, there is a whole lot of 'good' in egalitarian churches' ideals, which has failed to address their theological anthropology based on other distinctions. But, as Jesus critiqued the above four churches, good intentions mask 'sin without reductionism', and this subtle condition invariably leaves the shame of gender unresolved, and persons and relationships in the condition 'to be apart'. This brings us back to the old algorithm of the old gender equation lacking wholeness.

To reiterate Paul's incisive statement, it is only the wholeness of Christ that is to be the sole determinant of the church's identity and function (Col 3:15). All else is from human shaping, and good intentions do not have significance to God. Furthermore, the only thing that matters, as Paul stated emphatically and without equivocation, is the new creation of whole persons in intimate and equalized relationships (Gal 6:15); that is, our persons and relationships together function in the Trinity's image and likeness only in equalized and intimate relationships (2 Cor 3:18; Eph 2:19-22). For Paul, anything less was a different gospel, and any substitute was not the new creation.

Further Issues Common-izing the Church

There is a very fine line that the church has always had to walk between their uncommon identity and function in the Trinity's likeness, and the illusions of this likeness. Both complementarians and egalitarians blur this line because they still function with theological fog. For example, on one hand, complementarians blur the line with their referential lens of selective use of Scripture, and by articulating rules to follow that help earnest Christians know not only what to do, but are outer-in parameters defining so-called biblical femininity and masculinity. This structured primary identity and practice gives a sense of certainty and false sense of security about who they are, without having to face the inconvenience and uncertainty of being vulnerable before God and each other with their whole persons without those veils. As noted earlier, this intentional or default practice diminishes wholeness of persons and relationships, and keeps persons functioning in self-consciousness, with very distinct genderized practice in everyday life. An entire Christian culture of this nature is practiced as if gospel truth.

On another hand, many evangelicals today—including those in the academy—blur the line between the uncommon and common by their primary focus on participating in our sociocultural context, and participating in its spheres of influence (e.g. politics, media, business). The thinking is that Christ also engaged culture in order to transform it and to extend God's kingdom on earth (variably defined). The complementarian/egalitarian debates have roots in the question of engaging culture and politics, which consistently have neither addressed their tap root nor understood what that depth involves.

Politicizing Gender

Generally, complementarians are labeled as conservative, and egalitarians as liberal-progressive. While this would not be incorrect, it is problematic for the church in both its theology and practice. First, the association of conservative or liberal with a theology on gender becomes confused with political categories (e.g. right or left), which then conflates sociopolitical ideology with theology. This conflation is not a recent phenomenon in church history, but it prevails in the U.S. church to make indistinguishable the church's unique identity and function—unable to be distinguished in the theological fog. This politicizing of gender is inseparable from politicizing the church, having the same root sin of reductionism. Church leaders involved in politicizing the church are often involved in the deceptive practice of claiming to promote God's agenda in the broader culture. That is, they claim (falsely) to have a spiritual mandate to influence culture and society, thereby to spread God's kingdom on earth. It is a false claim because Jesus expressly declared that his kingdom is not of this earth but is distinguished from it (Jn 18:36), not to be confused with living in this world (Jn 17:16-19).

Second, the politicizing of gender also impacts church practice. Without being distinguished in the unique identity and function of the church embodied by Jesus, the church is reduced to a voluntary association of likeminded individuals. Churches become occupied by mainly those who think and act alike, and church growth takes place accordingly. In other words, the church's identity and function are like most other

associations, organizations, and institutions common to the human context. Some may argue that this church practice is valid as long as the church's integrity is not compromised. But that in fact is the problem here. The church has not only been politicized but more deeply been common-ized. The church, the whole and uncommon church, whose identity and function are distinguished only in likeness of the Trinity, has relinquished its whole-ly integrity (cf. "forsaken your first love, Rev 2:4) for that which is merely common—that is, reduced and fragmentary, albeit in the name of Christ (cf. Mt 7:21-23).

The third and obvious consequence for the general population is the divided and distorted witness the fragmented church gives. The politicization of gender and church creates confusion or even barriers for persons who want to know the one true God but find themselves having to associate with a politicized group in conflict with 'the other side', a division that they may find to be completely distasteful. Not to mention that any fragmented church presents a common-ized God in place of the whole-ly Trinity who cannot be shaped by human biases, political and otherwise. The current Federal government leadership counts Christians among its prominent leaders and influencers, whose self-interests are so obvious, to the detriment of the church's witness of God and God's church. Who holds whom accountable, and on what basis?

Furthermore, and closer to home, for the church's persons and relationships, the gender equation unfolding in this consequential politicizing process leaves unresolved the *bôsh* intrinsic to the sin of reductionism, rendering persons to the relational condition "to be apart." And the church and its persons and relationships will continue in this human condition— "Wake up! I have not found your works complete *by God's lens* (Rev 3:2)—until its theological anthropology is restored to whole ontology and function "just as we are one" (Jn 17:22).

Inherent in politicizing gender is the use and abuse of power and influence. Church leaders in particular are accountable for their misuse of power and influence, which has been tied to many of the cases of sexual abuse and harassment of females. Recent popular church leaders who have gained political status in the public sphere have also been woefully compromised in their integrity—not least of which is their disparaging treatment of women, or silence when their peers treat women hurtfully. It is impossible to separate their sexist actions from their politics, for upon close examination, it appears that most of the time the two go hand in hand. Even in the absence of overt actions of sexism, the benevolent sexism in churches renders females (and some males) to the condition of lost or wandering lambs (discussed in Chap. 2). Such church leaders and their churches will continue to misrepresent who, what, and how the Trinity is, and the good news of the gospel.

A prominent example of the politicizing of gender in the U.S. is the unfinished journey of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), which would guarantee equal rights in the Constitution for all persons regardless of sex. First proposed in 1921, the most recent version proposed in 1972 states:

Section 1. Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.

Section 2. The Congress shall have the power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article.

Section 3. This amendment shall take effect two years after the date of ratification.

This is a politicized issue about civil rights of all persons; and it is a current topic of conversation because the #MeToo campaign has exposed the need for a Constitutional basis for lawsuits against perpetrators of sexual violence and discrimination. The ERA would provide that basis. Christians supporting the ERA are, of course, those considered to be left and progressive (e.g. Evangelical and Ecumenical Women's Caucus, a.k.a. Christian Feminists Today). Persons against the ERA are politically right and conservative, although it's difficult to find any position statements by specifically *Christian* conservatives.²² Phyllis Schlafly's well-known successful campaign against the ratification of the ERA is not specifically theologically based, but her arguments are clearly ones that conservative Christians affirm for their traditional family values.

Despite some gains for females in the U.S. in terms of equal opportunities (e.g. higher education), such as the increasing numbers of women making headway into traditionally all-male jobs, sexism still pervades this society. This is reflected in the fact that whatever gains women make, there is always powerful backlash. Backlash in the contemporary U.S. politicized gender climate—which includes LGBTQ issues—concurrently takes place in the church (e.g. the emergence of CBMW to counter evangelical feminism in the 1970s). Since that time, evangelicals have become so polarized that some (notably less conservative evangelicals) don't want to be associated with the name 'evangelical' any longer due to the name's association with the Christian right's politics. Common-ization is killing the uncommon roots that should determine the Western church. We urgently need God's perspective and correction.

The politicizing of gender by the church is, of course, inextricable from the culturizing of gender, the latter of which has gone on since the primordial garden. Culture in the human context is the various expressions in everyday life of human-determined theological anthropology, evolving over generations, and forming societies' identities. The fact that the spheres of influence in the human context pivot on gender distinctions leads gender sociologist Michael Kimmel to ask:

Why is it that virtually every known society is also based on male dominance? Why does virtually every society divide social, political, and economic resources unequally between the genders? And why is it that men always get more?²³

Kimmel's questions are relevant and urgently need to be asked of the common-ized global church.

The deeper issue is, to reiterate, the common-ization of the church by its involvement in using these gender distinctions as the primary determinant to define persons and relationships in church practices. Human contextualization of gender prevails in the church to render the church incompatible and incongruent with God's paragender creation and new creation in Christ, and will continue to prevail until the church is de-contextualized from the primacy of human shaping of gender, and recontextualized in the

²² For arguments for the ERA, see <http://www.equalrightsamendment.org/>. For the conservative arguments against the ERA, see The Eagle Forum, the Phyllis Schlafly Report online at <https://eagleforum.org/psr/1986/sept86/psrsep86.html>.

²³ Michael J. Kimmel, *The Gendered Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 2.

Trinity's relational context and relational process, embodied by the Word. This is the relational outcome of Jesus' dynamic of *reciprocating contextualization* (noted previously), or, to use Jesus' words in prayer to the Father, "for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth" (Jn 17:19).

Reciprocating contextualization is discussed further below, but we first must make the necessary connection of gender equations with race (and ethnicity). A commonized church, which unavoidably reinforces and sustains incompatible and incongruent gender equations, without question also reinforces and sustains the human distinctions of race and racial discrimination. With globalization of the world, the church has been increasingly struggling with racial divides and bridging these divides because we're all coming face to face with more and more others who are racially/ethnically different from 'us', along with economic and religious differences. Thus, we need to understand that common-ized churches cannot or will not—intentionally or unintentionally—bring about racial reconciliation, even with stated intentions promoting it.

