

The Global Church Engaging
the Nature of Sin & the Human Condition
Reflecting, Reinforcing, Sustaining, or Transforming

T. Dave Matsuo

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Contact:

www.4X12.org

tdavematsuo@4X12.org

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Chapter 1 The World Today and Yesterday

Let the *wholeness* of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one *unfragmented* body.¹

Colossians 3:15

If you are familiar with a U.S. comic strip called “Dennis the Menace,” then you are aware that this frank little boy has a somewhat snobbish adversary named Margaret. She routinely tries to demonstrate her feminine superiority over the rawness and literal honesty of Dennis—implying that she is “better” in her maturity and he is “less” in his immaturity. In a recent episode, Margaret is reading a history book and snobbishly turns to Dennis to say “I bet you don’t know who ‘Joan of Arc’ was.” Dennis innocently reacts, “Yeah, she was Noah’s wife.”²

This cartoon interaction, unfortunately, is less funny and more true, illustrating an existing reality in the global church. The underlying dynamic in their encounter unfolds in critical issues that are vital for the church to understand about itself and for Christians to address both individually and collectively as church together. Besides Margaret’s arrogance about her knowledge, her practice demonstrates defining her identity based on the limits of such outer-in criteria, quantified by the narrow referential information she possessed; and then she imposes this narrow measurement of the person onto Dennis not only to compare his person as less but also to determine their relationship in stratified terms (she’s better, he’s less). This dynamic parallels a dynamic in the global church, such that Margaret’s “theology and practice” is aligned to Christians/churches in the global North—perhaps giving priority to the quantity of theological knowledge from extra-biblical sources over the Bible itself (Joan of Arc over the Bible)—and the Western dynamic of imposing a dominant position onto the global South (mainly Africa, Asia, Latin America). Achievement in referential information and knowledge has become the prevailing distinction for theology and practice.

Not surprisingly, Dennis reacts to Margaret’s challenge and thereby engages in defining his own person by Margaret’s outer-in terms, plus further fragmenting their relationship by reinforcing her stratified terms. Moreover, not only did Dennis fail to answer Margaret’s challenge, his re-action (a reduced act of his person) was determined by a misuse of the Bible, which pointed to an incomplete, distorted and incorrect interpretation and understanding of Scripture (Noah’s wife indeed). The dynamic unfolding here for both Dennis and Margaret, and for those in likeness, is the influence of sociocultural factors constructing an interpretive framework and shaping an interpretive lens that perceives the human person from outer in and determines relationships on a narrow comparative basis. The reality evolving is in fact the following: from the beginning this underlying dynamic composes a theology (notably theological

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

² Created by Hank Ketcham, *Los Angeles Times*, 12/1/2014.

anthropology) and practice of persons and relationships in who and what they are and how they live with reduced ontology and function.

This critical dynamic in the global church also exposes the bias we bring to Scripture that narrows down God's revelation and shapes it by our referential terms—for example, ignoring the priority of relational communication by giving primacy to extra-biblical sources. This shift transposes communication in relationship to the transmission of information. Moreover, this is the content reinforced and sustained by scholarship, which creates the theological fog making the global church unaware of its reflecting, reinforcing and sustaining a deeper condition.

While Dennis re-acts innocently enough and Margaret functions in common practice (in a global norm?), both are unaware of the underlying influence shaping how they function: reductionism and its counter-relational work. The prevailing issue for Christians and the global church to recognize and fully understand, and that needs to be ongoingly addressed, is the nature of sin operating in the dynamic of reductionism, and its inescapable influence composing the human condition, the global human condition—indeed our human condition. Apparently, the global church is also unaware of reductionism's presence and influence shaping our theology and practice. As implied in this cartoon that's not funny but of serious concern; what intrudes on and evolves in the global church is the existing reality of reductionism's sin, which continues to be defining as long as the lack or absence of redemption from this human condition continues for the persons and relationships currently composing the global church.

Jesus saves! Yes, indeed, but from what, and for when, and to what outcome? This study addresses these issues in order to integrally identify the *whole* of the global church, so that the fragmenting effects of its theology and practice can be made whole from inner out at the heart of its persons and relationships in their ontology and function. Nothing less and no substitutes constitute the church family of Jesus Christ—whether locally, regionally or globally.

Emerging Tide and Converging Currents

In the rising of globalization transforming modern societies, raising speculation about the sovereignty and autonomy of modern states,³ a further tide has arrived. This is the tidal shift that has changed not only the centers of global commerce, thought and power but also the center of Christianity. The shift in these matters from the West to the rest of the world has occurred, whether we like it or not. Accepting this irreversible change has been most difficult for the West, understandably so for the U.S., since it requires relinquishing old ways (notably of dominance) and embracing the new (namely of shared, equal or even greater partners).⁴

³ This analysis of the process of globalization is undertaken by David Held, Anthony McGrew. David Goldblatt and Jonathan Perraton, *Global Transitions: Politics, Economics and Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999). See also, Peter Heslam, ed., *Globalization and the Good* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

⁴ For further discussion on this global change, see Kishore Mahbubani, *The New Asian Hemisphere: The Irresistible Shift of Global Power to the East* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008).

Much has been recently noted about the central shift of Christianity from the Western context to the Majority World, namely the contexts of Africa, Asia, and Latin America composing the global South.⁵ This emerging tide from the global South has received increasing attention, if not always significant in substance, at least to note the numerical emergence forming a new majority in Christianity. Explicit or implicit tension, however, still pervades Western perception and thinking about what distinction should be given this part of the church—particularly in comparison to Western Christianity/church. I will only engage this part of the discussion in a secondary way, because I define the main issues focused on in this usually limited discussion as only secondary to what is primary to God and thus what needs to have primacy in the global church.

In this shifting tide of globalization sweeping over the world, there are converging currents that also bear upon Christianity for either its fragmentation or its transformation. Christianity in general and every Christian in particular are confronted with the challenge to change from old ways to new. First is the current of Western Christianity. Western Christians in the global North need to ask if they have developed, advanced and matured in the primary substance of their faith compared to Christians in the global South, or if they in reality have strayed from (cf. Ps 95:10; Rev 2:4), diluted (cf. 2 Cor 2:17; Rev 3:1) and thus reduced the truth-word of God (cf. 2 Cor 4:2; Rev 3:15). If global North Christians indeed embody maturity based on God's terms, then we have something to teach global South Christians. If the current converging here, however, is the latter reality of reducing God's word (even by evangelicals), then we have to learn from global South Christians and be restored, for example, to the experiential truth of the whole gospel.

Also converging on the central shift of Christianity to the global South are the strengthening currents of other world religions, notably Islam yet including Hinduism and Buddhism. This increasingly has come to bear on global South Christians in terms of persecution and other blatant forms of discrimination. Given these situations and circumstances, the global church is challenged, and yet, more importantly, is further confronted about its own theology and practice determining who, what, and how it is. What the church in both the North and South needs to ask of itself is the critical issue of its identity in the world: Is our church theology and practice simply of a religion and thereby having a distinction only in the comparative process with other religions; or is our church theology and practice distinguished in its identity beyond all religions because of its constituting basis in the whole and holy God distinguished beyond human contextualization, shaping and construction? This is not a doctrinal issue of dogma in referential terms but rather the crucial identity issue of who we are and whose we are in relational terms.

Jesus embodied his church to be transformed in its identity of both who it is and whose it is. This identity in the world must be neither shallow nor ambiguous, or else “the salt” has lost its substance and meaning and “the light” no longer has purpose and significance (Mt 5:13-16)—in spite of any ecumenical and inter-faith distinctions achieved. When Christian identity becomes shallow or functions ambiguously, it is more closely associated with other religions and less connected to its distinguished composing

⁵ For example, see Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), idem, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

source, and thereby enters into a comparative process with those religions. This more-less dynamic is crucial to understand, which has a zero-sum effect on Christian identity.

The distinguished whole and holy God is beyond comparison to any human standards and measurement. Nevertheless, historically God's people have consistently reduced God to human terms (e.g. Job 38:2); ironically, this includes even the idolization of God that honors a weaker or reduced being (connoting an idol), about which global South Christians in particular need to be cautious. This distinguished God, however, can only be known and understood if revealed/disclosed to us from beyond any human source—just as Job experienced and thereby understood in relational connection with the Source (Job 42:3-5). Otherwise, we are left to our speculations (however educated) and human shaping, which reduce Christian identity accordingly. When Christianity and Christian identity in the world have their basis composed by what the distinguished (*pala*) God reveals to them—“too wonderful (*pala*) for me to know”—then they also become distinguished (as salt and light) beyond what exists, pervades or prevails in human contexts. At the same time, being persecuted and discriminated against does not necessarily distinguish Christians on this relational basis. On the other hand, when Christians and churches become selective in receiving and embracing what God reveals—as Jesus made paradigmatic (Mk 4:24)—then they are narrowed down accordingly to simply a religion subject to measurement in comparative religions.

Selectivity of God's words has been a defining issue for God's family throughout its history, a diluting current resulting in a shallow and ambiguous identity in the world. For the global church to counter the converging influence (indeed, force) on its identity, it must be composed whole-ly on “the unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple” (Ps 119:130). Therefore, Paul made it the relational imperative for the church: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you *whole-ly*” (Col 3:16); and in order to be distinguished and not reduced to a comparative process, “Nothing beyond what is written *in God's Word*” (1 Cor 4:6). Clearly then for us today, selectivity of God's words (to be further discussed later) in the tide of globalization dilutes the identity of God's family from being distinguished; and such a perceptual-interpretive lens continues to determine much of Christian practice (if not theology) by the converging currents from the surrounding contexts in the world, thereby narrowing down Christian witness to merely distinctions defined from reduced theology and practice.

So, what *does* distinguish the global church beyond the emerging tide and converging currents in which it lives and must function today? This is not an optional matter merely for discussion but a critical condition requiring urgent response for the well-being and wholeness of the global church's integrity at the heart of its persons and relationships in whole ontology and function.

Understanding the Bigger Picture

When the ‘Dennis the Menace’ interaction is seen in the bigger picture, it becomes more serious and true for the global church. The fragmented persons and relationship represented in that innocent scene reflect conditions that emerged from the beginning, which have since developed into common, conventional and, yes, innocent patterns. It is the bigger picture than globalization that the global church urgently needs

to fully understand, because this is the only context that Christians and churches can and will *find* themselves in the experiential truth and relational reality of who they *are* and whose they *are*.

In the big picture, emerging in the beginning are whole persons created from inner out in the qualitative image of God, and further distinguished by relationship together in wholeness only in the relational likeness of God (Gen 1:27;2:18,25). Converging with this creation narrative is the fragmenting influence of reductionism and its counter-relational dynamic that reduces human ontology and function from the wholeness of who and what God created (Gen 3:1-7). The pivotal shift from wholeness to reductionism in persons and relationships precipitated God's confronting question composed only in relational terms to expose persons and relationship together: "Where are you?" (Gen 3:8-9), which continues to resound to the global church today. In relational terms, while God's question is inescapable, reductionism is unavoidable due to its persistent subtle workings in our midst.

The big picture includes God's relational response of grace unfolding for the emergence of the covenant relationship of love (Gen 17:1-2; Dt 7:7-9). Covenant relationship together, however, can only be composed according to God's terms for relationship, which by their nature must be in wholeness (*tamiym*,⁶ Gen 17:1) of ontology and function. Reductionism and its counter-relational workings converged on covenant relationship to transpose conjointly persons from inner out to outer in and relationship together from the intimate involvement of love to relational distance (as in Isa 29:13). Such function precipitated God's confronting question in relational terms to further expose reduced ontology and function: "What are you doing here?" (1 Kg 19:9,13), which continues to resound to the global church today. These two key questions are important for us to account for, because they don't expose isolated situations but are interrelated for the big picture.

This integral big picture is deeply enhanced for the global church when Jesus cleared out the temple of its reductionism of persons and relationships in a comparative stratified system (Mk 11:15-17), and reconstituted God's dwelling place by his relational work on the cross (Lk 23:45) in order to make whole persons (regardless of human distinctions) and relationships (removing barriers) in intimate relationships together with the whole and holy God, face to Face (Heb 10:19-22; 2 Cor 3:16-18; Eph 2:14-22). Yet, converging with Jesus's integral relational work in order to cloud the big picture and render its deep enhancement to a fog are attempts within the church to reconstruct Jesus' theological trajectory (e.g. by Peter, Mt 16:21-23), and also to counter or reshape his

⁶ Greek and Hebrew word studies used in this study are taken from the following sources: Horst Balz, Gerhard Schneider, eds., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990); Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975); R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., Bruce Waitke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980); Ernst Jenni, Claus Westermann, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. Mark E. Biddle, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997); Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974); Harold K. Moulton, ed., *The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978); W.E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1981); Spiros Zodhiates, ed., *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible* (Chattanooga: AMG Publ., 1996).

intimate relational path (as Peter did, Jn 13:6-8). Also converging were attempts to reduce the primacy of reciprocal relationship together by replacing it with secondary ministries (such as to the poor, Mk 14:4-9) and long-standing traditions (Acts 10:13-15; Gal 2:11-14). Without the big picture in relational terms, those accounts become referential information of somewhat unrelated situations, which lacks understanding of their fragmenting consequence on the wholeness Jesus embodied and saved us to.

The reality of such attempts above reflects a perceptual-interpretive lens narrowed down by the influence of their surrounding contexts, which defined persons and determined relationships in fragmentary terms composed by reduced ontology and function. The relational consequences will not justify merely storing this information in our NT file, without examining their relational implications for our persons, relationships and churches. Once again, such function precipitated Jesus' confronting questions in relational terms to further expose reduced ontology and function among even his followers in the church: "Don't you know me *yet*, even after I have been among you such a long time?" (Jn 14:9, NIV), and in further vulnerable terms, "Do you love me, *that is, with intimate relational involvement?*" (Jn 21:15-17)—questions which continue to resound to the global church today in order to make unmistakable the irreducible and nonnegotiable primacy of relationship together in wholeness composing God's family.

Understanding the big picture whole-ly enhanced by Jesus involves an integral relational epistemic process—*syniemi* (putting the pieces together for the whole), which Jesus exposed as the specific process that his disciples failed to engage with the pieces of Jesus (Mk 8:17-18). As Paul made further definitive for the church, understanding the big picture requires the whole knowledge embodied by Jesus' person (not fragmentary information about this teachings) to compose whole understanding (*synesis*, Col 1:15-20; 2:2-3). Thus, Paul also raises the question to the global church about its theology and practice: "Has Christ been divided, *fragmented, reduced?*" (1 Cor 1:13). Nothing less and no substitutes compose the big picture, and anything less and any substitutes by the global church narrow down its identity in the world to practices by its persons and relationships in reduced ontology and function. Because of this tendency in the church, Paul made it a further relational imperative for the church: "Let the *wholeness* of Christ rule [*be the only determinant*] in your *persons from inner out*, to which indeed you were called *in relational terms* in one *whole body integrated by intimate relationships together in likeness of Christ's wholeness, the Trinity*" (Col 3:15).

This study will further discuss these issues, keeping these questions in the forefront for the global church—again, not as an optional matter but to evoke the urgent response necessary for the well-being and wholeness distinguishing the global church at the heart of its persons and relationships in whole ontology and function.

What We Have in Common

Along with the big picture framing our theology and practice, 'who' the global church has in common as the Object of its faith and worship should be a given. Perhaps this is an assumption that shouldn't be made, yet I do in this study. Converging issues, however, clarify and correct what may or may not be shared together in the global church.

In terms of *Who*, we have to ask if the *Who* we share together is composed in referential terms or relational terms. *Who* in referential terms is narrowed down in ontology and function, and usually limited to the referential information composing our doctrines and teachings, and quite often constrained to merely an Object. In contrast, *Who* in relational terms is constituted by the whole ontology and function relationally disclosed by God as Subject—disclosed in God’s relational context and process with only relational terms—for the integral purpose of relationship together; accordingly, *Who* must be received as Subject and responded to as Subject in reciprocal relationship. If we profess that our God is a relational God present and involved, not a deistic God distant and uninvolved, then *Who* can only have the ontology and function as Subject. If we further claim to have relationship with God, then *Who* can be nothing less than and no substitute for Subject God; and *Who*’s vulnerable presence and intimate involvement determines ongoing reciprocal relationship together only by the relational terms of Subject God. Anything less and any substitutes render *Who* to an Object in the relationship now shaped by our terms. Having God as the Object of our faith and practice becomes all too convenient, for example, either to remain less than vulnerable with our person and in our relationships, or to maintain our lifestyle shaped by the surrounding context—keeping us in our comfort zones and the security of the status quo. Any function as Subject requires more from us and holds us accountable ongoingly in the relationship, which is not subject to negotiation to our terms (whether individual or collective). These are crucial issues global North and South Christians need to face, both among themselves and between each sector.

Furthermore, *Who* the global church may or may not share together is also determined jointly by the *What*. That is to say, again in referential terms or relational terms, the *What* of God must be understood in terms of the whole and holy God. Since referential terms narrow down the epistemic field, *What*’s composition of Who God is becomes incomplete, based on fragmentary knowledge and information, thereby limiting What God is from being whole. *What* always qualifies the ontology and function of Who our God is as either the whole God without fragmentation or God who is reduced. In relational terms, God is only revealed in wholeness—whose epistemic field can only be engaged by the relational epistemic process made available by God—which composes the whole knowledge and understanding (*syniemi, synesis*, as above) embodying What God is, that is, Jesus integrally embodying the Who and What of the whole God (as in 2 Cor 4:6; Col 1:19; 2:2). Therefore, any reduction of Jesus’ person to referential terms that fragment him in to parts—for example, of his teaching or serving—also reduce the ontology and function of God. A complete Christology is necessary for the global church in order to share together in the whole of God.

If the God we share together is indeed whole and not fragmentary, the What of God is also inseparable from the holy God. This is not a minor theological nuance but an ontological distinction of immeasurable significance for our theology and practice. ‘Holy’ is one of those Christian terms (along with faith and grace) that has had variable meaning or perception among God’s people, and that has increasingly lost its significance as a relational term despite the global church having the holy God in common in referential terms. In the big picture, holy (*qadash*, Gen 2:3; Ex 31:13) means to be set aside and consecrated to God, not about just being pure. This relational process is constituted by the holy God, Who is certainly pure and What is indeed whole. Yet, what

distinguishes the holy God is that God is *pala* and beyond any comparison measured in human terms—beyond what is ordinary or common to human contextualization. The *What* of God is uncommon, Who is affirmed by philosophical theology yet unfortunately defined in referential terms as ‘the unknowable God’. In relational terms, the Uncommon intruded into the context of the common to be known and understood for the uncommon purpose of relationship together with the holy God. What as Uncommon and Who as Subject, however, require uncommon terms for relationship together in order to compose compatible reciprocal response from no ordinary subjects—that is, from persons whose ontology and function are not defined and determined by what is common to human contextualization, but rather who are transformed to the uncommon constituted only by, with and in the whole and holy God. Otherwise, the uncommon God and common humans are incompatible for relationship together, even if they are members of the church. Certainly then, uncommon terms for relationship are irreducible to referential terms and nonnegotiable to human terms, which holds us accountable for what God we share together and challenges our assumptions about this God central to the global church.

Unfolding from the uncommon theological trajectory and intrusive relational path of Jesus, the global church embodied by Jesus, together with the Spirit, shares together uncommonly in reciprocal relationship together with the whole and uncommon God—as the whole of God’s uncommon family transformed in ontology and function integrally in the qualitative image of the Uncommon and the relational likeness of the Whole. Anything less and any substitutes in our theology and practice reduce God to the common and thus fragment persons and relationships to the common condition in their surrounding contexts—which the global church seems to reflect, reinforce or sustain rather than transform. If this *commonization* is true, it needs to be responded to by the church in both the North and the South with the highest priority and deepest concern.

The most critical issues converging on this whole process are pivotal for what the global church may or may not share together, and yet still have in common. Unequivocally and unmistakably, what is common to any and all sectors of the church—regardless of geography, culture, race and ethnicity, and socioeconomic status—is the nature of sin and its outworking that determines the human condition. This commonality existing in the global church has been neither understood adequately nor responded to sufficiently, therefore it has been consequential for the integrity of Christian whole theology and practice and church whole ontology and function. The nature of sin defined by the presence and influence of reductionism, and its outworking determined by reductionism’s counter-relational work, for example, has had ongoing consequences on gender, class, age, along with race-ethnicity and other human distinctions. Part of the current discussion on the significance of Christianity in the global South evidences the lack of fully understanding such distinctions in terms of the nature of sin as reductionism. While moral and ethical judgments of distinctions may be made—for example, about race or caste—what is still lacking is the whole understanding needed to get down to the deeper significance of persons and the relationships required to be whole and uncommon. When we get down to this underlying relational basis, persons and relationships emerge who have significance to the whole and uncommon God.

Moreover, another related commonality easily existing throughout the global church involves the following: The significance of the theology and practice in the church—in both the global South and North without singling out either—is an open question that strains to be distinguished from the nature of sin as reductionism due to its quantitative referential influence shaping a reduced theological anthropology of persons and relationships, which then essentially reflects, reinforces or sustains the fragmentation defining the human condition. Reduced ontology and function of persons, relationships and the church are not readily recognized by a common perceptual-interpretive lens; and this is consequential of the dynamic of reductionism underlying much of the theology and practice in our midst, the subtle consequences of which are immeasurable.

Again with the highest priority and deepest concern, Christians and the church need to talk about sin in its breadth and depth. Yet, to engage this dialogue, our understanding of sin needs to go beyond the limits of ethical and moral terms. Sin didn't emerge from the beginning as mere ethical and moral failure; and how sin composes the human condition cannot be narrowed down to ethical and moral language. Our engagement, therefore, may challenge our assumptions and, indeed, may make us vulnerable to our own condition needing to be changed. Without this engagement, we may unintentionally reflect, reinforce and sustain this condition rather than transform it.

These are the primary and pivotal issues that need to intensify the concern of the global church and compel a single-minded response. Christians in God's whole family are accountable to vulnerably address what is primary to God over the secondary—turning from our occupation, even preoccupation, with the secondary, as necessary—and thereafter to integrate the secondary into the primary. This study proceeds reciprocally with the Spirit on this relational basis, with this relational purpose, and for this relational outcome.

So, whether you are from the global North or South, perhaps beyond, if you profess the relational God present and involved and if you claim to have relationship with this God, then the whole and holy God pursues us for answers in reciprocal relational response to his questions:

“Where are you in your person and relationships?”

“What are you doing here in your theology and practice?”

“Don't you know and understand me yet, even after all your learning, knowledge and information?”

“Do you love me with intimate involvement in reciprocal relationship together?”

And in further pursuit of our theology and practice:

“Has Christ been divided, fragmented, reduced in your Christology, ecclesiology and discipleship?”

These are ongoing questions for each of us because that's *how* the *Who* and *What* of God is in relationship with us. Therefore, we can always count on the righteous God to be nothing less and no substitute! May this study be helpful for our reciprocal response to

be compatible to God's, such that the whole and uncommon God can also count on us to be whole and uncommon in relationship together as God's global church family. And so that the persons, relationship and churches composing the global church will be distinguished to function ongoingly for the transformation of the human context, rather than remain within the limits and constraints of common function that would only reflect, reinforce and sustain the human context's prevailing condition.

Section I: The Fragmentary Human Context Shaping the Church

Chapter 2 Listening to Sin

You will not be reduced or fragmented.

Genesis 3:4

Therefore, consider carefully how you listen.

Luke 8:18, NIV

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

Mark 4:24

With the wave of technology sweeping over the globe, the Internet and social media have amplified communication to increasing quantitative levels that is shrinking the world and reshaping its cultures in how persons behave. The heightened intensity in this new(er) process of human engagement creates “noise” (too much activity, overstimulation, information overload, overly distracted brains), which significantly has reduced both the quality of our listening and the depth of our relational connections. This impact occurs not only in individualistic cultures but also in collectivist cultures (such as in East Asia) as the digital age takes hold—anxiously causing, for example, China to enforce strong constraints on Internet usage to control access that could result in political consequences. Whatever the exposure and response to cyberspace, whether in the global North or South, there is and has been a growing disconnect in relationship as persons become further fragmented.¹

Yet, there is more than technology that is causing changes in human behavior. There are deeper areas of human life that we need to listen to, which engage us beyond technology. Underlying the shape and reshaping of culture are deeper influences and causes for either individualistic cultures or collectivist cultures, some of which they have in common. For example, neuroscientist Robert Sapolsky reports on studies showing that what region persons live in a particular country can alter how a person thinks contrary to their culture. This is demonstrated in a specific context by how rice farmers in China epitomize their collectivist culture, whereas wheat farmers in China live as in an individualistic culture characteristic of the West—not due to technology or Western influence but from the structure of each farming system. The main point Sapolsky highlights in this “is simply to make us marvel at the subtlety of the factors that shape us.”²

Beyond technology, and apart from its noise in our lives, we need to listen carefully and pay attention to the subtle factors that shape us. The most consequentially factors are those that reduce the quality of human life, most notably by fragmenting persons and relationships, both of which have resulted from technological engagement yet have more subtle causal factors than that. The most subtle factor converging with the

¹ Further discussion on these changes is insightfully made by Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), and Jaron Lanier, *You Are Not a Gadget: A Manifesto* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010).

² Robert M. Sapolsky, “How humans are formed,” OP-ED, *Los Angeles Times*, August 3, 2014.

global church to shape its theology and practice, and thereby to reduce the quality of its life and fragment persons and relationships embodying the church, is reductionism and its counter-relational workings. Perhaps the Internet and social media engagement are only its most apparent symptom. What distinguishes the global church, however, is not currently apparent, because only the church's persons and relationships together in whole ontology and function composing whole theology and practice can distinguish the global church from the subtlety of reduced ontology and function and fragmentary theology and practice shaped by reductionism. The subtlety of reduced and/or fragmentary factors shaping us—notably defining persons and determining relationships with a reduced theological anthropology and an incomplete gospel—is never apparent unless we listen carefully and pay attention to the subtle presence of reductionism and understand its subtle influence.

Listening carefully could be more problematic for global North Christians, whose individualistic cultures and Western functional dominance and theological prominence imply 'speaking over listening'. At the same time, paying attention could be problematic for global South Christians, whose cultural lens may make too many assumptions that readily accept and thus easily ignore subtleties. Evil, for example, would likely draw the attention of global South Christians more than their counterparts in the North, yet the subtlety of reductionism could readily be accepted or ignored (e.g. like the spirit world, even variations of magic). Contextual differences and variations must be accounted for in theology and practice. Simon Chan points in this direction to make a reasonable case for grassroots theology in Asian Christianity.³ Yet, unless it is understood what persons (at whatever level) in a particular culture listen to, and what is paid attention to or ignored and why, it is problematic knowing 'what shapes who' and 'who shapes what'. Without making clear the subtlety of these distinctions, any theology and practice is unable to be distinguished beyond the common shaped by the surrounding context—in spite of good grass-roots intentions.

In other words, how we listen and what we pay attention to or ignore are both shaped by our surrounding contexts. And human contextualization cannot be the primary determinant for the global church—as Paul made imperative for the church (Col 3:15-16)—or its theology and practice are rendered subject to the shaping influence of reductionism. This is why Paul's fight *for* the whole gospel composing the global church required conjointly (inseparably and equally) his fight *against* reductionism, so that the global church would not be fragmented and its theology and practice fragmentary—as he demonstrated against Peter and the like (Gal 2:11-14; 5:6; 6:15).

Listen from the Beginning

The subtle presence and influence of reductionism emerged from the beginning, although the narrative account in the primordial garden usually has not been interpreted and understood in the underlying depth of its subtlety. Christians in the global church, notably we in the North, need to listen to sin from the beginning; and on this definitive basis we all in the church together need to pay attention to how it has converged with and

³ Simon Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology: Thinking the Faith from the Ground Up* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2014).

emerged in the global church to shape us today—not for a referential purpose “to make us marvel at the subtlety” (as Sapolsky said above) but for the relational purpose to make us whole.

In our theology and practice, when we start wondering “Did God really say that?” we urgently need to listen carefully to what’s emerging and pay close attention to its counter-relational work seeking to influence. It is understandable, and necessary, to want to know what God said, and further to understand what God means by those words. Yet, there is a conflicting difference between letting God speak for himself and speaking for God—a subtle conflict of interest (especially by teachers in the church and academy) that we don’t pay close attention to and thus which has shaped much theology and practice, past and present, in the global North and South.

Whether the account in the primordial garden (Gen 3:1-13) is seen as history or allegory, God wants us to listen from the beginning and pay attention to the experiential reality of what ongoingly opposes the *whole* of God, and that seeks every opportunity to interfere, disrupt and disconnect the relational words of communication from God in order to diminish and minimalize relationship together with the whole and holy (uncommon) God. The seemingly innocuous issue raised by “Did God say that?” quickly transitioned into the underlying issue of speaking for God and redefining what God meant and intended with those words: “You will not *be reduced*, for God knows...your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (vv.4-5). Defining what God means and intended has been a hermeneutic issue—particularly pervading the global North academy—which has resulted in various theories and conclusions subtly causing fragmentation of God’s words and reduction of what is primary and thus significant to God: this primary significance is only relationship together in wholeness that both defined what is *good* and was determined in God’s relational likeness (Gen 1:27; 2:18).

The initial question raised by Satan needs to be heard beyond a mere query but must by the nature of its source be listened to in its subtle challenge, and thereby paid attention to for its underlying dynamic: promoting a conflict of interest (speaking for God, “For God knows...”) in order to subtly compose human identity with epistemological illusion (“your eyes will be opened”) and ontological simulation (“you will be like God”); all based on the underlying assumption that “you will not die,” that is, be reduced and fragmented, but will achieve the highest distinction “knowing good and evil.” The appeal of this subtle challenge intensifies when human identity is measured by terms composed in a comparative process—a process fragmenting persons and stratifying relationships. What unfolds from this challenge is not ‘an eye opener’ but rather ‘an eye changer’.

All Christians are subjected to this challenge and its underlying dynamic. Whether we become subject to it is contingent on how we listen and what we pay attention to. Even when neither explicit nor intended, speaking for God has an appeal that is undeniable and often irresistible—particularly when we want answers or need explanations in our situations and circumstances, just as Job demonstrated (Job 42:3-5). Moreover, when you add self-determination (even among collectivists) to the equation determining human identity, a pivotal paradigm shift emerges that transposes human persons and relationships from the whole of inner out (“they were both naked vulnerably from inner out and not ashamed of their wholeness in relationship together,” Gen 2:25) to

the reduction of outer in. This pivotal shift unfolds as it subtly changes the perceptual-interpretive lens of persons and relationships to fragmentary parts. With this fragmenting lens, these persons explicitly or implicitly “saw that it was good...a delight...to be desired *for self-determination*.” Such persons who don’t listen to reductionism and pay attention carefully to its counter-relational work readily engage, even unintentionally, to “partake of the fruit of self-determination...then, with the consequence of a lens narrowed down to outer in, persons only saw their fragmentary parts that they hid from each other, causing relational barriers to relationship together” (Gen 3:6-8). Therefore, they went from ‘good to be whole together’ to “good to be apart *from* wholeness” (2:18), engaged in a reductionist process entrenched in a comparative system inevitably needing self-justification—“the woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me the fruit of *self-determination* and I *participated*” (3:12).

What we are witnessing is the reduction of human ontology and function from the wholeness that only God determines. Given this account of what emerged from the beginning, it is inadequate to define the Fall as merely disobedience to God. Nor is it sufficient to define sin merely as moral or ethical failure. We can attribute this limited view and narrowed-down lens to the genius of Satan, who promotes epistemological illusions and ontological simulations as the outworking of reductionism—and whom Jesus exposed as “the father of lies” (Jn 8:44) and Paul fought against in the church disguised “as an angel of light...as ministers of righteousness” (2 Cor 11:14-15). Reductionism is indeed a force to contend with, yet most pervasively a subtle force that often eludes our recognition or detection.

The subtlety of this primal challenge to wholeness from the beginning, its underlying assumption of not being reduced or fragmented, and its pivotal paradigm shift have not been listened to as the reductionism defining the nature of sin, nor paid attention to as determining the ontology and function of persons and relationships pervasive (if not prevailing) in our midst. The subtle influence of reductionism, therefore, has notably shaped much of our theology and practice as follows:

Narrowed down with a reduced theological anthropology composing fragmentary persons and relationships, with an incomplete Christology lacking the wholeness of Christ, with a truncated soteriology without what Jesus saved us *to* ‘already’, and thus without the whole gospel embodied by the whole and *uncommon* God, and therefore without the whole ontology and function necessary for the global church to be God’s intimate relational dwelling equally with all peoples both South and North.

Anything less and any substitutes in our theology and practice, whether intentional or not, always mean the imprint of reductionism exists as an experiential reality, for which we can no longer avoid being accountable.

When we don’t listen to sin as reductionism and pay attention to its subtle counter-relational work, the best we will be able to say to God’s question “Where are you?” is “The *subtlety of reductionism* tricked me” (Gen 3:13, “deceived me,” NIV). However, God holds us accountable to listen from the beginning and pay attention—not only to sin but also to God speaking for himself and “the unfolding of your words gives light, it imparts understanding to *those listening*” (Ps 119:130).

Continuing to Listen

Any discussion of sin—if and when it emerges at all in our conversations—has been inadequate and needs to get to sin’s breadth and depth. Since sin didn’t emerge in the beginning as mere ethical or moral failure, we need to continue to listen to how sin composes the human condition beyond the limits of ethical and moral language. In addressing the human condition in this respect, there are even times when it appears that ethics is secondary (yet not unimportant) to the primacy of wholeness for persons and relationships, which mere ethical action is insufficient to bring about (e.g. Jesus’ forceful clearing of the temple to make it whole, Mk 11:15-17, Jn 2:13-17). If we don’t fully understand what composes the human condition, then we can in fact be reflecting, reinforcing or even sustaining the human condition rather than transforming it.

In the creation narrative, God made a definitive statement about the human person that we need to listen carefully and pay close attention to: “It is not good for the *human person* to be alone” (Gen 2:18, NIV). What is “good” (*tob*), however, is not about the work that God gave human persons to do (2:15, cf. Ecc 2:24; 3:22). It may appear that God is focused on the work as the primary purpose for which another human person was created, “a helper” (discussed further in chap. 3). This is where we need to listen more carefully and pay even closer attention to God’s relational language, not referential language. To emphasize “work” (*abad*, term also for service) as the primary concern of God would both redefine how God defines the person and invert the primary priority of God’s created design and purpose for human persons.

“To be alone” evokes different perceptions in an individualistic culture and a collectivist culture, thus what would be considered “not good” would vary. For example, while to be alone may not be a primary value in the U.S., it is an increasing practice among younger generations and less considered ‘not good’. Whereas to be alone is not good in a collectivist culture, it may actually become highly valued implicitly by those wanting to have a further sense of identity as a person. This renders what is good (*tob*, correct, righteous, right, virtue) to the shaping from our surrounding contexts, which then reduces the practice of good to human determination according to their situations and circumstances (e.g. situation ethics). “To be alone,” however, is only one side of the coin, and, though prominent, it is a misleading side until the other side is grasped.

The Hebrew term in “to be alone” (*bad*) can also be rendered “to be apart.” This rendering gives a deeper sense of relationship and the significance of not being connected to another person, which is the significance of God’s words in relational terms over merely referential terms. The distinction of this side of the coin is vital to make and critical to pay attention to in our theology and practice. For the human person in the beginning, it was not just the secondary matter (however important) of having no one to share space with (“not to be alone”), no one to keep him company (“as his partner”), or to do things with (particularly the work as “a helper”). Even though important, all those matters are secondary to God and the primacy constituting human persons in the beginning. Unlike “to be alone,” “to be apart” is not just a situational condition but most importantly a relational condition, that is, the relational condition composing the human condition. A person can (and commonly does) be alone in a situation but also experience some degree of loneliness in the company of others, often at church, even in a family

(extended or nuclear) or marriage, and notably in a collectivist culture, because of existing relational distance—“being apart.”

Yet, isn't this relational distance to be expected, and is it not unreasonable to expect more relational connection, given the situations and circumstances of most persons? Yes and no. Yes, this is the norm for the human condition, which we can continue to ignore and allow to have primary determination of our person and relationships. No, if we listen and pay attention to God's created design and purpose for human persons and why it is not good, correct, right for any person (regardless of situations, circumstances or human distinction) “to be apart.”

What is often overlooked or ignored in the creation narrative results in our person and relationships becoming fragmentary: “to be apart” from the wholeness of God's creation—namely, but not solely, apart from the wholeness of persons from inner out and of relationships together (“both naked and were not ashamed”). In spite of the responsibility of work to be done from creation, what the person needed had little to do with help for work but everything concerned with the primacy of his whole ontology and function—the distinguished quality that work can neither provide nor fulfill. This concern (“It is not good”) was God's focus, response and whole provision for the human person in the irreducible design and nonnegotiable purpose to be whole persons in intimate relationship together in the image and likeness of the whole of God. Anything less and any substitute for persons and relationships—for example, making work, serving, even ministry primary over God's primacy—render them to be apart from wholeness, reduced to the fragmentary terms composing the human condition. This is the consequence to be expected and the limits and constraints determining what will emerge for persons and relationships in the global North and South, whenever reductionism converges with God's created whole and allowed to have its influence.

In the beginning human persons clearly already knew *good (tov)* composed by the wholeness from inner out in which God created persons and relationships—“they were naked *whole-ly from inner out* and were not ashamed, *confounded, disappointed, disgrace or deceived*” (all connoting *bad*, Gen 2:25). Sadly, they also experienced what is *bad*, of inferior quality, signifying the term for evil (*ra'*) that was predicted for them, yet not at the comparative level promised (“be like God, knowing good and evil,” 3:4). Therefore, it is never good, correct, right, beautiful, righteous (all signifying *good*) to be apart from God's whole.

These are the words unfolding from the beginning—which “gives light and imparts understanding...” (Ps 119:130)—that God speaks for himself and requires us to listen carefully to, and the sin of reductionism that God necessitates for us to pay close attention to. Based on God's created design and purpose, *good* is neither negotiable to human terms nor relative to our surrounding contexts, cultures or other such influences, thus making us accountable to be whole, live whole and make whole the human condition existing both in the church and in the world. And if we're listening and paying attention, this is the human condition subtly composed by reductionism and its counter-relational work—composed in the modern world with increasingly complex measures (such as technology simulating relational connection and creating illusions about it) that we uncritically assume “will not be reducing and fragmenting.”

So, “Where are you *in your person and relationships?*” is God’s ongoing concern for and pursuit of those composing the global church. Remember, the covenant relationship with God is engaged only by wholeness (*tamiym*, Gen 17:1)—the wholeness constituting our creation and further composing God’s definitive blessing on us, his family (*shalom*, Num 6:24-26)—which Jesus embodied for us in relationship together beyond what’s common (Jn 14:27), and thereby that Paul made the relational imperative for the global church (Col 3:15). Therefore, God is further concerned and pursues us for “What are you doing here *in our covenant relationship and in my church family?*”

Listening to the Word

The tension and conflict between God’s whole and reductionism are ongoing. What should be apparent if we pay close attention is often not practiced due to making the uncritical or sweeping assumption that “you will not be reduced or fragmented.” The subtlety of reductionism’s challenge of the whole emerged from the beginning when the person’s focus was prompted to shift from the whole to the parts (“eat from any tree,” Gen 3:1). The shift in our focus to the parts in itself is only significant if it becomes a substitute for the whole, and thus replaces the primary with what is only secondary at best. Moreover, discussion of the parts could make clear reference to the whole, or the sum of the parts may simply be assumed to equal the whole. Thus, the distinction between the whole and the parts is critical to make and indispensable for our theology and practice to either be whole or be fragmented into parts, the latter of which, at best, can only simulate God’s whole.

This is where the process of reductionism can become obscure because logic and reason blur the line between the parts and the whole to confuse the issue of what determines the whole of God (or God’s whole as the church) and how to perceive God’s whole (both the Trinity and the person, individually and corporately, created in the triune God’s image). This process is crucial to address because it forms the basis for *who* will determine *what* and *what* will determine *whom*. This then is about the issue of causation—a subtle issue specific to Christian practice—which involves either the effect of the whole of God on persons (top-down causation) or the effects of Christian behavior on the whole of God (bottom-up causation).⁴ While Christian practice tends not to be either-or but a combination, the critical issue to resolve is who gets the primary function and who has only a secondary function, including how they will functionally interact together. Reductionism gives primary priority to the parts over the whole—an influence not always indicated in our theology but witnessed in our practice. Reductionism is further evident when the secondary becomes the focus over the primary, which directly emerges from a narrowed-down lens that is often preoccupied with the secondary.

Conjointly, reductionism’s counter-relational work always involves human persons determining relationship with God on their terms in contradiction to God as sole determiner of the terms for the relationship. This happens in the functional practice of one’s beliefs, not necessarily reflecting the beliefs themselves. How this gets ambiguous

⁴ For a further discussion on the general issue of causation, see Nancey Murphy, *Theology in a Postmodern Age* (Czech Republic: International Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003).

is when the outward forms and practices of those terms appear similar, yet in function are qualitatively different from God's terms—the crucial distinction between our referential terms and God's relational terms. This becomes clearly distinguished later when the embodied Word was also challenged in summary tests by Satan (Lk 4:1-13).

When we don't listen carefully to God's words unfolding in relational terms over referential terms and don't pay close attention to subtle challenges narrowing down God's words to a limited epistemic field and process shaped by human contexts, then the trajectory of our theology and the path of our practice have a lack of clarity. Clarity is only distinguished by God's relational terms—"gives light and imparts whole understanding"—which referential terms cannot provide no matter the amount of knowledge, level of scholarship, or the extent of belief and degree of conviction. The lack of relational clarity renders our theology to ambiguity and our practice to shallowness—conditions describing the presence of fog—which Jesus exposed in order to clearly distinguish the identity of his followers (Mt 5:13-16).

The created order of life in likeness of the relational God was constituted in the beginning by God's irreplaceable relational terms. Human persons and relationships were constituted in the distinguished relational context and relational process of the whole and holy God, and since the beginning they are composed whole only in God's irreducible relational context and nonnegotiable relational process. Ever since, this whole process has also been taken out of this primary relational context to reshape persons and relationships in a fragmenting process narrowed down to their parts—primarily secondary parts from outer in composed by referential terms over the primacy of God's whole relational terms. Certainly, yet not obviously, the ongoing issue of *who* determines *what* and *what* determines *who* needs clarification, if not correction, in our theology and practice. The need is urgent because the integrity of God's whole and the interrelated reality of our wholeness otherwise is subject to reductionism—a condition needing redemption and transformation, which referential terms can only refer to at best. For this purpose, God's question ("Where are you in your persons and relationships?") emerges in the human context only in the significance of relational terms and only for the relational reality of this relational outcome.