Gender and Race/Ethnicity

We need to highlight the parallel between incongruent and incompatible gender equations and the divisions based on race and ethnicity in U.S. churches. There are gender equations, and there are race equations. The prevailing race equations make clear distinctions among various people groups based on skin color and ethnicity. (Note: for the rest of this section, I use 'race' as shorthand for 'race and ethnicity' for the sake of simplicity). Efforts at racial reconciliation rarely if ever get below the surface of racial distinctions shaping persons' own identity and function, as well as their views of the 'other'. Just recently the New York Times featured an article about black worshipers leaving white evangelical churches, basically because racial distinctions keep emerging from white members (notably since the 2016 presidential election) to the extent that they don't feel they belong.²⁴ In one church, some black worshipers initially liked a church that was majority white, but when the pastor wholeheartedly endorsed a racist presidential candidate on the grounds that he represented the values that his church did, these black sisters and brothers deeply felt the relational condition "to be apart" in that church.

Yet, the issues here are twofold, as in two sides of the same coin, just like the complementarian/egalitarian coin. On one side are white evangelicals who are biased and discriminate against persons of color function in the comparative process of better-less, taking the position of 'better' for themselves. This racism can be overt (hostile racism) or covert (benign racism, as in paternalism). On the other side are persons of color, who want to be treated as equal—equal opportunities, equal pay, and the like—just as egalitarians want for women. These persons of color may or may not attend racially segregated churches; they may intentionally work to create multicultural churches.

As with gender, the 'same coin' that all these persons inhabit is the pervasive distinction-making based on human differences. That is, the secondary distinctions constitute these persons' identity and function, which includes viewing all others with

²⁴ Campbell Robertson, "A Quiet Exodus: Why Black Worshipers Are Leaving White Evangelical Churches." Online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/09/us/blacks-evangelical-churches.html>, posted March 9, 2018.

this same lens focused with priority on the ‘outer’. It is as incongruent and incompatible with wholeness to give primacy to these secondary criteria to constitute our identity and function as it is to use gender distinctions. Again, they share the same tap root sin of reductionism; that is, the same coin is fragmentary theological anthropology and pervasiveness of the sin of reductionism.

This coin has various other expressions of good intentions. Churches seeking to integrate racially-ethnically have good intentions, trying to bridge this gap, especially in diverse communities. These churches are likely also concerned about the divisiveness in the church as a whole, and want church to look more like heaven, citing the vision of worship (Rev 7:9-10). Then there are those who prefer segregated churches for one of a number of reasons: (1) Some persons feel more comfortable or at home with ‘their own kind’; (2) some persons experienced discrimination in other contexts and seek the comfort and healing in a safe space—which means to be among their own kind also; (3) still others congregate based on language and country of origin due to the need for social support in a new country—which may be a necessary interim situation, but must not be permanent.

The church cannot address only one ‘-ism’ and expect transformation to wholeness from inner out. This is the challenge and fight Paul was devoted to: the fight against reductionism and for the whole of God’s new creation church family.

Racial reconciliation is a false hope held out by many well-intentioned Christians (and non-Christians). It is a false hope because persons who have not been redeemed from their identities based on the secondary fragment of race/ethnicity—and this is true for all sides—cannot make the deep vulnerable relational connection that constitutes reconciliation of the gospel of wholeness, namely redemptive reconciliation. Just as persons who haven’t been redeemed from gender distinctions cannot be reconciled with the reconciliation of the new creation, so too persons whose primary identity and function are defined and determined by race do not experience redemptive reconciliation of the new creation (as Paul clarifies, 2 Cor 5:16-20; Eph 2:14-22). This is a difficult reality to embrace by Christians with high hopes. This is where the bold reality of the Word from God is necessary to cut through any virtual reality in our thinking and action (as in Mt 10:34-36). For the wholeness of Christ to be our reality, it can only emerge from the relational reconciliation between persons from inner out. Anything less results in only simulation or illusions.

Though this study focuses on gender distinctions, to be paragender—by the nature of wholeness—must encompass all such secondary distinctions. That is, for our theological anthropology to be transformed whole and uncommon from inner out, it is imperative for the church to repent of its sin of reductionism in all its expressions in order to experience the redemptive reconciliation of transformation. Only then will it be able to emerge in wholeness of persons and relationships together in the image and likeness of the whole-ly Trinity.

Sanctifying Contextualization

Perhaps the most critical lesson for our transformation is the relational truth in Jesus' words: "For their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in the truth" (Jn 17:19). It's true that Jesus interacted with political structures and religious culture of God's chosen people, less so with the Greco-Roman structures, although the latter came with the territory of his theological trajectory and intrusive relational path. How Jesus interacted while in the human context is the key for us to understand the difference between being contextualized by it in common contextualization, and his uncommon dynamic of reciprocating contextualization.

Christian leaders (e.g. in missiology, ecclesiology, and worship leaders) commonly say that Jesus' incarnation contextualized the gospel in the human context. This can be confusing. When persons make such statements, they tend to mean that Jesus shaped his message into the cultural forms familiar to his hearers—for example, by using parables about farming and shepherding—so that they could relate to his teachings. The problem with this approach is that secondary aspects of culture unavoidably become primary, and shape the message. U.S. churches engage in essentially the same practice by contextualizing the gospel to a consumerist, technology-savvy, and entertainment seeking population. This approach is always susceptible to common-izing the gospel, notably the incomplete Christology and truncated salvation discussed in Chapter 3. The reductionism may be perceived as the lack of qualitative substance, either clearly perceived, or as a nagging feeling of "something's missing."

Jesus did not contextualize his message in the above manner, because while he was 'in the world' his primary context was always in the Trinity's relational context and relational process. It is *from* this primary relational context and relational process, that Jesus functioned *in* the world, but not *of* the world (not defined or determined by human shaping, Jn 17:14-19)—though the world (including his disciples) tried, unsuccessfully, to shape him to fit their biases. This relational dynamic is what defined his whole person and determined his involvement—in the relational process of *triangulation* (as in navigation using the North Star) and *reciprocating contextualization*:

The primacy of relational involvement with our Father is the guiding point of reference for the function of our primary identity in the surrounding contexts and in relationships with persons in those contexts, including in his kingdom-family. Furthermore, this involvement is the dynamic necessary for Jesus' followers to embody *the reciprocating contextualization* to clearly both be whole and make whole without being co-opted by human contextualization.²⁵

With reciprocating contextualization, Jesus connects us to an even greater context and an even deeper process of life and practice beyond the limits of sociology...to the theological anthropology which coheres with the embodied light. As the light, Jesus functioned to embody the relational design and purpose of the human person created in the image of (and his relational context in) the whole of God, and he

²⁵ T. Dave Matsuo, *Jesus into Paul: Embodying the Theology and Hermeneutic of the Whole Gospel* (Integration Study, 2012). Online at <http://www.4X12.org>, 129.

embodied the function of the relational ontology of human persons together created in likeness of (and his relational process with) the Trinity. This involves going further than moral ideals, values and virtues, and deeper than ethical character and conduct, to engage human persons together not only for optimal function but for the ongoing relationships in everyday life and practice necessary together to be whole, God's whole.²⁶

... [W]hat prevails in (*en*) any context of the world is reductionism. Jesus calls his followers relationally out of (*ek*) these contexts in order to be whole together as his family, then also relationally sends them back into (*eis*) those surrounding contexts to live whole together as his family and to make whole the human condition (as defined in his formative family prayer, Jn 17). Without the reciprocating dynamic of this *ek-eis* relational involvement, church practice is functionally based on just *en* (in) the surrounding context and thereby shaped in its influence. Modern contextualization of the gospel, for example, has not made this distinction and thus has been subject to reductionism. This is problematic in function for the ongoing relational involvement with the whole of God and God's terms to constitute the whole of who we are as church and whose we are.

Without the ongoing function of the reciprocating *ek-eis* relational involvement, there is no engagement of a culture's life and practice in the surrounding context with the necessary process of reciprocating contextualization. In conjoint function with triangulation, reciprocating contextualization provides the relational process imperative for the qualitatively distinguished identity of a church to function in the surrounding context without being defined or determined by what prevails in that context, even in its culture. That is to say, without this reciprocating relational process in church practice, there is no consistent functional basis to negate the influence of reductionism. This leaves church practice susceptible to subtle embedding in the surrounding context, or engaging in ontological simulation and epistemological illusion, despite the presence of apparent indicators of important church practices illuminating its identity.²⁷

Relational triangulation and reciprocating contextualization are nonnegotiable for the church to be 'sanctified', which means to be uncommon-ized—made holy by being set apart from the common's identity and function. Jesus embodied this sanctification conclusively during his incarnation, for our sakes to also be uncommon-ized just as Jesus was (Jn 17:19). The church needs to understand that sanctification is not a mysterious process that 'somehow' takes place inside a person after being 'saved'. It doesn't happen by regular church attendance and participation in Communion, that is, if persons participate without the submission of their whole persons to the Trinity's whole relational terms. Just as Jesus was notably distinguished and different from others while in the world, so too we are to be distinguished and different—whole-ly defined and determined in our identity and function as paragenders, vulnerably involved in the primary relational context and process of the Trinity—while *sent* into the world to be and live whole-ly in

²⁶ T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology: A Theological & Functional Study of the Whole of Jesus* (Christology Study, 2008). Online at <http://www.4X12.org>, 205.

²⁷ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Gospel of Transformation: Distinguishing the Discipleship and Ecclesiology Integral to Salvation* (Transformation Study, 2015). Online at <http://www.4X12.org>, 305-306.

order for the world to receive the whole gospel (Jn 17:21-23).

The unaltered reality for the global church is that Christ's sanctified identity and function comprise a minority identity while he was in the world. Neither enhanced nor idealized, his essential minority identity is our identity and function also to embody as we are sent into the world just as Jesus was. Therefore, church, hear Jesus' wake-up alert! Persons who want to be just like everyone else (as my mother wanted her kids to be) or merely don't want to be marginalized will remain in their majority identity, fragmented in gender distinctions, along with all the other human distinctions that the world makes. The choice between these two identities places the church before the narrow gate and its narrow road leading to life, or the wide gate and its comfortable and convenient road that leads in the status quo of the human condition (Mt 7:13-14).

II. The New Creation Paragender Church

To begin this final section of the study, it is helpful to review the significance of the paragender equation as the only equation that necessarily defines persons and determines relationships by the nature of the Trinity's new creation family. This is the only valid alternative to human shaping in the question posed at this chapter's outset: Do we as the church gather in likeness of human shaping, or in likeness of the Trinity? The original persons were created in the image and likeness of the Trinity. God as Subject (not mere Object) transcends gender—God is neither defined nor determined by the limits of gender—and we were created as subject persons in God's likeness yet created with biological sex, though not as gendered objects. Thus, the original 'male and female' were persons as paragender subjects. **Paragenders** are: (1) *beyond* gender, meaning they are persons whose identity and function are beyond the limits and constraints of gender, and (2) integrally *beside* gender, in that gender is only a secondary reality in everyday life, and always integrated into the primacy of whole relationship with God and each other. Paragenders' identity and function are integrated from inner out, which puts their biological sex into whole perspective as only a secondary reality. Anything less than paragender fragments identity and function by gender, which becomes the default equation in likeness of human shaping.

Now in the new creation reality (that has yet to become the churches' experiential truth), the prevailing gender distinctions of 'male and female' also are not to define and determine persons' identity and function. This has nothing to do with being asexual, or unisex (which I can well imagine Paul has been accused of saying), but has everything to do with being transformed to the wholeness of our person that God originally created and recreated new by Jesus' relational work of salvation—the complete soteriology (not truncated) that both redeems us from the sin of reductionism and inseparably saved us to the Trinity's wholeness and well-being (*shalôm*).

Paragenders and paragenderism are presented in this study for the global church to examine and weigh with open hearts and minds as the only valid alternative for our theological anthropology (identity and function) to be whole from inner out, just as the Trinity created the original human persons in the image and likeness of the Trinity. Paragender identity and function are antithetical to the fragmenting distinction-making

process based on gender (sexism) that pervades human life today, the latter which egalitarians and complementarians have yet to counter at its tap root. Experiencing God's relational grace as the basis for human theological anthropology to be whole in the image and likeness of the Trinity in the primacy of relationship together, paragenderism integrally resolves all distinctions that exist in human contexts (racism, ethnocentrism, ageism, able-ism, etc.) based on secondary human differences, because these all come from the shared tap root of reductionism (refer to Chap. 3, Fig 1).

The new creation paragender church family is the gathering of persons who (1) are redeemed from their fragmented identity and function (the sin of reductionism), and (2) take their place of belonging in the Trinity's whole relational context and process in family love to which we are saved—the relational outcome of the whole gospel composing complete salvation. Nothing less than complete salvation in these distinguished relational terms can bring the church to its whole and uncommon life together; and anything less is common-ized and thus fragmentary. As Jesus made definitive of his family gathering, “Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven *composes together my uncommon family*” (Mt 12:50). The “will of my Father” (*thelēma*) signifies nothing less than the Father's deepest desire, the fulfillment of which brings the Father—indeed the whole Trinity—pleasure and joy (as in Ps 147:10-11).

I can imagine that persons reading these pages will balk at the very idea of ‘paragender’—the idea that we can and need to be beyond and beside gender. But keep in mind that the distinction of gender was the first human distinction resulting from the original sin of reductionism in the primordial garden, thus burdening all humans thereafter with the shame of gender. The new creation in Christ penetrates this reality, and distinguishes its wholeness from this original evil and its shame. Therefore, churches' leaders and members who are uncomfortable, even resistant to Jesus' relational imperatives necessary to constitute his family, and thereby to please the Father, still need to become vulnerable and humble their persons before Jesus without the veil of distinctions, to let Jesus wash their feet. He is waiting, and asking “Where are you?” and “Do you love me?”

Circumcised, Genderized, or Uncommon-ized

We have biblical record of the difficulty the early church had shifting from being contextualized in the common practice of making distinctions to the relational process of reciprocating contextualization in the Trinity's relational context and process. In the earliest beginnings of the church, a dispute emerged among its members because the needs of the Hellenists were being ignored by the Hebrews (Acts 6:1). This exposed a critical issue existing in the church centered on distinction-making based on secondary practices of two groups of believers. The persons first responding to the gospel were from the Jewish people—of the Trinity's theological trajectory in the human context establishing Jesus' human lineage. Among them were the Judaizers, or “circumcision faction,” (Acts 11:2; 15:1,5; Gal 2:12), who held fast to the Law of Moses. The defining bias of those distinctions favored circumcision and kosher practices, which the circumcised believers tried to make requisite to be saved, and thus for church membership.

Peter, the leading church leader, had this bias and openly practiced its underlying theological anthropology of defining his person on the basis of secondary outer-in criteria (discussed previously). Therefore, by necessity Jesus corrected Peter's theology and bias (Acts 10:13-16)—which he had clarified earlier for his disciples (Mk 7:17-19)—in order for the church to have defining change, because God makes no distinctions between persons but defines persons only from inner out (Acts 15:1-11). Peter needed to be corrected by Jesus, and later by Paul, because Peter hadn't vulnerably involved his person in the relational dynamic of triangulation and reciprocating contextualization, by which secondary distinctions would not have defined and determined Peter's practice.

In contrast, Paul was unambiguously defined and determined by the Trinity's relational context and process, and thus unequivocally put secondary distinctions into perspective in his claim that "neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation *defined only from inner out* is everything!" (Gal 6:15). While the circumcised church slowly changed from this point, other human distinctions still prevailed, with gender the most prominent. But the fact that gender continued pervasively in church history might indicate something about the early church's halt of the practice circumcision, and where the church has been contextualized.

I suggest that the practice circumcision was an easier bias to change than gender biases were, because it is easier to stop an overtly 'outer' practice just by not doing it anymore. In fact, Gentiles didn't have this practice to begin with and still engaged in its underlying reduced function. However, Paul's point is critical; that is, not circumcising has no significance either (as Paul stated, Gal 6:15) because it was always a secondary issue for God. For God, "real circumcision is a matter of the heart" (Rom 2:28; Dt 30:6; 10:16; cf. Lev 26:41). That is, circumcision in OT times was only a secondary 'sign' of being relationally submitted to God's irreducible terms for the covenant relationship together, thus to integrate their identity and function from inner out—and thereby to be set apart as the uncommon people of the uncommon God (the significance of consecration, Ex 13:2; 29:36).

The genderized church has yet to make significant change analogous to the circumcision issue. This is not surprising, but signals the persistence of reductionism in the church throughout its history, even though circumcision is now absent from the church. No doubt all along the journey of the church, reductionism is rejected when recognized, but just re-emerges whenever churches are swayed by subtle illusions and simulations, and cross that fine line between God's uncommon whole relational terms and the human shaping of the words of God. Egalitarians need to take note here. They certainly have the right idea that women can serve in any capacity in church life, and should not be prohibited from doing so on account of their female gender—which is, of course, discrimination. Yet because they are shaped more by other distinctions (such as abilities and resources) from the human context than reciprocating contextualization in the Trinity, their illusion of 'good without wholeness' leaves them susceptible to the deeper human shaping of their churches' life and practice; and in the simulations from distinction-making, it is inevitable that gender distinctions will again resurge at some point. The reason that evangelicals keep witnessing the push for women as senior pastors as taking one step forward and two steps back—or being all the way back at step one—is because illusions of 'good without wholeness' have a shaky foundation to begin with and at best can only simulate the church family.

The tap root of reductionism from Satan is always present to counter wholeness of persons and relationships, and when allowed to remain, hidden behind a veil of distinctions and its simulations, it will always eventually give rise to any form of distinction-making. This is also the dynamic behind the persistence of racial/ethnic divisions fragmenting the church.

Jesus' alert to "Wake up" is ongoing for all of us to pay attention and to respond to God's relational imperative of the heart's vulnerable involvement for the wholeness of persons and their relationships together (with God and corporately with each other). Indeed the whole-ly Trinity has not wavered over the millennia as to what constitutes uncommon-ization of human persons and relationships to be God's very own family, the living dwelling for the Trinity. Just as the LORD told the ancient high priest to distinguish between the common and the uncommon (Lev 10:10), so too does Jesus expect all of us comprising "a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" to distinguish between the common and uncommon, and "be uncommon, for I am uncommon"—as Peter declared decisively in his new uncommon-ized identity and function (1 Pet 2:9; 1:16).