To further distinguish the relational outworking of God's relational response of grace to the human (our) condition, and thereby also fulfilling God's definitive relational blessing (Num 6:24-26), God's relational context and process has been whole-ly embodied by the face of Christ (Col 1:15-20; 2 Cor 4:6), and by his vulnerable relational terms further unfolded in the trinitarian relational context of family and the trinitarian relational process of family love. Yet, expectedly, at least for those who listen carefully and pay close attention, reductionism also extended and intensified its counter-relational work both in the church and its surrounding context (2 Cor 2:17; 4:2-4; Col 2:4, 8-10).

Listening and paying attention to the Word was an ongoing issue that Jesus addressed, and continues to be an ongoing issue today that global North and South Christians need to address further and deeper. Yet, how this issues is addressed will determine if it indeed goes deeper. Listening is primarily a relational issue, shaped by our perceptual-interpretive lens. What we pay attention to and ignore depends on our lens, which also involves a hermeneutic issue composing our perceptual interpretive framework in primary relational terms or secondary referential terms.

At the pivotal point in the incarnation when Jesus' person was whole-ly illuminated as embodying God (known as the transfiguration, Mt 17:1-5), the Father gave the relational imperative to his followers "This is my Son...listen to him" (17:5). The transfiguration highlights persons in relationship together, not a referential event (as Peter reduced it to, v.4). The Father's relational imperative focused only on the person and highlighted the person's relational significance to compose the promised, expected and now fulfilled relational outcome. Listening to the Word is not about listening to referential teachings, but rather listening to the whole of the Word unfolding: Jesus' whole person embodying the whole of God's relational context and process that integrally constitutes the distinguished theological trajectory of God's vulnerable presence and God's uncommon relational path of intimate involvement in relational response to the human condition only in whole relational terms.

In other words, the embodied Word is composed by and composes only relational language in relational terms; and listening is problematic notably when heard (read) and received in referential language and terms. This means that listening to the Word jointly requires listening to sin as reductionism, which must include the following: paying attention to what counters the relational wholeness of the Word, and reductionism's attempts to fragment the Word into parts such as merely teachings, examples and events, and consequently reduce the Word's relational significance both of the Father and to his followers without the whole relational outcome.

In a prominent interaction, Jesus addressed some Jews who believed in him (Jn 8:31-47). At this point, they were not aware of reductionism having shaped their theology and practice. Consequently, their listening to Jesus' words on redemption and transformation was not only problematic but also involved function incapable of hearing Jesus' relational terms—a lack characteristic of those not listening to reductionism. Their theology and practice, likely from Second Temple Judaism, had been transposed to outer in, thus they were preoccupied with referential information of their identity (v.33) and referential knowledge of God (v.41). Their preoccupation with the secondary left them with "no room for my word" (v.37, NIV); and "for the sake of your *referential* tradition, you make void the *relational* word of God" (Mt 15:6). Yet, underlying their not listening to the Word is a deeper issue that Jesus exposes. "Why is my *relational* language not clear to you?" Jesus asked rhetorically. "Because you are unable to hear what I say *only in relational terms*." Why, because their theology and practice had been shaped by reductionism and its "native language" narrowed down to referential terms, thereby biasing their listening to the relational Word and predisposing them to pay attention to, for example, secondary parts (reduced and fragmented) and to ignore the primary unfolding in whole relational terms, therefore exposing "the reason you do not hear" (vv.43-47, NIV). This is the relational consequence of not listening to reductionism and paying attention to its counter-relational work.

Jesus' main disciples were not immune from this relational consequence. Reductionism in their theology and practice was not apparent to the early disciples, since they ignored its influence—even while they were strongly committed in serving Jesus—and didn't carefully listen and pay close attention to Jesus' words while in his presence (e.g. Mk 4:24; Lk 8:18), especially his critical feedback to them.

When Jesus directly asked his main disciples if they wanted to retract their commitment to follow him, Peter responded without hesitation for all of them: "Lord, to

whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the *Uncommon* of God” (Jn 6:67-69). Quite a statement and confession, that is, from those not listening to reductionism and paying attention to its shaping of their theology and practice. Not surprising or even unexpected, however, when composed in referential language by referential terms (signified in “Lord,” “eternal life,” “know” and “Holy One”). The words of Jesus that they assumed “to know” were referential words in referential language composing their referential knowledge of God, which Jesus would soon clarify and correct in them. They didn’t listen to Jesus’ whole person and pay attention to his relational work, while ignoring his relational significance embodying the whole and uncommon God. This was soon evident after Jesus’ second feeding of thousands, when Jesus exposed their narrowed-down epistemic field and myopic perceptual-lens: “Do you still not perceive or understand [*syniemi*, integrating the whole picture]? Are your hearts *distant and not vulnerable to me*? Do you have eyes, and not *pay attention to my whole person and relational work*? Do you have ears and not *listen to my relational words and relational significance*?”—which they could only answer in referential terms. “Do you not yet *turn from your reductionism in order to understand my whole relational terms*?” (Mk 8:17-21)

Later, speaking for the disciples, Peter made another major confession in response to Jesus’ relational request (Mt 16:15-17), which Peter unknowingly made from beyond his narrowed-down epistemic field (“not revealed to you by *human terms* but by my Father,” v.17, NIV). Yet, as Jesus relationally revealed his coming intense relational work (not explaining a referential event), Peter rejected his relational terms and attempted to constrain Jesus to the bias of his common lens of the messiah that limited what Christ could and could not do—clearly demonstrating the shaping of Peter’s theology and practice by reductionism (16:21-23).

Moreover, as Jesus further revealed relationally his coming relational work, he made imperative for the disciples to listen carefully and “Let *my relational* words sink into your ears.... But they did not understand *his relational terms*; its meaning was concealed from *their lens*, so that they could not perceive *relational terms*” (Lk 9:44-45). How they perceived (*aisthanomai*, recognize, understand) involved understanding words through referential recognition, having this frame of reference for terms, which obviously was incompatible to *aisthanomai* Jesus’ words in relational terms. At this stage, the disciples were unwilling to be vulnerable with Jesus and kept their hearts at a relational distance (as in “hardened,” Mk 8:17). This prevented their *aisthētērion* (from *aisthanomai*, organ of perception, faculty of discernment, capacity of recognition) from being developed and maturing (as in Heb 5:13-14), in order to have the hermeneutic means necessary to know and understand God’s whole relational language, terms, words and actions, and therefore to know and understand the whole and uncommon God.

Their continued preoccupation with the secondary exposed an underlying theological anthropology composing reduced ontology and function of persons and relationships from outer in. This entrenched them in a comparative process stratifying relationships with distinctions of ‘better’ or ‘less’, which further shaped their discipleship by reductionism and the comparative measurement of “which one of them was the greatest” (Lk 9:46). Even at their last table fellowship with Jesus in communion, they continued to be preoccupied with “which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest” (Lk 22:24). While Christians today might not express concern about this exactly in the

disciples' terminology, we unmistakably still have the same concern, whether as an individual or a local church or a theological school, or even as a global sector.

Without listening carefully to reductionism and paying close attention to its fragmenting and counter-relational work, it is not surprising but even to be expected that after three intensive years of discipleship and ministry with Jesus, these magisterial disciples experienced a pervasive consequence among Jesus' followers, including Christian leaders today: "...and you still do not know me?" (Jn 14:9) Jesus wasn't stating a hyperbole but distinguishing the primary from the secondary, and the results expected from each. If we listen to the Word, he made paradigmatic for all his followers: "the measure you use will determine the measure you get back" (Mk 4:24).

Listening to History

Along with hermeneutical and epistemological issues, there are ontological and relational issues deeply involved ongoingly in the composition of our theology and practice and the formation of Christian identity in a changing world. When Israel was chosen by relational terms to be God's uncommon family in the covenant relationship of love (Dt 7:7-9), they had difficulty being distinguished beyond the common and maintaining their whole identity in the limits of the world. The fragmentary human context would shape who they were at the expense of whose they were. They increasingly wanted to be a nation-state "such as all the other nations" rather than be uncommon—perceived as 'different thus less' in a comparative process—"so that we also may be like other nations" (1 Sam 8:5,20).

Without listening to God's relational terms of wholeness (*tamiym*) for the covenant in the primacy of relationship together and without paying attention to reductionism influencing their theology and practice, they composed traditions that reduced their theology and practice to the ontology of persons and the function of relationships defined and determined from outer in, based on fragmentary parts unconnected in relational distance (as in Isa 29:13). This history of their theology and practice unfolded further in Second Temple Judaism (after the exile) distinctly into Jesus' time—history we need to listen to carefully because it has significance for examining our own theology and practice, notably our worship (Mk 7:1-9, NIV). Pay close attention to the unconnected parts composed by tradition:

"lips" moving apart from "hearts"; "hearts" in relational distance "far from me"; the "worship me" relationship reduced to referential "teachings...rules taught by humans"; thereby substituting "the whole relational terms of God" with "the traditions composed by humans"; and, therefore, "You have a *subtle way of reducing* the primacy of God's relational terms for relationship together in order to keep your traditions primary."

What Jesus confronted in religious traditions was reductionism, exposing its subtle shaping of theology and practice that reduced God's whole relational terms to the fragmentary parts of our terms having renegotiated covenant relationship together (cf. *aphiemi* in v.8 with Rev 2:4).

Both religious and cultural traditions have shaped the global church, and we cannot continue to assume that they are simply ‘what’s *good* for the church’. Listening to the Word is how we need to pay attention to the traditions in our theology and practice for any influence from reductionism, notably working subtly in our surrounding contexts that we must not ignore—or be subject to the above relational consequences. We should not, must not, cannot just assume that in the traditions explicitly or implicitly composing our theology and practice “you are not being reduced or fragmented”—the subtle assumption we are ongoingly subjected to.

We will learn further and deeper as we listen. In the fragmentary traditions of majority Jews theology and practice, circumcision was reduced to an outer-in identity marker for nation-state, rather than signifying circumcision of the heart from inner out to distinguish the identity of the whole person in the covenant relationship together of love (Gen 17:10-11; Dt 10:15-16; 30:6). This unfolding history of Israel’s theology and practice—in which Paul was thoroughly embedded and defined by, “a Hebrew of Hebrews,” (Phil 3:5-6)—was illuminated for Paul when he listened to the Word and paid attention to reductionism. Therefore, Paul (still a Jew) made definitive the whole theology and practice that truly composed the identity of a Jew in God’s whole relational terms (Rom 2:28-29)—the formation of which in referential terms, Paul also clarified, had neither significance to God nor value to his family (Gal 5:6; 6:15).

Within this background history, we need to place Jesus during the cleansing of ‘the house of the LORD’ in order to locate him on the theological trajectory and relational path necessary for our theology and practice to be compatible, on the same trajectory and path, and thus composing our theology and practice as the global church in his wholeness (Paul’s only determinant imperative for the church, Col 3:15). As noted earlier, we need to listen to sin beyond just ethics and morality to its breadth and depth as reductionism. Otherwise Jesus’ forceful actions become debatable, arguably seen as an anomaly or exception that no longer applies today, especially in the church. What Jesus saw in “my house,” however, with his whole perceptual-interpretive lens was reductionism, and its sin and counter-relational workings needing to be redeemed and restored to wholeness. The above condensed history established irrefutably—despite rebuttal from Jewish leaders in John’s account of Jesus redeeming “my Father’s house” (Jn 2:18)—the full context for Jesus’ action in relational terms for a necessary relational purpose, not as a referential event. And this relational purpose is needed even in the church today.

Since Israel’s theology and practice revised God’s relational terms for covenant relationship together to referential terms, they renegotiated the terms for relationship with God to be defined by their terms; consequently, they assumed they could configure the LORD’s house on their terms, shaping it accordingly (cf. Jer 7:10-11). In contrast, the Psalmist declared joy for “the house of the LORD,” its condition of well-being in wholeness (*shalom*), 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’ (*tob*) once again emerges with a subtle challenge to be defined either by God’s whole relational terms (as this psalmist) or by our reduced referential terms (even well-established by tradition with good intentions). That is, the nature of the challenges 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.”

When we define good apart from the wholeness that God constituted in the beginning, we make assumptions about what’s good for the church that imply ignoring sin as reductionism. The influence of reductionism is inseparable from the former, underlying who defines what and what determines who. We need to understand that good without wholeness has become the common definition prevailing in the world, and that underlies the various aspects of globalization. The reality for the global church exists in both its defining use of the common good and the church shaped by it. As emerged from the beginning, good apart from wholeness opens the door to anything less and any substitutes in our theology and practice. This renders us, often unknowingly or at least inadvertently, to epistemological illusions and ontological simulations, all of which are operating in our theology and practice under the uncritical assumption “we will not be reduced or fragmented.” The reality (often subtle) of this consequence is unavoidable when subject to reductionism; more importantly, this consequence is inescapable unless redeemed by the wholeness of Christ.

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.

First of all, as we return to Jesus’ intense action in the temple, he immediately declared in relational terms—Jesus didn’t teach them in referential terms—that “My house *is* a house of prayer” (Mk 11:17). That is to say, not just referring to the temple as such, Jesus was stating definitively his house’s relational ontology and function: God’s relational context and process for communicating together face to face in reciprocal relationship. The very nature of “my house” can be nothing less and its existence cannot be determined by any substitutes, which then raises urgent questions about the compositions of churches today. What Jesus found was a conflicting nature and contrary existing substitutes *re*-presenting the Lord’s house. Setting aside our assumptions and paying close attention to what likely have been only familiar details until now will help us understand the depth of what Jesus saw and the breadth of what he found.

In John's account, what Jesus forcefully intruded on was "a marketplace" (Jn 2:16), which helps us have a deeper understanding of the subtle issues than the blatant "a den of robbers" tends to offer in the other Gospels. What do you perceive in a marketplace? Such a context is certainly common and necessary in the global South as well as North (shaped by a shopping mall). There are various factors that characterize a marketplace: sellers, merchandise, buyers, and convenience of both product and process, that is, for those consumers who have the means (including social currency), which then implies a stratified system composed by a comparative process. Sound familiar in churches today? What we need to pay attention to for the contemporary global church are the subtle ways a marketplace conflicts with the nature of "my house," and is contrary to its existence, thereby reducing or fragmenting the ontology and function of God's church family.

In one sense, the church can be described as "sellers" of the gospel. Yet, when various "merchandise" is offered to seekers of good news for their "convenience of product and process" called faith, even with good intentions this reinforces them to be consumers. Consumers and their spiritual consumption sustain the church to function (even unintentionally or inadvertently) as a consumer church—demonstrated even in the early church, which Paul exposed in the fragmented church at Corinth (1 Cor 1:11-12; 3:4). At this early stage, Paul was already distinguishing his person and ministry from the consumerism of those "peddlers of God's word like so many" (2 Cor 2:17); his person and ministry can only be distinguished in whole relational terms composing the primacy of relationship together with God, whereby "we speak *in relational terms* as persons *from inner out*, as persons *in the primacy of relationship* sent from God and standing *vulnerably* in his presence." Unlike Paul, do we essentially also get into merchandising God's word to peddle it to buyers, and likely for their convenience of the product and process of faith, in order to subtly generate more participants and thus supporters for the church—a church's existence and even survival depending on it?

Moreover, 'convenience of product and process' has long been desired. Consider carefully these two examples: (1) The convenient fruit desired to make one conveniently wise that emerged from the primordial garden; and (2) following Jesus conveniently for the convenient outcome of messianic expectations, "When the people saw...they began to say...indeed the *messiah*...make him king.... Jesus said, '...you are looking for me...because you *consumed convenience and want more*'" (Jn 6:14-26). From the beginning, a desire for consumption unfolded to feed self-interest and self-determination; and the human context has evolved to make this consumer process increasingly convenient and abundant. Since the Industrial Revolution, we have come to expect convenience, which likely has since evolved into entitlement, at least in the global North. Both in terms of product and process, convenience requires less work and thus also less involvement by our person—resulting, for example, in less face-to-face contact, much less involvement, by the convenience of modern technology.

At the same time, living in this age of convenience—which is emerging also in the global South—extends the subtle challenge from reductionism. We need urgently to pay attention because convenience has become a prevailing subtle substitute for our person and relationships, reduced from the wholeness God created. Convenience also is pervading the church in its theology (e.g. of the gospel) and practice (e.g. in discipleship, or lack thereof)—just as Jesus found in the marketplace composing "my house." For

example, on the one hand, promoting a prosperity gospel (popular in global South and North) amounts to false advertising that sells short the whole gospel; on the other hand, promoting a gospel limited to salvation from sin (yet without reductionism) truncates salvation and shortchanges the whole gospel with a convenient substitute having little significance for everyday life today and making minimal demands in the practice of faith—in other words, giving the consumer what they want at the loss of what they need.

Going deeper, there is still more underlying that we need to listen and pay attention to. Just as the temple courtyard was used to merchandise the sacrifice and offerings necessary to practice faith, the consequence was that certain people benefitted and others didn't, and usually at their expense. That is, the "den of robbers" signifies that persons were being shortchanged or cheated in their faith, and thus essentially robbed of receiving and experiencing the wholeness of faith constituting God's family. Only in relational terms *is* "my house" the relational context and process of communication in reciprocal relationship together between God and all persons, regardless of human distinction and without their exclusion or subordination. When Jesus irrevocably qualified "my house" as "a house of prayer for all nations, *peoples, persons*" (Mk 11:17), he also confronted the existing systemic, institutional and structural factors preventing this relational reality. For example, the outer temple courts were designated originally for Gentiles but were substituted by a marketplace. Furthermore, women and foreigners were excluded from having access to "my house."⁵ The conflicting nature and contrary existing substitute that Jesus found for "my house" *re-presented* a reduced and fragmented context and process for persons and relationships that resulted in reduced ontology and function needing to be redeemed and transformed. Their shaping of the Lord's house functioned as a stratified system that measured persons and relationships in a comparative process to include some and exclude others, to benefit some at the loss of others, which in human terms could only operate as a zero-sum process. Again, past or present, these relational consequences are unavoidable, as are the consequences of anything less and any substitutes from reductionism.

Indeed, "the measure you use will be the measure you get," yet Jesus would not tolerate "my house" being shaped by reductionism. With the intensity (*zelos*) of his whole person directed to his family's house, Jesus made it imperative: "Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" (Jn 2:17). John's Gospel, unlike the other Gospels, places this account near the beginning, not with a different chronology but for a different purpose. John didn't highlight an event but rather used this to illuminate the integrating theme for the whole theology and practice that Jesus embodied for the whole gospel, in order that our ontology and function, theology and practice, as God's family would also be whole in likeness of the whole of God (as in Jn 14:27; 17:20-26). Therefore, does listening to the Word, to this history, and to reductionism make it imperative for the global church today to pay attention to what exists in the church, what's shaping churches, and currently what needs redemptive change for transformation to wholeness? The alternative is to continue to reflect, reinforce and sustain a condition of good without wholeness and sin without reductionism.

⁵ See Craig Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary, New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 101.

Listening to Key Words for Church History

Let's consider some other early churches and further listen to the Word address their theology and practice. In the beginning history of the early church (after the Acts and epistles) Jesus observed some recurring issues that needed clarification and correction, which is recorded in what signifies his post-ascension discourse for ecclesiology to be whole (Rev 2-3). This discourse contains vital relational words that have not been sufficiently listened to and adequately paid attention to in relational terms during the course of church history. When we listen to the Word in relational terms, we also need to pay attention to the reductionism contending with his wholeness. In his family love, Jesus exposed reductionism in various church practices to hold them accountable for the integrity necessary to be whole as his church. This integrity has not changed based on his relational terms, and this unaltered condition makes it imperative for the global church to examine its own integrity and its basis for it. The skewed emphasis of the secondary over the primary in churches was clearly evident in his post-ascension discourse and makes his vital relational words indispensable for churches today to be whole in likeness of the whole and uncommon God.

We need to understand the full context of Jesus' discourse to have complete understanding of his key words for us today. Being whole always involves the issue of reductionism, since the sole purpose of reductionism is to counter God's whole. While subtlety is a trademark of reductionism, prevalence is the mark of its common presence and workings. We cannot ignore the reality that what prevails in (*en*) any context of the world is reductionism; nor can we simply assume that we will not be reduced or fragmented by its influence in our surrounding contexts. Earlier Jesus called (and continues to call) his followers relationally out of (*ek*) these contexts in order to be whole together as his family and thereby to be distinguished from those common contexts. Thus distinguished, he also relationally sends them back into (*eis*) those surrounding contexts to live whole in the primacy of relationship together as his family, and therefore embody the good news to make whole the human condition "to be apart"—all made definitive in Jesus' formative family prayer (Jn 17:9-23).

This prayer must not be seen (heard) in referential terms for mere information—for example, as often considered when seen as his high priestly prayer—but it is crucial to receive in relational terms as defining for his church. Without the reciprocating dynamic of this *ek-eis* relational involvement by which Jesus constituted his family, church practice is functionally (if not theologically also) based on just *en* (in) the surrounding context and thereby shaped in its influence, that is, by the prevailing influence of reductionism. To be *en* the world not only exposes us to the presence of this prevailing influence surrounding us but, more important, we become subject to its shaping (e.g. of our identity), unless we are ongoingly connected and involved with a source beyond the prevailing influence surrounding us—namely, the Source who wholly determines us (and that identity). *Ek* is that relational dynamic connecting us to be directly involved with that Source beyond—the whole and uncommon God not narrowed down to the limits and constraints of the world, notably contained by the surrounding human context.

We may try to avoid or escape reductionism's prevailing influence—for example, by isolating ourselves, as attempted in church history by monasticism—only to discover

the experiential reality that the sin of reductionism is unavoidable and inescapable because it composes the human condition “to be apart” even in isolation. However, how Jesus constitutes his family is distinguished with the relational process *ek* composed by relational terms distinct from referential terms—the irreplaceable relational process distinguishing the church’s whole and uncommon identity. Furthermore, what distinguishes his family requires jointly the relational dynamic of *eis* directing his family back *into* the world in order to live their whole and uncommon identity *in* the world to make it whole also. And any form of separatism is not an option for distinguishing his family in the world but simply diminishes and minimalizes its identity (as salt and light, Mt 5:13-16). Only this reciprocating dynamic of *ek-eis* relational involvement with the whole and uncommon God—composing reciprocating contextualization in the relational process of triangulation—constitutes the identity of his family distinguished from anything less and any substitutes shaped by reductionism.

On this relational basis constituting his church and distinguishing the church’s identity in the surrounding context, Jesus clarified and corrected the practices and related theology of various early churches. This integrally forms the lens also for how we need to pay closer attention to church history and the basis for the current global church.

Each of these churches is notable for its own variation of church practice, which parallel church practices today. An underlying issue, however, common to these churches emerges in Jesus’ correction of them: the referentialization of the Word from God’s whole relational terms (composing Jesus’ theological trajectory and relational path) to referential terms. Referentialization of the Word involves a narrowing-down process resulting in an incomplete, selective or otherwise distorted view of the Word—for example, not closely listening to the Word discussed above, notably his defining prayer for his church family—which then reshapes his theological trajectory and fragments his relational path. One of the common theological consequences of fragmenting the Word is substituting a hybrid theology for whole theology; and this further results in related consequences of fragmenting practice by substituting hybrid practice for whole practice.

A hybrid process emerges clearly in the church in Thyatira (Rev 2:18-19). Thyatira’s economy emphasized trades (including brass-working) and crafts (cf. Acts 16:14). In the Greco-Roman world of that time, trade guilds organized the various trades and were necessary to belong to if one wanted to pursue a trade (much like unions today). These guilds served various social functions as well, one of which was to meet for common meals dedicated to their patron deities, thereby engaging in activities of pagan worship and immorality. For Christians not to belong to a guild and participate would generally mean becoming isolated economically and socially.⁶ The economic structure of this church’s surrounding context shaped them to take an apparent pragmatic approach to their practice of faith, rather than become isolated economically and socially.

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 prevailing teaching and practice from the surrounding context (likely related to trade-guilds), which

⁶ For further contextual information, see Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000).

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 (as another church will soon demonstrate) 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* 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.

The influence of reductionism is usually more subtle than witnessed in the Thyatira church, as becomes evident increasingly in the other churches Jesus addressed. The subtlety should not be lost to us because the recurring issues Jesus clarifies and corrects also penetrate deeper into the global church today.

Next is the church in Laodicea (Rev 3:14-22), perhaps the most recognized of these churches due to familiarity of key words by Jesus: “you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot.... Listen! I am standing at the door knocking.” Laodicea’s water supply was unique—hot water piped in from hot springs and cold water trenched in from the mountains—yet what characterizes this church is how *common* it was. Western churches, notably in the U.S., need to pay added attention 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. The state of the church reported this self-assessment: “I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing” (v.17). 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—subtle but common theology and practice of most churches. This was the fragmentary condition that the embodied Word (in and from the beginning) 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. In other words, this church embodied the common theology and practice that what’s good (or at least OK) for the church is ‘good without wholeness’; and it maintains this illusion because it only acknowledges any sin as ‘sin without reductionism’, while ignoring ‘sin as reductionism’ of their persons, relationships and thus church under the assumption that they are not reduced or fragmented.

Moreover, and this is crucial today for the global church to listen and pay attention to, the prevailing reality is that the Internet and social media have amplified the comparative process to compose “virtual good.” And these pervasive messages and referential information subtly both shape our lens and thinking as well as construct illusions and simulations in our practice. Churches (including the global South) are neither isolated nor immune from this globalized comparative system. Think about all the church and academy websites, and remember the early disciples primary concern for “which of them is the greatest.” How much does this create a consumer mentality promoting consumer products to feed our consumption of what’s good? Therefore, since Christians and churches are exposed to and participate in this comparative process, we cannot assume any longer that “we are not and will not be reduced or fragmented.”

What Jesus found in the Laodicean church he continues to find common in churches today. As we listen to the Word and to reductionism, we also need to listen to him pursuing us at the door of our hearts (3:20). His family love seeks for his family to be uncommonly whole together in likeness of the whole and uncommon God, which is irreducible to anything less and nonnegotiable with any substitutes—notably prevalent in the surrounding contexts. The classic image of Jesus knocking at the door is a metaphor of his deep desires and the redemptive change needed for this relational outcome—a metaphor relationally directed less to the individual (as is Christian convention) and more to his church family, the full context for ecclesiology to be whole.

The pervasive influences of reductionism in churches is to be expected when they don't pay close attention to their theology and practice shaped by 'good without wholeness' and ignore the presence in their midst of sin as reductionism. The convenient alternative assumed in theology and practice—which readily provides a rationale for this to continue, even develop into traditions—is some hybrid. This is the subtle challenge unfolding from reductionism that continues to be engaged with increasing subtlety. Two other churches demonstrated an increased subtlety in their theology and practice, which listening to the Word will help us understand the dynamic of reductionism and its counter-relational workings even in our prominent churches that, comparatively speaking, put lukewarm churches to shame.

The next church is in Sardis (Rev 3:1-3). They had “a name, *reputation, brand* [*onoma*] of being alive” apparently in the prevailing perception surrounding them, even though this city hosted many pagan cults whose practices pervaded the surrounding context. The implication here, which we need to understand fully, is that this church lived behind their name, reputation, brand, that is, *onoma* used as the substitute for what a person (in this case church) actually is. A popular name or brand, for example, is highly respected and has a strong reputation (perhaps even appeal) in the surrounding context, which in a diverse context like Sardis commanded even more acclaim. Yet, did this *onoma* actually represent what the church was, or merely represent what the church hoped to be, hoped to achieve in the surrounding context or even hope to claim in their comparative system? That is to say, did their *onoma* in reality become a reductionist substitute for what the church actually needed to be?

Jesus wasn't impressed by their practice and made no such assumptions about them being alive in their ontology and function. Rather he examined how they functioned, that is, examined in relational terms through the qualitative whole lens penetrating inner out with family love. Though he was subjected to reductionism yet not determined by the influence of the surrounding bias perceiving this church—which is important for us to distinguish in our church assessments—Jesus exposed what actually existed beneath the outer layer (and *onoma*) of “being alive”: the simple, if not inconvenient, 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).

Was there also something more specific missing in their church practice that we can understand? Unlikely if we are listening only in referential terms, yet there is indeed in relational terms. Since no explicit sins such as idol worship and sexual immorality were mentioned (as in Thyatira), their incomplete deeds point to something more subtle or lacking. Their activity was perceived as alive, yet likely in the quantitative aspects of *bios*, not the qualitative function of *zoe*. Their reputation signified only a substitute (*onoma*) of the integral identity of who, what and how his church is, consequently 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 dirtied from subtle incomplete work, including preoccupation with the secondary—would have this relational consequence.

What this more subtly indicates is the lack or absence of ongoing involvement in the *ek-eis* relational dynamic that Jesus made the relational imperative for his church family to be distinguished *en* the surrounding contexts of the world (Jesus' defining prayer discussed above, Jn 17)—distinguished in their whole and uncommon identity from the common and fragmentary surrounding them. Without this relational outcome from the *ek-eis* relational dynamic, this church became subject to the shaping influence of reductionism with the following consequences:

Therefore, they were unable to distinguish being whole from reductionist substitutes in their practice, which emerged from subtly renegotiating God's whole relational terms to their terms, thereby submitting to a comparative process measured by 'good without wholeness', which composed their illusion and simulation of being alive, unable to perceive that "you are reduced and fragmented," which rendered them to reflect, reinforce and sustain the human condition "not good to be apart," leaving them to know only 'sin without reductionism'—the knowledge of good and evil too many churches are subject to and thus shaped by.

It seems incongruent that this highly esteemed church was so incomplete. Their practice obviously wasn't lukewarm to reflect a status-quo church as in Laodicea. Yet, the subtle self-contradiction is that what often appears compatible to Christ's church (known early as the Way) is in reality not congruent with Jesus' relational path embodying God's whole relational terms (cf. Mt 7:22-23). Being complete and whole and not reduced or fragmented has been an ongoing issue in church history, with recurring issues facing the global church today. Yet, the issue of not being complete or being whole started back at creation and the purpose to "fill the earth" (Gen 1:28). The Hebrew term for "fill" (*male*) generally denotes completion of something that was unfinished. When God declared "it is not good for human persons to be apart," God started, with Adam and Eve, the relational context and process of the function to be God's family. This was later fulfilled by Jesus—as he declared "I will not leave you as orphans" and sent us the Spirit for completion—in the trinitarian relational context of family by the trinitarian relational process of family love. This relational context and process of God's family were not the primary function of the Sardis church's involvement and ministry, so Jesus critiqued what they "filled their church" with, as he does all churches.

In spite of how well the Sardis church presented itself (its appearance) and how well it was perceived (its image), qualitative substance was lacking. This reflected a shift in how they defined themselves from the inner out to the outer-in aspects and functions (*metaschematizo*, 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—unlike the Laodicean church’s lukewarmness. The choice essentially of style over substance is not unique to the church in Sardis. In fact, the distinction between style (for appearance and image) and substance is blurred in many current church practices. Yet, the credibility gap between what appears to be and what actually exists is not readily apparent to a church and observers, when a church relies on what it does to define itself. Reputation becomes one of those valued indicators of success 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).

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 (*metamorphoo*, the inward change of transformation) of the person and relationships, while being redeemed from the outer-in aspects and functions (*metaschematizo*) that did not give full importance to the qualitative function of the whole person (signified only by the heart) 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.*”

The last church we will discuss in this group is in Ephesus (Rev 2:1-4). It is the first church recorded in Jesus’ discourse yet it summarizes the primary issue underlying the other churches, as well as many others through church history into the present. When reductionism is not carefully listened to and its sin is not closely monitored in its subtlety, there is an increasing loss of qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness. This loss emerged initially in the primordial garden when persons changed from “naked and were not ashamed” (Gen 2:25) in the primacy of whole relational terms from inner out, to “naked and *covered* themselves” (Gen 3:7) in fragmentary referential terms from outer in. The shift to referential terms from relational terms is often more implicit than in this scene, and thus is easily overlooked if we don’t pay attention in church practice to both the quantitative having the main focus over the qualitative and the secondary having more priority over the primary. The referentialization of the Word is the prime indicator of this shift, resulting in a distinct qualitative insensitivity and relational unawareness of the primacy of relationship together distinguishing God’s family—just as the embodied Word prayed only in relational terms (Jn 17:23,26). The church in Ephesus demonstrated this shift and its relational consequence. As you listen compare this church with churches today and see if there are recurring issues.

Jesus consistently disclosed knowing these different churches' "works" or deeds (*ergon*, what defined them). The list of the Ephesian church's deeds is impressive: their "toil" (*kopos*, denotes not so much the actual effort but the weariness experienced from that effort); their "endurance" (*hypomone*, endurance as to things and circumstances, in contrast to patience toward persons; signifies character that does not allow losing to circumstances, cf. church in Thyatira); they maintained the doctrinal purity of the church under trying circumstances and did not tolerate falsehood, unlike the Thyatira church and its hybrid theology; they even suffered repercussions for Christ's name and yet endured the hardships to remain constant in their faith. It seems fair to say that their theological orthodoxy appeared uncompromising and spotless, maintaining their integrity in the surrounding context. This list forms a composite picture describing how they were, what they did and were involved in, which essentially was extremely dedicated in major church work, and which can also describe a number of successful churches today.

Jesus knew not merely the information about their deeds but also knew (*oida*) the nature of them, and the extent of their functional significance. It may seem somewhat perplexing that Jesus was not impressed with this church and even felt to the contrary about their church practice: "You have abandoned the love you had at first" (v.4). We may wonder "how can a church so involved in church work abandon its first love?" As noted previously, if this were not Jesus' own critique, we would easily discount this as a misguided conclusion or uninformed allegation. Yet, his discourse here for the integrity of ecclesiology raised a serious issue of church function, which is crucial to account for in how we practice church ourselves. His critique makes conclusive the very heart of his desires for ecclesiology to be whole.

The term "abandoned" (*aphiemi*) means to forsake, abandon persons, to leave, let go from oneself or let alone; 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.

As the term *hypomone* for "perseverance" denotes, they were so focused on circumstances and situations such that persons (especially God) unintentionally were ignored in relationship, inadvertently left in relational distance or emotionally forgotten. This is a common relational consequence when secondary matters (such as situations) become the priority over the primacy of relationships. Their *hypomone* was in contrast to the Philadelphian church's *hypomone*, which was a reciprocal relational response to Jesus' desire ("you have kept my word") for relationship together (3:8,10). What distinguished them from the Ephesian church was the latter's referentialization of the Word. Enduring "for the sake of my name" (2:3) narrowed down "my name" to "name without my person," that is, apart from relationship together; this namesake issue subtly

involved a fragmentary process that either disembodies or de-relationalizes, or both, the Word embodied in only relational terms for only a relational purpose and outcome. By “abandoning” their involvement in relationship together (however unintentional or inadvertent), their focus shifted to their persevering character of not giving in to bad circumstances. Thus, their endurance for the sake of “name without my person” also stands in contrast to *makrothymia*, which is patience, endurance, longsuffering with respect to persons; the former is about dedication in hard work (characteristic of the Ephesian church) while the latter involves relationship with mercy, grace and family love (cf. Mt 18:21-22, Rom 2:4).

Despite what would usually be defined as significant church practice reflecting sound ecclesiology, there was distance in their relationships leaving them in the condition “to be apart,” indicating a well-run orphanage (i.e. an organization substituting for family) that could only simulate ecclesiology of the whole. They did not have the relational involvement of family love, therefore they lacked the only involvement having relational significance to God (cf. Mary’s anointing of Jesus as a priority over ministry to the poor, Mt 26:8-13, par. Jn 12:1-8). This is further demonstrated by their reduction of the truth to mere doctrinal purity. They forgot that the Truth was vulnerably disclosed only for relationship together on God’s terms, which they were effectively redefining on their terms. Essentially, their referential terms reversed the priority order of Jesus’ paradigm for serving (Jn 12:26) that clearly defined the first priority of discipleship as intimate involvement in relationship together, not focused first on the work to be done for serving (*diakoneo*). Consequently, they also compromised their identity as the light, which is rooted in their relationship with the Light (Rev 2:5b, cf. Mt 5:14-15); this was also contrary to Paul’s relational imperative for the church to “live as children of light” (Eph 5:8).

Jesus exposed this church’s lack of qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness in their theology and practice. In reality, what unfolded in this church is neither surprising nor unexpected. Since they focused primarily on what they did—indicating their reduced theological anthropology in how they defined themselves—they paid attention to related situations and circumstances and less important issues, while ignoring the primacy of relationship together in family love. Functioning with this perceptual-interpretive framework of a reduced theological anthropology resulted in the relational consequences of forsaking their first love, which reflected the lack of relational involvement in their church practice and signified their renegotiated ecclesiology in narrow referential terms. This should raise serious concerns for church theology and practice today. Does this mean that such church theology and practice reflects, perhaps reinforces or even sustains, the human condition “to be apart?”

The basic complaint Jesus had against this church is the primary issue facing all churches for defining their ontology and determining how they will function: embracing the whole ontology and relational function of the Trinity, and embodying church practice in likeness of the Trinity’s relational ontology, therefore in congruence with and ongoing compatibility to Jesus’ defining prayer for his family (Jn 17:20-26). In all that the Ephesian church was doing (which was a lot), they were not directly involved in the relational context and process of the whole and uncommon God and did not function in

the context of family and process of family love constituted in the Trinity. They demonstrated a direct correlation between the priority we give relationships and the extent to which we are loving, as defined by relational involvement, not as doing something (like serving others), however dedicated. For Jesus, this correlation is irrefutable for ecclesiology to be whole; “the measure you use will be the measure you get.” Whether Jesus’ complaint against this church included both their relationship with God and with each other is not clearly indicated in the text. Yet we can strongly infer that it included all their relationships, because their primary emphasis on their work reflected the three major issues ongoing in life: (1) how they defined themselves, which further determined (2) how they did relationships and thus (3) practiced church. These three major issues are always deeply interrelated, and also in integral interaction with the primary issue of the Trinity, noted above, thereby together they need to be accounted for in ecclesiology in order to be whole.

The global church today needs to learn from the contradictions in both the Ephesus and Sardis church practices in order to counter reductionism’s influence of ‘good without wholeness’ (and ‘virtual good’ today) and ‘sin without reductionism’—recurring issues throughout church history. What these churches focused on and engaged in were reductionist substitutes for the trinitarian relational context of family and the trinitarian relational process of family love. The relational consequence was to become embedded in ontological simulation and epistemological illusion, notably (pre)occupied by the secondary over the primary. Moreover, the relational function of the Trinity cannot be understood in theological propositions nor experienced in church doctrine, even in its purity. By reductionist practice, these churches demonstrated how their practice (“abandoned the love you had at first” 2:4) and their understanding (“a reputation of being alive,” 3:1) became *decontextualized* from what was primary, and embedded in human contextualization. In their ironic struggle to remain distinct in a pluralistic Greco-Roman context, the Ephesian church stopped paying attention to the greater context that defined them and distinguished their significance. In their effort to be significant (or popular) in their surrounding context, the Sardis church ignored the primary context that constituted them. That is, they were both shaped by the fragmentary human context. Thus, they were removed, diminished or deemphasized from the relational context and process of the Trinity, and needed to be recontextualized in the relational nature of the Trinity. This is the function of reciprocating contextualization in the *ek-eis* relational involvement that Jesus made imperative to distinguish his family in the ecclesiology to be whole and to make whole. Without this reciprocating relational dynamic, church practice increasingly finds its functional basis only *en* (in) the surrounding context, in which reductionism prevails.

When a church disembodies the Word embodying Jesus’ person to fragmentary parts of his teachings and actions, and also de-relationalizes the Word from Jesus’ relational terms composing reciprocal relationship together, then that church disconnects with the whole of Jesus’ person (whose ontology integrally includes the Father and Spirit) and thereby becomes relationally uninvolved or distant from the presence and involvement of Jesus’ person (and the Trinity) in the primacy of reciprocal relationship

together. This unfolding relational consequence (often unrecognized or just ignored) emerges directly from the referentialization of the Word, which renders that church's theology and practice to the shaping influence of the surrounding context. This consequence unfolds since the reciprocating *ek-eis* relational involvement is not engaged to integrally distinguish church identity, purpose and function from beyond merely its position *en* the common of the world. Unable to be distinguished beyond referential terms, this shaping influence subtly shifts church theology and practice to a variable hybrid process. This subtle shift encompasses the following:

1. This shift is qualitative, thus cannot be observed in quantitative terms, as the Thyatira church's increased amount of "good deeds" demonstrated and the Laodicean church's wealth, fine clothes and medicine illustrate.
2. This shift is ontological, away from the inner-out whole person, thus cannot be understood by an outer-in ontology of personhood, as evidenced by the Sardis church's inability to understand its true condition.
3. This shift is relational, thus cannot be experienced in any other human activity than the primacy of intimate relationships together, as signified by the unawareness of the Ephesian church's diminished experience in their level of relational involvement together.

The lack of qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness are prime indicators that a shift has taken place to a hybrid theology and practice.

As long as our perceptual-interpretive framework is narrowed down, for example, to referentialization, our lens' view of the qualitative, the ontological and the relational will not discern the extent of the surrounding influences reducing the whole of church practice. The churches critiqued by Jesus were not unique in church formation; and if we listen to his key words for ecclesiology, those churches cannot be considered exceptions in church history. Each church has at least one counterpart in the contemporary church that must be taken seriously because of Jesus' critique for his global church family to be whole and uncommon in likeness of the whole and uncommon God:

1. Church at Ephesus—the theologically orthodox or doctrinally correct church
2. Church at Sardis—the successful "mega" church, or multisite church
3. Church at Thyatira—the activist, service oriented, or missional church
4. Church at Laodicea—the traditional status-quo church, or consumer church of convenience.

All these churches have in common what continue to be critical recurring interrelated issues needing epistemological clarification and hermeneutical correction: a weak view of sin not including reductionism, an incomplete knowledge of what's good (for the church) without including wholeness, and a fragmentary theological anthropology reducing ontology and function from wholeness—all working subtly under the assumption that "we will not be reduced or fragmented" because "we know good and evil." Therefore, Jesus' key words in whole relational terms are indispensable for the assessment of the global church's condition today, and are irreplaceable for the global church to be whole.

Listening to What Unfolds

Listening to the Word in whole relational terms has been a pivotal problem in church history; and the shift to fragmentary referential terms has clogged the ears to listen to the subtle sounds of reductionism and has fogged the eyes to pay attention to its counter-relational work (as demonstrated by his disciples, Mk 8:17-18). From the beginning the Word has unfolded integrally in the uncommon theological trajectory and the whole relational path, which are irreducible to the common's referential terms and nonnegotiable to terms other than the Word's relational terms. Anything less and any substitutes in the church's theology and practice have been on a different theological trajectory and relational path, however subtle. These so-called alternatives distinctly indicate the countering trajectory and path of reductionism's presence and influence unfolding historically. Reductionism's subtle challenge of the Word—"Did the Word say that?" and "Is that what the Word means or intends?"—promotes, encourages and directs us to engage a hybrid process that doesn't explicitly reject or deny the Word. It just subtly converts the Word's whole relational terms to narrowed-down referential terms specific to the common in the surrounding context in particular and in human contextualization in general. Not listening carefully and paying close attention have been consequential for the church.

Unfolding further in church history from the early church, we witness recurring issues shaping the church's theology and practice on a different theological trajectory or relational path. Two examples of this pivotal problem compel the global church to listen and pay attention.

After the early church and the theology and practice of the apostolic fathers, the emergence of Christendom reached a pivotal point in the fourth century under the influence of the Roman emperor Constantine. Generally speaking, Constantine assumed prevailing influence over the church's theology and practice. Much like Israel's history to turn God's people into a nation-state, Constantine directed his influence to construct a church-state—arguably with good or bad intentions—ostensibly to be distinguished as a theocracy. What unfolded, however, had no further distinction in identity beyond a state-church, the formation of which composed narrowed-down templates (read traditions) for conformity in church theology and practice—all composed, enforced and observed in referential terms. This so-called church-state (as in Israel's nation-state) gained primacy over the church as family that Jesus embodied. The hybrid of a church-state or a state-church set in motion the institutionalization of the church in reduced ontology and function, and its interrelated and more subtle consequence of reduced ontology and function of human persons (as seen in Jesus' clearing out of the Lord's house). This more explicit hybrid process has been called Constantinianism: "the disease of allowing secularized and pagan rulers to dominate church life and meddle in biblical and theological interpretation."⁷ In other words, this is but one example of the global church shaped by the fragmentary human context, whether with good intentions or not, that thrust the church on a different theological trajectory and relational path

Just as Jesus clarified and corrected church theology and practice—for example, the Thyatira church's hybrid theology and practice, discussed earlier—the current global

⁷ Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 158.

church needs to critique similar forms of civil Christianity in the global North (notably in the U.S.) and indigenous Christianity in the global South. Without intending to do so, what unfolds in the fourth century church theology and practice and those following in likeness fall into the recurring issue of church ontology and function “not good to be apart,” therefore subtly reflecting, reinforcing and even sustaining the reductionism composing the human condition. “I know your *practice*...you tolerate *reductionism*.”

Fast forward in church history to what unfolds in the Reformation. The magisterial Reformers rightly critiqued the reductionist traditions of the reigning church’s theology and practice that merely composed templates for conformity without significance to God and its practitioners. Yet, did the Reformers adequately correct the reductionism and fragmentation of the Word to restore theology and practice? With few if any exceptions, churches in the global North and even South have been influenced by the Reformation in one way or another. What unfolds from the Reformation into the global church is vital to be clarified and corrected if necessary.

Faith was a defining issue in the Reformation, yet even more pivotal in this debate was the underlying issue to either restore faith to its whole relational terms or extend the challenge of reductionism to still maintain faith’s subtle composition in referential terms—certainly not as reduced and fragmentary as the prevailing practice of faith, yet still in referential terms. The magisterial Reformers correctly addressed distorted aspects of faith regarding salvation, and they reformed theology and practice to restore faith in biblical terms not shaped by a hybrid process. But the question remains whether the primacy they gave to the Bible still leaves open the pivotal issue of the Word listened to and read in relational terms or referential terms. Generally speaking, what unfolded from the Reformation that gave it distinction are *re*-formed referential doctrines, which shaped a new orthodoxy that did not unfold in the transformation necessary to restore faith to the primacy of its relational terms composing relationship together in wholeness—faith’s relational outcome of the new creation church restored to Christ’s wholeness (as Paul made definitive, Col 3:15). And we should not expect faith to unfold in whole ontology and function from referential theology, no matter how doctrinally correct (as Jesus exposed in the Ephesian church, discussed above).

Again, while the Reformers correctly distinguished faith from works as the compatible response to God’s grace for salvation, this opened the door for faith also to be re-formed. On the one hand, faith became more qualitative than quantitative, more inner than outer. This also opened the door, on the other hand, for the person to be subtly exposed further to reduced ontology and function—that is, as an individual in nature who could define faith more on individual terms and who could shape one’s own identity and function without the whole. Directly interrelated to this unfolding process of re-form, new prevailing referential doctrines composed re-formed traditions of church theology and practice that were further fragmenting. Re-formers assumed that churches could construct relationship with God based on the church’s so-called biblical terms, and by those terms churches would not be reduced or fragmented. Therefore, each re-formed tradition was now free to define what’s ‘good’ (*tob*) for the church subtly ‘without wholeness’. Moreover, when the Reformers addressed a salvation limited mainly to the sin Jesus saved from, their referential terms did not illuminate sin as reductionism. Nor did their referential doctrine of salvation highlight what Jesus saved to: the primacy of relationship together in wholeness as God’s family, the new creation church family in

likeness of the Trinity (as Jesus prayed). Thus, the theology and practice for faith formulated by the Reformers did not unfold with the necessary focus for ecclesiology to be whole—"I have not found your *re-forms* complete in the *whole relational terms* of my God." Does this "Wake up" call also apply to the present global church?

Rather than wholeness (not to be confused with institutional unity or homogeneity), their skewed focus on sin without reductionism and imbalanced emphasis on what's good without wholeness opened the Wittenberg door to the construction of multiple denominational re-forms. These variations further led to the prominence of the individual in theology and practice (e.g. even in spiritual formation)—converging with modernity to legitimate the shaping of individualism. This re-formation set in motion the exercise of Christian freedom that (1) reinforced the reductionism of the person by giving primacy to human rationality and reason, and (2) fragmented the church and reduced the person to unintended practices of self-determination (cf. Paul's critique of individuals in the fragmented church at Corinth, 1 Cor 4:6-7; 2 Cor 10:12). Both of these re-formed results ironically lacked the relational significance of faith and reinforced the function of works, albeit under the name of individual faith. This fragmentary condition precipitated in the church the doctrinal need for Puritanism (e.g. as in Jonathan Edwards), the conformity to which further reduced the ontology and function of the person to outer in that made necessary the inward shift to the re-forms of Pietism (e.g. as in John Wesley). What unfolded increasingly became convenient. That is, convenient truths for faith, for example, which conveniently composed a so-called Protestant ethic to converge with the Industrial Age, resulting in an unintended (but not surprising) convenient faith of consumerism.

The recurring issues unfolding from the Reformation further reinforced and sustained a comparative process openly engaged by churches, thereby stratifying the global church and determining persons by human distinctions of better-or-less, good-or-bad. This is to be expected because the referentialization of the Word always narrows down our lens in theology and practice, which results in the objectification of persons, both God and us. The theological anthropology underlying the Reformation, both its ontology and function for the person and for the church, needs to be understood in its reduced ontology and function. The above dynamics evolving with reduced ontology and function made conditions ripe to be further rationalized (as never before) by the Enlightenment (from the 18th century). Consequently, all the re-forms were unable to address and answer the interpretive framework and influence of the Enlightenment. The modernist framework has narrowed down the Word's field of knowledge to the quantitative limits of referential terms. Accordingly, God's improbable theological trajectory has become more and more probable, if addressed at all. At the same time, the relational path of the Word has been ignored, resulting in a loss or lack of relational awareness and qualitative sensitivity. In other words, the Reformation is but another example of the global church being shaped by the fragmentary human context, which continues to project churches on a different theological trajectory and relational path.

The consequences have extended to the contemporary church, thereby entrenching the human person in reduced ontology and function and further embedding faith in referential terms, while essentially relegating God to an Object position with only referential information about God as the basis for theology and practice. The truth of this experiential reality is, what at best is only secondary now re-forms what is primary. If

any and all of our secondary are not integrated into and determined in priority by the primary of God, then the secondary subtly assumes the primary composing our theology and practice. And referentialization of the Word prevails into the present to serve this purpose.

The modernist's lens of referentialization has certainly been compatible for many global North Christians, notably demonstrated by neoevangelicals from the mid-twentieth century who tried to establish unequivocally the probability of God's improbable theological trajectory. This referentialized lens of the Word has yet to fully understand its ontological and functional consequence impacting persons and the church, rendering them incongruent with the theological trajectory of the Word in relational terms. A postmodern philosophical framework in the global North and an indigenous lens in the global South don't accept the grand-metanarrative of modernism—rightly exposing the modernist assumption of not being reduced or fragmented. Yet, Christians with this mindset have not and will not distinguish theology and practice beyond what's common in the surrounding context, until they understand their incompatibility with the Word in relational terms and incongruence with the whole and uncommon God. The recurring issues in the Reformation keep unfolding today in one re-form or another, which only reflects, reinforces and sustains not listening carefully to the whole Word and not paying close attention to reductionism in its subtlety.

The Reformation did not adequately distinguish the relational context and process of the whole and uncommon God, in order to distinguish God's relational language and terms for relationship together clearly from just referential language and terms for faith. This deficiency, on the one hand, put relational limits on what unfolded from faith and, on the other hand, did not have the relational constraints necessary for the human shaping that did unfold from the practice of faith. Consequently, the relational outcome from God's relational context and process became elusive in spite of overemphasizing the place of faith and overestimating its function. If we affirm God's revelation in Scripture, then we are accountable not just for our faith but for all of God's words communicating in his relational language and terms—accountable not referentially and partially (whether by fragmentation or selectivity) but relationally and whole-ly. The Reformation rightly shifted us back to the primacy of Scripture; its focus, however, was insufficient, even selective (e.g. biased or skewed), therefore not accounting for the depth of God's relational language communicated in the wholeness distinguished by God's relational terms. That is to say, the Reformers did not listen carefully to the Word in his whole relational terms. Thus, even though they were compatible with his theological trajectory, they essentially were on a different relational path than the Word—just as many continue on today. Therefore, with the clarification and correction of family love, "I know your *re-forms*.... But I have this against you: You have abandoned your *primary* love." Key words more relevant than ever.

So, what has unfolded since the Reformation that we give our attention to, that defines what's good for our churches, that determines with *what* and *how* we fill our churches? Jesus' housecleaning continues to be pertinent for directly confronting the recurring issues occupying churches today and serves as a wake-up call to churches for redemptive change. Urgently then, what recurring issues do we ignore that subtly reduce or fragment our theology and practice and underlying ontology and function, and,

therefore, that keep us apart from the primary of the whole and uncommon God with our well-intentioned (or even convenient) preoccupation with the secondary? Speaking in relational terms, how much of our theology and practice unfolds from an incomplete Christology that neither follows nor makes relational connection with Jesus' whole person on his whole relational path, who embodies his family and composes ecclesiology to be whole? Interrelated, how much of our faith incorrectly uses Paul to justify it merely to faith without works (and sin without reductionism), and thus in reality to be apart from his gospel of wholeness (Eph 6:15) and to counter his ecclesiology of the whole (e.g. Eph 2:14-22)?

“Don't you know me, even after I have been among you such a long time?” are Jesus' longing words—perhaps having become an inconvenient truth—that continue to pursue us today. Pursuing us in the experiential truth and relational reality of his inescapable key words, “Here I am! I stand at church doors and knock.” Do you hear him at your church door?

The Most Recurring Issue

As we listen to the Word unfolding in his theological trajectory and relational path, we cannot ignore but must also listen to reductionism, and pay acute attention to its trajectory and path subtly unfolding in our midst. Reductionism's trajectory and path are functioning parallel to the Word's in order to counter the Word; and thus the former is always present along with the presence of the Word and is unavoidable as a recurring issue in theology and practice (cf. Lk 4:13). Conversely, as we listen intently to sin as reductionism, we cannot ignore but must also deeply listen to the Word and pay attention to the relational Word's uncommon theological trajectory and whole relational path. The whole Word in relational terms unfolds in our midst with family love to clarify and correct our reductionism, and therefore is always interrelated to reductionism's presence and inescapably focused on its influence and counter-relational work—that is, always interrelated and inescapable in relational terms. Simply put, we cannot listen carefully to one without listening to the other.

Sin without reductionism is incompatible with the Word, and good without wholeness is incongruent, as the Word clarifies and corrects. Yet, we can pay partial attention to the Word and ignore reductionism. This was the practice of Jesus' disciples that subtly put them on a different relational path in their discipleship, with the relational consequence of not knowing and understanding Jesus in relational terms. Such a divergent path and relational consequence—which are often not paid attention to or simply ignored, as the disciples demonstrated—unequivocally reflect the ongoing presence and recurring issue of reductionism that are inseparable and unavoidable when engaging the Word. The interaction unfolding in this converging process is vital for us to understand and is critical for what unfolds in the global church. Listening to sin without reductionism is a long-recurring issue increasing in our midst that more and more conveniently ignores the whole Word. This unfolds in a subtle process that clogs the ears to listen to his whole relational terms and fogs the eyes to pay attention to his whole relational path—all while engaged in subtle illusion and simulation with reduced and fragmentary substitutes about the Word in our church theology and practice.

If the global church wants to unfold in wholeness, we cannot continue to be fooled by the reductionist challenge offering (even from a referentialized Word) that “you will know good and evil.” The inconvenient truth of being subject to reductionism exposes this convenient reality: Good without wholeness is what God has been saying is “not good to be apart” and thus what’s not good for the church; and sin without reductionism renders the church to what’s common, thereby subtly reflecting, reinforcing and sustaining the human condition. If the church doesn’t want to be shaped by the fragmentary human context, it must by its constituted nature be restored to wholeness by redemptive change of the *old* and transformation to the *new*. Sin by its nature operates on a trajectory and path of anything less and any substitutes—even with re-forms for the church.

Given our roots from the beginning and the unfolding of our history, can the global church still assume or claim that in this globalizing world and digital age, we will not be reduced or fragmented? The contemporary global church is not exempt from the sin of reductionism that prevails in the human context and pervades all those defined by their globalized context. This complex fragmentary human context persists with encompassing influence to shape persons, relationships, and churches until our theology and practice are distinguished whole from fragmentation and uncommon from the common. With the recurring issue of reductionism and its counter-relational workings converging with the global church, it is not only paradigmatic but indeed axiomatic for the reality of life in both the global North and South: “the measure we use will be the measure we get.”

Chapter 3 Listening to the Person

The Lord God called to *the person*...“Where are you?”

Genesis 3:9

...came to *the person*, saying in relational terms, “What are you doing here?”

1 Kings 19:9

The human person was central to what emerged in all of creation. From this primary beginning the person has assumed center stage in the human drama, using a revised script contrary to the central purpose of the creation narrative. The person has been composed on this basis, evolving with each revision shaped by the human context. Individualism, for example, is an obvious contrary script reducing and fragmenting the whole person in the global North, which the global South is correct not to follow. Yet, subordinating, ignoring or even losing the person in collectivist cultures of the South also reduce and fragment the whole person central to God’s creation. Which person we listen to will determine “Where are you?” Depending on which person we ignore could also determine if God asks us “What are you doing here?” Therefore, the global church cannot continue making the assumption from reductionism’s subtle challenge of the person that “our person will not be reduced or fragmented.” To make this assumption, from the beginning, has had far-reaching consequences that cannot be avoided by the persons and relationships composing the global church.

The human person who emerged from creation had the knowledge of good, with the understanding of “not good to be apart” (Gen 2:18)—that is, to be apart from God’s whole. God’s whole is the integral qualitative and relational whole by which the human person was created whole from inner out in the qualitative image of God, for the primary purpose of relationships together in wholeness distinguished in the relational likeness of the whole and uncommon God. Nothing less than and no substitutes for God and God’s whole constitute the integrity and identity of the human person.

The human person who emerged from the primordial garden had the knowledge of good and evil, with the mindset of ‘good to be apart’ from wholeness and sin (evil) without reductionism influencing ‘to be apart’ from God’s whole. That is to say, reductionism influences ‘to be apart’ from God’s whole by transposing the person from the qualitative of inner out to the quantitative of outer in, and reshaping relationships by reduced referential terms to substitute for God’s whole relational terms, and thus also to subtly simulate the likeness of God’s wholeness.

The distinction between the person emerging from creation and from the primordial garden is indispensable for our understanding of the human person, regardless of historical period, geographical location or culture. The former person(s) emerged in

distinguished consciousness of *who* and *what* they were and *how* to be: whole persons “naked” from inner out and “not ashamed” in intimate involvement in the primacy of relationship together in wholeness (Gen 2:25). The latter person(s) emerged in a distinct consciousness of what they were and thus how to be: fragmented persons “naked” from outer in, who became conscious of their quantitative parts and thus “made coverings” for their identity to reshape relationships together in relational distance, “naked so I hid.” The former composes ‘person-consciousness’ and the latter ‘self-consciousness’, both to be discussed later in this chapter.

“Where are you?” Discovering (or uncovering) where the human person is in general, and our person in particular, is simply problematic if we don’t pay close attention to the person and listen to who, what and how they (we) are. The person in individualistic cultures may appear easier to discover, whereas in collectivist cultures the person could be so covered (even lost, e.g. in cultural obligation or family duty) as to appear difficult to discover. Yet, the realities of the globalizing world and the digital age interact to further embed persons in illusions and simulations (such as virtual realities) both in the global North as well as South to make it difficult to uncover the depth of who, what and how the person is.

Illusions and simulations emerge from reduced human ontology and function to mask the existing reality of fragmented persons and relationships—disguised to virtually represent ideal persons and relationships. This would certainly be more appealing than to pay attention to what really exists. Global South Christians may ignore ontology as a Western philosophical concept without significance. There is a valid basis to ignore ontology if it is composed in referential terms, as philosophy tends to narrow down the human person without relational significance. Yet, all Christians need to pay attention to who and what the person *is* in the depth of the being created by God. The existence of this being is not unique to Western Christianity, or even Eastern Orthodoxy, and who, what and how this person is involves all Christians concerned for the person God both created and expects us to be. To say this simply yet in only relational terms: ‘who, what and how’ define the ontology and determine the function of all persons and relationships created by God. ‘Ontology and function’ becomes shorthand for all this, and will be used in this study accordingly.

The basic recurring issue has always revolved around what specifically has defined persons and has determined their function: whole ontology and function or some reduced ontology and function. Reductionism always distinctly signifies anything less and any substitutes of wholeness, yet often in subtle workings. And the recurring issue clearly indicates neither understanding reductionism as the nature of sin, nor paying attention to the consequential influence of reductionism’s trajectory and path on human ontology and function, all our persons and relationships. Unless we (both individually and corporately) can distinguish “Where are you?” as ‘the person in the beginning’ (as distinguished ‘from creation’), we will only reflect, reinforce and sustain ‘the person from the beginning’ (made distinct ‘from the primordial garden’)—in the theology and practice of our ontology and function that defines persons and determines their relationships and churches.

The Person in the Beginning

The person was always the key to God's creation constituted by God's whole relational terms. Distinguished in no other terms (even philosophical ontology), the person will always be the primary key in God's creation, even over the importance of any urgent creation-care concerns and environmental issues. The person is the irreducible and nonnegotiable reality composing the key in and to God's creation in the beginning. How so?

First of all, to reemphasize a recurring issue, we cannot look at creation in referential terms and hope to distinguish the person created by God's whole relational terms. By narrowing down creation from its primary qualitative and relational composition, referential terms limit the ontology of the person and constrain the function of the person and relationships, which then strains our understanding of who, what and how the person is whom God created and expects us to be. With such a lens, our understanding strains to get to the primary depth of the person and relationships, when the only basis we use is secondary referential information. Certainly some secondary referential information is useful, such as findings from neuroscience. We have, however, become preoccupied with the secondary from a referentialized creation in search for the primary depth of understanding. Has this not been an elusive understanding occupying theology and practice from the beginning, and thus does this not intensify the concern for our ontology and function to whole-ly define and determine who, what and how we are, both as an individual person and as persons in relationships together (most importantly composing the church)?

Science, most notably neuroscience, has been helpful in uncovering the complexity of human function. This knowledge has helped provide more understanding from how a person functions. Their limited observations, however, have not discovered the integral basis underlying human function: human ontology. Up to now, their summary explanation for the nature of human being and being human is assumed from evolutionary biology—an explanation which doesn't have apparent compatibility or seem to be consistent with the complexity of human function being uncovered.

Prevailing in the scientific community, development of human function has been vested in the evolutionary explanation of natural selection. According to biologist Richard Dawkins, natural selection is a simple idea that he simply defines: "That the bodies that survive are the ones that are good at surviving, and they pass on the genes that made them good at surviving"—a distinctly slow and characteristically selfish process that determines changes in the frequency of genes in the gene pool as generations go by—"and that is evolution."¹ From such a basis emerges a quite simple object quantifying human beings, or at least *Homo sapiens*. This basis then prompts the question whether it is adequate to identify human beings as objects and sufficient to describe them only in quantitative terms. Is human life that simple? It is evident that the complexity of human function uncovered by science needs to discover a deeper basis in order to uncover the depth of who and what the person is that would be integral with their findings of how persons function. 'Selfish genes' is simple enough but simply not enough basis for the whole person.

¹ Quoted from an interview in *The Los Angeles Times*, November 30, 2013. See also Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

What we discover from the creation narrative is that God created the human person with a primary dimension and a secondary dimension, both integral to God's created design of the person yet distinct in priority and significance. This distinction is critical for what defines the person and how the person is determined. Unless we uncover what is primary for the person, the secondary will determine human being and being human. The latter is where the person is for most scientists and even many Christians.

What is further discovered about the person unfolds distinctly less from human observation in referential terms and directly more from God's revelation in relational terms, though the heuristic process also integrates observations. God's creative action cannot be narrowed down to a limited epistemic field and still be expected to uncover the human person in the primary depth of who, what and how the person *is*. A limited epistemic field—for example, used by scientists and many Christians even with the Bible—does not and cannot distinguish the person beyond the secondary. So, what has God revealed about the primary, and also about the secondary that must be integrated into the primary, so that the human person is distinguished whole? It is this whole person we need to listen to, that is, pay attention to beyond the limits and constraints of human contextualization, whether in the global North or South.

When God completed the creation of human persons, two important matters are revealed to us: (1) “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good” (*tob*, Gen 1:31), then (2) “God finished the work that he had done, and he rested (*shabat*, ceased)...and made it holy” (i.e. uncommon, Gen 2:2-3, NIV). In referential terms, the Sabbath emerged and was observed. In relational terms, theology and practice was distinguished from the common and constituted in wholeness. The outcome of God's creative work was “good,” yet, most significantly, ‘good with wholeness’ as opposed to good “to be apart” from wholeness (i.e. ‘good without wholeness’ in contrast to Gen 2:18). God stopped the work while still in this uncommon process that highlights the primary—contrary to the common approach to work highlighting its primacy—to signify work as secondary (certainly not unimportant) in order to distinguish the primary and integrate the secondary into the primary of what's good only with wholeness. This qualifies the Sabbath beyond a day of rest from work (the secondary) to the ongoing highlighting of the primary—a day uncommon distinguished from the common—so that the secondary can be integrated clearly into the primary distinguished. Merely observing the Sabbath has no primary significance, even as an identity marker; its significance emerges only as it engages us in the primary of what's good with wholeness—just as Jesus clarified and corrected (Mt 12:1-8; Lk 13:14-16).

What is this good constituting the primary for the human person? When God completed the work of creation, God highlighted human persons, blessed them and transferred the creative work to them to extend creation and be responsible for creation care: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Gen 1:28) and “to work it and take care of it” (2:15, NIV). In the beginning, work was integral to God's created design for human persons. Yet, work in referential terms has a different function than work in relational terms. Referential work is narrowed down to define the person (even God) primarily by the parts of what they do and achieve—which then forms the defining identity of who and what the person *is* and thereby determines how the person functions. It is vital to understand that all this referential work composes human ontology and function based on

fragmentary parts that have become primary for our identity in a comparative process, likely under the false assumption that ‘the sum of the parts equals the whole person’.

What God revealed in the creation narrative, however, can only be received and understood in the whole relational terms by which God communicated. In contrast to the referentialization of God’s revelation providing only fragmentary information at best, this relational lens is necessary for our whole understanding of the person central to God’s creation. While work in creation is necessary and important, in God’s created design it is only secondary and thus must by its created nature be integrated into the primary—that is, the primacy of relational work distinguishing the whole function of who and what the person is in whole ontology. Contrary to the common perception of “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth,” God constituted this responsibility in relational terms by the relational work of whole ontology and function. Therefore, anything less and any substitutes for human persons are no longer distinguished as good by God but only “not good to be apart” from wholeness—in spite of successful good works (e.g. the incompleteness of the church in Sardis) and highly dedicated church work (e.g. the church in Ephesus without primary love). The so-called good works only reflect, reinforce and sustain the common rather than the uncommon’s relational work distinguished by God in creation (signified in “made it holy”).

The primary of whole ontology and function for the human person can now be distinguished, when the priority and significance of the secondary are clarified and corrected. As a reminder, this primary of the person in God’s created design is not uncovered by human observation; and what God reveals should be expected to have some unexplained mystery, since this is not about narrowed-down referential knowledge and information but rather of whole relational knowledge and understanding of the whole and uncommon God.

The person in God’s context is distinguished (*pala*) just in the epistemic field of the whole of God’s relational context, and only while integrally engaged in the relational epistemic process of God’s communicative action (the relational Word from God, not referential). *Pala* signifies to separate, to be wonderful, to distinguish, that is, beyond what exists in the human context and that cannot be defined by its comparative terms, or the person is no longer distinguished. Thus, this person can be distinguished only by whole ontology and function uniquely constituted by God, the Creator, the distinguishing nature (no less than *pala*) of which, for example, was beyond Job’s knowledge and understanding (Job 42:3, noted earlier). God pointed Job back to the unique constitution of the person from inner out, who has whole knowledge (*hokmah*) in the ‘inner’ (*tuhot*) person and whole understanding (*biynah*) also in the ‘inner’ (*sekwiw*, Job 38:36). The ‘inner’ (meanings of Heb *tuhot* and *sekwiw* are uncertain) has no certainty in referential language because it signifies a relational term that cannot be known and understood in referential terms. The ‘inner’ that God points Job back to is in the beginning: the whole ontology and function uniquely constituted by God that distinguishes human persons beyond comparison in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God (Gen 1:26-27).

The term ‘The image of God’ has been widely spoken in referential terms, perhaps even worn out in usage such that its meaning is just assumed or ignored, without primary understanding or significance. Global South Christians may strain under the common thinking of God’s image composed by a capacity of reasoning—that is, feel

inferior to the developed intellect of global North Christians, who haven't been shy commonly demonstrating their knowledge (referential) of God. Yet, stripped of the secondary, the inner of whole ontology and function distinguishes all persons in the uncommon, whereby we need to stop deferring to the common and what's good without wholeness—in both our theology and practice.

We cannot limit the dynamic process of creation—either by the limits of our epistemic field or by the constraints of a biased hermeneutic lens—which applies to both science and theology. In the creation narrative, the person is distinguished by the direct creative action of the Creator and not indirectly through an evolutionary process that strains for continuity and lacks significant purpose and meaning. At a specified, yet unknown, point in the creation process, the Creator explicitly acted on the developed physical body (the quantitative outer) to constitute the innermost (“breath of life,” *neshamah hay*) with the qualitative inner (“living being,” *nephesh*, Gen 2:7); the relational outcome was the whole person integrally constituted from inner out (the inseparably integrated qualitative and quantitative) to be distinguished irrevocably and irreducibly in the image and likeness of the Creator (Gen 1:26-27).

The qualitative inner of *nephesh* is problematic for the person in either of two ways. Either *nephesh* (Gen 1:30) is reduced when primacy is given to the quantitative and thus the outer in. All animals have *nephesh* but without the qualitative inner that distinguishes only the person (Gen 1:30). Or, *nephesh* is problematic when it is fragmented from the body, for example, as the soul, the substance of which does not distinguish the whole person even though it identifies the qualitative uniqueness of humans. The referential language composing the soul does not get to the depth of the qualitative inner of the person in God's context (cf. Job in Job 10:1; 27:2), because the inner was constituted by God in relational terms for whole ontology and function. The ancient poet even refers to *nephesh* as soul but further illuminates *qereb* as “all that is within me” (Ps 103:1), as “all my innermost being” (NIV) to signify the center, interior, the heart of a person's whole being (cf. human *ruah* and *qereb* in Zec 12:1). This distinction gets us to the depth of the qualitative inner that rendering *nephesh* as soul does not. The reduction or fragmentation of *nephesh* is critical to whether the person in God's context is whole-ly distinguished or merely referenced in some uniqueness.

While global North Christians are susceptible to a skewed outer-in focus on the person, global South Christians could be encouraged by an inner focus (e.g. including the spirit realm) yet must be aware of not fragmenting the person also. The qualitative inner of the person can be considered as the inner person. This identity implies an outer person, which certainly would employ a dualism if inner and outer are perceived as separate substances as in some frameworks of Greek philosophy (material and immaterial, physical and spiritual). In Hebrew thinking, the inner (center) and outer (peripheral) aspects of the person function together dynamically to define the whole person and to constitute the integral person's whole ontology and function (cf. Rom 2:28-29). One functional aspect would not be seen apart from the other; nor would either be neglected, at least in theory, but which was problematic throughout Israel's history as the people in God's context (e.g. Dt 10:16; Isa 29:13). It is irreplaceable in our theology and practice to identify “Where are you?” on the one hand, to make the distinction between inner out and outer in, and, on the other hand, to distinguish the whole person by the integral function of both inner and outer.

Making this distinction and distinguishing the function of the whole person bring us to the significance of the person God created and open us to what God expects of this person. *Nephesh* may be rendered “soul” but its functional significance is the heart (Dt 30:6; Rom 2:28-29). The qualitative significance of the heart is not composed in referential language and terms but only distinguishes the person in relational terms that God “breathed” into human persons. From the beginning, the heart defined and determined the qualitative innermost of the person in God’s context, and not the soul; the soul’s prominence unfolded much later from the influence of philosophical thought, shaped by referential terms. The heart’s significance only begins to define the image of God, yet the heart’s function identifies why the heart is so vital to the person integrally in the image and likeness of God. God’s creative action, design and purpose emerge only in relational language, the relational terms of which are not for unilateral relationship but reciprocal relationship together. Therefore, God’s desires are to be vulnerably involved with the whole person in the primacy of relationship—intimate relationship together. Since the function of the heart integrally constitutes the whole person, God does not have the whole person for relationship until it involves the heart (Dt 10:14-16; Ps 95:7-11).

We need to be unmistakable about creation that God never acted simply for the purpose of unilateral relationship—either God to us or us to God. God’s creative design, purpose and action always involved reciprocal relationship, which God directly participates in for the primacy of relationship together in wholeness. What God reveals is not referential information about God but rather the qualitative very heart of God in vulnerable relational terms. God created the human person in the qualitative image of the very heart of God—the innermost of God not in totality (hence the mystery) yet in wholeness—with nothing less and no substitutes of the whole and uncommon God. Therefore, God seeks the person compatible to the heart of God (as in Jn 4:23-24), who could only be compatible with nothing less and no substitutes of God’s qualitative image. This is who and what God expects the human person to be. And this reciprocal relationship together, which God seeks directly Face to face and vulnerably heart to heart, must by the nature of God’s creation also be congruent with the relational likeness of God. Here is where the relational likeness of this whole and uncommon God becomes foggy for many Christians; and what many Christians consider good for relationships becomes subtly ambiguous with ‘good without wholeness’. Having qualitative sensitivity of the image of God could be questionable for Christians, yet relational awareness of the likeness of God, well that’s problematic for many Christians to understand much less have awareness of.

This may bring up a question that would be helpful to address. If God constituted the physical body with the qualitative inner to distinguish the human person from all other animals, how does relatedness further distinguish human persons since most animal life subsists in relatedness also? Not only does the qualitative distinguish the human person from inner out with the quantitative according to the image of God, but at this intersection of God’s creative action relationship was now also constituted as never before (as in “not good to be apart”)—conjointly and inseparably with the qualitative—to fully distinguish the human person as whole according to both the qualitative image of God and the relational likeness of the whole and uncommon God (namely God’s relational ontology and function).

The likeness of God is not an add-on to the image of God, nor should it be considered simply the same as image (Gen 1:26). The distinction may appear technical or even unnecessary, yet God is helping us more deeply understand the wholeness of ontology and function that constitutes God and also human ontology and function in likeness. When God said “It is not good for the first human person to be alone,” he was not giving us a referential account of creation for referential information about its order and details. It was not the case that God realized that his creation of the first person was incomplete, so he added another person—notably as a companion, helpmate, partner, wife and mother. Rather, since the first person was already created in God’s image and likeness, God expands in relational terms the meaning and significance of whole ontology and function in the image and likeness of God’s. “To be apart” from relationship does not reflect the relational nature of God. “To be apart” from relationship together in wholeness is not congruent with the whole of God’s relational ontology and function—that is, not in likeness of the whole of who, what and how the triune God is in whole relationship together as the Trinity. In other words, God reveals what’s ‘good likeness’ to the whole of God and what’s ‘not good likeness’ apart from God’s whole. If we do not distinguish the depth of God’s relational likeness in our theology and practice, then we can only expect to be rendered to reduced ontology and function in our persons, relationships and churches—thus being indistinguishable in the human context.

The primordial garden illuminates the integral dynamic of the qualitative and relational in its wholeness as well as its reduction—the convergence of the physical, psychological, the relational, the social and the cultural, which together go into defining and determining both the human person and subsequent human condition. Paying attention to only one (or some) of the above gives us a fragmentary or incomplete understanding of what it is to be human. The creation narrative provides us not with a detailed (much less scientific) account of humans but with the integrated perspective (framework and lens) necessary to define and determine the whole person, as well as the underlying reductionism composing the human condition. Therefore, these contexts, expanding parameters, limits and constraints are crucial for theological anthropology to distinguish what and who only can be the whole person in God’s context. Unless we can distinguish this whole person in the beginning to be the person in our theology and practice, we become subject to the reductionism of our persons and relationships in reduced ontology and function. Accordingly and urgently, the ontology and function of the global church’s theological anthropology is indispensable to understand in order for the global church to address the issue of being shaped by the fragmentary human context.

Human ontology and function are created not in the referential likeness of God, even if referenced as the triune God or the Trinity. As in the qualitative image of the very heart of God, the person is conjointly created in the relational likeness of the very relational ontology of the whole of God (the Father, the Son and the Spirit in whole relationship together), which is relationally revealed by God’s word unfolding in relational terms and vulnerably embodied by the Word and relationally extended by the Spirit. In the mystery of the Trinity’s ontology, we have experiential relational connection with the whole relational function of the Trinity’s whole relational ontology—in the experiential truth of the whole gospel’s trinitarian relational context of family and trinitarian relational process of family love—to understand the very relational likeness constituting our ontology and function to be whole. This relational outcome

cannot be composed by referential terms, nor can it emerge from the referential likeness of God. On the unequivocal contrary, this whole understanding is the relational outcome of experiencing the relational reality of God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement with us. This experiential truth is crucial for our theology and practice: If God is not vulnerably present and relationally involved with us, then our epistemic field of knowing who, what and how God is is narrowed down to referential terms that, at best, can only boast of having fragmentary information *about* God—without experiencing the truth of the whole of God in the reality of intimate relationship together. This relational outcome was the experiential truth and reality for the monotheist Paul, whose theology and practice were made complete and thus whole by directly experiencing the relational reality of the whole of God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement with him in Face-to-face relationship together—not in tri-theistic relationships but in the trinitarian wholeness of family (2 Cor 4:4-6; Col 1:15,19).

In contrast to Paul's experience in relational terms, the early disciples lacked the experiential truth of knowing the whole of God because they didn't experience vulnerably the relational reality of the embodied whole of God's presence and involvement with them; thus, they participated in a narrowed-down engagement of serving that left them with only fragmented referential information about God in the reality of "don't you know me yet" (Jn 14:9). Christians today must account for the determining difference between relational terms and referential terms in our theology and practice, which composes the ontology and function of our persons and relationships in likeness. Congruence with the very relational likeness of God is the only relationship that God seeks with us together in wholeness, which must by God's nature be involved compatibly heart to heart (as in Jn 4:23-24). As Jesus prayed in whole relational terms for the persons and relationships in his family, this reciprocal relationship with the whole and uncommon God is the only relationship that whole-ly constitutes and distinguishes his church family, the global church family in the qualitative image and relational likeness of God (Jn 17:14-26).

If or when we listen to the whole person, we have to pay attention to the qualitative inner-out heart of the person over the quantitative outer-in parts of the person. If or when we listen to the function of the whole person, we have to pay attention to the person's involvement in the primacy of relationship together over their engagement in the secondary, for example, even with other persons in church activities or ministries. In other words (relational not referential), to listen to the whole person is to pay attention to the qualitative image and relational likeness of God unfolding whole and uncommon in that person's very ontology and function—the whole of who, what and how the person is and that God expects to be compatibly and congruently in relationship together as family. These are the only persons God created in the beginning whom God saw as *good* (*tob*, also meaning beautiful, excellent, lovely, delightful, fruitful, precious, correct, righteous)—only good with wholeness. And the inescapable reality is that anything less and any substitutes reducing or fragmenting these persons' ontology and function—even by the distinction of gender, which defines only the secondary integral to the primary—is "not good to be apart" from the whole ontology and function in the very image and likeness of the Trinity.

Persons in the beginning had qualitative sensitivity of their whole persons ("naked from inner out" without the distinction of gender) and relational awareness of their

relationship together in wholeness (“not ashamed to be vulnerable”). Integrally distinguished qualitatively and relationally, these are the persons whom God continues to seek, even long for, to be whole in relationship together, to live whole together as his church family, and to make whole the human condition “to be apart” both in the global church and in the globalizing world.

The Person from the Beginning

The qualitative composing the image of God has more appeal to persons (e.g. in the pursuit of spirituality)—even though quantitative reasoning has been its common composition—than the relational primacy composing the likeness of God. This would likely be true for global South Christians; even though collectivist cultures emphasize relational duty or obligation, this practice is defined more by performance in referential terms rather than by involvement in God’s whole relational terms. The reality is that the relational primacy of the likeness of God is threatening to persons, who would need to become vulnerable for its practice. “Naked from inner out” constitutes being vulnerable in likeness of God. Moreover, the relational likeness of God is counter to the common prevailing in surrounding contexts (North or South), and thus a threat to what’s considered good in the status quo. Of course, this would also be true for the qualitative in a quantitatively focused and consumerist world.

The lack of qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness has been reaching critical levels in persons throughout the globalizing world and is in need of urgent care in the global church. The need for the qualitative and relational in human being and being human, which was apparent from the beginning, has become optional, or unnecessary for survival and success in today’s world, or is simply ignored in daily life. Yet, the need for both the qualitative and relational will not go away and cannot be filled by substitutes. Even science is uncovering in the human brain the basic function and need pointing to the primacy of the qualitative and relational.² Where is the global church’s theology in this vital discussion, and what is its practice doing about it?

Regardless of the more-or-less favorableness of the qualitative and relational, we don’t have available the option to choose between, or even not choose, the qualitative image and relational likeness of God to define human ontology and determine human function. Both are inseparable and necessarily integral to whole human ontology and function by the very nature of the whole and uncommon God. Yet, the persons God created were not objects merely conforming to the templates of God’s image and likeness. Just as the nature of God is the relational Subject, thereby also persons in the Subject’s image and likeness are relational subjects. Therefore, persons from the beginning were and are given the freedom of will, by which to make ongoing choices between whole ontology and function in God’s image and likeness or reduced ontology and function in the common’s image and likeness (the subtle face of reductionism.).

² Two particular studies in neuroscience define in the brain the function and need for the qualitative and relational. Antonio Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010), and John T Cacioppo and William Patrick, *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008).

As subjects having freedom of will, persons from the beginning made choices to pay attention to good without wholeness and to ignore sin as reductionism. Listen to their persons carefully. Though persons in the primordial garden already knew what's good in whole relational terms, and were initially satisfied without disappointment and vulnerably unashamed in intimate relationship together, the appeal "to make one wise" opened the door to self-determination subtly engaged in a comparative process. This pivotal choice composed the 'self' not as the individual but as the alternative to the person, thus a self that is evident also in collectivist contexts. This self-determination made the choice "to know good and evil" and "be like God" into an irresistible challenge to establish one's self-worth, identity and position on the comparative scale of human life. Underlying their choice were two critical assumptions, which continue to recur today with increasing subtlety: (1) that their ontology was reducible to human shaping, and (2) that their function was negotiable to human terms (Gen 3:6-10). Their reductionism reflects a shift from the qualitative inner out ("whole-ly naked and vulnerable," Gen 2:25) to the quantitative outer in ("naked parts and covered up," Gen 3:7) without the integrating significance of the heart, thereby fragmenting the whole of human ontology down to one's parts. This fragmentary condition is a pivotal qualitative and relational consequence for persons, which should be expected from the choice of self-determination and its related assumptions. Again, this choice by 'self' is not unique to the global North but exists also in the global South, perhaps with more subtlety.

Engaging in self-determination is quite simple, yet the process should not be oversimplified (or spiritualized) because it gets ambiguous and complex. Self-determination requires the person to narrow down one's self-identity in order for self-understanding to minimize speculation and to have more certainty; this narrowing not only reduces the whole person but fragments the person into mere quantified and explanatory parts. And the person's innermost signified by the qualitative function of the heart is the most elusive to understand and explain, and thus the least certain basis for self-identity. Consequently, the person in self-determination necessarily ignores, avoids or merely pays lip-service to the heart—which again should be expected given the two assumptions made.

Yet, in Hebrew terminology of the OT, the *nephesh* that God implanted of the whole of God into the human person is signified in ongoing function by the heart (*leb*). The function of the qualitative heart is critical for the whole person and holding together the person in the innermost. The biblical proverbs speak of the heart in the following terms:

The heart is identified as "the wellspring" (starting point, *tosa'ot*) of the ongoing function of the human person (Prov 4:23); using the analogy to a mirror, the heart also functions as what gives definition to the person (Prov 27:19); and, when not reduced or fragmented ("at peace," i.e. wholeness), the heart gives life to "the body" (*basar*, referring to the outer aspect of the person, Prov 14:30, NIV), which describes the heart's integrating function for the whole person (inner and outer together).

When the person is narrowed down without the primary function of the heart, there are limits and constraints on the person who can emerge. We need to understand the person who can emerge from us and in our churches, given these limits and constraints.

Carefully listening to this person should be clarifying, confronting and correcting of the choice for self-determination.