What Peter eventually learned is that he needed to submit ongoingly to Jesus' relational terms and be established in reciprocating contextualization for his own identity and function to be uncommon-ized. For Peter, this meant being freed from his self-consciousness from *bôsh* (cf. 3:13-16,21). And he would also learn that this required his active (not passive) and ongoing relational commitment of discipline to be whole-ly (1 Pet 1:13; 5:8). I am thankful for Peter's life, for I readily relate to and have learned from his journey.

These are the relational terms necessary to gather in likeness of the Trinity as the *uncommon-ized church*. To paraphrase Paul's heart-felt and urgently stated new creation principle—*neither masculinity nor femininity is anything*; but the new creation of *paragender wholeness* is everything! This is the defining rule of faith essential for the church to be whole-ly (Gal 6:15-16; Col 3:15).

These are among the theological realities for us to weave together in our understanding, in order for us to know how to make functional this new identity as the Trinity's new creation paragender family. We are faced with life-changing realities that have eluded Christian theology and practice for too long because of the theological fog creating in us insensitivity to the qualitative and unawareness of the relational. The process involved in this transformation from our old gender equations to our new paragender identity is, thankfully, only a *relational* process, for which the Spirit dwells in our hearts for the primary purpose to be involved in reciprocal relationship together both individually and corporately. We are no longer relational orphans having to figure things out alone, no longer apart from God our Father, Jesus, and the Spirit.

For this new life, we must "be born again" (i.e. born from above, Jn 3:3,6-7), signifying being redefined from inner out as paragenders and therefore no longer defined by the limits and constraints of gender and any other secondary human distinction. To be 'in Christ' means our identity as paragenders is the experiential truth of having died to the old and raised new by following Jesus behind the curtain that his death 'tore open' for full access to the whole-ly Trinity in face-to-face relationship without the barriers of the veil (2 Cor 3:16-18; 4:4-6). The relational belonging of adoption (Eph 1:4-14) is to be paragender; our familial references as daughters and sons, sisters and brothers

acknowledge that we have gender—yet all subsumed under the shared primary identity as the Trinity’s new creation family (Jn 1:12; 8:35; 2 Cor 5:17). In other words, hers and his are equally integrated to become h-e-i-r-s, ‘heirs’ together belonging as family (Rom 8:15-17).

Being the new creation family is the integrally interrelated life of paragenders in equalized and intimate relationships together, illuminating the paragender equation of wholeness on God’s irreducible and nonnegotiable relational terms of grace. That is, paragenders together compose the new creation family in likeness of the Father, Son, Spirit, and in congruence with the Trinity make no distinctions among ourselves as daughters and sons, sisters and brothers. It must be apparent by now that the process of uncommon-ization (i.e. sanctification, also consecration) conflicts with the common perception of vague ethereal and even dualistic senses enshrouded in theological fog (as in Gnosticism), because it is distinguished only as the experiential relational reality for any of us to participate in, individually and collectively. We, as person without distinctions, are active subjects (not gendered objects) participating in our uncommon-ization, which can take place only in our corporate relationships together.

One initial step the church needs to take is to embrace how God views the shame of gender.

Demonizing the *Bôsh* of Gender

In the primordial garden, the shame (*bôsh*) of gender was demonized because it presented opposition to God’s created whole for persons and relationships (cf. Col 1:21). This shame has largely submerged while other, more sensational notions of sin (e.g. rape, murder, genocide, human trafficking) are demonized in our understanding. Even less sensationalized notions of sin (e.g. drunkenness, addictions, theft, lying, cheating) get more visibility than the shame of gender. This shift in focus has led to submerging this shame, which has then been adapted in the church by norm-alizing its condition as acceptable or, at least, tolerable—and more individualized than understood for its relational consequences. The gender equation that evolved in the church has rendered *bôsh* as either insignificant or redefining its meaning for human life. Perhaps not surprisingly, what evolved in the church emerges from the church either ignoring the reality (not necessarily the history) of the relational consequences from the primordial garden, or not understanding its dynamics still unfolding today.

The gender distinction was demonized in the primordial garden (not in creation, but later in the garden) because it conflicted with human persons created in the image of the Trinity. That is, reductionism influenced human persons into a paradigm shift that refocused their primary identity and function to their secondary human distinctions, thereby obliterating wholeness from their awareness. Ever since, the defining influence of reductionism has gotten lost in persons’ awareness because the definition of sin has evolved into many things other than reductionism. Equally important, the shame resulting from reductionism’s influence is obscured when the theological anthropology used for persons and relationships is fragmentary, reduced, and thus not whole. Indeed, the argument can be made that shame and its partner fear together underlie all the other sins. Thus it is a travesty in the church that the shame of gender is overlooked or ignored.

The church throughout human history has operated with a weak view of sin and a reduced theological anthropology, and the consequence has been subtle variations that fail to demonize gender as having distinctly emerged from the primordial garden. Thus, the gender equations defining the church today, both locally and globally, should not be surprising. It should also not be surprising to egalitarians and complementarians that they enable the *bôsh* of gender since they haven't demonized it and its interrelated distinctions.

That's *what* emerged from the primordial garden and this is *who* will continue to evolve in the church—that is, until redemptive change takes place in the church and transformation unfolds with paragenders constituting its persons from inner out and its relationships both equalized and intimate in the whole-ly likeness of the Trinity. This outcome, however, will not emerge without an ongoing fight with *what* and *who* counters it. Only paragender will disable the existing gender condition in the church, because only paragender demonizes gender in its fragmentary condition of reduced identity and function.

Therefore, the church must, by its new creation nature, be the most vigorous opponent of reductionism. Like Paul, the church is integrally engaged in the vigorous fight *against* all forms of reductionism and *for* the wholeness of Jesus' gospel. If the church doesn't fight all out against reductionism first within itself and then in the world, the gospel it claims is diminished, distorted, or simply "no gospel at all" (Gal 1:7, NIV). Likewise, if the church doesn't fight all out for wholeness, both in its persons and its relationships, then the gospel it proclaims is diminished, distorted, or, again, simply no gospel at all.

The integral fight *against and for* is nonnegotiable for the church. When the church renegotiates its view of sin to minimize reductionism or ignore it, the church's theological anthropology renders its persons and relationships in reduced ontology and function—contrary to creation, in conflict with the new creation, and incomplete with the defining presence and determining involvement of the Trinity. The relational consequence is that (1) gender continues to impose its constraints on church identity and function, and (2) the church equations for life together are limited to the secondary at best. This leaves the church fragmented in the relational condition "to be apart," thus unable to be whole. Whatever its theology, the reality of church identity and function is that it reflects, reinforces, and even sustains the human condition. And the human condition cannot resolve its skewed and harmful orders of relationships based on comparative processes and power relations, which the church currently is guilty of engaging in, even while promoting, for example, peace and justice.

It was noted in Chapter 2 that the integral human need of all persons is "to fulfill and to be fulfilled in the created make-up of the human person" in the primacy of relationships together in likeness of the Creator. This composes our human need-rights (vested rights), the fulfillment of which is only in the primacy of face-to-face relationship with God and each other in *just-nection*. It is worth repeating here for the new creation family to understand and embrace that just-nection is:

the *right* order of relationship together created by the Subject God for subject persons having the *right* relational connection in his likeness—the relational connection required for justice of the human order; therefore, God's justice is

distinguished and God's peace is experienced just in this relational dynamic of just-nection.²⁸

Accordingly, Subject God made the Sabbath holy in order to perspicuously distinguish the uncommon from the common prevailing—and notably preoccupying us in the secondary—in everyday human life.²⁹

Just-nection further highlights that justice in God's perspective determines the depth and breadth of the church's integral fight for and against, that is, the fight by paragenders for paragenderism and against anything less than the paragender equation, whose fulfillment is for the whole of human creation. The relational outcome for the new creation paragender family is the whole identity and function of human persons in likeness of the original paragenders at creation, but now in the new creation, who live every day without the veil of *bôsh*. In this new identity only—having demonized *bôsh* and being redeemed from it—can the church function whole-ly to restore us to the image and likeness of the Trinity. Only this identity and function distinguish the relational outcome of Jesus' gospel of wholeness (just as Paul illuminated, Eph 2:14-22, and prayed for 3:14-21). The church's purpose today is determined by nothing less and no substitutes for this wholeness, and anything less and any substitutes for its integral fight disables its purpose of just-nection, and enables the inherent injustice of the *bôsh* of gender.

Further Qualification of Redemptive Reconciliation

In the previous section, redemptive reconciliation was addressed in the context of churches working for racial reconciliation. It is vital for us to dig deeper into what is required for redemptive reconciliation. If reconciliation is to be distinguished in the new creation, then reconciliation must go beyond a common understanding deeper than currently witnessed. That is, reconciliation has to be whole-ly—the whole and uncommon relational outcome from Jesus' gospel (not our versions of it). Reconciliation between human persons is only redemptive if those persons are redeemed (from the sin of reductionism) and reconciled back to God in relationship together on only God's relational terms. This is the only legitimate functional basis for reconciliation among all human persons who have been in distant, even broken, relationships due to gender, racial, and all other human distinctions. Therefore:

Theologically, redemption and reconciliation are inseparable; and the integral function of **redemptive reconciliation** is the relational outcome of being saved to the whole-ly Trinity's family with the veil removed to eliminate any relational separation or distance (as Paul clarified, Eph 2:14-22).³⁰

²⁸ T. Dave Matsuo, *Jesus' Gospel of Essential Justice: The Human Order from Creation through Complete Salvation* (Justice Study, 2018). Online at <http://4X12.org>, 139.