Once the person becomes distant from, unaware of or detached from the heart, there is no qualitative means in function to integrate the whole person—leaving only fragmentary parts (however valuable or esteemed) that are unable to distinguish the person in God’s context. Conjointly in creative function, there is no basis for deep involvement and intimate connection in relationships together without the qualitative function of the heart (Isa 29:13; Jer 12:2, cf. Eze 33:31); intimacy is based on hearts vulnerably open and coming together. The qualitative and relational consequence, as witnessed in the primordial garden, is an outer-in association together accompanied with shame, disappointment, confusion or dissatisfaction that emerges from a comparative process (*bosh*, Gen 2:25, cf. Eph 4:18). Only the conjoint function of the qualitative inner (signified by the heart) and the relational from the innermost (signified by hearts coming together in intimacy) distinguish whole persons beyond comparison. Nothing less and no substitutes can claim to *pala* (distinguish beyond the common) the person in God’s context simply because these persons are constituted integrally in the image and likeness of the whole of God’s ontology and function. This is the created whole of the person and of persons in relationship together from which “is not good to be apart” (Gen 2:18).

Whatever our sociocultural context, persons are accountable for their ongoing choice between whole ontology and function in God’s image and likeness, or reduced ontology and function in the common’s image and likeness—including deferring to such reduction by a dominant person or group. The latter choice is always enacted when choosing self-determination—whether intentionally or unintentionally determining ‘self’ by human alternatives to the person God created whole. This is when the process gets ambiguous and complex, yet the alternative is clearly distinct. When persons in the primordial garden made their own choice for self-determination, the self that emerged was undeniably the defining alternative to their whole persons. This defining alternative is crucial to understand if we are to be able to make its distinction from the whole person. By the necessity of their choice, their focus of the person was narrowed down—the truth of “the eyes of both were opened” (Gen 3:7)—not only to the outer in of “naked” but more importantly to their reduced ontology. In addition, the reduced ontology of their self conjointly imposed constraints on their function that required covering up their innermost person (the qualitative function of their heart) and not being vulnerable in relationship together. In other words, their choice for self-determination embedded their self in reduced ontology and function, counter to their person in whole ontology and function. Consequently, their self emerged not as ‘good with wholeness’ but only as “not good to be apart from God’s created whole.” Unfortunately but still without excuse, this includes the self that emerges from oppression, discrimination or abuse by deferring to the alternative of their person imposed on them.

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 ontology and function. Unfortunately, we haven’t been listening well to the self who emerged from the

beginning and continues to emerge today with increasing subtle silence. This is to be expected for persons with the defining alternative to whole ontology and function. Without the qualitative function of the heart to integrate the whole person, the only alternatives for persons are ontological simulations and epistemological illusions shaped by reductionism—which can be both appealing and convincing in referential terms.

The heart's significance unfolds in relational terms for the relational outcome that we need to understand more deeply in the divine narrative composing the narrative of human being and being human: The whole of God ongoingly pursues, solely in relational terms, the heart and wants our heart (as in 1 Sam 16:7; Prov 21:2; Jer 17:10; Lk 16:15; Rom 8:27; Rev 2:23)—that is, pursues only the whole person for vulnerable involvement in integral reciprocal relationship together. The innermost person signified by heart function has the most significance to God and, though never separated from or at the neglect of the outer, always needs to have greater priority of importance for the person's definition and function to be distinguished in God's context. This person created whole, therefore, by nature must always be distinguished from the defining alternative of self, and the clear distinction between them is imperative to maintain ongoingly in our theology and practice. Certainly, this distinction is more subtle today making it problematic to be distinguished in a globalizing world and digital age; and this reality makes it even more urgent for the global church to confront human shaping and unfold transformed whole—starting with its own persons and relationships.

Persons in God's context cannot negotiate either the qualitative condition of their ontology or the relational terms of their function. Theological anthropology discourse must be engaged accordingly in order to distinguish the person without shallowness or ambiguity.³ For example, when discussing the social nature and character of human persons, it is insufficient for our theological anthropology to talk about merely social relatedness and community to define and distinguish the human person. For nonnegotiated theological anthropology (not composed in referential or other human terms), the person is created in the qualitative image of the very heart of God to function in relational likeness to the whole of God. Without renegotiation, therefore, human persons are created in whole ontology and function for the primacy of relationship together solely in whole relational terms as follows:

The qualitative ontology of the person's heart vulnerably opens to the hearts of other persons (including God) in order for the relational outcome of the primacy of relationship together to be nonnegotiable and irreducibly distinguished by the wholeness of intimate relationships—defined as hearts open and vulnerably connected together to be whole, that is, whole solely in the image and likeness of the whole of God (“not to be apart...but naked and relationally connected without disappointment”).

When God's relational terms from inner out are shifted to referential terms from outer in (even unintentionally or perhaps inadvertently), something less or some substitute replaces the above and renders the person and relationships to fragmentary-reduced

³ My discussion of theological anthropology originated in a previous study, *The Person in Complete Context: The Whole of Theological Anthropology Distinguished* (Theological Anthropology Study, 2014). Online at <http://www.4X12.org>.

ontology and function—without the primacy of the qualitative (with the function of the heart) and the relational (in intimate relationships of wholeness). This qualitative and relational consequence no longer distinguishes persons in God’s context, but only shapes them in the limits of the human context by the constraints of the human condition (“to be apart...naked and relationally distant”). The difference between this relational consequence and the above relational outcome is distinct yet immeasurable.

From the beginning, these two competing, contrary and conflicting dynamics have either whole-ly constituted the person in the primary of God’s relational context and process, or shaped only parts of the person in the secondary of the limits and prevailing constraints in the human context. When the choice for self is enacted (including by default), its ontology and function can never go beyond these limits and constraints of human contextualization, since by the necessity of this choice the focus of the person is narrowed down to those limits and constraints. This is the experiential reality even if our referential theology promises more, due to the fact that such theology cannot translate into relational terms for its practice to be our relational reality. That’s why God ongoingly wants to know “Where is your person in the human context?” and “What are you doing letting this context determine your person?”

Human contexts have been perceived along a spectrum from positive to negative. The measure used is the determining issue. For example, a deficit model has been used by colonialist and dominant group lenses to make negative judgments on differing cultures and persons. Moreover, ‘the common good’ uses a different lens yet assumes a similar basis for what’s good for a human context. Generally speaking, however, both look at human contexts with the underlying assumptions of ‘good without wholeness’ and ‘sin without reductionism’—which emerged from the beginning with the defining alternative for the person God created whole. As a postmodern lens unfolds, this spectrum widens to open the door to many more variations of the measure used in human contextualization. Contrary to human context, in God’s context just any good is not good enough to be whole, and only sin as reductionism defines sin in God’s whole relational terms. Therefore, along with the second critical assumption made from the beginning—that the person’s function is negotiable to human terms—we need to examine further our assumptions about the significance and value we give to contextualization of the gospel and missions for our theology and practice—most notably that shape our theological anthropology and our ontology and function. The subtle influence of reductionism, challenging persons to make their own choice for the defining alternative to the person centered on establishing self, is more intense today than witnessed from the beginning. Yet, the issues and consequences remain the same for persons—whether at the level of the individual person or persons together in the global church—who try to negotiate (explicitly or by implication) the qualitative condition of their ontology and/or the relational terms of their function.

The human person was designed and created to *be* whole in the qualitative image of the whole and common God, and to function in the primacy of whole relationship together in the relational likeness of the Trinity. Jesus summarized for his followers the whole ontology and function composing their whole identity in the human context as “salt” and “the light” (Mt 5:13-16). In full awareness and understanding of the ongoing influence of reductionism, Jesus made definitive the irreducible ontological nature of the salt and the nonnegotiable functional nature of the light, and that anything less and any

substitutes would reduce their ontology and function no longer as salt and light. The reality of reductionism that Jesus illuminated is that any shallowness or lack of vulnerable depth, and any ambiguity or lack of relational clarity of who, what and how we are as persons in the human context renders us to reduced ontology and function, no longer *being* whole and functioning whole—“no longer good for anything.” On this whole basis, Jesus made nonnegotiable that “our righteousness exceeds *unmistakably beyond the reductionists*” in order to constitute God’s whole family (Mt 5:20).

Does the global church need to listen more carefully to the person unfolding today from the beginning? Does it also need to pay closer attention to the persons (or alternative self) composing its churches both in the global North and South?

The Consciousness of Human Identity

Human identity has had a prolonged history since the beginning. That is, distinguishing the human person with the significance of the person’s created ontology and function has been elusive, with periods of fog and darkness further leaving the person “to be apart” in a fragmentary identity. This is the expected consequence from reductionism and its counter-relational work from the beginning, which ongoingly prevails when not exposed in sin as reductionism.

The history of the church’s theology and practice makes evident an ongoing difficulty with illuminating the theological anthropology necessary to distinguish the person not in terms of *from* the beginning but *in* the beginning. The former is about the defining alternative of the self in reduced ontology and function, which has assumed an increasingly subtle distinction (nevertheless distinct) from the latter person distinguished only in whole ontology and function. The consciousness of these two human identities, *in* and *from* the beginning, is vital to understand in order to make the clear distinction of who and what unfolds in our midst today and, most importantly, who and what unfolds in each of us, in me.

‘In the beginning’ is the created whole ontology and function of person-consciousness, whose identity is composed vulnerably by inner-out heart function in the primacy of intimate relationship together. This identity is consciously enacted as subject-person with the ongoing decision to involve one’s whole person. Therefore, the person consciously functions with nothing less and no substitutes and thereby distinguishes only the whole person—that is, in ongoing consciousness of the person in whole ontology and function necessary to compose human identity as created in the beginning. Person-consciousness is this subject living with ongoing resolve as the person God created only in ‘good with wholeness’ and thus conscious of ‘sin as reductionism’ with anything less and any substitutes. While this involvement doesn’t make the person perfect, it makes person-consciousness uncommon from the common prevailing in human contexts since the beginning.

‘From the beginning’ is the defining alternative of self-consciousness that shapes an identity from the self’s various parts from outer in, which are measured by a comparative process in the human context. The self that emerges is determined by how well it conforms to the human system, which then necessitates ongoing consciousness of how well self is perceived, received and evaluated or judged. While the process to

establish self is centered on self, it is in reality conforming to the measure of others. Self-consciousness is the ongoing self-concern and self-interest to have distinction, even in relation to God. When human subjects first made the decision to determine their identity (“be like God”), they narrowed down the person to center consciously on a self (“naked and covered up”) that they could only determine by ‘good without wholeness’ and ‘sin without reductionism’ (“knowing good and evil”). Therefore, the self emerged in self-consciousness for the self-determination of human identity that could only be limited to and constrained by reduced ontology and function. On this unyielding basis, since no experiential reality is possible beyond the limits and constraints composing the self, this self has consciously become the common’s standard of measurement for human identity—prevailing from the beginning, even as an experiential reality in the global church.

Human identity in a globalizing world has been subject to the variations of the multicultural human context, some ‘good with wholeness’ but mainly shaped by ‘good without wholeness’. However subtle the difference in these cultural variations has been, the clear distinction between these two ‘goods’ has become blurred; and thus even cultural variations based on good without wholeness have been assumed in what’s good for the church, which have resulted in churches becoming self-conscious. Ethnic-based churches, for example, reflect this self-consciousness and promote this good, even though their practice may be inadvertent due to surrounding circumstances imposed on them. The relational consequence often unrecognized is the not-so-subtle fragmentation of the global church and its relationships integral to its identity; these now become embodied by subtly fragmentary persons in reduced ontology and function—all likely operating under the assumption “we will not be reduced or fragmented.” The global church urgently needs to understand what consciousness composes its identity and the underlying ontology and function of its theology and practice.

The experiential reality of human being from the beginning is variable ontology and function; and this experiential truth of being human emerges clearly and is understood fully with sin as reductionism. Human ontology and function is not a static condition, yet must be realized as created whole in a definitive qualitative and relational condition that is not subject to a relative process of determination or emergence. Human ontology and function was created whole ‘in the beginning’. The issue from the beginning, however, is whether this ontology and function will continue to be whole by living whole. This outcome certainly was not predetermined, nor can we consider it our default condition and mode. This recurring issue and ongoing dilemma are confronted by “Where are you?” and “What are you doing here?”

To continue to be whole is a qualitative function of person-consciousness that focuses on the person from inner out, that is, on the whole person. Yet, the whole person is not a simple object operating within the parameters of a predetermined condition or behavioral pattern. Rather, contrary to some theories of the person, the whole person is a complex subject whose function includes human agency composed by the will that further distinguishes the person’s uniqueness created by God. At the same time, as emerged from the beginning, human agency could get ambiguous and become fragmentary in making the choice for self-determination.

Yet, a complex subject cannot be oversimplified in its human agency. A qualifier is raised by genetic limitations of brain function (e.g. mentally challenged), those

suffering brain dysfunction (e.g. Alzheimer's) and mind disorders that appear to lack human agency or lose human will—seemingly rendering them simple objects. This observation can only be made of a person from outer in; and any of its conclusions can neither account for variable ontology and function nor explain reduced ontology and function. While certain qualitative and relational functions may demonstrate a lack, if not appear lost, this involves the complexity of the human subject. The qualitative innermost constituting the uniqueness and human agency of the person functions integrally in the person as a whole, thus never separated from the body (whatever its condition), for example, in the spiritual substance of the soul, nor determined solely by the physical workings of the body. Regardless of any lack in the physical workings of the body, the qualitative innermost of the whole person still functions without being determined by the body and without being apart from the body in a separate function of the soul. How do we account for these persons then?

The complex human subject is manifested in different outward forms, all of which cannot be explained. For example, any lack of physical capacity does not relegate a person to reduced ontology and function, though variable ontology and function is still possible for such a person. Each of these different forms, however, should not be perceived in the comparative process of prevailing human distinctions that compose a deficit model identifying those differences as less. This has obvious relational implications for those cultures and traditions that have favored certain persons (e.g. by race) and discriminated against others (e.g. by class, gender, age). Such practice is not only ethically and morally unacceptable for the global church, but most important it exposes the sin as reductionism of persons embodying the church in reduced ontology and function. What is definitive of the complex human subject in any form is this reality: “It is not good to be apart” from the whole that God created for all human ontology and function in the qualitative image and relational likeness of God, and therefore any human subject can be affirmed and needs to be lived out fully in whole ontology and function—even if conditions, situations and circumstances appear to the contrary, as it does for the persons discussed above. This challenges both our assumptions about persons who are different and how we define them and engage them in relationship. Any differences from our perceptual-interpretive lens that we impose on them reflect our reduced ontology and function, not theirs.

As a complex subject in the human context, the human will is responsible for the perceptual-interpretive lens used to focus either inner out or outer in on the person, albeit with the influence of the surrounding context. Person-consciousness is intrinsic to being created whole but ongoing person-consciousness involves the person's will. The person's choice also can include using a lens focused on the person from outer in, which then shifts from person-consciousness to self-consciousness (as witnessed in the primordial garden). The vacillation between person-consciousness and self-consciousness is a reality of human agency that all persons assume by the function of their will, and that all persons are responsible for in living with whole ontology and function or reduced ontology and function—necessitating the careful and vulnerable examination of “Where are you?” and “what are you doing here?” And the further reality from the beginning needing to be understood is that self-consciousness and its lens of outer in have become the default choice. Unless this reality is addressed with the reality of human agency, the default mode will prevail in human consciousness and the perceptual-interpretive lens used.

Moreover, this process of reality is nonnegotiable and thus is not amendable by a hybrid consciousness.

Along with the lens used for the person and the human consciousness engaged, the human will is also responsible for the type of work engaged in. Given the reciprocal nature of whole relationships together, relational work is primary. How this work is perceived and the extent to which it is engaged—if it is perceived or engaged at all—unfold from the person’s will. For example, if the deliberate choice is not made to engage the primacy of relational work, secondary work becomes the primary focus either by intention or by default. In other words, the will is central to what ontology and function emerges from the person; yet, the central function of the will should not be confused with the means required for any needed transformation to whole ontology and function. Our theology and practice—notably the ontology and function of our theological anthropology—must be able to account for variable ontology and function. Otherwise the unavoidable reality is that we are rendered to our default condition and mode in self-consciousness.

Person-consciousness and the primacy of relational work are integral and thus inseparable for the whole ontology and function created by God. We cannot integrate person-consciousness with engaging merely in simple association with others, nor can we engage the primacy of relational work with self-consciousness. Person-consciousness is relational work, the primacy of which distinguishes the relational involvement of the whole person defined from inner out. The integral interaction between person-consciousness and relational work is both irreducible and nonnegotiable.

Yet, from the beginning relational work has been further problematic for persons whenever a reductionist interpretive framework misperceives God’s purpose for creating Eve and the significance of her relationship with Adam. These are vital issues necessary to include in theological anthropology discourse to understand what adds or subtracts in the relational equation of God’s created (original and new) design and purpose, particularly for relationships together constituting the church. Critical to our deeper understanding of the purpose for the person with Eve’s creation is the focus on the kind of work emphasized in the creation narrative. If you translate the Hebrew expression *‘ezer kenegdo* as “a helper suitable for him” (Gen 2:18, NIV), thus interpreting the woman as an assistant or helpmate to the man (as gender complementarians do), then the focus is on the work in the primordial garden with the emphasis on ‘what they did’. Or if you translate it “a power [or strength] corresponding to man”⁴ with the interpretation of Eve corresponding to Adam in every way, even “be his equal” (as gender egalitarians do), the focus can be on any type of work with the emphasis still on ‘what they do’. Both of these interpretations and perceptions minimize or even preclude the primacy of relational work, the nonnegotiable relational work in God’s design and purpose for relationships between persons distinguished by God’s qualitative image and relational likeness. This is the consequence because an emphasis on ‘what we do’ reduces the qualitative focus of how we function in relationships in order to be whole down to merely performing a role.

⁴ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., Peter H. Davids, F. F. Bruce and Manfred T. Brauch, eds., *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 93-94.

It is also not sufficient to say that Adam was lonely and needed a proper counterpart because he was living without community. While these conditions existed, community and its formation connote different perceptions to persons, the very least of which may not even involve intimate relationships as understood in the community (communion) of the Trinity. God did not create Eve for Adam in order to have simply a collective dimension to life called community or a social context within which to do their living. This has deep implications notably for relationships together composing the church and the basis for constituting this gathering in terms distinguished from other gatherings in the human context. By necessity this is true for churches in both the global South and North, though the emphasis would be different in each sector.

As signified by also being created in God's image, Eve was created for the primacy of relationship, thus for the completion of the human relational context by which their persons (from inner out) could now involve themselves in the relational process constituted in the triune God and signified conjointly by the qualitative image and relational likeness of God. Without making complete (i.e. whole) this relational context and process, a person(s) would "be apart"—a fragmentary condition God defines as "not good" but which has been normative for the human condition and has become the norm for gatherings in the human context, even among Christians.

Eve's primary purpose was neither about working the primordial garden nor filling the earth, especially as we have come to define those purposes with the narrowed-down emphasis on "what we do." These secondary parts would be quantitative reductionist substitutes that redefine the person from the outer in—for example, according to roles and our performance—which transpose the primary with the secondary. 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 the will. While making this choice does not change the created qualitative ontology of personness, it shifts that ontology to outer in and thereby reduces how the person functions and constrains what the person experiences, thus effectively constructing a personhood in human perception—an unfortunate consequence often seen in theological anthropology discourse.

It would be a further reduction of Eve's purpose, and thus an inaccurate interpretation, to perceive that women (in their gender and sexuality) were created primarily for specific relationships with men. That is to say, underlying Eve's function to work is the purpose God gave her and Adam to "fill the earth" (Gen 1:28). Obviously, this then involved the created function of marriage (2:24) and procreation (3:20). Yet our deeper understanding of marriage and procreation for God's purpose is also contingent on the kind of work emphasized in the creation narrative. If the work focused on is merely about making a living and extending it in raising a family (a dominant view), then our perceptions of marriage and family become reduced to secondary terms (as previously noted about what we do) and our practice increasingly quantitative and fragmentary (as discussed about how we do relationships)—engaged with a lack of qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness. This was not the purpose for Eve's creation.

In God's purpose to "fill the earth" the term for "fill" (Heb. *male*) 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 to make it complete. 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 in wholeness.

Reductionism turns God's purpose to "fill the earth" quite simply into making children and the quantitative work of populating the earth. Likewise, perceptions of "be fruitful and multiply" become based on quantitative notions lacking qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness, perhaps with their illusion and simulation. Some in theology and arts have perceptions that include filling the earth with culture and creative expressions, which may have qualitative sensitivity but lack relational awareness. If this were God's purpose, the results that such work had initially produced would have been partially acceptable, and God would not have started over with Noah and his family (Gen 6:1ff). But God's purpose is qualitative; filling the earth is not about the numbers. Yet even filling the earth with culture and creative expressions do not complete God's created design and purpose for human persons. What God started in creation was an extension of the whole and uncommon God's being and nature—not to be confused with pantheism. The person was created with the qualitative significance of God for the primary purpose 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 the primacy of their 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.

When relational work is functionally established as God's primary purpose for all persons, then the ontology and function of person-consciousness will not only emerge to be whole but also unfold to live whole in the human context. This happens not from a singular moment or decision-point, but from an ongoing pivotal process. Person-consciousness and the primacy of relational work, as theological anthropology must account for, are ongoingly subjected to the prevailing influence of reductionism and its counter-relational work; and its persistence will pervade unless addressed with resolve. As witnessed emerging from the beginning in the primordial garden, reductionism directed the shift away from person-consciousness and compromised the primacy of relational work. The integral relationship with God that constitutes the relational context and process of human life was fragmented by human will and the choice for self-determination, with the relational consequence "to be apart." Certainly, not only in relation to work but also directly redefining our relationships (especially with God) this condition "to be apart" underlies our reductionist tendencies, the substitutes we make in life and why we settle for less. In the human narrative, essentially every human activity since Adam and Eve's human agency in self-determination has been to diminish, distort or deny the primacy of relationships in the created order. In the divine narrative,

everything the Trinity has enacted is relational and is involved to restore relationships to God's complete design and purpose. This whole design and purpose is what Jesus came to restore us to—both with God and with others. Our theological anthropology and related doctrines need to reflect this coherence.

As we reflect on creation and the relational context and process, we have to examine how we also “see” God and thus relate to this God. Referentialization and selectivity are key issues to pay attention to. If we only see God as Creator in referential terms, there can be a tendency to define God only by what God did—not only in the past but also the present, prompting “what have you done for me lately” (cf. Israel in the wilderness)—and, based on this lens, ignore God's whole being. This is the result when our perceptual-interpretive framework is reductionist, primarily focused on the fragmentary parts of what God does. To focus on and relate to God's being is not only to engage the sovereign God (who commands) but also to be involved with the triune God (who is intimately relational). On the basis of this whole God, not selective parts of God, the relational process is constituted—composed only by whole relational terms and not referential terms. Any other God is a reduction of the God of creation and the God of revelation vulnerably shared with us. Whichever God is perceived and engaged certainly has determining influence for theological anthropology; and this implication intensifies the need for theological anthropology to address reductionism and its counter-relational work in order for the global church to embody persons and relationships in the image and likeness of God's whole ontology and function.

The counter-relational work of reductionism can be very covert and easy to overlook, ignore or simply dismiss. This is witnessed in the primordial garden, throughout Israel's history (including the history of Paul) and even found in the closest of Jesus' followers, the first disciples (as Jesus exposed, Jn 14:9). This variable ontology and function is demonstrated most notably by Peter.

When Jesus qualified “whoever serves me” by making antecedent the priority to “follow me” (Jn 12:26), he established a problematic condition for all persons, including us. This paradigm for serving and imperative for discipleship make our life and practice more difficult, if not unappealing, notably for the self-consciousness in self-determination. Serving is more difficult now both without the option of reductionist substitutes and with the nonnegotiable priority focused on the function of relationship in the primacy of relational work, thus easily discomfiting our self-consciousness. Following Jesus is now made more difficult because the terms of discipleship are not only relationship specific to his whole person but also relationally specific only to God's terms, thus leaving us struggling to perform in our self-determination. Does this sound familiar to what we witnessed in Peter's person?

Once we understand that the ongoing function in relationship together must precede and be the priority over serving, then we have to come to face the face of Jesus. That is, we have to deal directly with God's relational response of grace embodied in Jesus and relationship with him on God's terms. Jesus made his whole person accessible to persons in their human context. This never meant, however, that Jesus functioned in relationship with them in their relational context and by their relational process—in other words, that relationship with Jesus could be on our terms. On Jesus' relational path, he intruded *in* the human context without being shaped by and thus becoming *of* the human context.

“Follow me” is about both the primacy of relationship and relationship with him on God’s whole relational terms. “Face to face” with Jesus involves a specific relational process involving specific persons. This means the “me” Jesus makes imperative to follow has to be the whole person Jesus vulnerably presented in the incarnation. The face of Jesus cannot be our image of him shaped by our own predispositions and biases—especially from a reductionist perceptual-interpretive framework—which certainly involve our interests, desires and needs, particularly for subtle engagement in self-determination. The experiential truth is that we cannot truly follow Jesus’ person from self-consciousness, because such engagement fragments the persons (both Jesus’ and ours) necessary for this relationship together to be whole—and not “to be apart in only the association of our parts.”

Whole ontology and function is always subjected to reductionism and its counter-relational work. To continue to live whole becomes a struggle when qualitative sensitivity to reductionism and relational awareness of its counter-relational work are lacking in the person to expose its influence. Variable ontology and function results when any person’s integral identity is diminished and their person-consciousness and relational work are minimalized; and we can neither assume nor expect anything more to result. Therefore, in the human context what is clearly evident from the beginning for any theological discourse on human persons is to establish a strong view of sin, which is a glaring need today:

That is, the definitive view of sin as reductionism that accounts for persons and relationship in reduced ontology and function—not merely as moral and ethical failure, even qualified by shame—which provides the understanding needed to expose the reductionism of sin prevailing in the human context that composes the human relational condition “to be apart” from the whole, God’s qualitative relational whole and the whole of God.

As much as Christians don’t like to talk about sin and churches tend to minimize its discussion, except in fundamentalist terms, this definitive view of sin must be embraced as a nonnegotiable, or else we have no other basis for distinguishing persons from whatever variable ontology and function exist in human contexts.

A critical part of distinguishing the person in the complete context of wholeness is to confront the influence of reductionism in the person’s surrounding context. To ignore the presence of reductionism and to not pay attention to its influence in the surrounding context are indicators that theological discourse about persons has already been shaped by this influence and its practice is complicit, if not reinforcing and sustaining, of this fragmentation. For example, in contexts where honor-shame is more determining for practice than ethical and moral views (with focus on innocence-guilt), honor-shame would expand our view of sin with a more collective-relational emphasis. Yet, such a collective-relational concern would most likely be engaged merely in referential terms (notably with duty and obligation) and not be involved more deeply by God’s whole relational terms (as in the beginning, Gen 2:25). On this limited basis, honor-shame becomes a self-concern centered on self-consciousness that still continues in reduced ontology and function, however variable. Honor-shame, then, subtly extends sin without

reductionism. This is of utmost importance for global South Christians in particular to understand and not to be influenced to shape their view of sin.

Christians both South and North need to awaken to the pervasive reality of reductionism surrounding us and its subtle influence shaping us. Anything less than this strong view of sin definitive for any human context and any substitutes for sin as reductionism render persons to reduced ontology and function, unable to consistently live whole ontology and function into the human context. The resulting variable ontology and function is consequential immeasurably for Christian persons, relationships and churches. Without understanding sin as reductionism, the distinction between self-consciousness and person-consciousness is erased from human consciousness, whereby persons and relationships are always limited to and constrained by an inescapable default condition and mode: the prevailing alternative to the person composing human identity in the reduced ontology and function of self-consciousness, which, if continues to pervade the global church, will make insignificant its gospel, its shared life, its witness, and therefore its worship of the God claimed to be the one and true God who saves them and makes the significant difference in their life.

What would be your honest evaluation of the predominant consciousness that composes the identity of the global church, as well as the underlying ontology and function of its theology and practice? Perhaps you wouldn't want to generalize, in which case how would you honestly evaluate your own church? Yet, as the global church we need to be accountable to each other, which includes also holding others accountable—even in interaction between global South Christians-churches and global North Christians-churches; the latter have not been sufficiently accountable, and the former have not adequately held them accountable. Does this reflect persons and relationships determined *from* the beginning rather than *in* the beginning?

Therefore, as we listen to the person in the beginning and pay attention to the person from the beginning, “Where are you?” And in the accountability of God's family love, “What are you doing here?” It is indispensable for us conjointly to listen carefully to who is emerging in our churches and to pay attention closely to what is defining in our theology and practice. Furthermore, have we been, are we, and will we be honest enough to discover the extent to which we have made the assumption about our church(s), person(s) and relationships that “we are not and will not be reduced and fragmented”? The experiential reality is the following experiential truth: Whatever our source, our intentions and our efforts, good without wholeness is “not good to be apart”—which God has been telling us since in the beginning; and anything less and any substitutes for God's created whole of persons and relationships integral for God's family subtly reinforces and sustains sin without reductionism—even by default.

This is the unavoidable consequence of “knowing good and evil” from the beginning, which composes the human condition that has often been reflected in the church even to the present.

Chapter 4 Giving Voice to the Human Condition

**When *the person* saw that the tree was good for *consumption...*
a delight to the eyes...to be desired to make one wise, *the person acted.***

Genesis 3:6

**Therefore we must pay greater attention to what we have heard,
so that we do not drift away *and reflect, reinforce and sustain the human condition.***

Hebrews 2:1

The human condition, our human condition, has been narrowly perceived from the beginning in varying ethical-moral terms. Even with strict moral standards (e.g. as shaped by the ten commandments), this perception has weakened or distorted the voices of those occupying the human condition, that is, making many of their concerns inaudible, not understandable or simply insignificant to warrant a response. This response would unlikely emerge only from others but most importantly even from oneself.

Such a weakened or distorted voice emerges from Charlie Brown (in a recent rerun of the comic strip “Peanuts”), which will help us give voice to the breadth of our human condition needing a response. Charlie Brown is a kid with very low self-esteem, whose self-worth is in a constant state of pessimism. On this occasion sitting next to Lucy (a close neighbor girl), he is seriously wondering “if God is pleased with me.” In his woeful contemplation, he turns to the self-centered Lucy and asks “Do you ever wonder if God is pleased with you?” Though she was perhaps in a moment of self-doubt herself during Charlie’s wondering, she turns to him with an optimistic smile and answers in self-confidence “He just **has** to be!”¹

The pessimism of Charlie Brown reflects the condition of humanity, which many Christians perceive as composed by Augustine’s doctrine of original sin to define the innate sinful nature of all human persons. Charlie Brown rightfully wonders if God is pleased with him, and he has no basis to be optimistic that God is pleased given his woeful condition. In contrast, Lucy simply (though not without some doubt) assumes that God “**has** to be” pleased with her based on her optimistic view of her condition—which conflicts with the doctrine of original sin. Their interaction is a serious theological discussion in which more Christians need to engage, ironically even in the theological academy. Is God pleased with us? Yet, as we consider this question, we need to understand that this theological contemplation involves only a relational issue, composed just by relational terms in a specific relational process (as in Heb 10:38). God being pleased with human persons is not about the pessimism or optimism of their doctrine of the human condition.

¹ Created by the late and insightful Charles M. Schulz, *Los Angeles Times*, July 8, 2015.

The realism of our perception of the human condition certainly could be enhanced or weakened, sharpened or distorted, by our doctrine of sin. It is important, however, to understand that the breadth and depth of our perception of the human condition, our human condition, emerges primarily as an experiential reality in relational terms, which reflects what God has revealed as the experiential truth of the human condition. Doctrines of sin in referential terms, even the doctrine of original sin, narrow down the human condition (which is already a narrowed-down condition) such that our response to it becomes fragmentary, and even reflects, reinforces or sustains the breadth and depth of the human condition. That's why listening to sin and the person (like Charlie Brown) is critical to giving audible, understandable and significant voice to the human condition, which will not only warrant our response but whole-ly evoke, if not provoke, our relational response to make it whole.

Set Into Motion from the Beginning

When we go back to listen to the human person from the beginning, we can understand what emerged in God's relational context that set into motion a contrary relational process composing the human condition of all persons who followed. Who followed is determined by what emerged from the beginning. What emerged and was set into motion for persons who followed (including us) are contingent on how carefully we listen to the person from the beginning. And what voice the human condition has is modulated from this process.

What then was set into motion from the beginning? When we listen carefully to the persons in the primordial garden, we cannot narrow down their context and impose our human context on them. That would both take them out of God's context and thereby immediately reduce them to the limits of referential terms. Most doctrines of sin involve referentialization of persons in the primordial garden, whereby the human condition is limited to ethical-moral failure (namely their disobedience). In God's context, however, ethics and morality are insufficient to compose what is of significance to God that would please God. While ethical-moral behavior is important to God and necessary in the human context, this function is incomplete to fulfill the whole relational terms distinguishing God's relational context and process, and by which human persons necessarily are created. As long as persons are incomplete from their created ontology and function—which mere ethical-moral behavior is insufficient to complete—they can only emerge in reduced ontology and function that limits and constrains them to the breadth and depth of the human condition.

In the beginning, the persons in God's relational context were complete, created in whole ontology and function in the qualitative image and relational likeness of God, the whole and uncommon (holy) God. When persons in the primordial garden assumed they could renegotiate relationship with God from God's primary relational terms to their secondary referential terms, they shifted from God's whole and uncommon terms to human fragmentary and common terms. This subtle transition involved focusing on parts ("the tree") over the whole (the 'forest' of God's context) and becoming preoccupied with the secondary ("good for *consumption*...to make one wise," Gen 3:6) over the primary. That is, they transitioned from the primary in God's context, which constituted

them whole in the beginning, to a reduced alternative (or substitute) in a contrary (or competing) context. What emerged from this act of self-determination were persons and relationship together in reduced ontology and function. The relational consequence was two-fold: (1) on the one hand, persons now were composed “to be apart from God’s created whole” in a contrary context (“knowing good without wholeness and sin without reductionism”); and (2) on the other hand, persons were also relegated to the limits and constraints of their condition “to be apart,” embedded in a contrary relational process (“naked and covered up”) that set into motion the human relational condition “not good to be apart” for all persons who followed.

What was set into motion from the beginning was reduced ontology and function. Reductionism and its counter-relational work emerged directly from the redefining influence of Satan, who contends with God, God’s whole and the wholeness of God’s creation. Satan’s subtle challenge of persons unfolded from the beginning to fragment persons and relationships to a reduced ontology and function. We need to pay close attention to the trajectory of Satan’s presence and involvement because the subtlety of Satan’s influence also becomes redefining for our person and relationships. When persons chose to undertake this seemingly reasonable challenge (“Did God say that?”), they enacted a contrary relational dynamic to redefine themselves by self-determination (“be like God, knowing good and evil”) that unfolded as follows:

First, their perceptual-interpretive framework and lens had to be narrowed down to quantitative outer-in terms (contrary to “your eyes will be opened”)—reducing the primacy of the qualitative and relational integral to be whole—in order for a self-determination to emerge; and thus secondly, they shifted out of God’s relational context and process, which constituted them in whole ontology and function, to undertake a subtly contrary relational process (“you will not die”) that redefined their persons and relationships in the condition “not good to be apart” composed in fragmentary terms (“naked and covered up”), whereby their ontology and function were now reduced in a distinctly different context and process from God’s whole to set into motion the redefined condition of all human persons who followed in this context and process—the common human context and prevailing human process contrary to the whole and uncommon God’s relational context and process.

What unfolds and is set into motion is not mere referential information for us to formulate referential doctrine. Moreover, this pivotal redefining of human persons and relationships has not merely occupied our history for us to have referential points of human development (or lack thereof). On the one hand, it gets to the innermost depth of human ontology and, on the other hand, it pervades the encompassing breadth of human function, both of which inseparably compose the human condition, our human condition. In other words, this reduced ontology and function is the experiential reality that all of us must address in our persons and relationships, as well as respond to in other persons and relationships embedded in this human condition.

Whether this reduction becomes the ontology and function of choice by persons who followed is not a viable issue because whole ontology and function is no longer an available option of choice in the common human context and prevailing human process. Whole ontology and function only exists in God’s relational context and is available only

by God's relational process. Nor is this reduced ontology and function a reality sufficiently accounted for by the doctrine of original sin, the theology and practice of which tends to be about sin without reductionism and thus does not include the full depth and breadth of the human condition. All persons are rendered to the default ontology and function of the human condition unless they undergo the redemptive process necessary to be restored (transformed) to whole ontology and function—a process available only in God's relational context and not in the human context. This relational outcome then certainly cannot emerge from self-determination or any other human terms. The person-consciousness discussed in chapter three is not the outworking of self-determination but the relational work unfolding from the relational outcome of God's creative action and salvific response to our human condition. Until persons are restored by God to whole ontology and function, the only ontology and function enacted is limited and constrained to the human condition set into motion from the beginning.

The reduced ontology and function of the human condition is what we witness from the primordial garden and thereafter. God was grieved in his heart over the depth and breadth of reduced human ontology and function, such that “the LORD was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth,” with the exception of Noah (Gen 6:6). This reduced condition existed in its various expressions, both explicit and implicit, either blatant or subtle, all of which cannot be narrowed down to ethical-moral failure and simply a moral condition. Given the extent and depth to which God was affected, the human condition that was set into motion permeated all of human life—even in the important purpose of humans' secondary work “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.” Yet, Noah was different from the other persons of his time and “found favor in the sight of the LORD” (6:8-9). How was Noah different?

We don't have all the details of Noah's life but there is a summary of what distinguished him. Noah was defined as a righteous person. Yet given what was set into motions from the beginning, how is this possible? Certainly, Noah was not righteous from self-determination; as Paul later made conclusive, “There is no one who is righteous, not even one” (Rom 3:10). We have to look beyond Noah and his surrounding context for the source of his righteousness. Who, what and how Noah was (leading to his righteousness) remained involved in the primacy of God's relational context and process over his secondary engagement in his surrounding context; and thus he “walked with God,” that is, was relationally involved with God necessarily by God's relational terms in reciprocal relationship together. The relational outcome of the whole of who, what and how Noah was with God unfolded in Noah receiving God's relational response of grace for the following: (1) to integrally make him complete, whole (the full meaning of *tamiym* that the term “blameless” is commonly rendered in ethical-moral terms) by restoring him to whole ontology and function, and (2) to experience the relational reality of having “favor in the sight of the whole and holy God.” In other words, God was pleased with the reciprocal relational involvement of Noah's whole person (however imperfect), distinguished only by God's whole relational terms, contrary to the common that prevailed in his surrounding context. This is the reciprocal relational dynamic in relational terms that the author of Hebrews later made definitive (Heb 10:38). Noah was different (uncommon) only because he gave God the relational opportunity to respond to his human condition and to make him different, uncommon, *tamiym*.

The human condition that was set into motion continues to unfold in reduced ontology and function, even in Noah's son (Gen 9:20-27, think in terms of honor-shame, not in ethical-moral terms). Any optimism about the human condition that emerges from seeing the rainbow has no significance in human reality. The rainbow has relational significance to God's relational response to the human condition for the nonnegotiable purpose of covenant relationship together in wholeness (Gen 9:16-17). And God's relational response to the human condition unfolds whole-ly in the relational dynamic of *tamiym* to constitute the covenant relationship together of love, which distinguishes God's whole family in contrast to the common's prevailing terms and condition (Gen 17:1; Dt 7:7-9).

Human Intervention and Achievement, not Development

If selfish genes have dominated human development from the beginning, there is no other composition to the human narrative. I contend, however, this does not compose the human condition, nor can natural selection account for the whole in human development. Human development and progress in human achievement have to be differentiated, since the former is qualitatively oriented while the latter is quantitatively oriented; thus they emerge from contrasting and conflicting roots. Consequently, what each lens pays attention to or ignores is different, with different and even conflicting results. For example, social media has greatly expanded the quantity of human connections and, in the progress, reduced the quality of human communication and relationships, along with the persons so engaged.² The shaping influence of this reality must not be confused with human development. This modern reduction pervades further by hookup relationships dominating youth-young adult culture (and the millennial generation) in the U.S., which has fragmented the persons engaged and the relationships assumed to be without consequence.

What emerges here from redefining the human person in quantitative terms from outer in (mainly preoccupied with the secondary over the primary), unfolds in self-determination as an alternative person substituting for the whole person in the beginning. This is the redefining alternative that reduces the person to one's parts (notably in multi-tasking or insignificant connections) and results in fragmenting both the whole person in ontology and function as well as persons' relationships together. Such results cannot be confused with human development, yet human achievement is often mistaken for it and such so-called progress becomes a pervasive substitute for it. Moreover, if such results occur from natural selection, physical determinism certainly has a dark forecast for human life that perhaps warrants fatalism. At the same time, for theological anthropology to shed light on the human narrative, it must clearly illuminate the human condition from the beginning in order to spotlight who and what distinguishes the whole person—whose whole ontology and function are needed to emerge, develop and survive to expose, confront and make whole the human condition.

² The effects of technology on the quality of human life are discussed by Sherry Turkle in *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

Human intervention may attempt, and has attempted, to construct wholeness in human ontology and function, only to be faced with the limits and constraints of their condition that makes it impossible to go beyond self-referencing.³ In the absence of whole ontology and function, two persistent and pervasive conditions converge for our human condition to prevail regardless even of good intentions: (1) the persistence of self-determination as the alternative for redefining persons and determining human life, and (2) the pervasive need for epistemological illusion and ontological simulation to support and maintain, even to justify, engagement in self-determination despite its limits and constraints.

This converging dynamic was demonstrated by ancient residents of the world (Gen 11:1-9). As human migration expanded, these residents determined to “build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make *an identity* for ourselves and not be *fragmented* over the face of the whole earth” (v. 4, NIV). In their self-determination, they wanted to construct a unity and have an identity together, without being fragmented into separate entities. What also converged with their self-determination was having good intentions (discussed later in this chap.), which is a common motivation that we often assume as sufficient basis for our function. Yet, there is a deeper understanding critical to human ontology and function that unfolded in this context paralleling contexts today, which needs to be given a voice to articulate the human condition, our human condition. God totally rejected their good intentions and denied their human intervention and achievement for a common unity and identity together. Why wouldn’t God be pleased with them? Wasn’t this human progress from what God witnessed before the flood?

The reality is that this just further unfolded from what was set into motion from the beginning. We cannot merely assume that their good intentions didn’t reflect ‘good without wholeness’, or that their optimistic efforts engaged in anything more than reinforcing and sustaining the human condition. The parallel reality for today is the good intentions of human achievement for the purpose of so-called human progress (such as in technology and globalization) and the optimistic (vain or arrogant) efforts to build empire (such as in colonialism, including by the U.S., with economic neocolonialism). Our ancient counterparts chose the redefining alternative of self-determination, which conjointly required unavoidably a narrowed-down perceptual-interpretive lens and also composed them unmistakably in reduced ontology and function. Therefore, they assumed they could construct the whole based on their fragmentary parts and the sum of those parts, and that the result would be wholeness in their life together. Furthermore, their self-determination assumed they could construct the whole from ‘bottom-up’, and that the result would rise above the human context (with its limits and constraints) to achieve human progress to the level of God’s context (“a tower that reaches to the heavens”). The latter assumption is to be expected from a narrowed-down perceptual-interpretive lens, while the former assumption is understandable given the need for epistemological illusion and ontological simulation to sustain engagement in self-determination despite its limits and constraints.