²⁹ T. Dave Matsuo, *Jesus' Gospel of Essential Justice*, 59.

³⁰ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Disciples of Whole Theology and Practice: Following the Diversity of Reformation or the Wholeness of Transformation* (Whole-ly Disciples Study, 2017). Online at <http://4X12.org>, 82.

Accordingly, redemptive reconciliation is not a reality that takes place between two or more incompatible parts functioning with the veil covering the shame of *bôsh*. Redemptive reconciliation is only a reality for those who have been redeemed from their reductionism—however they have been reduced and fragmented—and are whole persons who function vulnerably from inner out without the veil, in intimate and equalized relationships. While degrees of harmony may be achieved between persons with distinctions, that should not be confused with redemptive reconciliation. Truly coming together is the process of redemptive reconciliation that transforms persons and relationships to wholeness in likeness of the Trinity, which only means these are whole persons together in relationships that are distinguished as intimate and equalized relationships. These indeed are uncommon relationships that distinguish the church as **the reconciling transformer**. Reconciliation of anything less or any substitutes for this qualitative depth of coming together will not distinguish the church as the reconciling transformer, but, at best, will identify the church as a distinct peacemaker for the common good—all distinctly without wholeness.

To further clarify the depth and transforming relational dynamic of redemptive reconciliation is that to be thus reconciled—both with God and all together as the new creation—is the unmistakable relational involvement that Jesus identified as *the* distinguishing quality of his disciples: loving each other just as Jesus has loved us, just as the Father loved him (Jn 13:34-35; 15:9-10,12). Jesus embodied this love as the qualitative depth of his vulnerable relational involvement with persons, which he enacted often even intrusively and to others' discomfort. Yet his disciples experienced Jesus' person presented to them at this depth in order to have their inherent need fulfilled in redemptive reconciliation with the Trinity. Love and redemptive reconciliation together compose God's relational involvement of the Trinitarian relational process of family love—that is, the trinitarian persons reaching out and bringing human persons into their own relational context—for the relational outcome of wholeness that is distinguished only by the uncommon peace enacted by Jesus as the face of God in fulfillment of God's definitive blessing (Jn 14:27; 2 Cor 4:6; Num 6:24-26). No part of the trinitarian relational context and process can be ignored, revised, or dismissed, and still be expected to result in the transformation of redemptive reconciliation.

This is why Paul made imperative the integral requirement for the churches to “clothe yourselves with love *in redemptive reconciliation*” and “let the *wholeness of Christ be the only determinant* in your hearts, *the wholeness* to which indeed you were called in one body” (Col 3:14-15).

It was Paul who clarified and integrated all these theological-relational realities for the church's understanding and growth to be uncommon-ized, and thereby become the dwelling for the whole-ly Trinity. As Paul said (noted earlier), nothing else in human contexts or by human shaping has any significance to God, but only the relational outcome of the new creation. Thus, we look forward to the church emerging from its old gender equation and its fragmentary practices to the transformation that many Christians long for but have struggled to experience as their relational reality:

What unfolds from Christ as the church's **uncommon peace** is the relational significance of persons redeemed from their distinctions, and relationships together freed from the relational barriers keeping them in relational distance, detachment or

separation. However comparative relations may be structured, Paul declares in unmistakable relational terms: “Christ has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of *fragmenting differences*” (Eph 2:14, NIV). The relational significance of this uncommon peace is not for the future but for this essential reality to unfold in our experience now in the church. This is the pivotal breakthrough in human relations that will transform the church to the new creation of persons redeemed and relationships reconciled in the new order uncommon for all persons, peoples, nations and their relations since ‘from the beginning’. “Christ’s *relational* purpose was to create in *his wholeness* one new *humanity* out of *their fragmentation*, thus making *them whole in uncommon peace*” (v.15). When this identity composed by the new relational order becomes the experiential reality for the persons and relationships of the church, they can claim salvation *from* sin as reductionism and salvation *to* wholeness together; and by only this experiential reality, they can proclaim and whole-ly witness to the experiential truth of this good news for human relations. Without this essential reality, persons and relationships in the church regress in what amounts to fake news based on alternative facts.

Furthermore, and most important, this pivotal breakthrough in relationships also includes and directly involves relationship with the whole and uncommon God. “In *their wholeness together* to reconcile *all* of them *having distinctions* to God through *his relational work* on the cross, by which he *redeemed their fragmenting differences*” (v.16). It is indispensable for us to understand what Paul unfolds for the church here is that reconciliation is inseparable from redemption.³¹

We should not expect reconciliation to happen between complementarians and egalitarians, or between any other groups of distinctions (e.g. racial groups), until persons undergo redemption from those distinctions and their identity and function are not determined by the secondary. Without this redemption, persons remain incompatible with the Trinity and with each other, and unable to come together at the relational depth necessary for uncommon reconciliation. If all that persons want is to smooth things over for the illusion of harmonious existence—the common notion of reconciliation—then that’s all they will get. But Christians must not continue to settle for this because (1) it renders them only common, (2) whereby they remain by default in the incompatible and incongruent condition “to be apart,” and (3) thus they would have no real hope to offer the world struggling in the human relational condition.

Ironically, yet not surprising from the Word, for transformation to be whole, redemptive reconciliation may necessitate causing further fragmenting division among persons—that is, the conflict required against reductionism in order for the uncommon peace of Jesus to unfold (Mt 10:34-36; Jn 14:27; cf. Ps 149:6). Not understanding “the things that make for peace” makes Jesus weep (Lk 19:41-42). The Word’s apparent paradox is the uncommon peace that Paul made imperative as the only determinant for the integration of the body as the whole-ly church (Col 3:15)—in the new creation of paragenders in likeness of the Trinity (Col 3:10-11; Eph 4:24), whose persons and relationships together constitute the church as the reconciling transformer (2 Cor 3:18; 5:16-21).

³¹ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Disciples of Whole Theology and Practice*, 129-130.

Redemptive reconciliation is further embodied and enacted by the new creation paragon family in how we perceive and are involved together relationally, whether at our church gatherings, or just in our daily lives, recognizing that we belong together as family:

Therefore, our faith as relational trust in ongoing reciprocal relationship with the Spirit is critical for freeing us to determine what is primary to embrace in church life and practice and what we need to relinquish control over “for the unity of the Spirit in the bond of wholeness” (Eph 4:3; Gal 5:16,25). The bond of wholeness by its nature requires change in us: individual, relational, structural and contextual changes. With these redemptive changes for persons, relationships and churches—encompassing the three inescapable issues in their depth—the integral function of redemptive reconciliation can emerge in family love for vulnerable involvement with others (different or not) in relationships together from inner out. Such reconstruction by design becomes, lives and makes whole uncommonly in the new relational order, which is not a mere option, merely recommended or simply negotiable for churches and its persons and relationships. Anything less and any substitutes for persons, relationships and churches are no longer whole and uncommon.³²

In a particular note to egalitarians, or for that matter, for complementarians as well, the issue of equality has to be put into the perspective of what makes persons, relationships, and the church family whole. While both Christian women and men are freed from the lies of the gender equation and its *bôsh*, if we function out of any sense of entitlement because of ‘Christian freedom’, then that makes us susceptible to be self-serving in our self-determination (cf. Gal 5:1,13; 1 Cor 8:9). This may happen for some women (it certainly happens with men), yet I think the greater challenge for Christian women is to fully embrace our place as equal *heirs* in the Trinity’s family, that is, to embrace the relational reality that we are ‘equalized up’ so to speak (cf. Jas 1:9). And for middle-way seekers who advocate “the great reversal” theology attributed to Luke’s Gospel, Jesus didn’t come to reverse roles or turn hierarchical structures upside down, but to redeem persons from roles and structures—whoever those structures favor—to make whole by equalizing persons, the basis of which is that for God, the only legitimate basis for the church’s persons and relationships is relational grace.

Egalitarians need to understand that only redeemed-reconciled relationships of whole persons together qualifies their common notions of equality, to constitute the uncommon equality as a function of the wholeness of the gospel, further illuminated here:

Based on the uncommon peace of Christ that Paul makes the only determinant for the church (imperatively in Col 3:15), nothing less than equalized relationships and no substitutes for intimate relationships compose the new-order church family of Christ, whose wholeness distinguishes the church’s persons and relationships in their primacy of whole ontology and function in likeness of the whole-ly Trinity. If we take Paul seriously, we cannot take him partially or use him out of his total context but need to embrace his whole theology and practice for ours to be whole also. Therefore, beyond any contextualized or commonized bias, what emerges from the

³² T. Dave Matsuo, *The Disciples of Whole Theology and Practice*, 141.

church's uncommon peace is the experiential truth of **uncommon equality**, which is the good news transforming the fragmentation and inequality of all persons, peoples, nations and their human relations. The relational reality of this uncommon equality unfolds from the relational progression of this whole-ly church family as it is ongoingly involved in equalizing all persons, peoples, nations and their relationships—equalizing in whole relational terms composed by the redemptive reconciliation of uncommon peace.³³

Again, Jesus is our hermeneutical and functional key to know the whole of God and to know the depth of how our identity and function can and need to be in order to be sanctified, just as Jesus was. It was for our sakes that Jesus enacted the new relational order for this relational purpose and outcome:

To compose the uncommon equality of his church family at the heart of its persons and relationships in whole ontology and function, and therefore unequivocally transformed them (1) to be redeemed from human distinctions and their deficit condition and (2) to be reconciled to the new relational order in uncommon transformed relationships together both equalized and intimate in their innermost, and thereby congruent in uncommon likeness with the wholeness of the Trinity.³⁴

The relational outcome of redemptive reconciliation is neither optional nor a mere ideal, but constitutes the essential transformation to the uncommon whole of who, what, and how the church and its persons and relationships are *to be*. And this experiential truth and relational reality unfold in the church only as the reconciling transformer.

The Church as the Reconciling Transformer

Since the early disciples were not yet relationally involved deeply enough to know Jesus' person (Jn 14:9), they didn't understand the trajectory and path of Jesus as "the Way and the Truth and the Life" (14:5-8). Beyond merely referential terms, the whole of Jesus' embodied person enacted 'the relational Way and the experiential Truth and the qualitative Life' for his church *to be* in whole-ly likeness. This raises two critical issues, for which we must urgently give account: (1) the integrity of the church today, and (2) the validity of the gospel claimed and proclaimed by the church. We must answer: Is the church a religious institution, or the embodied person of Jesus (Eph 1:22-23); does it operate by organizational principles and structure, or by the primacy of reciprocal relationship together as family with the Trinity (as in Eph 4:3-7,11-13; 1 Cor 12:4-6,12-13); does the church claim salvation from sin, excluding or including reductionism; how does it then claim and proclaim the significance of salvation for our human condition; and does it define the gospel of peace with common peace or uncommon peace? Only how Christians gather together today can account for the church's integrity and the validity of its gospel.

³³ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Disciples of Whole Theology and Practice*, 142.

³⁴ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Disciples of Whole Theology and Practice*, 143.

When Jesus prayed to the Father that all his followers be joined together “one as we are one” (Jn 17:20-23), he constituted ‘the qualitative life’ of his followers (their identity and function) in the new creation as his church family. But for their new creation, ‘the relational way’ of Jesus’ relational work also had to include the following ‘experiential truth’ to fulfill the Trinity’s theological trajectory and relational path:

- (1) To enact his whole gospel and fulfill its relational outcome, Jesus reconstructed the temple of whole-ly God’s presence by making his sacrifice behind the temple curtain, whereby the curtain was torn down in order to open direct face-to-face access to God (summarized in Heb 10:19-22).
- (2) The depth of Jesus’ *agapē* relational involvement, together with the Spirit, also removed the veil of gender and other human distinctions from persons to free them (redeem the old) in order that their whole person would be raised up in the new creation in the Trinity’s likeness (2 Cor 3:16-18; 15:16-17; Gal 3:28).
- (3) Thereby, their persons without distinctions would vulnerably come together without relational barriers or relational distance, thus to be joined together as the new creation church family “just as we are one” (Eph 2:14-22).

In this *complete* Christology—composed only in relational language and not referential language—Jesus whole-ly embodied and enacted the Word from God in order to compose the paragender equation essential for the church to be distinguished in nothing less and no substitutes. This whole-ly dynamic all converges in his formative family prayer (Jn 17), which is also called, less relationally, the high priestly prayer. The Word embodied and enacted the essential ontology and function that constituted the church in these two irreducible and nonnegotiable ways:

1. The church’s ontology is embodied as the body of Christ (Eph 1:22-23), whose “fullness” (*plērōma*) embodied the Trinity to constitute all the members of the church as one body of the Trinity—with different members without distinctions (1 Cor 12:4-6, 12-13, 27; Eph 2:19-22).
2. The church’s function is enacted in the likeness of the Trinity enacted by the Word from God, palpable with the Spirit, along with the Father; therefore, the church functions with the paragender equation without the veil of gender and other secondary distinctions, in transformed relationships together both equalized and intimate, just like the Trinity (Jn 17:21-23; 1 Cor 12:14-26; 2 Cor 3:16-18; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10-11; Gal 3:26-29).

All the relational work that the Word embodied and enacted in the incarnation were subsequently illuminated by Paul for the church to embody and enact in this irreducible and nonnegotiable equation. And it was an ongoing fight for Paul to deal with the fragmentation in churches and confront their reductionism, which Paul engaged with his vulnerable heart and many tears. In his love involvement and relational submission of his person to Jesus, Paul by necessity made it imperative for the church to embody nothing less than its new creation and to enact no substitutes for its persons and relationships—that is, nothing but their redemptive reconciliation (2 Cor 5:16-18). Paul was unequivocal that the church embodied the Word from God and his whole gospel of

transformation, whereby the church enacts its function in likeness of the Trinity as *the reconciling transformer*, first within itself, and then within the world (5:19-21). Nothing else could establish the church's integrity and the validity of its gospel, yet this issue continues to confront churches today that settle for anything less or any substitutes.

As Paul defined for the early churches distinctly in their interdependent dynamic relationships together, he always kept in focus that the church as reconciling transformer functions only in the equalized and intimate relationships held together in the bond of love, which is expanded on shortly, below. We too need to always keep primary in our focus the primacy of reciprocal relationship together, so that that the church as reconciling transformer is the irreducible identity and nonnegotiable function essential for the church today to be whole and uncommon just as the whole-ly Trinity is. Only by our reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit, we will keep this relational primacy in focus, because apart from the Spirit, it's simply too easy to succumb to our biases and default notions about who, what, and how the church is, all of which have been reduced from their qualitative-relational significance of God's relational language—thus no longer whole and uncommon but fragmented and common-ized.

Jesus' prayer to the Father for us to be one, just as he and the Father are one (inseparably also with the Spirit), cuts through all our alternatives to who and what gathers and calls themselves the church, and clears away our theological fog about how we must go forth into the world, just as the Father sent Jesus (Jn 17:18-19). Just as Jesus sanctified himself in the dynamic relational process of reciprocating contextualization—thereby maintaining his uncommon minority identity—only through our own ongoing reciprocating contextualization will our identity and function corporately together be such that the world will perceive *whose* we are, and *who* sent us into the world (Jn 17:21,23). This integrity cannot be assumed; the validity of its message must have relational, experiential, and qualitative basis. With the church's integrity and its gospel's validity established, the world will see and know that God indeed dwells in this gathering to establish an uncommon people (as Jesus prayed), about whom the world will finally recognize as its Creator, and not the various human-shaped versions.

Therefore, the challenge for the church today is to turn around from its common roots, and 'make every effort' to put into our theology and practice the truth of Jesus' whole gospel and its relational outcome—that which must prevail over its virtual common-ized counterpart that inhabits the church's gatherings. The latter is not the outcome that Jesus came to establish, nor the 'one as we are one' family that he prayed for. The virtual common-ized church has (1) fragmented Jesus' whole person into the distinctions of his teachings and examples to compose an incomplete Christology, thereby (2) reducing his whole gospel into primarily what he save us *from* (sin only without reductionism) at the loss of what he saves *to* (the whole of his new creation church family), for a truncated soteriology, resulting in (3) an ecclesiology of church identity and function shaped by human terms whose gender equations keep persons (both females and males) and their relationships constrained in anything less than and any substitutes for Jesus' whole-ly peace—the reconciling transformation—essential for the church to be his paragender church (Jn 14:27; Eph 2:14; Col 3:15). Therefore, the church must heed Jesus' wake-up alert, listen deeply to Jesus' family prayer, and turn around from its human shaping.

In the paragender equation created in the beginning and newly created in the

gospel, the primary issue is not about church leadership and who can be vested with that authority. Nor is the primary issue even about gender. Adam and Eve first had no *bôsh* because their sex distinction wasn't highlighted to define their identity and their function. Their whole persons from inner out were primary and integrally functioned in the primacy of relationship together in wholeness ("not to be apart"), which distinguished their identity and function as paragenders in the image and likeness of the Trinity.

Why the paragender challenge today is neither about church leadership nor about gender is important to take to heart. These issues must be seen and addressed in the primary context of creation and the gospel (the whole gospel), with their primary relational process of the Trinity's wholeness being the only determinant for gender and related issues. No doubt, therefore, that the paragender equation presents a major threat for the church, along with its persons and relationships. Yet, our *bôsh* will be unresolved and will continue if we cling to anything less and any substitutes in our theology and practice. As Jesus clarifies, corrects, and convicts with the Spirit, the measure we give and use will be the only measure we get.