³ Having learned these limits, physicist Stephen Hawking gave up his attempt to construct a “grand unified theory” (GUT) for knowing the world in its innermost. Discussed in Hans Kung, *The Beginning of All Things: Science and Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 15-24.

Reduced human ontology and function can never achieve wholeness because the reality of its irremediable (not irreversible) condition, however variable, can never be whole. Human intervention, whether at the systemic level or interpersonal level, cannot go beyond the limits and constraints of its context and its defining ontology and function. This is indispensable to understand for the tower of Babel and for parallel efforts today to construct unity, wholeness and the whole. In relational response to the human condition, God deconstructed Babel in order to clarify their illusion and correct their simulation, and thus to expose the influence of reductionism composing their human condition in reduced ontology and function. Throughout human history—from Egypt, Babylon through the Roman empire, Great Britain to the United States and Soviet Union, and now likely China—we have witnessed the recurring dynamic of Babel unfold, with God continuing to clarify and correct our illusions and simulations in relational response to our human condition in reduced ontology and function. As long as we don't pay attention to our condition and consequently not respond to God's pursuit of us, then human development in our persons, relationships and churches will not grow and mature in wholeness; and we remain enclosed epistemologically, hermeneutically, ontologically, functionally and relationally to the limits and constraints of our condition.

What does this say today, for example, about expanding efforts in globalization,⁴ for U.S. politico-economic policy,⁵ and for the encompassing Internet with its social media, including efforts even for the global church (notably vis-à-vis the Western church, and supplementing Jesus' post-ascension critique of churches, Rev 2-3)? Is what currently unfolds in these contexts an extension of Babel and what was set into motion from the beginning? Do we need to give voice to the human condition in such contexts as these and respond accordingly? As far as I am aware, God is not deconstructing any of these contexts as he did at Babel and as Jesus later deconstructed the temple. Yet, we should never assume that silence indicates they are not reduced or fragmented. God continues to clarify and correct, if we listen carefully and pay attention closely. God does not, however, engage in unilateral relationship and simply impose his will upon us—even if we affirm God's sovereignty or submit to a doctrine of prevenient grace.

Perhaps Christians and the church experience a reenactment of the primordial garden, yet in a contemporary context into which converge all the dynamics composing the human condition, but which emerges progressing in subtle and seductive complexity: the contemporary context of the city as the new primordial garden. Whether in the West or the majority world, the increasing presence and development of urbanization is the most prominent evidence of the human condition. Wherever the city has emerged and exists in our contexts, it represents the influence and consequence of reductionism both of persons and relationships; and the urban process has constructed monuments of good without wholeness and sin without reductionism—seducing persons with opportunity for achievement, even though most persons get lost in the city and are lonely in its crowd.

What unfolds in the city reenacts the human condition that unfolded in the primordial garden. Industrialization compounded what already existed in ancient cities;

⁴ Vinoth Ramachandra engages this discussion in *Subverting Global Myths: Theology and the Public Issues Shaping Our World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008).

⁵ A discussion of U.S. empire building and the role of evangelicalism is undertaken in Bruce Ellis and Peter Goodwin Heltzel, eds., *Evangelicals and Empire: Christian Alternatives to the Political Status Quo* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2008).

and this human intervention emerging from self-determination further mobilized assumed progress to usher in the post-industrial era, which has accelerated technological progress into the digital age with expanding cyberspace centered in the city. All this has unfolded to embed and increasingly enslave us in this narrowed-down context of reduced function as persons and in relationships. Families, for example, have fragmented from tribes and extended families into the nuclear family in migration to the city; and this narrowed-down family unit has further broken down to the individualism required by self-determination. When Jesus wept over Jerusalem and lamented “if you had only understood on this day the things that make peace, *well-being, that is, make you whole*” (Lk 19:41-42), he previewed for the global church the nature of sin and the workings of the human condition in the centers of life in which his church will live. Jesus’ words imply that the church must ongoingly decide whether to reflect, reinforce, sustain, or transform this prevailing condition—the latter only by being whole and living whole as persons and in relationships together, and thereby making whole the human condition prominently enacted in the city.

Human intervention, achievement and progress are facts of life, yet are also realities limited and constrained by the human condition, our human condition. Regardless of the breadth and depth of the human condition that the global church is subjected to in the city, these are converging realities that Christian persons, relationships and churches commonly become subject to, and thus which further reduce us in our human condition. Listening to the Word—notably as embodied by Jesus (e.g. over Jerusalem)—is integral both for giving voice to the human condition and for the relational path necessary to be redeemed from it and to make it whole. Not listening carefully to the Word, or being selective about what we pay attention to in it, will render us subject to these realities surrounding us—“But now they are hidden from your eyes,” as Jesus wept.

Western Christians in the global North may find the context of Scripture somewhat anachronistic to its modern life, whereas Christians in the global South more readily find Scripture directly relevant to the issues they face today, given the similarity with issues in biblical contexts. Yet, Christians both in the global North and South need a new lens to look beyond (1) ethics and morality, and their limits of justice and their constraints of conformity, and (2) honor-shame, and their limits in duty and their constraints in obligation—both likely enacted with a pervasive good without wholeness and perceived as a prevailing sin without reductionism. Looking beyond exposes reductionism and going beyond gives voice to the human condition of reduced ontology and function, which is the primary condition requiring urgent care for all Christians to address, confront and redeem the existing sin as reductionism in order to make whole the human condition, our human condition.

Self-determination is the default human condition, and this is unavoidably our human condition unless we respond to God’s relational response of grace to be redeemed from the limits and constraints of reduced ontology and function, and to be restored-transformed to whole ontology and function. The fact is, however, that human achievement is very appealing, as seen from the beginning. The defining alternative for persons of self-determination has increased human intervention, which has increasingly been seduced by the human progress resulting from our achievements. Regardless, such assumed progress does not go beyond our limits and constraints, and thus usually

emerges from ‘good without wholeness’ even for the common good—even with good intentions. For example, medical progress has increased medical intervention—particularly in Western medicine in the U.S., which also involves overly diagnosed conditions with unnecessary treatment⁶—ostensibly in order to prolong life. Even with good intentions, much of this effort only extends the quantity of life without the primacy of the quality of life. Yet this is the expected rationale that unfolds from our limits and constraints and thus doesn’t go beyond them. The seduction of human progress is compounded when a narrowed-down mindset doesn’t question, challenge and even oppose progress if it is perceived to serve the common good—despite the fact that this good is without wholeness and this progress does not develop the whole of human ontology and function.

Human progress, then, must be understood in terms of its reduced ontology and function; and such progress emerging from the achievements of subtle engagement in self-determination (e.g. “to make one wise”) also pervade into the global church. Christians, notably in the global North but equally in the global South, can remain within the limits and constraints of their surrounding human contexts and subtly be both defined by human interventions and determined by human achievements. Much of this subtle effort is assumed to be good and not to be reduced or fragmented. This has become the norm for how we define ourselves and others, how we engage in relationships with each other, and how we build the church—inevitably engaged in a comparative process that subtly becomes competitive. Or we can listen to sin, persons and the voice of the human condition, and then pay attention to the whole and uncommon God’s vulnerable presence and relational involvement with us and reciprocally respond in compatible relationship together. That is, we can shift back to God’s relational context and process and respond according to God’s whole relational terms over our terms. To some, this may appear naïve and will only lead to human regression, not progress. That’s why we must not confuse human achievement with human development, because the latter only involves human ontology and function emerging, unfolding and maturing in wholeness.

If we referentialize the Word from God, we remain narrowed down to human contextualization—for example, influenced in what we pay attention to or ignore, and become selective about in the Word—and thereby are rendered by default to the human condition of reduced ontology and function, even with the best of intentions (as embodied by the church in Ephesus, Rev 2:1-4). Likewise, the development of wholeness in our persons, relationship and thus the global church will neither emerge from self-determination nor unfold from our achievements, no matter its progress in human contexts (as evidenced by the church in Sardis, Rev 3:1-2). We who belong to the global church need to be clarified and corrected of our condition by the primordial garden from the beginning, and further convicted by Babel of our self-determination reenacted in our cities. “Unless the *whole and uncommon God* builds the *person, the relationship, and the church*, those who build them labor in vain” (Ps 127:1)—that is, labor in the subtle optimism that assumes their condition is not reduced or fragmented.

⁶ Internist H. Gilbert Welch addresses the issue of “How much medical care do we want in our lives?” and critiques current prevailing medical practice in “Life, medicalized”, Op-Ed, *Los Angeles Times*, March 15, 2010.

The Silence of the Human Condition

Sin is not a popular subject to discuss, and the human condition is either assumed or eludes understanding in discussion about the realities of human life. Perhaps accordingly, the human condition prevailing in the human context has been noticeably lacking or absent in theological anthropology discourse. Either too much is assumed about this condition or too little discussion takes place about it. And not enough is said when discussion does focus on the human condition. This is curious because how significantly can we discuss, define, determine, know and understand the person (individually and collectively) in human context without factoring in the human condition? The consequence for theological anthropology and its ongoing implications reverberate throughout human life, because our theological anthropology underlies our theology and practice. Any reduction or fragmentation of theological anthropology notably converges on the development and survival of the whole person and relationships together in wholeness. Therefore, theological anthropology is integral for our understanding of the human condition and is defining for the human condition to either have a voice or to be silent. And we cannot escape the reality that our theology and practice is dependent on theological anthropology and what can unfold from it.

The human context, by the nature of its limited epistemic field, imposes limits that preclude conclusive knowledge and understanding of human life. When the prevailing human condition is factored into the human context—a condition that is inescapable, though commonly ignored or even denied—added to the limits imposed are now also constraints that are unavoidable. The dynamic interaction between limits and constraints also unfolded in the primordial garden. When the question was raised “Did God really say *that*?” (Gen 3:1, NIV), not only was the epistemic field limited to only the human context but the epistemic field was further narrowed down and constrained in interpretation and meaning to a reductionist bias. In other words, the constraints of the human condition are always imposed to fulfill a reductionist purpose, and therefore quite naturally and very conveniently converge with the limits of the human context for this reduced result. This is further demonstrated by the assumption “You will not surely *be reduced*.” Their convergence makes constraints less distinguishable and limits more reasonable, despite the pervasive existence of this defining interaction between them, and as a consequence renders us to a default human condition.

The constraints, now inseparable from the human context, explicitly or implicitly diminish, minimalize or distort our knowledge and understanding of human life, such that without epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction, human life is rendered to epistemological illusions (e.g. “not be reduced”) and ontological simulations (e.g. “covered” and “hidden”). That is, human life is not rendered necessarily to fictions—though many essentially live a lie or believe in lies about themselves—but to various facts of life that in actuality do not adequately or truly represent reality in human life, only the limits and constraints of the human context. Any anthropology is subjected to these same limits and constraints, but whether its discourse is subject to them depends directly on having epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction from a larger epistemic field.

The parameters of anthropology are defined by the human context. Understandably, anthropology depends on the facts from this narrow and biased

epistemic field to compose its discourse. Given the above limits and constraints under which anthropology works, theological anthropology must be clearly distinguished from its counterpart in order for its own discourse to go beyond the limits of the human context and rise above the constraints of the human condition—and thereby compose validity statements. In its primary function, theological anthropology must fully account for the human condition and unmistakably distinguish the reality of the whole person in ontology and function from any reductionism. Not distinguishing this reality renders the person by default to the human condition, which theological anthropology by definition should be responsible to illuminate and give voice to in its pivotal position and vital function.⁷

Anything less and any substitutes of the whole, particularly the whole ontology and function of the person and relationships, can be found along a wide spectrum of expression. We tend to look at human fragmentation and reduction at only one end of this spectrum, located in more extreme forms of expression. The genius of reductionism even promotes this perception so that our interpretive lens either does not pay attention to or even tends to essentially deny the wider range of the spectrum, thus making it difficult to locate anything less and any substitutes of the whole. The consequence is that most of the spectrum engages the undetected human condition by default. In terms of our theological anthropology, unless the depth and breadth of the human condition has a voice, most of our human condition continues in silence and our practice is rendered by default to reflect, reinforce and sustain the reduced ontology and function of the human condition.

The journey of self-determination from the beginning has undertaken a path of known and unknown limits, which certainly have challenged science to explore these limits without either understanding or accepting the nature of their accompanying constraints. The constraints of the human condition are also imposed on self-determination, which thus makes relative all that this self determines. Since the person is never isolated *with* the human condition *in* the human context, any and all self-determination require competition because of the underlying comparative process inherently necessary for this alternative defining process of the person. Intentionally or inadvertently, competition engages the human comparative process with its subtle use of a ‘deficit model’ to measure, rank and thus stratify persons (individually and collectively) by their achievements—achievements and possessions that can be real or merely perceived as existing. For self-determination, therefore, to be successful it must be perceived on this human scale as ‘more’ or ‘better’ at the expense of others perceived as ‘less’. Moreover, with the use of a deficit model, anyone (again individually or collectively) considered ‘different’ from this defining standard of measurement is also considered *less*, as in inferior or deficient. This has obvious repercussions in human relations, both at the interpersonal level and the systemic level, which can be engaged explicitly or implicitly, blatantly or subtly, along the wide spectrum of the human condition. The consequences range from a biased lens of prejudice to systems of inequality, unfolding even in the church. Social minorities and people of color are well aware of these consequences on their lives, and this includes what the global South has experienced from the global North.

⁷ The responsibility of theological anthropology’s pivotal position and vital function is undertaken in an expanded discussion in my study *The Person in Complete Context: The Whole of Theological Anthropology Distinguished* (Theological Anthropology Study, 2014). Online at <http://www.4X12.org>.

The seductive appeal to be ‘more’, or at least not be ‘less’, is an obvious motivating factor for self-determination; and this increasingly silences the human condition underlying this human dynamic and its relational consequences. This unfolds even among God’s people, which was the path Israel undertook as the defining alternative for the persons in covenant relationship. In place of involvement together in *tamiym* (be complete, whole, Gen 17:1), the people of Israel turned to self-determination and thus redefined the terms for relationship together (Torah, cf. Dt 31:26-27) from God’s whole relational terms to narrowed-down referential terms—terms given originally as communication in relationship and transposed to merely the transmission of information. That is, the law became their code-template of conformity (their deficit model), by which to measure, rank and stratify their achievement in self-determination according to a comparative process with each other (cf. Mt 5:20; 15:8-9; 23:1-7; Acts 15:10). In his major discourse on discipleship (the Sermon on the Mount, Mt 5-7), Jesus contrasted prevailing Judaism’s self-determination (Mt 6) and accompanying self-justification (Mt 7) and exposed clearly their narrowing down the law to referential terms without relational significance, to which they merely conformed without regard for the relational consequences on others (Mt 5:21-48). As they renegotiated the terms for relationship with God, their practice of the law (or Rule of Faith) became either a means for their end of self-determination (as in Mt 15:3-9) or just an end in itself (as Ezekiel learned, Eze 33:30-32, and other church leaders also need to learn).

God’s people were not constrained by only their own human condition. The limits of referential terms were further narrowed down to fragment the whole relational terms for covenant relationship, as their human terms were influenced and shaped by their surrounding context. They shifted from God’s people as covenant family to become a nation-state, just like all the surrounding nations (1 Sam 8:4-5, 19-20). Then the law (such as circumcision and the Sabbath) also became their identity markers by which to establish their place in human contextualization through self-determination—further ignoring the limits and constraints of their human condition in reduced ontology and function. Therefore, rather than being distinguished as God’s covenant family for all the nations (Gen 17:4;18:18), they became reduced like all the other nations and just further reflected, reinforced and sustained the prevailing human condition.

This is the expected destination for God’s people undertaking the subtle path of self-determination—perhaps not contrary to their own theology yet so engaged in their practice. No matter what we achieve in Christian practice and how far we’ve progressed in church ministry, when the voice of the human condition is silent in our own condition, we cannot and should not expect to rise above its limits and constraints (as seen in the church in Sardis, Rev 3:1-2). Thus, even without intending to practice self-determination we should not be surprised to find ourselves engaged in self-determination by default—for example, falling into the practice of ‘works’ while holding a theology of ‘saved by faith’. God, however, corrects the subtle boasting inevitable to self-determination in a contrary human comparative process—widely demonstrated also by churches and seminaries competing for larger enrollment—and transposes any boasting to whole relational terms in the primacy of relationship together and its relational outcome “that they understand and know me” (Jer 9:23-24). And the relational outcome of understanding and knowing God cannot emerge from self-determination, even by scholarship in biblical studies.

One of the prime indicators that we have subtly undertaken self-determination is getting preoccupied with the secondary. This may not be apparent if we also have referentialized the Word and assume our focus on the Word is engaged in the primary (as exposed in the church in Ephesus, Rev 2:1-4). As constituted in the beginning, however, the primary is only composed in whole relational terms by the primacy of relationship together. Anything less and any substitutes are reduced in ontology and function, which is what unfolds from a narrowed-down Word in fragmentary referential terms. Even scholarship engaged in the referentialization of the Word is preoccupied with the secondary—notably for achievement in a Christian comparative process of self-determination, or simply progressing in our human condition. Therefore, if our secondary involvement is not integrated into God’s primary relational terms and thus the primacy of relationship together, we invariably get preoccupied with the secondary and will find ourselves on a different relational path from the embodied Word.

This dynamic further unfolded among Jesus’ early disciples, even as he clarified and corrected their practice. In the competitive terms of a human comparative process, the disciples argued about “which one of them was the greatest,” which Jesus clarified for them in whole relational terms (Lk 9:46-48, cf. Mt 18:1-4). Rather than listen to Jesus’ clarification for the development of their wholeness, they continued to define themselves by their achievements and assumed they made progress in their discipleship. Perhaps in secondary matters they could make this claim but not in the primary, namely the primacy of relationship together that is definitive for composing “Follow me” only in relational terms (as they demonstrated in Mt 26:35). Their self-concerns about their self-determination kept them from being vulnerably involved with Jesus in relational terms, even though they were committed to him in referential terms. The relational consequence was keeping relational distance that prevented them from receiving Jesus’ whole person (e.g. Jn 13:8) and responding to his whole person (e.g. Mt 26:6-13); and in spite of their intense time together, because of their relational distance they didn’t truly know the person Jesus (Jn 14:9). The reduced ontology and function of our human condition persists as long as it is silent and doesn’t provoke our needed response to change. And the disciples persisted in their self-determination, even through their last table fellowship together with Jesus, seeking to achieve “which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest,” which again Jesus not only clarified but also corrected for their wholeness together (Lk 22:24-26). Otherwise, their persons would remain fragmented and their relationships would be stratified, which are evident today in the global church.

I doubt that the disciples intended to practice self-determination with Jesus, and they certainly had good intentions in following him, at least in the common rabbinic tradition of following the rabbi. Likewise, the reality for all of us as his disciples continues to play out in our midst: When the voice of the human condition is silent about our own condition, we cannot assume and cannot expect to rise above its limits and constraints, nor assume that our persons, relationships and churches are not reduced or fragmented. “Therefore, we must pay greater attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away *and reflect, reinforce and sustain the human condition*” (Heb 2:1). As the writer of Hebrews alludes to in highlighting God’s relational response of grace to the human condition, there is a wide spectrum of practice composing our human condition that easily and subtly puts us on a different theological trajectory and relational path from the whole and uncommon God (2:2-4, cf. Mt 7:13). That’s why we need to give voice to

the depth and breadth of the human condition, our human condition, beyond just ethical-moral terms of guilt-innocence, even beyond honor-shame.

Good Intentions Composing the Human Condition

We don't commonly associate good intentions with the human condition. This occurs when the depth and breadth of the human condition's wide spectrum is silent, and reductionism and its counter-relational work subtly direct us on a different relational path—seemingly good (e.g. for necessities like “food” and improving oneself by “gaining wisdom”) and with no intention of sin, that is, except for engaging in variable ontology and function.

When the embodied Word is referentialized, this opens the door to a variation of ways the Word is engaged—all of which are composed by narrowed-down human terms that fragment the Word, usually for more convenient consumption. To relate to a fragmented Word is to be on a different relational path from Jesus' whole person. Throughout the incarnation, Jesus vulnerably presents and integrally discloses his whole person (and the whole of God), distinguished only in whole relational terms for the only relational purpose of reciprocal relationship together compatible to his wholeness. Anything less and any substitutes in this discipleship relationship are insufficient, unacceptable and relationally insignificant to Jesus—no matter the sincerity or good intentions.

As the early disciples found themselves on a different relational path than Jesus, three other would-be followers of Jesus were confronted with the reality that their good intentions blocked them from following Jesus' relational path and actually redirected them to an alternative path (Mt 8:18-22; Lk 9:57-62). To these would-be followers, an alternative path was either unthinkable or reasonable and even necessary; this is the perceived reality when the voice of the human condition is weak or silent and our human condition is not carefully listened to, and likely assumed to be good.

As we listen to Jesus' involvement with these persons, note what emerges to understand that what's unfolding is not good. The first person is identified as “a teacher of the law” (scribe) who asserts to Jesus, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go” (Mt 8:19). Since he was schooled in the rabbinic tradition, he knew what it meant to be a disciple (*mathetes*). That would suggest an advantage in his favor as he now offers (or responds, if Jesus called) to become a disciple of Jesus. Whether he merely wants to learn a “fresh” interpretation of the law or he is expressing a deeper commitment to Jesus—likely the latter, given that his “wherever you go” is in the Greek middle voice, subjunctive mood to indicate his planned involvement—Jesus responds in a curious way: “...the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Lk 9:58). This is commonly interpreted as Jesus identifying the rigorous sacrificial life of discipleship; an alternative reading I propose is about sojourning. With this relational lens, Jesus is making a deeper response to this teacher of the law—not about what his disciples *do*, achieve, and their progress, but of who, what and how they *are* and whose they are.

Since “nowhere to lay” is in the Greek subjunctive mood, Jesus is not describing an existing reality. Rather the subjunctive only expresses a potential possibility and only marks contingency. While using the contrast to the reality of the animal world (foxes and

birds having a place), Jesus then is not pointing to current reality of discipleship or even future discipleship in the world—though he is pointing to a distinct process of discipleship in this context. Part of this process involves being a sojourner in the world: unlike the animals *of* the world, “nowhere to lay.” Yet, the reality of sojourning *in* this world can only emerge from the further and deeper relational process of discipleship that composes a person’s response to “Follow me” only in whole relational terms. While a sojourner in this world is subjected to the pressures and influences *of* the world, that person cannot be defined and determined by the surrounding and prevailing human contexts. If any person is so defined and determined, they are also subject to reduced ontology and function of the human condition, even by default despite good intentions. This is the deeper issue Jesus addresses in his response.

As a teacher of the law, this person is not merely deeply knowledgeable about the law, he is also embedded in the Judaic religious and sociocultural context that has referentialized its theology and practice. Thus, he is bringing this narrowed-down perceptual-interpretive framework with him in his assertion to Jesus, which influences how he sees Jesus as well as himself. Without specifying what his own framework is, Jesus implies the following in his response: that as a sojourner he himself is not defined by the human contexts of the world; that who, what and how the Son of Man is can only be defined and determined by the further and deeper relational context of his Father; and that together his whole person is of this trinitarian relational context as family, in which the person he vulnerably presents is compatible in function only with the trinitarian relational process of family love—that is to say, nothing less and no substitutes of his whole ontology and function.

What Jesus implies in all this for this person to understand centers on the person’s own human condition: his framework needs to shift from a reductionist quantitative framework to a qualitative relational framework; thus he needs to change how he is defined and what defines him; and that discipleship is ongoing vulnerable involvement with Jesus’ whole person in the primacy of reciprocal relationship together only in the trinitarian relational context and process of the whole of God—in nonnegotiable relational terms,, nothing less and no substitutes also of his whole person being transformed to whole ontology and function. And that no matter how good his intentions, the *de facto* state (functional reality) of who and what he is will always implicitly shape how he functions as his disciple, in the default condition of reduced ontology and function with its insurmountable limits and constraints.

Jesus clarified that discipleship is this call to be redefined, transformed and made whole, and not about serving in the subtle variations of reduced ontology and function. Whatever this teacher of the law heard in Jesus’ response and however he perceived Jesus after this, we are given no further indication about his response back to Jesus. I suspect that following Jesus involved being accountable for more than he expected, even with his previous experience as a disciple—radically more deep, not to mention threatening to his self-determination and confronting of his condition needing to change. This interaction, however, provides the complete context for the following two would-be disciples, which suggests looking at these three interactions as a set rather than separately (see Lk 9:57-62). These three would-be disciples exercised strong initiative and displayed considerable interest in following Jesus, yet something happened to each of them. While these appear

to be describing the sacrifice and service of discipleship, the underlying accountability for Jesus' self-disclosures exposes the deeper issue.

Prior to undertaking his discipleship in response to Jesus' call "Follow me," the next person requests "Lord, first let me go and bury my father" (Lk 9:59). It was an important responsibility in the ancient community of the Mediterranean world for a son to bury his father, particularly the eldest son. Certainly, as Son himself, Jesus understands the importance of honoring one's father. Given the role of a son, this man makes a legitimate request of Jesus to adjust to his special circumstance so that he would not incur shame. Yet, Jesus appears to deny the request, counter the religio-cultural values of honor-shame, and change the man's role (9:60). If we look only at this son's circumstance, Jesus' response would definitely imply all of this. If, however, we look at this person's circumstance in larger context, beyond the human context to Jesus' relational context, a deeper picture emerges.

In saying "let the dead..." and "...proclaim the kingdom," Jesus is juxtaposing two different realities here: (1) the prevailing sociocultural reality of the world, which includes the family of those whose essential function is spiritually dead ("let the dead bury their own dead"); while this sociocultural reality is a basic one in which we all participate, Jesus is clarifying for this would-be disciple not to let this reality define him nor determine who, what and how he is; in contrast, thus functionally in conflict, (2) Jesus brings forth the reality of the kingdom of God—not a conceptual idea (reign) or a future condition (realm) of the kingdom of God—that is, the present reality of the family of those who truly are *alive*, a new creation in Christ, who are redeemed from reductionist definition, determination and control, and its limits and constraints that dominate the social reality of the world; those belonging to this new reality also need to share it directly with others in family love, just as Jesus discloses it, for relationship in God's family, because every person needs the experiential reality of this family of the living in order to be made whole as persons and in relationships together. And mere family duty and obligation do not fulfill this relational purpose and outcome in wholeness (cf. Mt 12:46-50). Such practice is a common secondary reality, which by necessity has to be integrated into this primary reality in order to go beyond the limits and constraints prevailing in the common human context that render persons and relationships to a reduced or fragmentary condition—a condition signified by good intentions and thereby rendered by default.

When Jesus told him "but as for you, go and proclaim," he neither denied him his role as a son nor denounced the religious value of honoring his father. He did clarify for him, however, what the ontology of his person as a disciple needs to be, into which his secondary must be integrated. By the nature of the whole of who, what and how this person is then subordinates all other determination and function. Discipleship is not a hybrid of the two realities, in which the whole of one's person and function become conflated with and thus reduced to something less and some substitute. That would fragment his person to reduced ontology and function. Moreover, Jesus is not changing his role to a missionary ("go") or evangelist ("proclaim"). "Proclaim" (*diangelo*) means not merely declaring the kingdom (family) of God in fragmentary referential terms but to declare fully, completely in whole relational terms. By this relational imperative, Jesus means "go and proclaim" not in a quantitative sense (as many view the Great Commission and evangelism) but in its qualitative relational significance. The former

does indeed make it about a role and what he should do by serving. This narrow emphasis reduces the whole person and functionally deemphasizes the primacy of relationships necessary to be whole constituting the family of God, thus a truncated soteriology with a gospel suffering from a lack of relational significance. Such a proclamation would not be full, complete, that is, whole, but rather would reflect, reinforce and sustain the limits and constraints of the human condition, our human condition. This is an existing reality pervading the practice of Christians and churches in their good intentions.

And Jesus corrects the good intentions of this would-be disciple to make unmistakable that discipleship is the call to be whole. Therefore, what is imperative in relational terms is not to fulfill his role to bury his father. That may be necessary along with other secondary matters in the sociocultural reality of the world but only as a function integrated into his wholeness as Jesus' disciple. This is the nonnegotiable imperative Jesus presents to him—the relational imperative of the whole and uncommon God distinguished from the fragmentary and the common.

Following Jesus is about more than interest, however strong. The adherence of a disciple to Jesus involves vulnerable deep attachment and distinctly uncommon priority for the experiential reality of relationally belonging in reciprocal relationship together as one of his distinguished disciples, not as an intention but as an ongoing relational reality. The third would-be disciple in this grouping declared his plans to follow Jesus but first wanted to “go back and say good-bye to my family” (9:61, NIV). Seems reasonable, except saying good-bye (*apotasso*) in their cultural context connotes a lengthy process (maybe many years) and a number of duties to perform before leaving. His use of *apotasso* in the Greek aorist form also indicates an open-ended period of time. While this person may have had a stronger interest to follow Jesus than he had in his family, he demonstrates a stronger attachment to his family. Attachments reflect where the heart is embedded (cf. Mt 6:21) and thus would always exert greater influence than interests (which only reflect the focus of the mind), no matter how strong the interest and intention. As a consequence of his attachment, his primary priority was still with his biological family over Jesus, even though he apparently had every intention of following Jesus seriously at a later time.

The differences of interest, attachments and priorities disclose where the person is, which then unfolds in various ways of relating to God and following Jesus. Jesus ongoingly clarifies this for persons, particularly his disciples (would-be and real). When he talked later about the need to “give up everything” (*apotasso*, same word as good-bye) to be his disciple (Lk 14:33), this is not about relinquishing all else and detaching ourselves from them, particularly the relationships he described earlier (see Lk 14:26). In that context and in these current contexts, this involves the primary way of how the person is defined, who/what determines their lives, and thus how relationships are practiced. For this purpose basic to all persons, Jesus is emphatic with this third would-be disciple that anything less or any substitutes in discipleship are a reductionist compromise, a fragmentary hybrid, that is, a default condition, which is not “fit for service” (*euthetos*, usable, suitable, 9:62). Variable ontology and function is not distinguished in relational terms—though may have distinction in referential terms—thus is neither significant relationally to God nor acceptable for relational function in God's family. In other words, his good intentions only reflected his condition in reduced ontology and function.

Jesus held these would-be disciples accountable for his whole person presented and disclosed vulnerably by the trinitarian relational context of family and relational process of family love in relational response to the human condition. Thus, his call continues to be clarified as the call to be redefined, transformed and made whole—not the common perception of a mere call to serve—to follow him for relationship together in relational progression to the whole of God, the Trinity in ontology and function as family. Anything less than and any substitutes for this experiential truth and relational reality are reductionism of the embodied whole of Jesus and the whole and uncommon God’s self-revelation, which render our life and practice both theologically and functionally to epistemological illusions and ontological simulations. Consequently, all who confess this Jesus are accountable—from the scholar in the academy to the teacher behind the pulpit to every person in the pew—for our good intentions and to give voice to our human condition.

Among Jesus’ main disciples, Peter demonstrated the good intentions that Jesus clarified and corrected both to expose his condition and to hold him accountable. The following summarizes Peter’s good intentions and Jesus’ responses: to walk on water to Jesus only to fall short in eventual self-determination (“You of little faith, why did you doubt *and rely on yourself?*” Mt 14:25-31); to correct Jesus’ theological trajectory and relational path, thus exposing his own reductionism and counter-relational work composing his theology and practice shaped by the human context (“Get behind me, Satan! You are *blocking my path*; for you are setting your mind not on *the primary of God* but on *the secondary* of human things,” Mt 16:21-24); to build monuments dedicated to Jesus, Moses and Elijah at the transfiguration (“Listen to my Son, *and pay attention to the primary,*” Mt 17:1-5); to promise to Jesus that he will never fall away and fall short (*skandalizo*, to stumble, related to stumbling block above, Mt 26:31-35); to be intimately involved with the depth of Jesus’ heart (“Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour?” Mk 14:32-37); once again in order to “save” Jesus from his theological trajectory and relational path, Peter acts in self-determination (“Put your *self-determination* away, for all who *function by it* will be *reduced and fragmented—contrary to any assumption from the beginning,*” Mt 26:47-52; Jn 18:10-11); to love Jesus in the primary (“Follow me,” Jn 21:15-19), yet being focused on the secondary (“You must follow me *in the primacy of relationship,*” Jn 21:20-22), and also preoccupied with the secondary at the expense of the primary (Acts 10:13-14; Gal 2:11-14).

In spite of the undeniable sincerity of Peter’s discipleship, his good intentions above were composed only with ‘good without wholeness’ and thus in sin as reductionism, paying attention only to sin without reductionism. It is pivotal for our theology and practice to understand the nature of good intentions, the nature which only reflects, reinforces and sustains the limits and constraints of our human condition. Whether or not we listen and pay attention to Jesus’ clarification and correction of Peter extended now to us, we are accountable for the ongoing ontology and function of our persons, relationships and churches.

Therefore, we in the global church have to stop accepting (or excusing) good intentions by Christians and churches as sufficient (or excusable) practice to fulfill our relational responsibility to God and each other. Contrary to Lucy (in ‘Peanuts’) assuming God has to be pleased with her, God is neither satisfied with good intentions nor are they acceptable to God to determine who, what and how we are. This is understandable when

good intentions are listened to for what they are, and thus paid attention to in their limits and constraints, as demonstrated above, and realized as subtle expressions of the following:

1. **Illusion:** the illusion generated by good intentions clouds the functional reality that we have either deliberately stopped short in our response-effort, or intentionally or even unintentionally lack the involvement of our heart in our response, and thereby failing to make the necessary relational connection (with God and others) for the relational outcome to be significant and not merely conveniently considered a good intention—all of which function in the fog of good intentions' illusion.
2. **Simulation:** the simulation presented by good intentions masks the functional reality that we engage our practice (notably in relationships) by the limits of our own terms rather than the whole relational terms (namely for relationship together) defined only by God; any stopping short or lacks in our engagement are to be expected and are deemed acceptable practice based on the good intentions of our terms, which on appearance simulate what God expects and desires from us, for example, by taking on roles and by engaging a narrowed-down Word on referential terms—all of which function to mask the limits and constraints of our own condition and terms in good intentions' subtle simulation.

The illusion and simulation of good intentions need to have a voice in our midst and be exposed in our theology and practice of persons, relationships and churches, in order to confront 'sin as reductionism' and to restore us to what's 'good with wholeness.' This pivotal process will require redemptive change for our transformation from old to new, from the common to the uncommon, both in our persons and relationships together to be distinguished in whole ontology and function as the new creation church family of God. When this experiential reality emerges, the relational outcome unfolds in the global church with the good news of wholeness for both our human condition and for the human condition in the globalizing world. Yet, the existing reality of our narrowed-down condition is an antecedent priority needing our response before the global church can be distinguished in and have significance for the world.

Voicing Our Narrowed-Down Condition

Since the beginning, the human epistemic field has been narrowed down to engage in self-determination and to accommodate and justify its progress. The underlying process of narrowing down subtly has become more complex for persons and relationships, and increasingly sophisticated with modern progress in science and technology—for example, from industrialization to urbanization into globalization and the digital age with expanding cyberspace. This self-determined progress has unfolded in a subtle interacting dynamic: on the one hand, progress unfolds in the human context where the options for human practice (notably as consumers) are subtly broadening for our engagement, yet only extend from the beginning what's "good for food and to make one wise"; and thus, on the other hand, progress stays within what still remain the limits

and constraints of a narrowed-down condition—and what remains our narrowed-down condition until restored to wholeness. Just as the narrowed-down epistemic field of the referentialization of the Word has opened the door to variation in the ways that Christians address, approach and relate to God—perhaps a garden variety offering a smorgasbord for consumer tastes—our theology and practice shaped by our surrounding contexts have unfolded on a broad path; and they continue to unfold in the global church in a globalizing world with variable ontology and function. All this also unfolds, however, within the limits and constraints of our narrowed-down condition, an unavoidable condition needing a voice to be listened to for the response required to make us whole.

Paying attention to what we hear, as Jesus warns, is critical for determining “the measure we use,” which inevitably limits “the measure we get” (Mk 4:24). Listening to sin without reductionism has been consequential for Christians and churches in this measure. For most Christians and churches, sin is present in the human context indisputably in moral terms, while the issue becomes arguable in ethical terms. The former appears to be a given and the latter is increasingly relative to their surrounding context. Otherwise, sin is overlooked, ignored or simply not understood in its depth and breadth. The lack of understanding of sin reflects the theological fog generated from the beginning by the genius of sin’s author—“Did God really say *that*? ...you will not *be reduced*...your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil”—which has progressed in composing sin by subtle ambiguous terms that directly or indirectly counter the nonnegotiable relational terms God constituted for relationship together in wholeness. In recalling the words depicting a junior demon asking his senior demon about the reality of sin: “If they are all doing it, is it still sin?”

The counter-relational work of sin is the nature of sin that must be clearly understood in its reductionism of persons and relationships from the wholeness created by the whole and uncommon God—that is, created irreducibly in this God’s qualitative image and relational likeness. Reductionism subtly narrows down persons and relationships from the condition that distinguished them in wholeness to a condition of fragmentary parts and distinctions, which become the key measures used by self-determination in a comparative human system and process for the persons and relationships it gets. This is our narrowed-down condition that requires voicing a wake-up call for our persons, relationships and churches to be complete and not narrowed down (as in the church in Sardis, Rev 3:1-2). Therefore, we have to pay attention to this existing reality in and around us: sin as reductionism and its counter-relational work extend further and deeper than sin conventionally defined in moral-ethical terms, even when qualified by honor-shame.

Even to the extent that conventional sin composes the human condition, the further and deeper reality of sin pervades and prevails to define the breadth of the human condition and determine its depth. This is the condition that has narrowed down our persons, relationship and churches, and that urgently needs ongoing voicing by those belonging to the global church. Unavoidably, this is the narrowed-down condition composing the global church as long as it continues to reflect, reinforce or sustain the human condition in its breadth and depth rather than transform it both within the church’s uncommon life together and in the common world. Until sin as reductionism is understood and confronted, Christians and the church will not be redeemed from it but unavoidably remain under its defining influence—even with good intentions (as

discussed), but also despite any moral-ethical initiatives, which often have been subject to the ideology of surrounding contexts.

To narrow down persons and relationships from wholeness, the nature of sin as reductionism engages them subtly in anything less and any substitutes for wholeness, the whole ontology and function created in God's image and likeness. This certainly involves a wide spectrum of expression to compose the human condition, which makes it more complicated for Christians and churches to be distinguished, and easier to drift, stray, wander and be misled from God's whole relational terms and Jesus' relational path (Heb 2:1; Ps 119:10,21,110,118). Even in the early period of covenant relationship, when God's people engaged in sin unintentionally, they were accountable (*shagah*, Lev 4:13-14; Eze 45:20). Thus, even when we think we're doing what we're supposed to be doing—for example, “to make one wise,” to have our eyes enlightened, even to know good and evil in the world—we could merely be reflecting, reinforcing and sustaining our narrowed-down condition, as in *shagah*. If we pay careful attention, however, the nature of sin exposes its presence with any and every reduction of God's whole, which is reinforced and sustained every time we assume we are not reduced or fragmented.

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

From the beginning and into today, the presence and influence of reductionism prevails in human contextualization to compose the human condition. Unless we can clearly distinguish our identity and function from human contexts (including culture, tradition and social norms), we become and remain subject to reductionism and thus under its defining limits and determining constraints. Whether explicitly or implicitly, its increasingly indistinct nature of sin pervades our theology and practice, to the depth of our ontology and function, with a *dipsychos* that renders us in *shagah* (unintentional sin) by default to unintentionally reflect, reinforce or sustain our narrowed-down condition (Jas 4:4-5; 5:19-20). Another way to understand the voice of double-minded and divided in heart is being selective with Scripture to compose our theology and practice (Jas 1:22-25; 2:8-10,20-24; 4:1-4,17). Even at the early stage of the emerging church (the original emerging church), James helps us understand the spectrum of sin pervasive in our midst and prevailing in human contexts. We urgently need to pay greater attention to this spectrum and listen to its subtlety being voiced for us to hear and respond accordingly.

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

This hybrid theology and practice extended into the early church (see Acts 10 and 15) and continues even more so today, as reflected in the wide-scale parallel with churches in Jesus' post-ascension discourse (discussed previously). Past or present, this existing reality exposes double-mindedness, a divided heart, the fragmenting presence of reduced ontology and function, the narrowed-down condition of which is contrary to and in conflict with God's whole relational terms (signified by commands, laws, statutes, decrees, precepts, summarizing the relational terms of God's word in Ps 119) for covenant relationship together. The terms for the primacy of relationship were defined from its inception for God's covenant family to be whole together (Gen 17:1), which are only relational terms both nonnegotiable and non-selective.

The global church today demonstrates either lacking complete understanding (*syniemi* and *synesis*) of God's relational terms—likely narrowing them down to referential terms in ethical-moral practice—or simply doesn't give them the complete significance required by their primary nature to define our identity and determine our function. Either way, we are accountable for the narrowed-down condition of our persons, relationships and churches. The Western church has led the way on this variable path of reductionism. With the roots of Christendom emerging from Constantine (4th century), the hybridization of the church narrowed down the new creation church family and has constructed distinctions—not the distinction made in contrast to the common but rather distinctions shaped by the common—which has fragmented God's whole church family into secondary parts. Intrinsic to the measure used from self-determination is the comparative process that embeds the church in distinctions of 'better or less', 'good or worse', that cultivate attitudes, feelings and related behaviors of 'superior or inferior'. The measurement from these fragmentary distinctions has been imposed by the dominant sector of the global church (i.e. the Western) on other sectors to enforce conformity to the

common measure of theology and practice used—with the intention of what’s good for the church, though under the assumption of good not being reduced. Historically, this narrowed-down church condition also unfolded in missions with the notion of manifest destiny and the practice of colonialism with the intention for the common good, yet with the underlying use of a deficit model to measure persons and relationships—which subtly continues today as the measure used for and by churches.

Of course, the Enlightenment’s interpretive framework, modernism’s assumptions unfolding into the consumption manufactured by industrialization and the convenience produced by technological progress into a post-industrial era have been key determinants entrenching Western worldview and ideological practice in a process of dominance—from a position assumed to be superior and to be for the common good. And, certainly, Christians and churches have not been immune from this but indeed shaped by it. What has unfolded is this experiential reality from the experiential truth Jesus made indisputable: The measure the global church has used, signifying our narrowed-down condition, has been and will be the measure the global church gets, nothing more but a wide variation of anything less.

Accordingly, and not surprisingly, Christians and churches who don’t distinguish themselves from such a worldview and social ideology (or others prevailing) become complicit with their surrounding context; and therefore they inevitably reflect, reinforce and sustain the human condition—even by default if they do not contend with that ideology and oppose such practice. Such complicity and subsequent engagement of the common prevailing in human contextualization demonstrate a loss of the irreplaceable distinction that distinguishes their integral identity of who they are and whose they are. The Word gives voice to their narrowed-down condition, for which we all have the relational imperative: “Hear,” that is, give undivided attention (*shama*), “Do not learn the way of the nations” (Jer 10:2), and “Listen to my Son” (Mt 17:5), “*my followers do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world...but I ask you Father to protect them from the source of reductionism. They do not belong to the world*” (Jn 17:14-16).

The shape of the global church, as it exists today, has been narrowed down in spite of its central shift to the global South. Many of the defining experiences of Christianity in the majority world have been colonial (dominance by the West). As the global church emerges from colonialism, however, it is insufficient to have a postcolonial worldview, interpretive framework and lens without deeply understanding the nature of sin underlying colonialism and the condition of the Western church. If the global church is to enter into truly postcolonial theology and practice that are redeemed, it needs to go beyond the limits and constraints of our narrowed-down condition.⁸

The human condition predates colonialism. Unless the global church has whole understanding—*syniemi*, which the disciples lacked (Mk 8:17-18), and *synesis*, which Paul made definitive (Col 2:2-4)—of God’s relational response to the human condition to compose the whole gospel (the gospel of wholeness, Eph 6:15), the postcolonial church will be essentially no more significant than the Western church. The church remaining in such a condition will not be distinguished as the new creation church family constituted

⁸ An attempt pointed in this direction, yet still remaining within the limits and constraints of our condition, is found in Kay Higuera Smith, Jayachitra Lalitha and L. Daniel Hawk, eds., *Evangelical Postcolonial Conversations: Global Awakenings in Theology and Praxis* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014).

by Jesus and the Spirit, as well as composed by Paul, in wholeness (Eph 2:14-22; Col 3:15). When our narrowed-down condition has a voice provoking our response to the vulnerable presence and intimate involvement of God's relational response of grace to us in our human condition, then the relational outcome will emerge in the experiential reality of transformed persons in transformed relationships together in the very likeness of the whole and uncommon God (just as Jesus further prayed, Jn 17:20-26).

As the global church, "Therefore, we must pay greater attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it—*stray, wander or be misled in anything less and any substitutes, and thereby reflect, reinforce and sustain the human condition, our human condition*" (Heb 2:1).

From the beginning, this is the voice that reverberates from the human context, waiting to be responded to in nothing less than our human condition. From beyond this beginning, there is also the voice that resounds from God's context, waiting to be received for nothing less than and no substitutes of the human condition both within the global church and in the globalizing world. As the global church responds to and receives what and who it hears, the church will transition beyond its common human shaping and emerge distinguished in uncommon wholeness.

Chapter 5 The Global Church Emerges Distinguished

Very truly, I tell you, no one can *participate in the kingdom of God*
without being born from above.

John 3:3

All of you must be [dei, necessary by its nature] transformed anew to be my family.

John 3:7

If the global church is not to be shaped by its surrounding fragmentary human context, it will need to be ongoingly accountable for “Where are you?” and “What are you doing here?” Furthermore and deeper, the global church must (*dei*, by its nature and not out of obligation, *ophelo*) be distinguished in its defining theology and practice, and its determining ontology and function, so that its identity clearly goes beyond the common human context to embody the qualitative depth and relational significance of the Uncommon. And the interrelated problem we must also awaken to is the reality that the challenge of reductionism is not in decline but in global reality is expanding, intensifying and more subtly pervading. And part of this subtle influence and shaping is not making a clear distinction between the common and the uncommon, because we have narrowed down the uncommon to a referential term of ‘holy’ that does not have functional significance for the church’s theology and practice, even its ontology and function.

Therefore, for the global church to emerge distinguished, by its nature all of us composing the global church must both neutralize reductionism’s defining influence from the human context (surrounding and global) pervading our persons, relationships and churches, and also be transformed from the common’s fragmentary shaping to the Uncommon’s wholeness. This will require the process of redemptive change, which will necessitate openness by the church to examine established ways and embrace the uncommon path.

Part of reductionism’s pervasive subtlety among God’s people is to promote the status quo—which includes fixating on the secondary—and thereby to ignore or even resist the innermost changes necessary for what’s primary and thus significant to God. This recurring dynamic provides the context for Jesus’ defining interaction with Nicodemus in the above Scripture, who jolted the status quo embedded in the secondary that Nicodemus represented. This interaction also provides the necessary launching context for the global church to unfold distinguished. Yet, to unfold distinguished the global church must first emerge distinguished. To fully understand the significance of this interaction for the church beyond the traditional rendering of Jesus’ words (just “born again”), it needs to be located in its complete context. For it is only at the intersection of the trajectory and the path implicit to this context does the global church emerge to be distinguished.

The Trajectory of the Old and the Path of the New Converge

As we listen to the interaction between Jesus and Nicodemus, it seems reasonable to assume some matters about Nicodemus. He came to Jesus that night for answers to questions that were framed by his Jewish identity, by his involvement as a ruling member (Sanhedrin) in Israel (v.1) and as one of her teachers (v.10); thus he came with the expectations associated with their Scripture, which were shaped likely by an interpretive framework from Second Temple Judaism and no doubt by a perceptual lens sociopolitically sensitized to Roman rule. While Nicodemus came to Jesus as an individual person, his query was as the collective identity of Israel and the corporate life and practice of a Pharisee's (of whatever variation) Judaism. With his feet planted in this status quo, he also ventured beyond it to know who came ("from God," v.2) and to understand what had come.

Jesus understood Nicodemus' query and anticipated his questions that certainly related to God's promises for Israel's deliverance (salvation), the Messiah and God's kingship in the Mediterranean world. Therefore, Jesus immediately focused on "the kingdom of God" (v.3), the OT eschatological hope, about which Nicodemus was probably more concerned in the present than the future. Yet, the whole of God's kingship and sovereign rule is integral to the OT, and thus a primary focus of Nicodemus' query, however provincial. The conversation that followed evidences a purpose in John's Gospel to clearly distinguish and make definitive the whole of God's thematic relational action of grace in response to the human condition—first, in continuation to Israel and then to the nations—that is, to unfold the history of God's salvation. Yet, the language communicated in this conversation became an issue, and this proved to be revealing not only for Nicodemus but for all he represented—as well as for all who would follow, even through a postmodern period.

Nicodemus apparently realized that someone or something different had appeared in their context than traditionally existed. Accordingly, he directly pursued Jesus to determine *who* came and *what* had come—which is a pursuit that too many Christians ignore, assuming they have the answers. When Jesus responded quickly with the kingdom of God (v.3), our common focus on his words features "born again" with a narrowed-down view without paying attention to his kingdom language. Yet, Jesus' response highlighted trajectories of the old and the new path that now converged, if not collided. Unless we understand what intersects here, the most that will emerge is the narrow view of "born again" and the subtle propagation of the status quo. This was *who* and *what* challenged Nicodemus and continues to extend urgently to us today. God indeed "so loved the world," but our knowledge and understanding of God's response in who came and what has come are often incomplete, perhaps found in the dark like Nicodemus.

Trajectories of the old include reductionism's trajectory, which also converged in the OT to misguide Israel's trajectory of the covenant. In the OT trajectory, Moses distinguished Israel from all other nations, because Israel initially had the experiential reality of God's presence and involvement and, on this relational basis, claimed the experiential truth of God's whole relational terms for covenant relationship together (Dt 4:7-8; Ps 147:19-20, cf. Gen 17:1). God's terms were not to be added to or subtracted from (Dt 4:2; 12:32; Jer 26:2; Rev 22:18-19); for example, even worship must not be "in

their way” but distinguished from the common in the surrounding contexts (Dt 12:30-31). In spite of the experiential truth of covenant relationship together, Israel’s trajectory of the covenant converged with reductionism’s trajectory to compose the trajectory of the old—not the OT trajectory Moses clearly distinguished for God’s people. Part of this trajectory of the old was what Nicodemus brought to the interaction with Jesus that predisposed him (and those he represented) to a messianic search essentially for a ‘salvation of the old’—a quantitative result of reductionism. This trajectory of the old was to collide with the path of the new (‘salvation of the new’).

What emerges from salvation and being born again (from above), and is synonymous with eternal life and the eschatological hope, is the kingdom of God (or heaven, used by Mt to be indirect in reverence for God for Jewish readers). The relational outcome of the kingdom Jesus proclaimed always raises questions and related issues. The primary questions involved in the interpretive issue of the kingdom are inseparable: (1) what is the kingdom that has come? and (2) when does the kingdom emerge? As much as the imminence of the kingdom has been debated, I contend this cannot be adequately answered until the kingdom itself is sufficiently defined and understood. When this is understood, I further emphasize that the question of its imminence becomes secondary—not unimportant, only less significant in the eschatological plan of God’s thematic action. This discussion may appear to be of concern only to the academy, when in fact it is of defining relevance for the global church.

The term “kingdom of God” is not found in the OT, yet the reality and expectation of God’s kingship and sovereign rule as vested in Messiah are embedded in the OT. The issue then and now is how the Scriptures are approached, and thereby how God’s kingdom is perceived and responded to.

When some Pharisees questioned Jesus about the coming of the kingdom of God, he could have replied as he did with Nicodemus: “You study and teach the Scriptures but do you not understand this?” (cf. Jn 3:10) Yet, the clear implication of such a reply came in another response he gave elsewhere: “The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed, nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is,’ or ‘There it is!’ For, in fact, the kingdom of God is *within* you” (Lk 17:20-21).

The kingdom of God cannot be reduced to quantitative aspects, though it certainly involves them in secondary ways that can never be made primary to determine God’s kingdom. The kingdom can only be defined in whole by qualitative terms, which vulnerably involves the whole person (signified by the heart); however, the whole of the kingdom is not contained merely in the individual person and spiritually within us. Conjoined with this definition, the kingdom can only be determined in function by qualitative relational terms directly involving the relationships together necessary to be whole, the whole of God’s whole family dwelling in likeness of the Trinity.

This was the qualitative significance that the whole of the Word embodied to disclose vulnerably the whole and uncommon God for covenant relationship together in “the kingdom of God has come to you” (Lk 11:20). Luke’s Gospel narrates Jesus’ salvific discourses and work with the emphasis of the kingdom of God for all peoples. A Jewish bias, particularly in a reductionist hermeneutic of their Scriptures, would reduce the whole of the kingdom and preclude access by all, or at the very least stratify the access for others—as demonstrated at the temple that Jesus cleaned out. Thus, it is important in Luke’s narrative accounts to interrelate Jesus’ discourses about approaching the

Scriptures integrally with understanding the relational significance of the kingdom of God that has come (cf. Lk 10:21).

In Matthew's portrait of Jesus as the Messiah, Jesus came to fulfill God's covenant promise and the eschatological hope of Israel as God's people, not as nation-state. Accordingly, Jesus' kingdom of heaven had continuity from the OT (Mt 3:1-3; 4:12-17, cf. 25:34). Yet, there was also a clear qualitative distinction about this kingdom (Mt 5:3,10,20; 7:21; 12:48-50; 18:3; 19:14). While the kingdom of heaven was an extension of the old covenant and the fulfillment of its covenant promise, there arrived also directly with Immanuel—the vulnerably present and intimately involved “God with us”—a new and deeper covenant relationship together that he composed for the kingdom of heaven. In relational terms, Jesus fulfilled both the quantitative terms of the old covenant and its qualitative relational significance, which Jesus vulnerably embodied for the direct experience of this covenant relationship together in its new and deeper relational process. Furthermore, Jesus appeared to further associate this relational significance with his church (*ekklesia*, gathered body, Mt 16:18-19), which involved building (*oikodomeo*, to build a house, v.18, whose root is *oikos*) his household family (*oikos* and kingdom together in Mt 12:25). Building “with me” is in the trinitarian relational context of family and by the trinitarian relational process of family love to “gather with me” (*synago*, Mt 12:30, the root for synagogue, the counterpart to *ekklesia*) the family of God, both signifying and constituting “the kingdom of God has come to you” (12:28).

Therefore, after Jesus disclosed to his disciples “the secrets of the kingdom of heaven” (*mysterion*, hidden, hard to understand because undivulged, Mt 13:11-51), he made the following definitive for every teacher of the covenant relationship who has been made a functioning disciple (*matheteuo*, rendered inadequately in NRSV as “trained”) in the kingdom of heaven: as persons belonging to the household family of God, they openly share the qualitative relational significance of the new covenant relationship together as well as the fulfillment of the old (Mt 13:52). This involves the full soteriology of both what Jesus saved from and what he saved to—the conjoint function of his relational work of grace only for new covenant relationship together, and thus for only the transformation to wholeness of persons and relationships. Anything less renders salvation incomplete to ‘salvation of the old’.

Yet, the *mysteria* (pl.) of the kingdom can remain hidden even though they were vulnerably disclosed by Jesus and made directly accessible even to “little children.” This happens for two important reasons, which Jesus identified at the beginning of the above discourse with his disciples (with the parables of the kingdom directed to the crowds, Mt 13:13). First, Jesus the Messiah and the kingdom of heaven were disclosed only for covenant relationship together, not for the quantitative aspects and functional implications of his kingly rule. The latter become the focus determined by a reductionist perceptual-interpretive framework, which Jesus identified as an ongoing issue in Israel's history (vv.13-14). Predisposed by reductionism, what they paid attention to and ignored precluded their understanding (*syniemi*, denotes putting the pieces together into a whole) and prevented them from perceiving deeply (*horao*, not merely to see but means to pay attention to a person to recognize their significance, encounter their true nature and to experience them). Furthermore, their whole person had been reduced (signified by “*their* heart has grown dull”) to function without the critical significance of both qualitative

sensitivity and relational awareness, thereby biasing what they paid attention to and ignored. This had a direct relational consequence “to be apart” from the whole and uncommon God, to which God’s thematic relational work of grace in Jesus would respond if they opened their heart (v.15).

This points to the second important reason the kingdom remains hidden despite Jesus’ vulnerable disclosure and intimate accessibility. Jesus began this discourse saying “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not” (v.11). This was not a selective bias by Jesus showing preferential treatment to some while denying access to others, which he appeared to embed in a system of inequitable distribution (v.12). The significance rather was about relationship and its reciprocity, distinguishing the involvement in the relational epistemic process that Jesus made clear (Lk 10:21; cf. Mk 4:24-25). Jesus was pointing to the terms necessary for the nature of the relational process he was defining, and to the relational outcome or consequence of its ongoing experience or lack thereof. “To know” (*ginosko*, experience) was not mere referential information, for example, of propositional truths to quantify in a belief (or theological) system. This was experiential truth that “has been given” (*didomi* in Gk perfect tense, passive voice), hereby illuminating the experiential reality of Jesus’ relational communication of this kingdom knowledge in relational terms “to you” and stressing his ongoing relational process for his disciples to respond back to and be involved with him only in relational terms for their experience of the truth of new covenant relationship together. This reciprocal relational involvement in his relational process is the nothing-less-and-no-substitute terms necessary for whole knowledge and understanding of the kingdom of heaven—the qualitative relational terms Jesus illuminated, and that he affirmed the disciples engaged, however imperfectly, while the others did not (vv.16-17).

These whole terms for relationship are the terms for adherence that Jesus defined for his disciples (*mathetai*). These relational terms for adherence to Jesus are inherent in being his disciples (*matheteuo*), not only for teachers of the covenant relationship (in his above definitive statement, 13:52) but for all his followers to have qualitative relational significance in the kingdom of God. Matthew’s Gospel takes *matheteuo* very seriously, given the evangelist’s emphasis on discipleship.¹ Moreover, Matthew is the only Gospel to record a specific imperative in Jesus’ Great Commission, which is “make disciples (*matheteusate*, imperative of *matheteuo*) of all nations” (Mt 28:19). This further composes the nature and integrity of reciprocal relationship in his kingdom.

These are the qualitative relational terms necessary for new covenant relationship together with the whole and uncommon God and for the experiential reality of God’s kingdom to emerge. Without the function of whole relationship together in Jesus’ relational context and process, there is no experiential truth of the kingdom of God, regardless of whether the kingdom is ‘already’ (present) and/or ‘not yet’ (future).

The process to the new is what Jesus’ salvific work saved us to: the kingdom of God, or its equivalence in John’s Gospel, eternal life. John’s Gospel replaces “kingdom” language with eternal life, possibly in part to avoid any conflicts such language could create with Gentiles, yet more importantly to provide the further and deeper significance

¹ In his study of the term *mathetes* (disciple), Michael J. Wilkins makes a case for calling Matthew’s Gospel a manual on discipleship in *Discipleship in the Ancient World and Matthew’s Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 126-172.

of the kingdom in the relational context and process of the whole of Jesus. The kingdom that had come came embodied *in* Jesus, the whole of the Word. As he told Nicodemus, the qualitative relational shape of the whole and uncommon God's kingdom was "born from above," not by human shaping but born new by the Spirit as the new creation in the image of the relational ontology of the whole of God, thereby made whole in new relationship together in likeness of the Trinity—just as Jesus asked the Father in his formative family prayer (Jn 17). Only as the trajectory of the old and the path of the new collide at the intersection revealed to Nicodemus can and does the relational outcome of the new emerge and unfold. On this basis, the kingdom of God indeed signifies more than God's kingly rule; and Jesus embodied that significance and constituted the kingdom in the trinitarian relational context of family by the trinitarian relational process of family love for this new covenant relationship together—functioning beyond the quantitative limits of the old to intimate relationship together in the very likeness of the relational ontology (*zoe*) of the Trinity. Only the vulnerable relational involvement of Jesus' whole ontology and function distinguishes who came and what has come.

Therefore, Jesus' salvific work and the kingdom must be understood in this further and deeper relational context and process. The whole of God and God's action are only about relationship, relationship together, covenant relationship together in the whole and uncommon God's whole vulnerable presence and intimate dwelling, which certainly then is only on God's qualitative relational terms. And if God's whole terms for relationship are interpreted only as kingly rule, this would reduce the qualitative relational significance of Jesus' relational work of grace in *agape*-love involvement to fulfill God's thematic relational response to the human condition. Historically such rule has been wrongly imposed on others in the name of God, as the global South is well aware. Relationship, by the nature of the relational ontology of the Trinity, however, cannot be decreed, legislated, otherwise imposed for conformity, nor can it be unilateral, all of which are assumed in the primacy of kingly rule. In contrast, God's kingdom is qualitatively defined irreducibly and relationally determined nonnegotiable by the whole relationship of God vulnerably revealed by Jesus, and thereby functions in whole relationship together in likeness of the Trinity. And this qualitative relational basis exposes our shaping of who came and what has come in our theology and practice as simply fragmentary terms without significance, and therefore without the experiential reality of this whole relational outcome.

The shape of the kingdom of God as the whole of God's intimate dwelling cannot emerge from reductionism—notably when we assume that we are not reduced or fragmented. Reductionism always counters the relationships of the whole, separating or distancing persons in the relationships to be whole—for example, by stratifying relationships in a system of inequality, which Jesus found operating in the temple and throughout the surrounding context. Revisiting the disciples' dispute about which of them was greatest, Jesus redefined the common perception of ruling in relationship together in his kingdom by composing their relationships in unstratified intimate involvement together without relational distance (Lk 22:24-30). His clarification and correction both pointed them back to the function of "little children" and the need for redemptive change for the new relationship together in God's kingdom (Mt 18:1-4), and pointed ahead to intimate and equalized relationship together with the veil removed (as Paul distinguished, 2 Cor 3:18; Eph 2:14-22). This was the kingdom that Jesus embodied and distinguished

for his followers, which was incompatible with reductionism and its counter-relational workings; therefore, their intersection was both inevitable and necessary.

Reductionism reshapes the kingdom of God into ontological simulations, and distorts its shape even with epistemological illusions. Consequently, we need to fully understand Jesus' relational context and process for the *whole* of his kingdom to expose the presence and influence of reductionism. The only shape constituting the kingdom of God emerges from the whole of Jesus embodying the whole relationship of God for new relationship together in likeness, thereby fulfilling God's thematic relational action in response to the human relational condition "to be apart" from the whole of God's whole family. Jesus embodies for us the path that transforms to the new—the path which by necessity collides with the trajectory of the old, in order for the kingdom *into* the global church family to emerge and unfold distinguished, and so that the global church will unfold whole as family for all persons and nations.

Jesus illuminated the intersection at which by necessity converged and collided the trajectory of the old and the path of the new for (1) our whole understanding of *who* came and *what* has come, and for (2) the relational outcome of belonging to and participating in the whole of God's family. Therefore, when Jesus communicated that the uncommon kingdom is "within you" (*en*, inside, Lk 17:21), any measured-temporal sense of the kingdom is incomplete and cannot be narrowed down to "among you collectively," and thus be considered present ('already', realized eschatology), or narrow down "within you" to be understood as merely an inward (spiritual) nature pointing to the future ('not yet', future eschatology). It is important for our whole understanding to recognize that Jesus addressed the issue between reductionism of the kingdom to mere quantitative terms as opposed to the qualitative integrity of the whole of the kingdom's relational significance. Failing to make this distinction is the major issue of the kingdom in its past, present and future—in Israel's past, in Jesus' present, in the whole of God's thematic action in relational progression to the future—which directly involves how the Scriptures are approached, and how God's kingdom is perceived and responded to. The global church today is accountable for these issues, because they directly interrelate to how the church will emerge.

When we also adequately address this major issue, we more congruently follow Jesus on his relational path for the outcome of what has come. And his relational path of the new unmistakably brings us to this intersection, unavoidably colliding with the trajectory of the old—including our salvation of the old. Only from this intersection can and does the global church emerge distinguished; and we need to recognize further where this has been incomplete in the ontology and function of who came and the theology and practice of what has come.

In terms of ontology and function, for Jesus the kingdom was the relational realm of his qualitative focus from outside the universe (cf. Jn 18:36) that encompassed the whole and uncommon God's whole presence and dwelling. In Paul's theology and practice, he had a more localized focus—yet not determined from human contextualization—on the qualitative kingdom (e.g. Rom 14:17) for the experiential reality of Christ's kingdom in the church as the *pleroma* of Christ, the embodying of the whole of God's whole vulnerable presence and intimate dwelling (Eph 1:23). This transition of the kingdom into church and their whole convergence by necessity goes through the cross of Christ, the process of which is often misperceived in Paul given his

seemingly central focus on the cross.² Any issue between the kingdom and the cross emerges from how Jesus and Paul are perceived and whether they are congruent or even compatible. The importance of the kingdom to Paul is not reflected in the amount of attention that he gives to the cross over a quantitative focus on the kingdom. If one integrally understands the meaning and significance of both kingdom and cross, as did Paul, then they are inseparable and thus irreducible and nonnegotiable to the shaping and variations seen in theology and function, both in church and the academy. From the transformation only from the cross is the relational outcome of the new creation church family composing the kingdom of God's dwelling in new covenant relationship together (Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 5:17). Understanding the whole of Paul is critical to understanding the whole in Paul, otherwise there is only fragmentary knowledge and understanding of who came and what has come.

Perhaps Nicodemus was already aware that the kingdom had undergone human shaping, notably as nation-state in Israel's history and Second Temple Judaism. Paul, though remaining as a Jew, certainly became aware of this human shaping to expose it (e.g. Rom 2:28-29; 9:6-8) along with its parallels of human shaping of the church. The latter occurs even with good intentions of serving and sharing the gospel, both of which involve the human shaping of persons and relationships, and thus reinforcing or sustaining the human relational condition. The kingdom *into* church both illuminates the qualitative significance and distinguishes the relational significance of the whole and uncommon God's whole presence and dwelling emerging from Jesus and unfolding *into* Paul *into* the persons and relationships composing the global church in wholeness. As Jesus revealed in this interaction, all this emerges and unfolds in contrast and conflict with the human shaping both of persons and relationship together that "must be *transformed anew to be my family.*"

The kingdom of God extended into the church to be distinguished in the world similarly to how Moses distinguished Israel in the OT trajectory; but this now is further based on God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement, yet still only by the whole and uncommon God's relational terms that must not be added to or subtracted from. When the church adds or subtracts from God's relational terms—as Israel did contrary to Moses' imperative (Dt 4:2; 12:32)—it shifts to the trajectory of the old and is rendered to 'salvation of the old' that no longer distinguished the church's identity in the world but reduced it in ontology and function (cf. 1 Cor 4:6-7; Rev 22:18-19). As the whole gospel collided with the status quo of the old represented in Nicodemus that night, its shock waves continue to reverberate to awaken us to who came and what has come.

Therefore, the global church not only needs to recognize where its understanding is incomplete in the ontology and function of who came and in its theology and practice of what has come. Unless it also enters this intersection with its own trajectory of the old to collide with Jesus' whole relational path of the new, the global church will not be transformed in order to emerge distinguished as the new creation family, so that its persons and relationships will indeed belong to and participate in the whole and uncommon God's whole and uncommon family. This is the only relational outcome from

² N.T. Wright addresses the current split between the kingdom and the cross in both theology and function in "Whence and Whither Historical Jesus Studies in the Life of the Church?" in Nicholas Perrin and Richard B. Hays, eds., *Jesus, Paul and the People of God: A Theological Dialogue with N.T. Wright* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), 137-47.

the whole of both who came and what has come that awaits the global church and the persons and relationships composing it integrally from the global South and North.

From the Beginning or In the Beginning

The relational path of the new embodied by Jesus is the uncommon path distinguished from the context and process of the common prevailing in human life. The uncommon is distinguished from the common at all levels of human life, from the structural, systemic and institutional to the sociocultural, familial and individual, in order to have the integrity integral to the new. Underlying all these levels of human life and interrelating them for some type of collective life is anthropology—that is, the basic ontology and function of the persons and relationships composing all human life, without which human life is nonexistent. The primacy of persons and relationships is the key to human life at all levels, and these persons and relationships are integral for composing the path of the new.

Accordingly, yet unmistakably distinguished from the common at all levels, Jesus embodied in whole relational terms *what* has come, which he distinguished by *who* came to embody the persons and relationship together of the whole of God, the uncommon Trinity. It was critical, therefore, for this Messiah to come with “a sword” rather than “to bring peace”—that is, a narrowed-down peace lacking wholeness and thus not distinguished from the common (Mt 10:34-36; Lk 12:51-53, cf. Jn 14:27). These are difficult words from Jesus to listen to for those waiting for a messiah with a different sword and for those in the global church expecting a savior with a different peace. But, the gospel is incomplete without complete Christology (which integrates the Trinity); likewise, our knowledge and understanding of what has come cannot be whole with an incomplete Christology (which fragments God, e.g. by being overly christocentric). The primacy that distinguished who came is Jesus’ whole person, and that integrally distinguished what has come is the uncommon relationship together in wholeness. Only the primacy of whole persons and relationship together in wholeness distinguishes the whole and uncommon God and God’s whole and uncommon family from the fragmentary and common shaping of persons and relationships specific to the human context and terms.

It is critical, therefore, for the global church to take Jesus’ words seriously in order to be distinguished in wholeness by Jesus’ sword (not the common’s sword, cf. Mt 26:50-53) without any illusion and simulations of peace. The global church (including related peace activists) must know and understand whether its persons and relationships are distinguished in this uncommon primacy or only distinct in common human shaping. Since the *commonization* of life prevails in all levels of the human context surrounding the church, global North and South Christians and churches cannot assume that they are not reduced or fragmented.

The global church is not a recent phenomenon, which has seen its center shift to the global South. Its persons and relationships were initially defined *in* the beginning at creation, having certainly been shaped by the human context *from* the beginning. As these persons and relationships converged, the global church was initially determined when it emerged from Jesus’ reconstruction of the temple as God’s house for all nations;

and it was integrally determined when the temple was raised up after three days in Christ's body, who constituted 'the body of Christ' as his new creation global church family. The truth of these metaphors is not composed in their doctrinal truth (even with certainty) but in the experiential truth of this experiential reality composed in relational terms over referential terms: Only on the basis (the intersection and collision) of the whole and uncommon God's relational context and process enacted in direct response to the human condition of persons and relationships did the global church emerge and does it unfold. Thus, the primacy of persons and relationships integral to this relational outcome is nonnegotiable to any other terms propagated by the global church, even if doctrinally correct.

When the global church examines whether it is distinguished by the composition of persons and relationships in the beginning, there are two 'in the beginnings' that must be accounted for:

1. In the beginning of creation and the whole of God's creative action constituting the whole ontology and function of human persons and relationships in the qualitative image and relational likeness of God.
2. The Word was integral to the above creative action (Jn 1:1-4; Col 1:16-17), who then embodied a new 'in the beginning' (Col 1:15,18) to fulfill the whole (*pleroma*) of God's salvific action to restore persons and relationships to the whole ontology and function in the new creation (Col 1:19-20; 2:9-10; 3:10; Eph 4:23-24; 2 Cor 5:17).

The global church 'in the beginning' is composed only of persons and relationships of both 'in the beginnings', from which the global church emerges distinguished irreducibly and unfolds distinguished nonnegotiablely. Without the integration (and related intersection and collision) of both these beginnings, the global church is rendered back 'from the beginning' and composed by persons and relationships in reduced ontology and function—regardless of its theology and practice, as demonstrated by the churches in Jesus' post-ascension critique (Rev 2-3).

Churches in the global North and South must account for their beginning, and therefore need to relinquish any assumption that their persons and relationships are not reduced or fragmented. We need to revisit Jesus and Nicodemus to listen more carefully to the person and pay closer attention to sin as reductionism, and to understand if they merely converge together at this intersection in reduced ontology and function (as witnessed in the primordial garden), or collide with the relational path of the new to whole ontology and function. From the relational path Jesus embodied vulnerably, the body of Christ emerged in whole ontology and function and unfolds distinguished only by persons and relationships integrally determined in wholeness—which is the 'who came and what has come' that Paul made definitive for the church in the ecclesiology of the whole only Jesus embodied. Yet, the ongoing reality for the global church is that it unfolds either distinguished in wholeness or reduced in a distinct hybrid (a convergence, not a collision). And Paul gave primacy to persons and relationships to counter 'from the beginning' "in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes" (2 Cor 2:11, NIV).

We know from our previous discussion of ‘from the beginning’ that the challenge and influence of reductionism are subtle and thus often beneath our awareness, or simply ignored. Israel in general and Nicodemus in particular reflected having assumed reductionism’s challenge and living under its influence. When Nicodemus responded to Jesus’ intersection with “How can anyone be born *anew* after having grown old?” (Jn 3:4), he demonstrated an anthropology of the person in reduced ontology and function defined from outer in primarily in quantitative terms—“Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” Obviously, Nicodemus didn’t understand Jesus’ relational language and the relational terms composing his path of the new. After Jesus revealed the collision necessary to belong and participate in God’s family dwelling, Nicodemus stated incredulously (as a matter of fact) “How can these things be?” Not only was Nicodemus narrowed down as a person to outer in, his epistemic field and thus interpretive lens were also narrowed down to the probable of referential terms prevailing in human contextualization (similar to science today)—which then referentializes the Word (even by biblical scholars today).

Referential terms narrow the Word to the transmission of information and knowledge, all based on a narrowed-down epistemic field that no longer distinguishes the Word’s primacy in relational terms. The Word was embodied, however, from beyond these limits and constraints and composed in relational terms for the communication of the whole and uncommon God to human persons for the only purpose of relationship together in the primacy of their wholeness—not to transmit information and knowledge with relative certainty. Understandably then, to be expected to emerge from Nicodemus’ narrowed-down epistemic field and referential lens, “How can this collision happen at this intersection?” (v.9) Even as “a teacher of Israel *and the Scripture* and yet you do not understand these things” (v.10) is a common conclusion (even by scholars in the academy today) because of his narrowed-down person, epistemic field and referentialization of the Word.

Nicodemus, and those he represented, reflected ‘from the beginning’ and were primarily determined by what emerged from the beginning: an anthropology of persons and relationships in reduced ontology and function, with its ongoing limits and constraints operating within a narrowed-down epistemology that engages in the referentialization of the Word—all countering the primacy of persons and relationships in whole ontology and function in order to reshape the qualitative image and relational likeness of God, and to referentialize the whole and uncommon God’s relational communication down to secondary information by which to gain, use and teach for self-determination. Does Nicodemus also represent any Christians today, especially teachers in the church and academy?

“Did God say those words in referential terms?” The referential truth, however, is that “You and your relationships will not be reduced and fragmented.” In fact, “Your eyes and epistemology will be opened.” And on this basis of “good and evil,” “you will become like God in the comparative process of self-determination.”

The variations composing the spectrum of what has unfolded ‘from the beginning’ are more subtle than obvious; and with such pervasive influence reductionism shapes persons, relationship and churches composing the global church contrary to ‘in the beginning’. And reductionism’s most subtle influence pervading the global church—

which emerged in the global North and unfolds in the global South—is the referentialization of the Word and its conjoined implicit or explicit reduced theological anthropology. For example, from the heights of the academy down to children’s Sunday school classes, what characterizes theological education is the transmission of information, albeit about God yet in limited referential terms. Such knowledge referring to God is narrowed down to the parts that God does and/or has, which is transmitted to compose the content of theological education for persons to accumulate about God and use as needed. Lacking or absent is the primary Subject face of God communicating with persons in the primacy of relationship for the involvement necessary to truly know and understand God face to face, heart to heart, whereby persons grow in reciprocal relationship together in God’s family. Who came was not in referential terms. When we understand who came in relational terms, we come face to face with the vulnerable presence and intimate involvement of the whole and uncommon God, who communicates only in the primacy of persons and relationships.

Where the global church has transposed God’s relational terms to referential terms of who came and what has come, and has converted to the common practice prevailing for persons and relationships (e.g. in education or in culture), the global church needs to awaken ‘from the beginning’ and intersect its trajectory of the old (in commonization) to collide with Jesus’ uncommon relational path of the new in order to emerge distinguished ‘in the beginnings’. Perhaps this is a wake-up call just as Jesus gave to the church at Sardis because their theology and practice were “not found complete” (Rev 3:2), reflecting an incomplete ontology and function without wholeness. Only in the transformation of persons and relationships can and will God’s global church family unfold in the primacy of persons and relationships in whole ontology and function, and thereby compose the body of Christ in the qualitative image and relational likeness of who came and what has come. Nothing less than the primacy of the Word in whole relational terms and no substitutes for the primacy of persons and relationships emerge and unfold in the wholeness of this relational outcome.

The Primacy of Persons and Relationships

When the whole and uncommon God revealed God’s vulnerable presence and intimate involvement in the human context, the presence and involvement of who came were not embodied by the common terms prevailing. Commonization is an ongoing issue not just in theology but pervades practice with even greater consequence. What has come distinguished by who came also cannot be embodied by the common terms prevailing, or it relationally disconnects with the presence and involvement of who came. This disconnect may not be apparent in church theology yet it is evident in church practice. Relational distance is the issue of theological education discussed above and the key issue for church practice, both of which need to reconnect with who came in order to be distinguished from the common prevailing.

For the dwelling of God’s presence and involvement to be distinguished from the common requires relational connection with persons in relationship together who are also distinguished from the common function prevailing for persons and relationships. In other words, the ongoing presence and involvement of God necessitates the primacy of

persons and relationships in whole ontology and function, which ongoingly must by nature be distinguished from the common prevailing in order to integrally compose God's new global church family—integrally composing the whole body of Christ with the primacy of persons and relationships. Without the primacy of persons and relationships there is no relational connection with the ongoing vulnerable presence and intimate involvement of the whole and uncommon God—regardless of the scholarship of the referential information accumulated about God or its related doctrinal purity and certainty (as demonstrated by the church at Ephesus, Rev 2:2-4). Referential language and terms narrow down the context and process of God's revelation without their relational significance, consequently God's presence and involvement lack the experiential truth and reality to compose the primacy necessary for persons and relationship together to connect with the whole and uncommon God—relationally beyond having fragmentary knowledge about parts of God.

The body of Christ, whether local, regional or global, has had difficulty unfolding in spite of its distinguished emergence in the beginning. The major issues for this ongoing difficulty involve (1) a narrow epistemic field and interpretive lens that results in an incomplete or selective ontology and function of who came, and (2) a reduced theological anthropology composing a fragmentary theology and practice of what has come. The embodied Christ and the body of Christ converge on Jesus' relational path of the new for the body of Christ to emerge whole in likeness of the embodied Christ. Whether the body of Christ continues to unfold whole depends on its relational connection with the embodied whole of Christ (in complete Christology) and thereby is determined by the primacy of its persons and relationships in likeness. The body of Christ at every level and with all its components needs to reexamine its condition and address where it is in need of both urgent care and the nurturing for growth and development.

When we think of the body of Christ, we usually think of various parts, hopefully but not necessarily that make up the complete body. Yet, in the physical body the parts are important but not primary, and how they are interrelated is the key to making the body complete. When Paul made definitive the body metaphor for the church (1 Cor12:12-31), the parts and their interrelatedness have to be understood in what's primary in order for the body to be complete, that is, for the church to be whole. What's primary for the church must be distinguished from and should not be confused with what's good for the church from the beginning.

In terms of our human body, it is evident that it has diversity of parts, each with a specific function, which hopefully yet not always serve for the well-being of the total body. This result is certainly a health issue of our body parts, their function and how well they integrate to serve the growth, development and maintenance of our physical body. What is also obvious in the body-care for most (if not all) of us is how we look at the diversity of our body parts differently, viewing their functions with different values and priorities, which then structures our body in stratified body parts whose attention and care become selective accordingly. The ongoing result of this skewed approach to the body is a fragmented body condition that struggles for well-being and is unable to be whole—in spite of good intentions, limited intervening measures, and other hopeful practices, which at best only create an illusion of well-being and try to simulate being whole. Does this sound familiar at all to how we perceive and address the body of Christ?

The fragmentation of the body (human and of Christ) emerges directly from reduced anthropology that composes persons by the parts of what they have and do, and on this fragmentary basis, determine the relationships such persons engage. When Paul unequivocally defined the body of Christ, he did not use a reduced theological anthropology. Nor did he use a reduced ontology and function of Christ to determine the body of Christ (Eph 1:23; 2:14,16; 4:12-13,16; Col 2:9-10; 3:15). The wholeness of Christ's ontology and function was the only determinant (*brabeuo*, Col 3:15) for the body of Christ, and that required the theological anthropology of whole ontology and function for the persons and relationships composing the church body (again, local, regional and global). For Paul, this wholeness was irreducible for the embodied Christ and nonnegotiable for the body of Christ (e.g. by referential terms). How then did he define the diversity of parts and determine their function such that the body benefits to emerge whole, and continues to grow and develop in the wholeness in likeness of Christ's whole?

Just as in the human body, the parts are important but not primary for Paul (Rom 12:4-5). Paul composed the church body with "members," who can be seen as parts of the whole yet who must by their nature be perceived whole-ly only as persons. This perception has certainly been problematic for church membership—both by church leaders and church members in general. Parts are secondary to persons and it is their primacy by whom Paul composed each member of the body. This not only qualified who the parts are but also defines what the significance of the parts is and how they serve the well-being, growth and development of the whole body.

The initial focus that Paul gave to the diversity of parts involved the gifts given by the Spirit, which includes by the Son and the Father for the whole of God (1 Cor 12:4-11), that needs to be distinguished from our common notion of spiritual gifts. The latter occupies the primary way members narrowly see each other and thus prevails as the common shaping of how persons are defined and relationships are determined in the church. Like our view of the human body, the diversity of spiritual gifts are seen differently, with their functions having different values and priorities in the church (or even in the academy), which have stratified how persons are defined and relationships are determined. Paul countered this reduced theological anthropology and fragmentation of persons and relationships with the relational connection and involvement with the whole of God's Spirit ("same Spirit, same Lord, same God") to constitute the primacy of relationship and the relational connection necessary for persons to be distinguished beyond spiritual gifts and to belong to each other in relationship together (cf. Rom 12:5).

Paul illuminated that it is the primacy of the Spirit's presence and involvement that "is given the manifestation" (*phanerosis*, 1 Cor 12:7) in relational terms "to each member person" over their gifts in order to constitute the church body's primacy in persons and relationships together—and not in, with and by the gifts given by the Spirit, as important and necessary as they are. And therefore, the only relational purpose for the Spirit's presence and involvement is neither in the distribution of gifts nor in their needed empowerment—even though the Spirit is integral to both without our self-determination (vv.8-11)—but for the relational connection necessary to have the integrating relational outcome "for bringing together [*symphero*] each person in the relationships necessary for wholeness of the church body" (v.7). It is inadequate, even contrary, to render *symphero*

as “the common good” (NRSV, NIV, ESV) for two reasons: (1) it reduces the ontology and function of the Spirit’s presence and involvement, which shifts the focus to members’ gifts over their persons, and (2) it assumes both that such gifts can have the same (or better) results as persons can, and thus that what’s good for the church can emerge from a reduced theological anthropology composing ‘good without wholeness’.

The notion of the common good for the church was never what Paul illuminated for the primacy of the Spirit’s presence and involvement with the church body and the persons and relationships composing its primacy (see also Eph 2:22). What unfolds in this relational process is reciprocal relationship together, the nature of which requires (demands as the relational imperative) this integral involvement: (1) the primary involvement of the whole person, neither fragmented by nor preoccupied with gifts, and (2) the primacy of involvement given to the whole of God’s Spirit in order to transform the church’s persons and relationships to wholeness in likeness of the whole of God. For Paul, the primacy of persons and relationships composing the church in wholeness emerges only from the primacy of the persons and relationship in the whole of God (2 Cor 3:16-17; Rom 8:6,11,14-16), and unfolds only in this primacy in likeness of this whole God, the Trinity (2 Cor 3:18; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10-11). This is not to say that Paul was a trinitarian but that, ever since the Damascus road, he experienced the reality and truth of the whole of God, which made his monotheism complete (*pleroma*, Col 1:19) and the body of Christ complete in likeness as the *pleroma* of Christ (Eph 1:23; 4:12-13).³

The primacy of the church body’s persons and relationships was fully defined in Paul’s metaphor when he transitions from the diversity of gifts to the diversity of persons (1 Cor 12:12-27). This is a crucial transition for church theology and practice in order to be distinguished in what is primary to God, which should not be confused with our common views of what’s good for the church.

The primary will not and cannot be distinguished in the referentialization of the Word and by a reduced theological anthropology, because, as Paul made definitive, “the body *is not composed* of one member but of many”; and this counters such a narrowed-down lens that would focus on the secondary parts of members. Whether unintentionally or not, the consequence for members is that their person is subtly transposed to a secondary position and a fragmentary condition. This is not the ontology and function of members that is primary to God and that Paul makes primary in likeness for God’s church family.