Jesus indeed embodied and enacted who, what, and how we are to be in likeness, both individually as his paragender disciples, and corporately as his new creation paragender family. To add to all his enactments noted above, he also answered certain specific gender concerns that we have today. Awhile back—I don't recall exactly when—some vocal Christian men complained about Jesus' being feminized and about the church as too feminized also. By this they meant that sermons and even male pastors are too touchy-feely, and men in the pews can't relate, don't find church irrelevant, and thus drop out from their involvement in church. Some church leaders' and thinkers' solution is to re-masculinize Jesus, of course based on the genderized stereotypes from human culture, for example, highlighting "masculine" qualities of Jesus, such as the warrior Jesus as opposed to the gentle lamb-holding Jesus. What is lacking is a whole and uncommon picture of Jesus, along with the demonization of genderizing human needs and emotions. Men have been deeply socialized and their brain patterns hardwired to distance themselves from their inherent human need, the shame of gender, and fear. The other side of this same coin involves women seeking feminine qualities of Jesus (e.g. sensitive, nurturing) to counteract male-shaped oppressive views of God. Women also have been socialized and our brains hardwired in gender distinctions, yet socialized definitions of feminine character traits make it somewhat easier to be vulnerable with our needs and emotions. The church must clear away its christological fog and see Jesus' whole person as the basis for whole human persons, both male and female. Then, with christological fog cleared, Jesus' gospel must be further cleared of other theological fog for how the new creation church can and must embrace our paragender identity.

Jesus loved, he wept, he grieved, he got angry, he corrected, he rebutted Satan, he challenged, and he danced (more on Jesus' dancing below). He nurtured, cajoled, comforted, refused to be shaped by others, likened himself to a protective mother hen, and boldly cleansed the temple. None of these qualities are feminine or masculine (except being a hen)—and to say so is to make false distinctions from a genderized bias (and neural patterns/associations in the brain). Jesus' divine nature transcended gender, and his human nature, though male, was neither defined nor constrained by its limits. Jesus was whole and uncommon, thus distinctly set apart from the common while ongoingly relationally involved in it. Human emotions are what all created persons share in common

as essential to our human ontology. So, for anyone who wants Jesus to be more feminine or masculine, and wants to shape the church accordingly, the reality is that they are trying to construct a reduced Jesus in their own image—which Paul would describe in the modern vernacular as a virtual reality of fake news.

For the experiential reality as the new creation paragender church, Jesus is, again, the reconciling ‘paragender’ key transformer, from whom we need to learn how to walk the talk, and, yes, dance the dance!

The Paragender Dance Essential for the New Creation Church

In traditional trinitarian theology, the Trinity’s ontology and function are integrally conceived in a *perichoretic dance* to envision the interdependence of the trinitarian persons as the ontological One, which is integrated by their interrelations for the relational Whole of the Trinity. The church’s identity and function in likeness of the Trinity are also distinguished by this essential interdependent and interrelational dance. Rather than a conceptual terms, however, Jesus qualitatively embodied and relationally enacted the likeness as essential for the self-disclosure of the Trinity in the human context. Consider what we witness in Luke’s Gospel.

In one of Luke’s vital narratives for us to understand (Lk 10:17-23), Jesus danced, and leapt about joyfully. Inadequately translated as “rejoiced in the Spirit” (NRSV) or “full of joy through the Holy Spirit” (NIV), the Greek word for the underlined words (*agalliaō*) means to exuberantly leap, dance, or skip about joyfully. Here was Jesus unconstrained, fully involved in the relational context and process of the Trinity—inseparably with the Spirit and the Father—bursting with delight. Another notable time when someone danced and leaped with such joy was in the OT, when David rejoiced at God’s ark returning to Jerusalem: “David danced with all his might...leaping and dancing before the Lord” (2 Sam 6:14-16). Jesus danced over primacy given to persons without distinctions (“little children”) rather than those defined by secondary distinctions (“the wise and learned”), which signified what is primary to the Trinity. Jesus’ whole person—nothing less and no substitutes—danced, thereby to model for us whole human ontology composing the paragender dance, essential for the whole function of his new creation church family: nothing less and no substitutes, without constraints from self-consciousness or fear of rejection due to *bōsh*.

Paul defined this interdependent-interrelational dance essential for the church in two distinguished ways, which cannot be reduced from their relational primacy:

1. The physiological interdependence of the body, with all its parts essential for the one body to function whole and not fragmented (1 Cor 12:12-26)—the parts of which are only determined by the Spirit (not human determination) in order for the body to be whole like the Trinity (1 Cor 12:4-11).
2. And the integration into family by the interrelationships between whole persons without distinctions, and thus equalized from inner out, who are vulnerably involved in intimate relationships together in order to be God’s family in wholeness—the transformed relationships integrally equalized and intimate essential for the new creation church family of the Trinity (Eph 2:14-22).

Paul clearly acknowledges human differences among church members—which we’ve named throughout this study: gender, race, ethnicity, age, class, abilities, and the like. The human body doesn’t go looking for certain parts to recruit them, nor favor or show partiality to certain parts (except handedness), nor marginalize other parts. All these differences are integrated (as in ambidextrous) into the living *whole*. Moreover, we all have been socialized in gender distinctions to varying depths, having varying degrees of deep matters needing healing (e.g. shame, fear, pain, anger)—thus some parts are weaker, and need to be attended to accordingly for their wholeness. Persons are at varying places of relational trust in the Lord; some have difficulty trusting anyone. Others are more mature in the wholeness of God’s relational grace. These are the deeper aspects of persons in which the new creation family needs to be vulnerable together, to make our hearts aware of each other, and to be involved together in, just as Jesus was with the first disciples. As Jesus relational replacement, the Spirit is here for reciprocal relational involvement to lead us and help us grow together in wholeness from inner out. In these family relationships at this depth together, our hearts are knit together by the intimate relational involvement of the Trinity’s family love, as Jesus prayed (Jn 17), and Paul prayed and clarified for us (Eph 3:14-4:24).

Persons who’ve been made whole without distinctions are paragender; they are equalized together in interdependence, and are involved intimately in the interdependent-interrelationships essential to be new in likeness of the Trinity. Only the identity and function of these persons in reconciled transformation distinguish the interdependent-interrelational paragender dance essential to be the new creation church family—irreducible to anything less and nonnegotiable with any substitutes.

Like a group dance, there are many ‘moving parts’, and everyday life always pulls at us to focus on secondary matters. These secondary matters include basic necessities, jobs, school, chores at home, and play. To God, his paragender family doesn’t genderize who does what, except by obvious necessity, such as mothers bearing children, or a physically stronger male person doing the heavier lifting that a smaller female cannot do. In fact, the paragender family helps each other go beyond limits and constraints of gender on our persons, in order to grow and mature in the just-nection of paragender wholeness.

The critical key is that the new creation paragender church’s activities (including ministries and service) are always secondary to the primacy of reciprocal relationship together. This integral dance of just-nection is a critical shift for the new creation to address itself to, and takes constant reminders and loving correction to grow as ‘one’ in making the primary *primary*. When we get preoccupied with the secondary, we all need to be corrected, and relationally work with the Spirit in the primacy of persons and relationships.

What we need to learn and mature in is following Jesus with this relational imperative: To always integrate the secondary *into* the primary—not the converse, and also not to equate them—in order for our everyday, ongoing involvement to be in the primacy of reciprocal relationship together on God’s whole relational terms. “Where are you?” and “What are you doing here?” continuously face us with this challenge, so that in our discipleship [and as the new creation family] we will not be faced with “Don’t you know *my whole person* yet, after all this time *as my disciples?*”

.... Since [preoccupation with the secondary] is a common practice among Christians, it is indispensable for all Christians to integrate the secondary into the primary by ongoingly engaging the **process of integrating priorities** (PIP).³⁵

Among all of Jesus' disciples, Mary demonstrated PIP in contrast to other disciples, including Martha (discussed earlier in the study). This is why Jesus made Mary's paragender practice paradigmatic for Jesus' disciples who gather together as his uncommon paragender family to embody and enact the good news.

The church today needs to recover the paragender dance of "the love you had at first" (Rev 2:4), which will require the church (local and global) to "wake up...for I have not found your identity and function whole in the sight of the Trinity" (Rev 3:2). Therefore, "let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches" (Rev 2:7; 3:6)—because it's time to dance in order for the church's integrity to be the transforming transformer, and the validity of its gospel to distinguish the just-nection of all its persons and relationships!

"You Follow Me"

[Note: This last section is included to further get us to think outside the common theological box.] One of the primary arguments that complementarians (based on the early church Fathers) make to rebut the egalitarian claim for equal female leadership in church and home is the fact that Jesus chose only males to follow him and be his disciples. Complementarians are correct in their observation that Jesus specifically called the twelve men by name, clearly delineated in the Gospels (Mt 10:2-4; Mk 3:16-19; Lk 6:14-16; Acts 1:13), and that nowhere in Scripture does Jesus so visibly call women to "follow me." For complementarians this is an incontestable matter of the authority of Scripture. Egalitarians counter that there were women among Jesus' disciples, which is also true and cannot be downplayed, as complementarians do. Both, however, use the words of God without understanding the significance of the words *from* God communicated in only relational language, which renders the former by the lens of the reader/listener without its whole meaning defined by the primacy of the latter's Speaker.

Wayne Grudem states: "The most unique, foundational, authoritative leaders in the church were all men. At its very foundation, the church of Jesus Christ is not an egalitarian institution. It has 100 percent male leadership."³⁶ So, why did Jesus choose the twelve persons to be his disciples, to follow him, to be intimate witnesses to his life, and to establish his church? Grudem would add that God established from creation a pattern of male leadership.³⁷ This is clearly a conclusion that exposes the complementarian confirmation bias by which their genderized hermeneutic—influenced at least in part by the primacy given to a historical-traditional concept of what constitutes church leadership—predetermines the interpretive outcome, since Scripture doesn't specifically say what Grudem claims.

³⁵ T. Dave Matsuo, *The Disciples of Whole Theology and Practice*, 53.

³⁶ Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism & Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More than 100 Disputed Questions* (Sister, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2004), 172.

³⁷ Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism & Biblical Truth*, 166-167.

Further, one would need to then ask if God favors males over females. But the answer cannot be “yes” because God shows no partiality among humans (e.g. Dt 10:17; 2 Chr 19:7; Act 10:34; 15:9; Rom 2:11; Eph 6:9; Jas 2:1). Why, then, did Jesus choose only men, even though women would also become disciples and leaders in the church—which Jesus certainly knew beforehand? Why were only men ostensibly selected to be with Jesus in closest proximity to him, and to witness all his interactions with other persons, to hear his teachings to others, as well as getting direct teaching from him? It could not have been in order to follow a pattern of male leadership established by the order of creation—as complementarians insist—since God doesn’t show partiality.

Egalitarians offer two reasons why Jesus chose twelve males, specifically noting that they were Jewish males. The first reason is in order to accommodate the Jewish culture, for example, in which women, Gentiles, or slaves would not have been taken seriously. The second reason is because of the parallel with the twelve patriarchs and twelve tribes of Israel³⁸—which in part really supports the complementarian view of a pattern of male leadership.

Here is an alternative, one perceived with a lens that doesn’t have anything to do with these common interpretations. Rather, this alternative involves the deeper context of the apostles’ reduced theological anthropology and weak view of the sin of reductionism, and how that context conflicted with Jesus’ whole identity and function. Perhaps it could be said that instead of being complementarians or egalitarians the first disciples were *contrarians*. But why would Jesus choose such a contrary group? This points to the whole meaning of the Word from God that only Jesus’ person defined, which encompasses the uncommon relational purpose of his whole gospel.

Recall that the male disciples had difficulty understanding Jesus, that they often wondered about him but dared not say anything directly to him. There were numerous instances when these disciples asked questions among themselves, but were not free to approach Jesus honestly and vulnerably. They appeared to have been embarrassed about not understanding Jesus’ words and actions, so they hid (cf. the shame involved, *bôsh*, Gen 2:25 with Gen 3:7). Recall that Peter initially refused Jesus’ whole person who wanted to wash Peter’s feet; Peter obviously missed the primacy of relational connection Jesus was making. Even after Jesus stated the relational necessity of Jesus washing Peter’s feet, Peter again showed his reduced theological anthropology and lack of understanding by telling Jesus to wash his other parts. And at the final table fellowship that Jesus had with the men, Jesus painfully responded to Philip’s query, “Have I been with you all this time...and you still do not know me?” (pl. “you” for all those disciples, Jn 14:9) And Jesus asked them, “Do you still not perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes, and fail to see? Do you have ears, and fail to hear? And do you not remember? (Mk 8:17-18) There is a pattern among these male disciples of missing the qualitative-relational significance of Jesus’ person, teaching, and actions. The pattern is that their persons were undisputedly fragmented and in need of change, inner-out redemptive change to free them from their *bôsh* and restore them to uncommon wholeness. In other words, they were in urgent need of not any gospel but only Jesus’

³⁸ See, for example, Aída Besançon Spencer, “Jesus’ Treatment of Women in the Gospels” in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, 135-136. See also Stanley J. Grenz and Denise Muir Kjesbo, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 211-212.

whole gospel.

Therefore, my conclusion of why Jesus chose men (not women) as the Twelve is this: Jesus chose these representative males to be his closest disciples because most men were (and still are) more deeply entrenched in reductionism—the fragmentation of persons based on outer-in criteria (what one does and has, or doesn't do and doesn't have)—than females, though not to say females aren't embedded in reductionism. Fragmentation, the cause of reduced identity and function, creates relational distance and barriers because persons try to cover up their *bôsh*, and present a self of anything less and any substitutes in relationships. Accordingly, due to their gender equation, the male disciples were not vulnerable with the qualitative function of their hearts for deep relational connection with Jesus (and thus with the Father and Spirit). By choosing these men of such distinctions, Jesus illuminated the extent of all that is necessary for inner-out, turn-around change to become whole persons once again—the reconciling transformation to the qualitative image and relational likeness of the Trinity. That is to say, Jesus' choices (as the original reconciling transformer) centered on the significance of his whole gospel and not on the men's gender (or any other human distinction), in order that his disciples would be the paragenders to establish the integrity of his church and the validity of the gospel it claims and proclaims. Implied then in the purpose of Jesus' choices is this vital process: He further illuminated the depth necessary in the making of disciples, and he used these men to demonstrate the ongoing process of transformation involved to be his true followers. In all this, Jesus teaches all persons (female and male) what it means to "Follow me."

This same reason can be applied to why Jesus chose Paul for furthering God's theological trajectory to grow his family in all nations. That is, Paul was extremely successful—and extremely fragmented from his whole person—according to secondary outer criteria of what he did and had (including his pedigree, Phil 3:4-7). According to that measure of success, to that extent Paul functioned as an enemy of Christ, physically persecuting Christians and religiously opposing Jesus (Acts 7:58; 8:1-3; 9:1-4); it might even be said that Paul was Jesus' worst human enemy. Is this then another example of only selecting male leaders, or of Jewish contextualization? On the contrary, Paul's inner-out transformation demonstrated the depth and breadth of the sin of reductionism needing God's relational response of grace as the only basis for relationship together. Contrary also to common belief from church tradition, Jesus' choosing of these men had nothing to do with their personal attributes (e.g. strength, gifting for leadership, education and referential knowledge of Scripture [as in Paul's case], or accomplishments), but everything to do with enacting the depth of the Trinity's relational response to their inherent human relational need as relational orphans, to be redeemed from the sin of reductionism and raised up new by reconciling transformation to wholeness from inner out—the reality of the whole gospel's relational outcome in just-nection.

Related, Jesus' paradigm for the new relational order—succinctly stated as 'the first will be last and the last will be first' isn't a mere structural reversal of the human relational order. Rather, this just-nection is the deconstruction of the old human order for transformation to the new relational order, that Paul called "the new creation" (1 Cor 5:16-17; Gal 6:15), and referred to by the writer of Hebrews as "the new order" (Heb 9:10, NIV)—namely the Trinity's family reconciled by equalized persons in intimate relationships together.

Furthermore, there is nothing innate in males that make them more susceptible to hardened, entrenched reductionism (e.g. Peter), just as there is nothing innate in females that make them more responsive to being open and vulnerable from inner out (as witnessed in whole-ly Mary). These characteristics are all the influences of individual personalities shaped by the interaction of religious and cultural norms, through experiences and received messages wired in our brains, along with choices we make (even by default) that reinforce and sustain our genderized stereotypical identities and function. Why did Jesus ostensibly call only males to be the Twelve? To unmistakably demonstrate his vulnerable involvement with them in intrusive relationship together so that they could experience the depth of the Father’s love, and thereby show these relational orphans how to change and become like the child-persons belonging in his family. This is why Jesus had to tell Peter emphatically, over all of Peter’s other self-concerns, “You follow me” (Jn 21:19-22)—to be relationally involved vulnerably with his whole person before he could be a shepherd of Jesus’ flock.

If *this* Jesus—not a common-ized Jesus of human shaping—but whole-ly Jesus...if this Jesus doesn’t move persons to wake up and break open their hearts, then the integrity of the church will be fragmentary and its gospel will lack the validity to be of qualitative relational significance for its persons and relationships, and the world—thereby relegating the church to a different trajectory and path than the Way and the Truth and the Life.

For persons who relationally respond in whole-ly likeness, let’s celebrate—celebrating with Mary, the lead paragender, whose equation distinguishes the church in the experiential truth and relational reality of whole-ly Jesus’ gospel!

Songs for the New Creation Paragender Church Family

Just as Jesus danced for joy in the Spirit in praise to the Father, Jesus also sang. And since Jesus embodied the Trinity, it can be said that the Trinity sings, thereby composing the new creation family’s song. Psalms originally were sung, so here is an ancient song updated for the Trinity’s new creation paragender family (make up your own melody), followed by a song for the global church to celebrate, with dancing of course!

Ps 133 paraphrased

- 1 How qualitatively right and relationally significant it is
when God’s children live together in the wholeness
of transformed relationships that are integrally equalized and intimate.
- 2 It is being distinguished in the relational likeness of the Anointed One.
- 3 It signifies the integral relational process of wholeness.
- 4 For in this relational context the face of God bestows
the Trinity’s definitive blessing to bring the change necessary for
new creation relationships together in wholeness—that is,
to be distinguished beyond human comparison in the qualitative image
and relational likeness of the whole and holy God (cf. Num 6:26).

The Global Church Celebrating³⁹

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

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

Chorus 1:

Praise— the whole and uncommon (*“Praise” is shouted*)
God beyond all that is common,
You have transformed, you make us whole (*shout freely with beat*)
Your family whole and uncommon.

3. We are not parts of the common
Fragmented apart from God’s whole,
We are transformed, we are made whole
Peace together whole and uncommon.
4. We are God’s whole and uncommon
Distinguished family from the common,
No longer old, raised in the new
Now together like the Trinity.

Chorus 2:

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

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

[continued on next page]

³⁹ By T. Dave Matsuo and Kary A. Kambara, ©2016. Printable sheet music available online at <http://4X12.org>.

Chorus 2:

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

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

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

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