As noted earlier about the Corinthian church, Paul did not formulate this metaphor in a theological vacuum or isolated in an ivory tower but rather composed the necessary solution to that fragmented church and the consequences of reduced ontology and function on its persons and relationships (e.g. 1 Cor 1:11-13; 3:1-4,21-22; 4:6). Accordingly, we need to apply the body metaphor to the contemporary church, its fragmentation and the consequences of reduced ontology and function on its persons and relationships. As we do, the primacy of both persons and relationships must neither be separated nor addressed with different priorities or emphases. This process becomes

³ I discuss Paul’s completeness in a previous study, *The Whole of Paul and the Whole in His Theology: Theological Interpretation in Relational Epistemic Process* (Paul Study, 2010). Online at <http://www.4X12.org>.

subtle and easily ambiguous. In human consciousness (discussed in chap. 3), our identity emerges either from self-consciousness (in reduced ontology and function) or person-consciousness (in whole ontology and function). In self-consciousness, the individual person is highlighted, which may appear to give it primacy when in reality the person has been narrowed down to one's parts, thereby centered on and revolved around one's self for determining self-identity. With this self-determination of self-consciousness, relationships become secondary and always engaged by the primacy of self; this self, moreover, is our default mode unless willfully shifted to person-consciousness. We need to listen to this ambiguous person in the church in order to attend to the fragmentation of the church's diversity and emerge distinguished with person-consciousness in the primacy of both persons and relationships.

The diversity of human persons is a reality of life that Paul, on the one hand, highlights for the body's "many members...whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free" (1 Cor 12:12-13). The church body is not a homogeneous unit—contrary to a recent church growth principle—such that all the members conform to be as "an eye," that is, as "a single *prominent or dominant* member" (vv.17,19). Homogeneity in whatever form constrains the integral function and reduces the whole ontology of the church body to be God's dwelling vitally for the diversity of all persons, peoples, nations (v.18, cf. the temple Jesus cleansed for all nations). On the other hand, Paul renders all human diversity secondary by dissolving the distinctions of such differences and negating any significance attached to them. This may appear contrary to a global church, yet we have to remember that Paul was fighting against reductionism in the church and its influence promoting illusion and simulation in church practice. Therefore, his body metaphor by necessity pointed to and exposed common church practices that reduce persons to more-or-less value on a comparative scale in a fragmenting process and consequently stratifies their relationships, thereby preventing persons and relationships from being whole together as God's new church family (vv.21-27, cf. Gal 3:26-28; Col 3:11). What Paul also does here is give voice to the reality of the human condition in the church and the need to transform our condition, not merely with secondary changes but in the primary.

What emerges unmistakably from Paul's theology and practice of human diversity in the church is the unequivocal primacy of persons and relationships to compose the whole church body. Integrally important, this primacy of persons and relationships can only be distinguished by their whole ontology and function, without any of the distinctions of spiritual gifts and human diversity that reflect, reinforce and sustain reduced ontology and function. For Paul, the global church as the whole and uncommon God's family is composed in wholeness, and thus distinguished whole, by nothing less and no substitutes of all the persons belonging to the church in the primacy of relationship together as family (as he made definitive in Eph 2:11-22).

When the primacy of persons and relationships emerges unequivocally to distinguish the global church, its persons, relationships and churches are challenged to grow and develop in wholeness in order for the global church to be distinguished unmistakably in likeness of the whole and uncommon God—just as Jesus prayed for his global family (Jn 17:13-26).

The Emerging Transition in Functional Significance

After Paul illuminated the primacy of persons and relationships (hereafter ‘primacy’) that distinguishes the body of Christ, he transitioned to *how* this primacy has functional significance for the church body: “I show you a still more excellent way,” or “the most excellent way” (1 Cor 12:31, NIV). That is, the way, road, path (*hodos*) that Paul illuminates is not a method but a relational function “beyond comparison” (*kath’ hyperbole*) to any human practice for persons and relationships. Thus, when Paul transitioned to love, he did not use a hyperbole to establish an ideal for the church to work toward. This is an interesting statement since love is a universal ideal that concerns all global people groups. In fact, the love that Paul transitioned to is usually perceived as this ideal of *what* to do, which would be the most excellent way to define a person or a church. Yet, for many Christians, this ideal of love is essentially a hyperbole that is either not achievable or not practical for what to do in everyday function, even on Sundays. And there is some truth to this in what the ideal of love likely represents—perfect love (cf. such a lens of 1 Jn 4:18).

Paul, however, did not transition to *what* to do with the *what* of love as an ideal. Such practice would fragment persons and relationships in a reduced theological anthropology by how well they measure up to this standard in what they do. Again, this is not the ontology and function of persons and relationships that distinguishes them to God and for Paul, nor with such practice could they have the functional significance of persons and relationships in their primacy. Paul only transitioned to *how* this primacy has functional significance. And the uncommon path he illuminated is the relational function of love that is composed beyond the common human practice (both within and outside the church) of *what* to do.

Love beyond human comparison is not a hyperbole but rather the vulnerable relational involvement initiated by the whole of God in relational response to the primacy of our persons, and perhaps secondarily to our situation and circumstances. Therefore, in contrast to a hyperbole, this love is only the relational function of *how* to be vulnerably involved with other persons (including God) in the primacy of their persons and the relationship; this involvement may include secondary response to their situation and circumstance but not as a substitute for the primacy of relational involvement with their persons. Love as what to do fragments the persons involved and reduces love to a secondary response, which would not be beyond the common ideal and practice of love. Paul made love the relational imperative for Christian persons and their relationships, yet not in order to meet an ideal but in order for their primacy in the church to have the functional significance that “relationally integrates [*syndesmos*, bond] the ontology and function of God’s church family together in complete wholeness” (Col 3:12-14). When the primacy of persons and relationships in the church (local, regional and global) do not transition in this functional significance, their primacy becomes another ideal like love of *what* the church should do—which then merely renders it unachievable or impractical. Does this describe the prevailing condition in the contemporary church?

As Paul transitioned to the relational function of love to embody the primacy of persons and relationships in functional significance, we must also transition with him beyond the body metaphor for the church’s function to emerge in the significance of this primacy. Christ’s wholeness embodied the fullness (*pleroma*, complete, whole) of God

(Col 1:19) to embody the church in likeness as the *pleroma* of Christ (Col 1:20; Eph 1:22-23). This is where church theology and practice often become separated, and church practice is problematic when it is detached from this *pleroma* theology. Of course, church theology is not helpful if it is fragmentary and not complete. That's why Paul made it a relational imperative for the church to have Christ's wholeness ("peace") be the only determinant for its theology and practice (Col 3:15).

Paul's transition to the relational function of love by the nature of its primacy also involved the relational function of embodying the whole ontology and function of the *pleroma* of Christ (the whole church). The church in completeness can only be embodied in likeness of Christ who embodied the whole (*pleroma*) of God. This wholeness of God defines and determines who the church is and whose the church is in whole theology and practice, which cannot be narrowed down or fragmented and still be *pleroma* in relationship together both with this God and as this church body. The transition to the relational function that Paul unfolds is pivotal for the church to emerge distinguished not simply as the body of Christ but the *pleroma* of Christ.

Yet, having this relational clarity of wholeness together is one issue for the church, and living its functional significance in wholeness together is a further issue ongoing in church life and practice. That is, for the church to be whole is one matter, and for the church to live whole and also make whole is another matter. Even so, for Paul these functions are inseparably interrelated in God's new creation family. This ongoing issue for the church further amplifies the tension and conflict between wholeness and reductionism, which Paul continues to address in his ecclesiology.

As the embodying of the church's whole ontology and function emerges, reductionism and its counter-relational work increasingly seek to exert more indirect and subtle influence to define and determine church life and practice with ontological simulations and epistemological illusions, which Paul illuminated previously to the church at Corinth (2 Cor 11:12-15). In the further theological-functional clarity that Paul illuminates in his transformed *pleroma* ecclesiology (unfolded in Eph), the functional significance of the church is never assumed but is an ongoing relational imperative for church life and practice in wholeness together; and this includes challenging assumptions of theological anthropology underlying the church. What is this functional significance and how does its dynamic work for wholeness? The following theology and practice distinguish what the global North churches have not paid close attention to and what global South churches need to discover (or recover) as the emerging center of the global church.

A Necessary Paradigm Shift

In the whole of Paul's theology, and in the relational progression with Christ (the *pleroma* of God) and the Spirit (Christ's relational replacement), God's people became the relational outcome 'already' that emerged in the church (the *pleroma* of Christ). Yet, for Paul the *pleroma* of Christ (Eph 1:23) is not the institution of the church but the embodying of the church in the qualitative ontology from inner out and the relational function of love involvement in the whole relationship together of God's new creation family—integrally in the image of the one God's qualitative ontology (the ontological One) and in the likeness of the whole of God's relational function (the relational Whole).

Nothing less and no substitutes of who, what and how God is and God's people are could signify and can constitute their whole ontology and function. More important than as a Jew and a Christian, Paul's experiential truth as the adopted son in the whole and uncommon God's family was 'who he is' and 'whose he is', in whole relationship together, both intimate and equalized, with his sisters and brothers. The immediate implication for the global church of Paul's *pleroma* ecclesiology is the urgent need for a paradigm shift in church theology and practice from the body of Christ to the family of Christ. As paradigm shifts involve, this will challenge the church's traditions, its sociocultural roots, and its underlying theological anthropology for persons and relationships to change—the process of redemptive change that Paul also illuminates for the church as family (Rom 8:5-6,14-16; 12:2).

As we transition with Paul, his ecclesiology deepens our need for a paradigm shift. When Paul defines the church as being reconciled in one body (Eph 2:16) and as equalized persons without distinctions relationally belonging to God's family (*oikeios*, 2:19), this *oikodome* (church family not church building) is further defined as being "joined together" (2:21). Paul is providing further theological-functional clarity to his previous dialogue on the church (1 Cor 12:12-31; Rom 12:5). His earlier relational discourse appears to describe an organic or organizational structure of the church whose parts are interrelated and function in interdependence. Paul deepens the understanding of interrelated parts in interdependence by further defining the relational dynamic involved to make this function in wholeness together (Eph 4:16). This relational process deepens the primacy necessary for persons and relationships; and church leaders notably are accountable to be involved in this relational family process (not organizational management) for the functional significance of the church family's persons and relationships in their primacy

This *oikodome* is dynamic, not static, and by its dynamic nature necessitates ongoing growth ("building up," *oikodome*) for the embodying of the church's whole ontology and function as the *pleroma* of Christ, as Paul illuminates (4:12-13). Church growth has been commonly approached in quantitative terms and not the primacy of relational terms. The dynamic of *oikodome*, however, both defines the church family in joint interrelations together, and determines how church family interrelations function in the interdependence necessary for embodying wholeness in its ontology and function. In Paul's ecclesiology, *oikodome* is relationship-specific to the church as family, not as a religious group or organization (2:22), and, therefore, the dynamic of *oikodome* is functionally significant in only the depth of its relational involvement together (the significance of love), not to the extent of its working relations (4:15-16,25). This distinctly identifies two contrasting ways interrelatedness is defined and interdependence is determined, which in function are conflicting and subtly competing. These distinctions are critical to understand and ongoingly are essential to make because each involves a different church ontology and function, with different perceptions of human ontology and function. Thus, this difference determines what is primary or secondary in church practice. Another way to understand this difference is the functional significance between a family and orphanage. Whatever organizational unity and interrelatedness orphans have as members of an orphanage, this cannot substitute for belonging to a family. Yet, many so-called families function without the significance of the primacy of relationship, thereby reducing what should distinguish a family and essentially making their members

into relational orphans. Many churches in the global North function as orphanages, while churches in the global South may be filled with relational orphans. This difference is crucial for the global church to address because Jesus made it unequivocal “I will not leave you orphaned”—without family or even within a family (Jn 14:18).

Not surprisingly for Paul, this difference involves the contrast between wholeness and reductionism, and the ongoing issue of ‘who, what and how’ will emerge for the church’s persons and relationships. *Oikodome* is rooted ‘in Christ’ and thus embodies Christ’s wholeness (Eph 1:23; 2:21). The dynamic of *oikodome* is a function of the integral relational dynamic of family wholeness in ontology and function, conjointly in the primacy of whole persons and whole persons in whole relationship together (i.e. transformed persons in transformed relationships together). Accordingly, the interrelations of *oikodome* are constituted only by whole/transformed persons in whole/transformed relationships together both equalized and intimate. The primacy of this distinguished relational process and outcome emerge irreducibly and nonnegotiable, “In him the whole *family* is *integrally* joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord”—that is, grows into the uncommon family distinguished from the common prevailing for persons and relationships in the human context.

Reductionism more likely does not blatantly fragment these whole interrelations, for example, as Paul encountered between Jew and Gentile (2:11-12), but more subtly redefines ontology and function for person and church to create distance, detachment or separation in church relations, thereby making relationships together fragmentary. Such fragmentation is effectively accomplished by defining persons from outer in by what they do/have, and, on this narrowed-down basis, creating better-or-less distinctions in stratified relations that prevent deeper relational involvement (cf. 4:2,25). This is accomplished in a subtle yet insidious way when church leaders and church members commonly define themselves by their roles and/or gifts and relate to each other in the church based on their roles or gifts, all for the work of ministry for building up the church. This misleading dynamic may work for group cohesion or organizational identity in building up a gathering, but in reality it signifies a reduced ontology and function for both person and church that renders persons relational orphans and church as an orphanage. This certainly is not the work “created in Christ Jesus” that Paul means for the church (2:10). Such pervasive practice is a major misinterpretation of Paul’s ecclesiology—likely fragmented by using a model from 1 Corinthians out of context—which does not have the relational outcome he defined for whole church interrelations and their function in interdependence (4:11-13). Since we are ongoingly subjected to reductionism, we need to recognize, pay attention and address when we become subject to reductionism’s influence, and thus shaped by it. This urgent matter is not going away for the global church.

It is indispensable for Paul’s ecclesiology that it is based on complete Christology—the *pleroma* of God embodied by Christ, nothing less (Col 1:19; 2:9). In the primacy distinguished by Paul’s *pleroma* ecclesiology, the functional significance of church ontology and function emerges as the church lives “created according to the likeness of God” (Eph 4:24; Col 2:9-10). The church, for Paul, is the Father’s new creation family embodied in Christ and raised up by the Spirit in the relational likeness of this whole and uncommon God, who dwells vulnerably and intimately in the relational involvement of love, composing the trinitarian relational context of family love integrated

with the trinitarian relational process of family love. If not created and functioning in this likeness, church becomes a gathering from human shaping or construction in likeness of some aspect of human contextualization, which such gathering then often reifies in ontological simulations and epistemological illusions as the body of Christ. This is a pervasive, if not prevailing, condition of the existing church urgently requiring a paradigm shift to the family of Christ and the related changes for embodying the *pleroma* of Christ.

The body of Christ by itself is insufficient to be the church rooted ‘in Christ’ who embodied the nothing-less-than God in fullness, that is, complete and whole (*pleroma*). As noted already, Paul was no trinitarian in his theological development, yet his monotheism went beyond the knowledge and understanding of the Shema in Judaism. At the same time, Paul was not overly christocentric. As a model for teachers of theological education, his experiential truth of Jesus and the Spirit in ongoing relationship together gave him whole knowledge and understanding of the whole of God (cf. Col 2:2). The relational and functional significance of Paul’s whole God—neither limited by tradition nor constrained by human shaping—constituted him (both by transformation and adoption) as a new creation in God’s family; and only this experiential reality provided the integral relation basis and ongoing relational base for the church as God’s new creation family to be in the relational likeness of this whole and uncommon God whom he himself was experiencing. Paul’s experience, however, was the experiential reality of the primacy of their persons and relationship together, the whole of whom Paul experienced face to face in the intimate relational involvement of God’s family love.

The integral relational function of love that Paul makes the relational imperative for the church is the further unfolding of God’s family love whole-ly embodied by Christ: the trinitarian relational context of family integrated with the trinitarian relational process of family love that embodies the *pleroma* of Christ as God’s whole family with nothing less and no substitutes of God’s vulnerable presence and intimate involvement. This complete relational involvement by God is the love that Paul prays to be the growing relational reality experienced by the church (Eph 3:17-19, echoing Jesus’ family prayer). Therefore, it should be unmistakable that the church in likeness of the whole of God was not a theological construct in Paul’s ecclesiology. Yet, as a concept this notion has growing interest in modern theology, of course, as the church in likeness of the Trinity; not surprisingly, this trinitarian theology lacks the functional significance of the primacy given to the trinitarian persons and their relationship—notably as it unfolds in the integral relational involvement of God’s family love.⁴ Paul’s understanding of the church’s likeness, however, emerged from engagement in the relational epistemic process with the whole and uncommon God beyond the limits and constraints of the common, the *synesis* (whole knowledge and understanding) of which appears to elude many of his readers even though that was Paul’s relational purpose for the church (Col 2:2; Rom 16:25).

It was natural for Paul that based on his experiential truth of God his theology and practice unfolded in the experiential reality of wholeness. In complete ecclesiology rooted in complete Christology, church ontology and function in likeness of the whole

⁴ For example, see John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985); Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991); Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

(*pleroma*) of God is not a construct, but rather this experiential reality is the embodying of the relational function of love that emerges from whole persons in the primacy of whole relational involvement together with both God and each other. This natural transition is also to be expected in the paradigm shift needed for the church today. Therefore, the embodying of the family interrelations of transformed/whole persons in these transformed/whole relationships is functionally significant only as it emerges in relational likeness to the whole of God's relationships within the Godhead, which cannot be fragmented to tritheism or reduced to deism (cf. Col 2:9-10; 3:10-11). The intimate family interrelations within the whole of God between the Father, the Son and the Spirit can best (not totally) be defined as follows:

intimate relationship to the depth that, as Jesus disclosed, to see the Son is to see the Father, to know the Son is to know the Father (Jn 14:9; 17:26), and to receive the Spirit is to receive all their persons (Jn 16:15); and their intimate relationship functions together in the dynamic interaction of interdependence to the further depth that, as Jesus promised and the Father fulfilled, the Spirit's person will be his relational replacement so that his followers would not be reduced to relational orphans (without family or even within a family), but by the Spirit's relational presence and involvement, the Father and the Son will also be present and involved so that they all will be intimately involved together as family (Jn 14:18,23; 15:26; 16:13-15).

As Jesus also prayed in his formative family prayer (Jn 17:21-26) and then relationally extended *into* Paul, Paul further illuminated in his letters the primacy of this intimate interrelationship together in interdependence. Paul developed this theologically and functionally in *pleroma* ecclesiology for the embodying of the church's whole ontology and function composed by the primacy of its persons and relationships in this distinguished functional significance uncommon only to God. In trinitarian theology, this relational dynamic of God is inadequately described as *perichoresis*, tending to be overly conceptual. Likewise, more church theology and practice today are conceived on a trinitarian basis, yet have not translated well in function to have the relational significance distinguished by the whole of God. This is a critical juncture for the global church to determine how its persons and relationships can be distinguished with the functional significance in likeness of this apparently elusive God.

God remains elusive in referential terms since the referentialization of the Word narrows our view of who, what and how God is, which then requires our speculation to speak for God or remain silent. In relational terms, God speaks for himself and communicates in the primacy of relationship, which then requires our relational involvement to receive God's communication in relational words composed in relational language. Accordingly and compatibly, the interdependence within the whole and uncommon God can only be understood to the extent that God has disclosed his ontology and function. In Paul's theological systemic framework and forest integrating his letters, his experiential truth centered on the relational function Jesus embodied and on the overlapping and extended relational function the Spirit enacted, both of which the Father initiated and ongoingly functions to oversee only in relational terms. For Paul, God was neither deistic or tritheistic, and never either pantheistic or panentheistic. Paul's relational

connection to each of them only appears to be in their specific functions, which seem to overlap and interact yet remain unique to each of them. But what each did was secondary for Paul to the experiential reality of connection in the primacy of relationship with each person. How this is perceived and interpreted have theological implications or repercussions depending on the interpretive framework of Paul's readers—notably in defining our person and determining our relationships, that is, depending mainly on our theological anthropology.

Although contrary to referential terms, however, interacting functions in themselves do not account for the integral dynamic of the trinitarian Persons' whole relationship together. This dynamic underlies each of their functions and integrates their uniqueness into the whole they constitute together in the innermost, the whole of God. Specifically, the Trinity is constituted in the primacy of their persons and relationship together, not by what they do in function; and it is crucial for our theological anthropology to be composed in likeness. The ontology and function of God's whole relationship together lives also in interdependence. In this integral relational dynamic, any distinctions of their unique functions are rendered secondary to the primacy of relationship together; and such distinctions should not be used to define each Person or to determine their position in the Godhead. If God is stratified by such distinctions, the primacy of their persons and relationship is rendered secondary and God's wholeness is fragmented into these parts. As vulnerably disclosed in relational terms, the Father, the Son and the Spirit are irreducibly defined and inseparably determined only by the primacy of their whole persons and whole relationship together; and this relational dynamic functions in various involvements in human contexts and with human contextualization to enact, embody and complete the whole of God's thematic relational response to make whole the human condition—that is, to save us both *from* reductionism and *to* wholeness together. To highlight their distinctions in Scripture and the gospel, for example, by being overly christocentric, simply binitarian, skewed by the Spirit's power, just role-specific or even gender-specific, is to diminish the whole of God's ontology and to fragment the whole of God's function. Moreover, to make primary their distinctions is simply to construct God in the human shaping of reduced ontology and function.

Paul understood their whole relationship together as the experiential truth of the whole of God relationally undifferentiated—that is, vulnerably equalized in intimate relationship together without distinctions. His integrated understanding (*synesis*) of this relationally whole God was the theological-functional basis for the church's whole ontology and function to be embodied in likeness (Eph 4:4-6). Anything less or any substitute is neither in relational likeness to the whole of God, nor, therefore, embodies the functional significance of persons in the primacy of the intimate interrelationships together in interdependence, which is necessary to grow in the wholeness of the *pleroma* of Christ beyond merely the church body of Christ (4:12b-13).

As the relational function of God's family love makes definitive, relationships together in the church are not only challenging but most definitely threatening. The primacy of persons in relationship together, either for God or the church, requires the vulnerable function of the heart opening to be involved for the intimate relational connection necessary for the interdependence of persons to be whole together. This vulnerable relational function of church interdependence is the new creation's relational outcome and ongoing integral dynamic of transformed persons relationally involved in

transformed relationships together. The church's (local, regional, global) relational function of interdependence in likeness of the whole of God's interdependence falls into a critical condition when it shifts from the primary function of transformed/whole relationships together.

Returning to the body metaphor, Paul warned against such a shift as he described this interdependence for the fragmented church at Corinth (1 Cor 12:12-31). This interdependence of the individual parts involved the connections together that resulted in covariation between the individual parts ("If one member suffers, all suffer...if one member is honored, all rejoice"). Moreover, if the parts are properly connected together, the implied result would be synergism in which the whole becomes greater than the sum of its individual parts ("together with it" to be more than their sum, 12:25-26; cf. Eph 4:16). What Paul points to goes beyond simply having mutuality and what constitutes this covarying synergistic connection is the vulnerable relational involvement of love (12:31). Earlier Paul exposed their fragmentary relationships disconnected from each other by the primacy given to one's level of knowledge (cf. wisdom in the primordial garden, Gen 3:6). He simply stated the experiential truth and reality: "Knowledge puffs up *the individual*, but love builds up *each other*" (1 Cor 8:1). In another letter, Paul provided the theological clarification needed to define the transformed relationships together as the basis for church interdependence (Rom 12:3-16). Both of these church scenarios struggled with the influence of reductionism and its counter-relational work affecting the primacy of persons and their relationships together. Would you say the contemporary church's difficulty with being vulnerable in the relational involvement of love reflects the same struggle?

Reductionism, however, is often not as blatant as at the church in Corinth. As noted earlier, it is often more indirect and subtle, for example, involving assimilation into human contexts as existed perhaps in the Roman church (cf. Rom 12:2). The norms fragmenting persons and relationships that prevail in the surrounding context are in their function mainly how reductionism affects church relationships together in general and church interdependence in particular. For example, when the norm for defining persons is based on what roles they perform and/or resources they have, this fragmentation determines how relationships function, which affects a church's interrelations together and, subsequently, affects church interdependence. Cultural models of family, social models of group relations, organizational and business models of interdependence, all influence a church's interrelations together and its interdependence by these various shaping of relationships together substituting for the relational likeness of God. Furthermore, norms of individualism and individual freedom foster the independence (even in collectivist contexts) that strain and weaken church relationships *together* (cf. 1 Cor 8:9-11) and counter church interdependence (cf. 1 Cor 11:17-22; 14:1-4), thereby redefining, reshaping and reconstructing what it means to be created in the likeness of God.

Reductionism defines a church and explains church function by the deeds of its individuals and their resources. A church, therefore, becomes the sum of its individuals; church interdependence is thus no longer the relational outcome of relationships together with the Spirit but a byproduct at the mercy of individuals. The shift from top-down and inner-out to bottom-up and outer-in is subtle. In the Western church today, synergism has been replaced by individualism, and church interdependence has been renegotiated to

church dependence on the individual's terms—in contrast to Paul's relational imperative for the church (Eph 4:2,15-16; cf. Col 3:10-15). Independence is the reductionist alternative to interdependence and, intentionally or unintentionally, serves as the functional substitute for it, with freedom as its identity marker. This dynamic also operates in non-Western churches in a less obvious variation of the human shaping of relationships together defining church ontology and church function. Family may have a greater priority in the global South, but its family relations likely do not have the functional significance of the primacy of persons and relationships; and they are rendered to a reduced ontology and function that is limited to fulfilling family duty and constrained by meeting family obligation.

This reduction of persons and relationships was the pivotal issue that Paul was fighting against, making epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction, even in that collective-oriented sociocultural context (e.g. Gal 5:1,13; Rom 12:3; Phil 2:1-4; 1 Cor 4:7; 8:1,9). And the contemporary church is accountable to listen to the persons from the beginning and the existing condition of its relationships. Even modern neuroscience recognizes that interdependence is the natural state for human persons, and that independence is a political notion, not a scientific one.⁵

Accordingly and urgently, the church (local, regional, global) needs to pay attention and take to heart what Jesus made paradigmatic: “The paradigm you use will be the church you get” (Mk 4:24).

Reductionism and Church Leadership

The church does not emerge in functional significance unless it is led in this transition by the above paradigm shift—not by any paradigm, even if it seems good for the church—and it takes the lead in the changes necessary for it to be distinguished in the primacy of persons and relationships together as family only in likeness to God's integral Persons in whole relationship together. By the necessity of his whole God's family love, Paul challenged the renegotiated ecclesiology of churches in reduced ontology and function, and also challenged the assumptions of theological anthropology underlying the definition of the person and its determination of relationships together in reductionist terms. Both of these conditions existed in churches apart from, in contrast to, or in conflict with the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole and uncommon God. Paul's challenges to such reductionism are summarized in his response to make relationally specific the functional significance of the transformed and whole ecclesiology of God's new creation family (Eph 4:14-25). His theological-functional clarity of this functional significance is directly connected to and emerges from his relational discourse on the theological dynamic of church ontology (4:7-13). Here again, we cannot revert back to a 'body of Christ' paradigm or this functional significance will elude the church.

For the ontological identity of the church to be of functional significance, it cannot be shaped or constructed by human terms from human contextualization, including innovations that appear good for the church (cf. the incompleteness of the popular church at Sardis, Rev 3:1-2). In Paul's ecclesiology, the church in wholeness is

⁵ John T. Cacioppo and William Patrick, *loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), 248.

the new creation family by the whole of God's relational response of grace ("was given grace") from above top-down—as Jesus previously made imperative with "born from above"—the dynamic of which ("descended...ascended") Christ relationally embodied to make each one of us together to be God's whole ("he might fill all things," *pleroo*, make complete, 4:7-10; cf. 1:23). This relational process emerges in God's ongoing family love, with the relational outcome of the church in wholeness embodying the *pleroma* of Christ. In God's relational response of grace composed by the vulnerable relational involvement of trinitarian family love, Christ also gave the relational means to church leaders to be involved in likeness for the dynamic integral embodying of the church (4:11). Previously Paul defined this process also as part of the Spirit's relational involvement to share different *charisma* from the whole of God (not a fragmented source) for the functional significance of the church body (1 Cor 12:4-11). For the church's whole theology and practice, Paul illuminates this further to make definitive the functional significance of embodying the church with the primacy of persons and relationships in relational likeness to the whole and uncommon God. The church in general and church leaders in particular need to embrace this whole understanding from Paul.

When Paul highlights church leaders in their function, he does not highlight their roles and resources in the body of Christ, which have become the highlight in many church bodies. Rather Paul further illuminates the primacy of their whole person and the functional significance of their relational involvement for the church to be distinguished as the family of Christ—the *pleroma* of which is in likeness to the *pleroma* of God. The role of church leaders has been grossly overemphasized and their resources overestimated, while the significance of their person has been minimalized and their relational involvement undervalued. For Paul, church leaders—even in the global South who may lack formal theological education—are given the relational means for the purpose "to equip the saints" (*katartismos* from *katartizo*, to put into proper condition, to restore to former condition, make complete, 4:12). This process holds church leaders to be the most accountable since its condition directly points to the dynamic of transformed persons reconciled and relationally involved in transformed relationships together in relational likeness to God. And in these whole relational terms, what unfolds is integrated in the interdependence of the various church functions ("work of ministry") necessary for the dynamic embodying (*oikodome*, 4:12) of the church's whole ontology and function—the only process "to maturity" of "the *pleroma* of Christ" (4:13).

Paul made definitive the whole theology and practice required for the church and its leaders to be distinguished in the functional significance of their primacy of persons and relationships together. What Paul illuminated above is open neither to our negotiation nor to our selectivity. Therefore, this means unequivocally:

For church leaders to be of functional significance, their persons must be defined by the wholeness of the new creation in the qualitative image of God from inner out, not defined by their gifts, resources, or the roles and titles they have that reduce their persons to outer in; and for their leadership to be functionally significant as transformed persons, their function must be determined by the vulnerable relational involvement of love in transformed relationships together (both equalized and intimate) as God's new creation family in the relational likeness of the whole of

God—not determined by the titles and roles they perform (even with dedication, sacrifice or achievement) that make distinctions, intentionally or unintentionally creating distance and stratification in relationships together.

The latter practices by church leaders renegotiate ecclesiology from bottom-up based on a selective theological anthropology from outer in. This certainly challenges the theology and practice of all church leaders; yet, given the Spirit’s involvement, it also holds all persons in the church accountable for their person and relationships to be made whole. At the same time, those in theological education must account for their contribution to this condition. Both levels, for example, don’t need innovative leaders willing to take risks but rather vulnerable leaders whose persons are relationally involved for this primacy over any secondary—which perhaps involves the risk of such leaders losing their jobs in churches unwilling to change.

The cost of discipleship for church leaders is an ongoing issue that emerges either in wholeness or with reductionism. In Paul’s transformed ecclesiology of wholeness, church leaders in reduced ontology and function are not created new or living new in the image and likeness of God and, therefore, cannot *katartismos* (equip by restoring and making complete) others in the interdependence necessary to be of functional significance for embodying the church in relational likeness of the whole and uncommon God. Nor can they proclaim the experiential truth of the gospel of wholeness (Eph 6:15). Only transformed leaders—whose persons are ongoingly being restored to the image and likeness of God (*anakainoo*, Col 3:10-11; cf. *ananeoomai*, Eph 4:23)—vulnerably involved in transformed relationships together with the Spirit can help make complete the saints. That is, and this is critical, *katarismos* emerges from integral interaction with *anakainoo*, which is nonnegotiable for church leaders. Only leaders functioning as whole persons in the primacy of relationship serve in whole relational terms to make complete the saints in the interdependence that is functionally significant for the church’s whole ontology and function. Summarized below is what Paul makes definitive and nonnegotiable to distinguish the church in wholeness:

Church leaders are whole persons with various resources who are relationally involved with church members (the uncommon, *hagios*) in the primacy of relationship, regardless of their resources, in order to help restore persons and relationships to their primacy to fulfill their relational responsibility (“work of ministry”) as family members, with the functional significance to dynamically embody (*oikodome*) the family of Christ (over the body of Christ) until all those relationally belonging to God’s family come to (*katantao*, reach, arrive) vulnerable involvement together in wholeness (*henotes*, unity), that is, whole in their vulnerable relational response of trust (“the faith”) in reciprocal relationship together and whole in specifically knowing (*epignosis*) the Son of God in intimate relationship, the relational outcome of which is persons in their primacy without distinctions (even beyond gender, *aner*) who are whole-ly complete (*teleios*, mature) in the qualitative depth (*helikia*, stature) of the *pleroma* (fullness, whole) embodied by Christ, therefore who together with the Spirit can embody the *pleroma* of Christ in functional significance of the relational likeness of the whole of God (4:12-13).

Without church leadership in the functional significance of the primacy of their persons and relationships, the church is constrained, if not prevented, to emerge, grow and mature distinguished in the primary functional significance of the persons and relationships belonging to God's family.

We must not referentialize the experiential truth and reality of Paul's theology and practice. Paul is not outlining an ecclesial function of church growth models, missional models or any other ministry techniques of serving for the quantitative expansion of gatherings shaped or constructed by human terms. Following and expanding on Jesus' lead that "the paradigm you use will be the church you get," Paul makes conclusive the theological paradigm integral for the whole relational function embodying the church's ontology and function of who the church is and whose the church is as God's new creation family in his qualitative image and relational likeness. This paradigm composes only in whole relational terms the theological dynamic of church ontology, whose function is entirely relational and whose whole ontology and function distinguishes the functional significance of transformed persons relationally involved by God's family love in transformed relationships together in interdependence. This integral relational paradigm distinguishing the church in functional significance is nonnegotiable, especially for its leaders no matter how innovative a variation may be or how good it may seem for the church.

Regardless of the experiential truth of the family of Christ composed in Paul's transformed and whole ecclesiology, reductionism is an ongoing reality that raises subtle alternatives—the subtlety of which leads churches in ontological simulation of who and whose they are, and in epistemological illusion of the function that distinguishes the church in the significance of God's new creation family.

Seeking Alternatives

The intersection of the trajectory of the old and the path of the new has been ongoing in church history. The theology and practice of the church that have emerged at this intersection is less from a collision and more from a convergence in some hybrid. Hybrid alternatives to the family of Christ have prevailed in the body of Christ and continue to emerge in the contemporary church. And the reality of reductionism emerges in the simple fact that 'the old' also subtly changes with the times and its surrounding context, thereby making such alternatives more difficult to detect and easier to ignore as the status quo of the old (as demonstrated by Nicodemus). Paul warned the church family about this fragmenting influence and challenged us "to be wise about what is good [*i.e. distinguishing 'good with wholeness' from 'good without wholeness'*] and *not subtly intermixing* what is evil [*i.e. sin without reductionism*]" (Rom 16:19). Yet, 'the new guise of the old' is a pervasive reality in the global church. In the meantime, persons and relationships wait for the collision imperative for church theology and practice to emerge transformed and whole.

Any alternatives in church practice always involve renegotiating church theology or the significance of its theology, whether church practice is separated from church theology or not. As Nicodemus learned unexpectedly, churches cannot assume that their theological tradition unfolds in practice that's good for the church—that they are "wise

about what is good.” Nor can churches assume that their practice doesn’t renegotiate their theology. These assumptions are part of the subtlety of reductionism promoting alternatives that change with the times and the surrounding context.

A renegotiated ecclesiology could easily be considered a pragmatic alternative to Paul’s complete ecclesiology by some of his readers, even a necessary reality. This would be understandable given the paradigm shift and related changes required in Paul’s theology and practice for the church. The intersection of the old and the new will always be a tense convergence, with a collision waiting to happen. Likewise, there is simply no way to deny, minimize or get around the vulnerability involved in giving primacy to persons and relationships. With its subtle appeal, social media (amplified exponentially by smartphones) conveniently becomes the prevailing alternative to being vulnerable in the global North and a pervading alternative increasing in the global South, which we need to stop assuming is a good alternative for both persons and relationships. Paul clearly understood that only the vulnerable relational involvement of “love builds up” (1 Cor 8:1) persons and relationships in their primacy for the church; and he certainly encountered ongoing alternatives to this vulnerable relational involvement, and confronted in family love their fragmenting influence and consequence on persons and relationships in the church. Thus, it is also untenable that for some of Paul’s readers his transformed and whole ecclesiology may be perceived or considered as “just theological,” perhaps merely an ideal not attainable in practice (just as love is often perceived. Yet, theology and practice were never separated by Paul—for example, as is common in the academy—nor could they be incongruent.

Many of his readers may even argue that some of Paul’s prescriptions for the church (e.g. about women and slaves) appear to be pragmatic ecclesiology, thus that he either contradicted his theology or suspended its ideal. While there seems to be ambiguity in some of his church prescriptions (e.g. for women and those in a slave-caste), key to understanding the whole of Paul and the whole in his ecclesiology is the perception of what context Paul is speaking *from*, not the context he is speaking in and to. Renegotiated or pragmatic ecclesiology is based on human contextualization and shaped by human terms. Paul’s *pleroma* ecclesiology emerges from God’s trinitarian relational context of family and process of family love, and is defined and determined by God’s terms through reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit—whole relational terms irreducible by the nature of the whole of God and nonnegotiable by the nature of the uncommon God down to referential terms reduced and fragmentary. In his prescriptions for the church, Paul is speaking of family and in family love from God’s relational context and process. Therefore, Paul’s prescriptions need to be seen in the strategic interest and concern of *pleroma* ecclesiology—the *pleroma* of God embodying the *pleroma* of Christ—and must not be confused with or reduced to renegotiated ecclesiology for pragmatics. His prescriptions involve a tactical shift advocated by Paul that points to the strategic concerns of God’s relational whole on just God’s whole relational terms to fulfill and complete God’s thematic relational response to the human condition (to be discussed in coming chaps.). In this relational process, Paul engages the whole gospel composed by complete Christology for the relational outcome of God’s church family to emerge in wholeness. This relational outcome is the full soteriology of what Christ saves us *to*, ‘already’.

It is unequivocal in Paul's *pleroma* ecclesiology that the church in relational likeness of the whole of God is irreplaceable for the functional significance of its ontology and function. For the church's ontology and function to be whole as God's new creation family, it must (*dei* by nature, not *opheilo* by obligation) be the functional significance of both transformed relationships reconciled equally together and intimate interrelations integrated together in interdependence; and both of these in their primacy are functionally significant only in the vulnerable relational involvement of God's family love. Church whole relationships together are reconciled together by Christ with the Spirit, thus are by their nature irreducible; and the integrated relational outcome of church interdependence in relational likeness to the whole of God is nonnegotiable. Interdependent is how God created his new creation family, which is how God created the whole human family in relationship together (cf. Gen 2:18) and integrated all of creation (cf. Col 1:20; Rom 8:19-21). Just as modern neuroscience affirms this interdependence and acknowledges the influence of reductionism to counter it, the whole ontology and function of the church embodies the functional significance of this new creation family to fulfill the inherent human relational need and to solve the human problem—which neuroscience can merely identify but without having good news for its fulfillment and resolution. Yet, the church in renegotiated ecclesiology is also without both the functional significance of the good news of what persons and relationships are and its relational significance of what persons and relationships can be saved *to*.

Only in the primacy of the persons and relationships belonging to the church does the church (local, regional, global) emerge distinguished in the functional significance of wholeness as the family of Christ. This distinguished outcome, however, can only emerge from the collision of the church's old trajectory with the new relational path—therefore, emerging transformed and whole in church ontology and functions, theology and practice, whereby the global church family unfolds on this whole relational basis.

Chapter 6 The Church Unfolds with the Palpable Word

“Here is your son...here is your mother.”

John 19:26-27

Speaking about the kingdom of God *into the church...*

“This is what you have heard from me....”

Acts 1:4-5

With all that is facing the church in a globalizing world, we cannot talk about the church unfolding today unless it has emerged distinguished in the primacy of who the church is and whose it is, thus distinguished beyond any common identity. If the *complete* embodied Word does not embody the contemporary church body of Christ, then the church body does not embody and therefore cannot unfold as the wholeness (*pleroma*) of Christ—whether within itself or in the world—which Paul made integral for the church (Eph 1:22-23).

The paradigm shift from ‘the body of Christ’ to ‘the family of Christ’ remains pivotal for the church (local, regional, global). When Jesus clearly communicated to his disciples in relational terms “I will not leave you orphaned,” he pointed to two relational processes integral for the experiential reality of his church to unfold: (1) foremost is the primacy of his family, and (2) utmost is the ongoing reciprocal relational involvement with the palpable Word. These foremost and utmost relational processes are inseparable for Jesus and they interact by necessity for the church to unfold in the relational outcome of wholeness.

Soon after Jesus’ defining communication to his disciples in relational terms, these two relational processes became the experiential truth that the embodied Word constituted for the experiential reality of his church as the family of Christ in likeness of the whole and uncommon God. First, when the embodied Word was completing his relational work of what he saved us *to*, he communicated in family love from the cross directly to his mother and beloved disciple that what unfolds from here is now ‘your family in the primacy of relationship together’—that is, the church as the uncommon family of Christ (cf. Mt 12:48-50). Certainly, this must have involved a paradigm shift for Mary and John, because they didn’t receive Jesus’ communication in family love merely as referential language but only in the significance of relational terms. Therefore, in the primacy of relationship “from that hour *his brother John* took her into his own *care in the primacy of Christ’s family*”—not just “his own house” (*idios*, Jn 19:27). This uncommon relational process conjointly (1) countered the common practices for persons and relationships and the trajectory of the old (including constrained in ‘the body of Christ’), and (2) projected the church on the uncommon relational path embodied by the complete Word, whole and uncommon—without referentialization or selectivity of the Word. This was the pivotal moment that distinguished the experiential reality of the family of Christ from commonization, clearly separating nothing less and no substitutes from anything less and any substitutes in the church.

What we are saved to unfolds further as the whole Word transitioned from embodied to palpable significance in order both to not leave us orphaned—even as relational orphans within a church body—and for the church to unfold in the wholeness of who it is and completeness of whose it is. This relational outcome is dependent on the essential integration of the embodied Word with the palpable Word. Just before Jesus ascended, he extended the face of the whole embodied Word completely *into* the palpable Word for this integral relational purpose, process and outcome. In spite of the Word’s bodily absence, the face of the Word would continue to be palpable by the deeper presence and involvement of the whole of the Word composed integrally with the Spirit. This would soon become the face of the whole palpable Word. To those present in the gathered body (*ekklesia*)—called out of the common to be uncommon and then to unfold as the uncommon family of Christ in the common context (as Jesus prayed for his family, Jn 17:11-23)—the embodied Word fulfilled his earlier relational words (Jn 14:15-27; 15:26; 16:7-15) to send his relational replacement, the person of the Spirit, to constitute the continued vulnerable presence and intimate involvement now distinguished as the palpable Word (Acts 1:4-5). What the embodied Word earlier communicated in relational terms, “I have much more to *communicate* to you, more than you can now bear” (Jn 16:12, NIV), the palpable Word will further communicate in relational terms in the utmost relational process of reciprocal relationship together.

As the church is in ongoing relational involvement with the face of the whole palpable Word, the church unfolds with the palpable Word in the wholeness (“peace”) Jesus promised in likeness of Christ’s wholeness—that is, the uncommon ‘peace as wholeness’ rather than the common ‘peace without conflict’ (Jn 14:27; 16:33, cf. Nu 6:26). This is the wholeness that Paul later made the relational imperative as the church’s only determinant (Col 3:15) and made conclusive its relational outcome as the family of Christ (Eph 2:14,17-18; Phil 4:7). Yet, wholeness has not been the prevailing condition of the church that has unfolded to the present. This likely is the result of disconnecting the Spirit from the palpable Word and thus reducing the Spirit’s person as the relational replacement for Jesus’ person (cf. 2 Cor 3:17-18; Eph 2:22); for example, a reduction takes place when we focus only on the Spirit’s power or as a force, and disconnection happens whenever we ignore the Spirit’s person or keep relational distance. This reduction and disconnection leave the church without the utmost relational process necessary for reciprocal relational involvement with the palpable Word, so that the church unfolds in the wholeness of Christ.

The palpable Word emerges with the Spirit, and the Spirit emerged as the face of the palpable Word. The Spirit emerged clearly (not initially) at Pentecost, yet *who* emerged has not been distinguished from *what* emerged—which correlates to our previous discussion of *who* came and *what* has come. More often than not, Pentecost is seen as an event rather than as the convergence (and perhaps collision) of persons. What is commonly perceived as emerging from this event was the prominence of the Spirit’s power, which arguably continues to manifest in the church. The significance of the Spirit, however, is not distinguished (*pala*) by power and its related accomplishments, just as the other trinitarian persons are not distinguished (not to be confused with having distinction) by what they do or the role they have. The significance of the Spirit is distinguished only by the primacy of both the Spirit’s person and the relationship together that integrally compose the face of the palpable Word’s ongoing vulnerable presence and intimate

involvement face to face. When the Spirit as person has been neglected or ignored—which is a pervasive practice by Christians that prevails among churches, even Pentecostals and charismatics focused on only the Spirit’s power—the relational connection with the face of the whole palpable Word is unavailable for the church to unfold in the wholeness of Christ.

This has been problematic, for example, for evangelicals who are overly christocentric and neglect the primacy of the Spirit’s person, yet which can also result from a referential trinitarian theology without the primacy of their persons and relationship together. Though their churches are expanding in the global South, the problem continues also for Pentecostals and charismatics who focus on the Spirit’s power at the expense of the Spirit’s person and the Trinity in the primacy of their relationship together, which has relational consequences in spite of any ‘signs and wonders’ of the Spirit. This experiential reality, however, does not define the complete experiential truth of the Spirit, who is inseparable from the face of the Truth embodied, who is indistinguishable from the Father. Underlying these issues and determining the shape of God for Christians and churches is a reduced theological anthropology of reduced ontology and function of *who* came and *what* has come, which limit and constrain the persons and relationships belonging to the family of Christ from unfolding in the wholeness that the face of the whole embodied Word composed and the face of the whole palpable Word unfolds *into* completeness.

The early stages of the church unfolding with the palpable Word were recorded in the book of Acts by Luke, whose Gospel was written with the concern that the gospel be for all nations. This concern also involved the church’s composition and extended into Acts to highlight some major ups and downs experienced by the church in this defining relational process. What unfolds is the reciprocal relational involvement necessary to compose with the palpable Word the integral relational context and process of the kingdom *into* church *into* family that the embodied Word saved them to, and that Paul made definitive in the embodied Word’s wholeness and in likeness of the palpable Word (Acts 28:28-31).

The Church Local, Regional and Global Unfolds

What unfolded from Pentecost was pivotal for the church and continues to be so today. When Jesus told his gathered disciples that they would soon “be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5), he was soon to complete the transformation process that he initially revealed to Nicodemus: to be born new from the dying of the old—which Paul later clarified theologically (Rom 6:3-4; 8:6-11). The Spirit is the key to the church’s baptism in this relational process of redemptive change from the trajectory of the old to the relational path of the new; and this baptism should not be confused with unique situations identified as ‘the baptism of the Spirit’. If we reduce the church’s baptism by the Spirit to narrowed-down circumstances, resources and gifts unique to the so-called anointed, we reduce the person of the Spirit who came and what has come for the church to unfold in the wholeness of Christ. The vital issue for the church to understand is the transition of the embodied Word extended whole-ly *into* the palpable Word.

What we witness at Pentecost is not a phenomenon of language and tongues, which for some is merely an epiphenomenon that is not directly relationally connected to the church. The unique multiplicity of languages expressed by the disciples was only secondary to the face of the whole palpable Word emerging from their innermost, as Jesus earlier forecasted (Jn 7:38-39). With the face of the Spirit the disciples were able to communicate face to face with others (not just speak in their own language) in the primacy of relational terms for relationship together (not in referential terms to transmit information). This relational process and its relational outcome established the global church of all nations (Luke's concern) that unfolds with ongoing reciprocal relationship with the face of the palpable Word, whose vulnerable presence and intimate involvement continue to be the experiential truth and reality by the person of the Spirit. Peter verified the face of the Spirit's presence and involvement for the global church as fulfillment of some of Joel's words (Joel 2:28) and David's anticipation: "you will make me full of gladness with your presence" (*paneh*, face, the front of someone, Ps 16:11, Acts 2:28), that is, the vulnerable presence and intimate involvement of the face of the whole embodied Word transitioned *into* the face of the whole palpable Word by the Spirit (Acts 2:32-33).

As the global church for all nations unfolded with the Spirit, it emerged locally in a distinct fellowship (*koinonia*) over any other organization structure and membership process. How the local church is described can be perceived as a communal structure (or an intentional community) with a common purse (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35), which most would say is no longer applicable for the church today. While this form is not precluded for the local church, it should not be confused with what unfolded in this early church. *Koinonia* in the context with the Spirit needs to be distinguished from the common, namely in the practice of persons and relationships. This may get confusing since the root for *koinonia* is *koinos* (common, belonging to several, or of which several are partakers). *Koinonia*, however, is not a static description of the local church that can describe any common gathering or association, which many local churches fall into. *Koinonia* is the dynamic relational process of the church taken from *koinoneo*, which defines those who participate, who are vulnerable partakers of and thus who intimately share in what the church has in *common* together in Christ with the Spirit—not what the common church is or has commonly that is shaped by its surrounding context. This uncommon *koinonia* is also discussed further in the next chapter.

What the church has in common together 'in Christ' with the Spirit is the primacy of persons and relationships together in the wholeness of the embodied and palpable Word's likeness; only this composes the *koinonia* of those belonging to the uncommon family of God. Therefore, the local church partakes of and shares in the vulnerable and intimate participation of its persons and relationships whole-ly in their primacy together as the family of Christ, not just the body of Christ. All else that the local church participates in is secondary, at best, to this primacy and must be integrated, if not redeemed, to what's primary and thus good (always with wholeness) for the church.

Neither secondary participation nor selective participation constitutes the relational process of *koinonia* primary for the church and church membership. This may appear as an ideal or unrealistic expectation—which would eliminate the communal church with a common purse as an option—that is not a priority for the church, especially when a local church's survival is the main consideration. After all, how many persons

would join such a fellowship? Yet, we must not minimize or dismiss the relational consequence of Ananias and Sapphira's participation and its relational significance for the church to unfold in wholeness or to merely survive reduced and fragmented (Acts 5:1-11). The regional and global church took what happened seriously, without considering participation an ideal or unrealistic expectation to be accountable for, as "great fear seized the whole church and all who heard of these things." Does this hold the church accountable today for what fills its membership, and hold members accountable for their participation? The integrity of *koinonia* is at stake here, and the contemporary church cannot avoid what composes the primacy of wholeness.

The early regional church had to deal with this issue, when distinction-making in church practice by Hebrew members in the treatment of Hellenist members was exposed to reveal an inequity in the general fellowship. Hellenist "widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food" (Acts 6:1). Their need was important yet the situation was secondary to the primacy of persons and relationships and the relational consequence this treatment had on the integrity of *koinonia* as God's family. The apostles responded in relational terms to this primacy, not by making the situation primary but integrating the secondary into the primacy of all their persons and relationships together; and the priority of their relational response "pleased the whole *koinonia* community" (6:2-5).

In spite of the church's corrective relational action, what this relational consequence also exposed was the local-regional church's provincialism (perhaps inadvertently narrow in focus) that centered on the surrounding context of Jerusalem, and thus limited and/or constrained the nature of the global church for all nations (the major concern of Luke, cf. 6:7). The word of God spreading in and around Jerusalem, however, could not constrain the palpable Word, whose presence and involvement in ongoing reciprocal relationship together—notably with Stephen (6:5,10; 7:55) and with Philip (8:39)—used Stephen's martyrdom and subsequent great persecution against the church to force them out of their provincialism and into the contexts of all nations. This was a critical relational process in order for the global church to unfold transformed in wholeness, the wholeness of Christ. Without the presence of the palpable Word and reciprocal involvement with the person of the Spirit face to face, the church does not unfold in wholeness—regardless of the church's membership, resources, situation and circumstances, even in spite of its related corrective action (as witnessed above). This irreplaceable relational process unfolds for the church in ongoing involvement in *reciprocating contextualization* (noted previously) with the palpable Word in order to address the surrounding contexts (as in the *ek-eis* relational dynamic), and to be distinguished whole and have the significance of wholeness by ongoing involvement in *triangulation* (e.g. connecting a situation with connection between the church and the palpable Word, as in the process of navigation) with the palpable Word, to be guided in those specific situations and circumstances. Without this relational involvement with the palpable Word, the church is faced with contexts, situations and circumstances in which it isn't, or doesn't know how to be, distinguished and significant. This lack of involvement leaves the church susceptible to, if not already subject to, the surrounding influences, which then shape the church's identity and function according to those common terms.

While the early church was forced out of its provincialism, this did not automatically result in the complete transformation of their theology and practice. Ups and downs continued to qualify the unfolding of the global church, and this required intrusive relational action by the whole palpable Word (both Jesus along with the Spirit) to intervene for the wholeness of the church family for all persons, peoples and nations. Paul became the main focus of their intrusive relational work (Acts 9:1-31), followed by the further pursuit of Peter's theology and practice (10:9-11:18). The palpable Word's relational work with Paul and Peter was the key for the global church to make the necessary pivotal shift to be composed by the primacy of all persons in equalized relationships together without distinctions of 'better or less'. This was indispensable and thus nonnegotiable, so that God's family would indeed be for all nations (15:1-35). The presence and involvement of the palpable Word was indeed available to all persons for relationship together, because the experiential truth and relational reality became definitive to the church that "God has made no distinctions between *persons, peoples and nations*" (15:9). The relational outcome was unequivocal for distinguishing the church in the wholeness of God's uncommon family.

This initial outcome proved pivotal for the global church's theology but its practice still had ups and downs. Trajectories of the old kept colliding with the relational path of the new for the redemptive changes required for the church to unfold transformed in wholeness—just as Nicodemus learned from the embodied Word. Notably colliding with the new was Peter's old practice that continued to make distinctions between Jews and Gentiles, with the relational consequence of discrimination against the latter in spite of his theology corrected by the palpable Word. This was the disparity for which Paul confronted Peter in his *hypokrisis* (Gal 2:11-14). Paul also made it the relational imperative that church theology and practice be integrated integrally for the church's whole ontology and function (Col 3:15-16)—an integration that the academy has increasingly lacked. And if this integral interaction is diminished, even for practical reasons—including for self-determination and scholarship—the church is renegotiated by human terms and becomes determined by human shaping, mainly influenced by the surrounding context and what commonly prevails (e.g. 1 Cor 4:6-7).

The palpable Word, therefore, continued to pursue the churches composing the global church, clarifying and correcting both their theology and practice in order for them to be whole in church ontology and function. The face of Jesus in post-ascension with the Spirit composed the palpable Word's communication for the church unfolding in history, which the contemporary church cannot deny as communicated in relational terms directly to us to "hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev 2-3). What is evident throughout the palpable Word's vulnerable and intimate involvement is the intersection of trajectories of the old by the relational path of the new, and their necessary collision for the church to be transformed in wholeness—not merely re-formed in what is perceived commonly as good for the church, which likely includes most innovations for an emerging church. The church (local, regional, global) unfolds transformed in wholeness only through ongoing relational involvement with the palpable Word—involved together ongoingly in reciprocating contextualization with the surrounding global context, and in triangulation with the surrounding situations and circumstances, along with ongoing involvement in the primacy of relationship with each other. And anything less and any

substitutes for and from the church unfold neither whole nor distinguished as God's uncommon church family.

This is the challenge facing the church today, and likely confronting the church "knocking on its door," which the face of the whole palpable Word's vulnerable involvement ongoingly presents in irreplaceable, irreducible and nonnegotiable reciprocal relationship together face to face.

The Church Face to Face

When the church is willing and ready to meet the challenge facing us today, and open the relational door, we must come face to face first with the glory of God's presence and involvement. 'Must' emerges from *dei* to unfold by the nature of God and how God participates in relationship, and what is necessary for us by this nature that makes it irreducible and nonnegotiable. Thus, this 'must' does not emerge from *opheilo* to unfold as an obligation that one is obliged to fulfill as one's duty or even morally. Next, the church must come face to face with each other in the church, with the relational involvement of family love just as experienced face to face with God's presence and involvement. On the basis of this face-to-face relational involvement and its relational outcome, the church then shares itself face to face with the world in the uncommon relational process of God's whole and uncommon family.

Face to Face with God's Presence and Involvement

The face (*paneh*) of God's presence and involvement unfolded from God's definitive blessing for God's whole family (Nu 6:24-26). This *paneh* was the presence of God that Peter illuminated at Pentecost as the palpable Word. Before the palpable Word unfolded, the embodied Word unfolded "in the face of Christ," who constituted "the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God," and thereby "who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God" (2 Cor 4:4,6). Who came and what has come become merely the transmission of information when Paul's words are rendered in referential terms. In the relational terms composing Paul's words, however, who and what unfold are distinguished beyond the glory commonly attributed to God and Christ.

Glory (*kabod* in OT, *doxa* in NT) involves the honor, majesty, splendor and prestige that we usually assume as attributes of God. With these attributes, God's glory becomes a static condition that is too vague when we want to know who, what and how God is. For Judaism in the OT, the image of God's glory is also mainly characterized as strength and power (e.g. Ex 15:6,11; 16:6-8; Ps 24:6-8; 29:1-4; 59:9,17). This may help us know what God *does* or can do but insufficient to know who, what and how God *is*. What this points to goes beyond having some information about God's glory to having direct connection with the glory of who, what and how God is—that is, the relational connection with God face to face that emerged between God and Moses (Num 12:6-8) and unfolded from God's definitive blessing.

The face of the embodied Word deepens this image and glory of God to reveal to us whole-ly what is integral to God's glory: (1) the qualitative being of God signifying the very heart of God, (2) the intimate relational nature of the whole of God, and (3) the vulnerable presence of the whole and holy God, who vulnerably participates in relationship both by his intimate relational nature and with his whole heart. That is, beyond merely attributes and what God does, this distinguished relational dynamic of God's glory unfolded in the vulnerable presence of the innermost of God's heart, who was intimately involved by the face of Christ in whole relational terms for the new face-to-face relationship together in wholeness—the new relationship (*siym* with *shalom*) promised in God's definitive blessing and now fulfilled with the face of Christ. The relational significance of face, therefore, is integral to God's glory and for knowing the glory of who, what and how God is, just as Paul made unequivocally definitive of the face of Christ.

The unmistakable face of Christ is our relational connection with the glory of who, what and how God is, which involves the righteousness of the whole and uncommon God. Yet, this relational connection by the nature of God's glory must be in the integral relational process (1) with the innermost of our whole person signified by our heart for our righteousness to be compatible, (2) only in reciprocal relationship together face to face, heart to heart, and thus (3) vulnerably involved ongoingly. For this relational process to be whole in relationship together with the vulnerable face of God, Jesus tore open the temple curtain and removed the veil between us—signifying the limits and constraints existing in the relationship—in order to be free from the *old* and vulnerable in the *new* for the ongoing intimate relational involvement face to face. Moses' face-to-face connection with God was transient, but now with the face of Christ and by the face of the palpable Word this new face-to-face relationship together in wholeness—promised by the face of God (enacted with *siym* and *shalom*, Num 4:26)—has become the experiential truth for us to have as our experiential reality (2 Cor 3:12-18; cf. Heb 10:19-22).

For the Word to be palpable today, it must be composed beyond the referentialization of the Word and be composed in relational terms by the Word's presence and involvement. For the palpable Word to be present and involved today, the Word must intrude with face, the face distinguishing the trinitarian persons composing the palpable Word. The reality of this relational process cannot be avoided if we want to experience God's presence and involvement. Yet, the palpable Word remains elusive for us when we pursue the power of the Spirit instead of the face of the Spirit; and the face of the palpable Word is ambiguous when we focus on spiritual gifts rather than on the primacy of the person of the Spirit in reciprocal relationship together.

The only experiential truth the church can claim is as revealed:

The face of the whole palpable Word is vulnerably present and intimately involved for the church to be ongoingly connected in whole relational terms with the glory of who, what and how God is, in order for the church to be relationally involved ongoingly in reciprocal relationship together face to face, so that the church will unfold distinguished whole-ly as God's uncommon family in the primacy of persons without distinctions in relationships together face to face—the new face-to-face relationship together in wholeness without the veil of relational distance.

Face to face with God may not be an appealing process to those in sociocultural contexts where this kind of relationship is not the norm, especially as the digital age pervades the globalizing world to compound the loss of face-to-face relational connection. Yet, traditional spirituality is not necessarily the alternative for Christians and churches to turn to in order to be involved with God face to face. In fact, many spiritual disciplines focus us more on secondary matters like method, techniques, what to do, and inadvertently cast a fog on the primacy of face-to-face relationship with God. The relational consequence of such engagement in spite of good intentions is to reinforce or even sustain relational distance, albeit with the illusion and simulation of something deeper taking place.

Moreover, and this is equally important, in this integral relational process of face-to-face relationship, the church cannot make relational connection with the face of the palpable Word by its theology, however correct it is. Nor can the church be relationally involved with the face of the palpable Word through its ministry or organizational practice. The presence and involvement with the face of the palpable Word can only be connected and involved with directly by the face of our persons in compatible presence and involvement, who are congruent face to face. And this relational compatibility and congruence in relational terms must start with church leaders for this relational practice to permeate the church. The early church leaders followed the embodied Word with commitment and gave priority to the word of God with dedication (Acts 6:2-4), yet they missed or ignored Jesus' earlier teaching and interactions about the insignificance of food and human distinctions (e.g. Mt 15:1-20). This gap in the Jesus tradition of the apostles was demonstrated by Peter's interpretive framework and lens on purity and at the church summit in Jerusalem, whose leadership had relational consequences in the church (as just discussed). What this reflects is that their engagement was with a referentialized Word and perhaps with their selectivity of the Word, both of which would be incompatible with the face of the palpable Word's presence and involvement as well as incongruent with face-to-face reciprocal relationship together. Church leaders today must account for their engagement of the Word as well as the Word they engage.

The face of the palpable Word is unmistakable, and the face of the Father's ongoing vulnerable presence and intimate involvement is irreplaceable for the church to function with nothing less than face-to-face relationship together as family. The experiential truth of "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" involves the experiential reality that God is elusive in practice (if not in theology) for those in the church until connected directly in face-to-face relationship. If and when the church (notably starting with its leadership) makes itself vulnerable to the Word beyond its referentialization to the face of the palpable Word, the church will come face to face with the whole Word and unfold in the relational outcome distinguished by who came and what has come, and therefore distinguished as God's whole and uncommon family—nothing less and no substitutes, without the shaping influence of reductionism.

On the basis of the above face-to-face relational outcome, now the church must face—again, by the nature of God's relational terms and not out of obligation and duty—a likely more difficult involvement, face to face with each other in God's family.

Face to Face with Each Other

When Mary came face to face with Jesus to sit at his feet to follow him, she breached sociocultural barriers that also put her directly face to face with the other disciples and indirectly with her sister Martha; there is no indication how the disciples acted with Mary but Martha objected based on the cultural norm (Lk 10:38-42). Later, when Mary responded face to face with the embodied Word for an intimate connection, her face intruded on the faces of the other disciples, whose faces kept their relational distance as they contested such involvement with the substitute of ministry (Mt 26:1-13)—which also exposed their indirect connection with Jesus through their serving, contrary to the primacy of relationship that Jesus made imperative for discipleship (Jn 12:26). When the Twelve were faced with inequity in the church, they created a necessary division of labor for the body of Christ to meet its needs, but there is no indication from these leaders of the face-to-face relational involvement with those persons in the primacy of relationship together as the family of Christ (Acts 6:1-7). When these church leaders were faced with the relational consequence of making distinctions in the church, they had to come face to face with the reality of all persons and relationships composing the church in its primacy (Acts 10:23-48; 15:1-35).

What emerges from these examples, which are not exhaustive, are both the relational challenge and difficulty that Christians have with face-to-face connection and involvement with each other in God's family. Church history and the contemporary church certainly have an exhausting list of their own examples of this relational challenge and difficulty; and this primary problem with face-to-face relationships keeps unfolding along the spectrum of our human condition in the church and with a diversity of simulations shaped by our particular sociocultural lens.

When Paul addressed the fragmentation in the body of Christ in Corinth, the primary issue he confronted was their face-to-face relationships and the primacy of being involved with each other face to face by family love. Paul vulnerably engaged them face to face with his whole person from inner out (1 Cor 2:1-5) in the involvement of family love (4:14-15,21, cf. 8:1), and the face of the person who emerged from Paul reflected his face-to-face involvement with the face of the palpable Word (2:9-13). In Paul's theology and practice, therefore, the primacy of persons and relationships that distinguishes the church as God's whole family unfolds only in face-to-face relational involvement with each other together—without the veiled face of relational distance (2 Cor 3:16-18) and without the relational barriers of distinctions preventing face-to-face connection (Eph 2:14-18). For Paul, eliminating these limits and constraints makes persons vulnerable for the intimate involvement necessary to be whole together and to live whole in face-to-face relationship together in likeness of the face of the whole palpable Word (Eph 2:19-22; 3:19; 4:12-16, 23-24).

What keeps emerges to make evident for the primacy of persons and relationships in the church is the need for the primacy of the face of each person and their face-to-face relationships with each other. This primacy of relational involvement is the family love that composes the irreplaceable infrastructure of the church. God's family love is no ideal for the church but the experiential truth and reality that constituted the church by the loving relational involvement of the face of the embodied Word, further extended *into* the face of the palpable Word. The primary enactment of God's *agape*-love is not what God

does with sacrifice. That is only an indirect expression of love and thus always secondary (though not unimportant) to the primacy of direct relational involvement. Moreover, indirect love is a common substitute for the direct involvement and experience of love. For God, there is no experiential truth and reality of love without the face of the one who loves, nor is there without the face-to-face connection by the one who is loved. In other words, God loves only with the face of God and we experience God's love directly only in face-to-face connection together.

The reality facing the church is that without face there is no face-to-face communication of love; at best, there is only the referential term of love that merely transmits the information about God's love for us. While it is certainly nice to be informed of God's or others' love for us, that is an inadequate substitute for experiencing the love directly. This direct involvement of love is at the heart of what is primary for persons in their relationships. 'Face with face to face' is the experiential truth and reality of God's love and also of our love both for God and for others (including family and friends). The global church cannot appeal to its cultural diversity to compose and justify its practice of persons and relationships, and thereby expect to be distinguished and have significance as God's whole and uncommon family unfolding in God's family love.

When Jesus pointed to his embodied departure, he gave all his disciples the relational imperative that will define who they are, and thereby whose they are: "that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you *share* love for one another" (Jn 13:34-35). Merely to "*have* love for one another" does not necessarily involve the relational action that Jesus makes imperative. This defining relational imperative was communicated by Jesus in the subjunctive mood because the love to be enacted by his disciples had two qualifying contingencies:

1. His disciples are to love on the relational (not referential) basis "just as I have loved you," not similar to or like but "exactly as I have loved you." Jesus was not pointing to his example for his disciples to emulate, as is the common practice; rather Jesus highlighted how "I, the face of my person, have been vulnerably and intimately involved in face-to-face relationship with you." Besides whatever else Jesus did, including his forthcoming sacrifice on the cross, the face of his relational involvement was the primacy of love that is the only relational basis for his disciples to love—even over sacrifice, just as Jesus shared his love directly with others while *on* the cross. The contingency for his disciples is that in order for his love to be an experiential reality (not referential information) for them, they must by nature have face-to-face relational connection together with him; and having his love indirectly does not fulfill this contingency.
2. Only as the first contingency is met ongoingly—the relational experience of the face of the palpable Word's love is ongoing—can his disciples expect to "love one another." Yet, the experience of "I have loved you" is always qualified by how Jesus was relationally involved with them: the vulnerable face of his person intimately involved face to face. On the relational basis of 'face with face to face', all of Jesus' disciples are to love one another. This relational process not only qualifies *agape*-love but establishes the contingency for how his disciples' *agape*-

love is relationally involved with one another: the vulnerable face of our person intimately involved face to face.

When these two contingencies are met ongoingly, the experiential truth and reality of God's family love flows in the primacy of persons and relationships of the church. Accordingly, the face of these persons involved in face-to-face relationship with each other unfolds vulnerably and intimately to distinguish the primacy of who they are and whose they are as God's whole and uncommon family. This relational outcome composes the irreplaceable infrastructure of the church—the heart of the church not in secondary organizational terms as the body of Christ but only in primary relational terms as the family of Christ.

Persons being vulnerable for the intimate involvement of family love is not optional but required for the church to be whole and live whole in face-to-face relationship together in likeness of the face of the whole palpable Word. Vulnerableness and intimacy are in integral interaction and should not be separated. Being vulnerable is not an end in itself or it will shift into self-determination as merely transparency or accessibility. The only relational purpose of being vulnerable is for intimacy in relationships together. The glory of God involves the intimacy of the trinitarian persons in the face of the whole of God's innermost heart, vulnerably integrated in the relational nature of the Trinity's intimate involvement with each other; and the vulnerable heart of this relational God created us in his intimate likeness as persons and in relationships.

Intimacy is a need that all persons were created to have, which was whole-ly responded to and completely filled in the beginning by face-to-face relationship together (Gen 2:18,25). Even the human brain verifies the need for relational connection, triggering the release of its “master chemical” called oxytocin.¹ From the beginning, however, that intimacy was substituted with illusion and simulations in relationships, thereby redefining intimacy with various alternatives—notably quantitative from outer in that required ‘cover-ups’ and confused sex with intimacy—that reduced intimacy from face-to-face relational involvement. Intimacy in the beginning was defined in whole relational terms by the innermost heart of the whole person who is involved with the heart of another whole person in order to enact the primacy of face-to-face relational connection that God created for relationship together in wholeness—not the association of fragmentary parts of what persons do and have, which is the common substitute that prevails in the human context. The need for this intimacy may not be readily apparent in the midst of alternative substitutes today shaped by our surrounding contexts. Sex has been a classic substitute and social media has become the modern alternative feeding our need for intimacy. Yet, church gatherings create similar illusion and simulations, whereby indirect relational connections are mistaken for face-to-face involvement.

The human heart, however, is not confused by intimacy substitutes, though it is easily misled in search for intimacy. And the Christian hearts occupying our churches may even be less aware of their God-created need for intimacy with each other, either assuming intimacy (or its so-called substitute) with God is sufficient or assuming what they experience at church is all that's available now with more to come in heaven. In the meantime, God's family love is engaged and experienced by what persons do rather than

¹ This discussion is found in John T. Cacioppo and William Patrick, *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008).

in the primacy of persons involved vulnerably face to face with each other for intimate relationship together distinguished as God's family.

The main obstacle to intimacy is the need to be vulnerable with the face of our person. A vulnerable face doesn't hide behind the mask of distinctions such as roles, titles, resources, achievements, social and physical traits, or anything else a person does or has. This certainly can be very threatening to a person, especially if their identity or self-worth is at stake. If the threat to be vulnerable is perceived to be greater than the need for intimacy, then face-to-face relationships will be regarded as, at best, only an ideal that is too impractical to pursue, much less experience. Yet, the cost to be vulnerable is directly correlated to the need for redemptive change by the person, in which the old can die so that the person can be transformed to the new. Who and what unfold is the relational outcome of intimacy with the face of the palpable Word, which indeed requires the face of the person for this transformation to unfold. Does the need for this intimacy get lost in persons' fear to be vulnerable? If it does, then the reality is not about persons avoiding vulnerability. Rather the reality is about persons protecting and maintaining their engagement in self-determination. Being vulnerable exposes the weaknesses, deficiencies, failures, and all other shortcomings of persons, which reduce their self-determined value—measured, of course, in a comparative process with others that precludes such vulnerability. Any threat to this effort is a threat to the person's survival, and this perception is contrary to and in conflict with the face of the palpable Word, and also is incompatible with and incongruent to face-to-face relationship together with each other—which illusion and simulations subtly mask out of necessity.

Ironically, but not surprisingly, self-determination is maintained even through participation in church ministry. Accordingly, protecting this engagement requires minimizing or eliminating face-to-face involvement together, a process promoted by many church leaders and participated in by many church members. To be vulnerable with each other would expose the effort by these persons to be defined and determined by what they do in church ministry; this was the dynamic the disciples engaged with Mary. Unfortunately, these persons are widely reinforced by others in and related to the church, who then together sustain church practice minimizing or eliminating face-to-face connections. Is it any wonder that intimacy as created by God is hard to find at church, and that church experience leaves many hearts hungering for more? The heart of the church, its irreplaceable infrastructure, has been replaced by a substitute.

Face-to-face relations are perceived as disrespectful in some cultures, and intimacy is seen as shameful in others. This is a reality in the diversity of the world, which needs to be understood more in their *common*-ness rather than their uniqueness. The question facing the global church is whether the fragmentary human context will shape the church in such diversity (as in multiculturalism or pluralism, cf. the church in Thyatira, Rev 2:19-20), or whether "the wholeness of Christ is the only determinant" for the church, as Paul made imperative (Col 3:15). For Paul, this is nonnegotiable if the church expects to unfold transformed in wholeness with the palpable Word. Some may perceive this as dogmatism, yet only because their theological lens has been narrowed down to referential terms or is shaped by a theological anthropology of reduced ontology and function. The issue is not between multicultural and monocultural, between a diversity of narratives and a grand-metanarrative. The issue from the beginning remains between reductionism and wholeness, and what is only fragmentary or whole. Therefore,

anything that minimizes or eliminates face-to-face involvement is simply fragmentary; anything that prevents intimacy can never be whole.

These are the contingencies in Jesus' relational imperative for all his disciples to "love one another just as I loved you" that are nonnegotiable. They are nonnegotiable not because of dogmatism but because the alternatives narrow down persons and relationships to reduced ontology and function, which prevents them from their primacy of being whole and living together in wholeness. These are the experiential truth and reality confronting the global church today in the diversity of a globalizing world, more fragmentary than ever in the encompassing digital age. And the challenge facing the global church in this fragmentation is to be distinguished by the primacy of its persons and relationships together in wholeness as God's whole and uncommon family, and thus distinguished from the fragmentary and the common. For the global church to meet this challenge it must first meet the two contingencies for all of Jesus' disciples. Otherwise, it will not be distinguished in who and whose they are and thus not be of significance in, to and for the world.

Therefore, until the church—any and all churches in the global North and South—comes face to face with each other in the relational involvement of God's family love, the church will remain fragmentary and not be whole, regardless of its correct theology (as with the church in Ephesus, Rev 2:1-4) or its successful practice (as with the church in Sardis, Rev 3:1-2). When persons and relationships become primary in the church only on this relational basis, this church steps out on the relational path to wholeness with the face of the palpable Word. For the church to unfold in the primacy of its persons and relationships, the faces of those belonging to the church must be involved face to face with each other along with the palpable Word. Anything less than or any substitutes for face-to-face involvement diverts the church from the path to wholeness, with the relational consequence of hearts longing for intimacy, persons living as relational orphans, and churches serving as orphanages—all of which have no significance and bear no good news for persons and relationships occupying the fragmentary human context in the human condition of reduced ontology and function.

Face to Face with the Globalizing World

The breadth of human migration in the world today exceeds any precedent in human history, with the tide still rising. The depth underlying this migration descends to the level only established by the precedent of the human condition and its fragmentation of the globalizing world. This is the human context facing the global church. And the immediate question for the church is "Has it met the challenge of face-to-face connection and involvement both with the palpable Word and with each other in order to face the challenge of the globalizing world and be involved face to face with this human context?"

Many Christians and churches would likely ask "Why do we have to wait and meet the other challenges before we address the needs of the world?" That's a fair question, yet one that's focused only on situations and circumstances, and that does not address their underlying depth of the human condition. Would we be quick to act if that action reflected, reinforced or sustained the human condition? Such premature action can be misguided—for example, serving a common good that's 'good without wholeness'—and thus in reality does exactly that. The human condition from the beginning has

promoted the common ‘good without wholeness’, and such effort for this common good then inadvertently is complicit with the human condition. Moreover, the human condition is commonly perceived to operate only in ‘sin without reductionism’, and any effort that addresses sin without reductionism in the world also then unknowingly reinforces and sustains the human condition. So, yes, all Christians and churches must by nature wait and meet the above challenges before they meet the challenge facing them in the world.

This qualified relational process also unfolds from Jesus’ contingencies of loving each other, which now extends to his disciples facing the world: “By *meeting these contingencies* everyone will know that you are my disciples” (Jn 13:35). And as Jesus prayed for his family: “*Just as you Father have sent me into the world, on this relational basis I have sent them into the world*”; therefore, living whole in face-to-face relationship together is required in order to “be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you...so that the world may believe that you have sent me...that *the church family* may become completely *whole in our likeness* so that the world may know *of our presence and involvement* and have loved *the church family* just as you loved me” (Jn 17:18,21, NIV, 23). This integral relational process unfolds from the *ek-eis* relational dynamic Jesus composed in his prayer (17:14-18, discussed below), which provides the ongoing relational connection necessary with the palpable Word for reciprocating contextualization and triangulation with the world for the church family to be distinguished and have significance in the human context.

It is indispensable for the church to be distinguished as the family of Christ and thus to face the world in the relational significance just as the Trinity has loved the church family. Therefore, it is nonnegotiable for the church to be involved relationally face to face with the world just as how the embodied Word and palpable Word have been and continue to be involved with the world. This face-to-face involvement is composed only in whole relational terms uncommon to the common—thus nonnegotiable and irreducible to the common shaping from the surrounding context—in order to be distinguished whole as God’s family in the world so that the fragmented globalizing world can be made whole.

In the Great Commission (Mt 28:16-20), Jesus already assumes that his disciples will face the world, so there is no imperative to “Go” but just the qualifier for “as you go...” (in Gk aorist passive). Yet, there are also contingencies for his disciples going into the world. Jesus prayed that his family is “not *of* the world just as I am not *of* the world” (Jn 17:14,16). Even though his family does not belong to the world, they are “in [*en*] the world” (v.11). So, how does his church family live *in* the world and not become *of* the world and thus belong to it?

Being distinguished from the world involves the contingency for his church family to be relationally connected to “just as I am not *of* the world.” That is, Jesus illuminated the relational process necessary to be connected both to the face of who he is and to the uncommon source of what he is—“not *of* the world.” To be connected to the uncommon source of what he is in order not to belong to the common’s world requires the distinguished relational connection with the Uncommon “out of [*ek*] the world.” On the one hand, Jesus does not pray for this connection in terms of his family’s spatial location (e.g. as separatists or in asceticism); but, on the other hand, Jesus composes the relational dynamic for his family to be relationally connected and involved with the Uncommon distinctly “*ek* the common” and its shaping influence. *Ek* is the face-to-face

involvement with the uncommon God that distinguishes his family as ‘whose it is’, so that it will “not belong to the common” while “in the world” and thus have the significance of the identity of ‘who it is’ without ambiguity or shallowness (as Jesus made imperative, Mt 5:13-16). In other words, when Jesus said “out of the world,” he wasn’t transmitting information about his family’s future location but clearly communicated the relational condition of his family’s ongoing involvement with their uncommon God, in reciprocating contextualization while in the context of the common’s world.

On the basis of this antecedent contingency being met with *ek*-relational involvement, Jesus then relationally sends (or commissions, *apostello*) his family “into [*eis*] the world” with the interrelated contingency “just as you *Father* have sent me into the world” (v.18). Just as the face of Jesus’ person was relationally involved both face to face and intrusively into the world, his disciples follow his whole person (not mere example) on his vulnerable and intrusive relational path into the world—to be “where *and how* I am” (Jn 12:26). This integral *ek-eis* relational dynamic is the only basis for the family of Christ to be in the world, and to face the common distinguished as God’s uncommon family, and to come face to face with the fragmented human condition as God’s whole and uncommon family. These contingencies serve to distinguish the church in its relational significance just as the face of the embodied Word and the palpable Word have been vulnerably present and intimately involved face to face both with persons belonging to God’s family and with persons belonging to the world (who also could occupy the church).

In contrast to other disciples in the ancient Mediterranean world who limited their discipleship to following the teachings or example of their teachers, Jesus unequivocally defined his disciples as persons who follow the face of his person in the primacy of face-to-face relationship together, wherever and however his face is involved (as noted above in Jn 12:26). These persons are the “disciples of all nations” whom Jesus made imperative in his commission to make, nurture, mentor, train (*matheteuo*) in order to compose his family of all persons, peoples as well as nations (Mt 28:19-20). The faces of these persons are involved in face-to-face relationship together integrally with the whole and uncommon God and with each other in God’s family, whereby with the *ek-eis* relational dynamic they are involved face to face “into the world.” What unfolds for the church in this relational process emerges from this experiential truth and reality:

All the disciples composing the family of Christ are called to follow the face of Jesus’ person (over his teachings and example) in the primacy of relationship together face to face (not for the primacy of serving); and with the primacy of persons and relationships together, Jesus calls his followers together to be whole, just as the persons and relationship together in the Trinity are—called to be whole in likeness of nothing less than and no substitutes of the whole and uncommon God; and what unfolds integrally from his ‘call to be whole’ are the faces of his family members now “sent into the world *to be whole* just as the Father sent me into the world” and thus to live whole in the primacy of face-to-face relationship together, and on this relational basis to be involved face to face with the fragmented condition of the world to make it whole; therefore, the church (local, regional, global) as the family of Christ is integrally by nature inseparably ‘called to be whole’ and ‘sent to

make whole', nothing less from the subtle 'sin without reductionism' and no substitutes from the common 'good without wholeness'.

The church family cannot ignore or be unresponsive to the breadth and depth of the human condition, especially since that condition likely also continues to shape the ontology and function of the persons and relationships belonging to the church. As emerged from the beginning, the church is accountable for simplistically practicing 'good without wholeness' and for simply addressing 'sin without reductionism'—"Where are you?" and "What are you doing here?"

If the face of Christians and churches are not going to be vulnerable in order to be involved face to face with the world—"just as I am with you and have been sent into the world"—then they neither are distinguished from the common prevailing for persons and relationships in human contexts that composes the human condition; nor do they have significance for persons and relationships in reduced ontology and function to make them whole—not only for those in the world but more immediately for those within the church. Without the persons and relationships of the church being distinguished and having significance in wholeness, do those Christians and churches have any justification engaging the world in service to Christ? They, for example, cannot use conventional evangelism for their purpose and appeal to the Great Commission for their basis, because "just as I am and have been sent" will not support or justify such engagement.

The practice of much evangelism today in reality does not proclaim the whole gospel of *who* came and *what* has come. When evangelism proclaims a fragmentary gospel, its focus may be on 'saved from sin' but sin has been narrowed down to 'sin without reductionism'. How could such practice, for example, critique a social gospel or the prosperity gospel? Moreover, when evangelism is engaged without face, its salvation becomes truncated merely to being saved *from* sin (and only sin without reductionism) and lacks the complete soteriology of integrally being saved *to* the whole ontology and function of persons and relationships together in God's whole and uncommon family. Without the face of persons and relationships in wholeness, how could such practice be identified with the face of the embodied Word to be distinguished in the world as the family of Christ? Without being distinguished by this face, how could such practice be involved face to face with the face of the palpable Word in order to have relational significance in the world for persons and relationships in the human condition of reduced ontology and function? Accordingly, many occupying churches today are either being shortchanged in their faith by the church, or also shortchanging the church (including God) by the shape of their faith. In either condition, do Christians and churches have any significance professing their faith at all?

To face a globalizing yet pluralistic world with competing faiths that is inevitably engaged in a comparative process constructing stratified relations and systems of inequality, the church is challenged today, yet not to be outstanding above others. Rather, in contrast and even in conflict, the church is challenged to be distinguished beyond what's common, and thus not stratified apart from others but with the significance of being vulnerably involved face to face with others who are apart, even with those others apart in the upper strata of human life. 'To be apart' has no distinction in the human condition because that's its common condition at all levels of human life. As the whole gospel makes definitive in experiential truth, it is not good for any and all who are apart

from the whole of persons and relationships whom God created, responds to and is involved with face to face for the primacy of their wholeness—just as and in likeness of the whole and uncommon God.

The distinguished depth and relational significance of Jesus’ “just as I am involved and have been sent” is illuminated for us in a key yet simple interaction (Lk 7:11-17), whose depth and significance are often not given much attention or simply not understood. In the practice of purity in Judaism, exposing oneself to uncleanness was avoided as much as possible—notably the common practices in the surrounding context—which became legalistic with the law as a template of conformity. The face of Jesus, however, vulnerably intruded into human contexts to make face-to-face connection with persons no matter what he exposed himself to. When he came face to face with a funeral procession, his face didn’t just observe or even participate in it (as was custom). The face of Jesus’ whole person was moved with compassion when he vulnerably came face to face with this widow at her only son’s funeral. With this relational connection first with the face of this widow, Jesus then intervened on her situation and essentially got his hands dirty, which thus assumed to dirty his face (i.e. according to Num 19:11-22). Yet, the issue of Jesus’ involvement in the world was not about purity. For him the issue was, and for his family it remains, the ongoing issue between the wholeness of persons and relationships, and their reduction in the surrounding contexts of the world—which may include the contexts of churches. What Jesus did next was only secondary to *how* he was involved face to face with her; and what he did must be integrated into the primacy of *why* he was involved or his secondary action (however outstanding) loses its significance. How and why so?

It is indispensable for the church to understand the face of Jesus’ involvement face to face with his family and with others in the world, in order for the face of the church today to be involved face to face “just as I am with you and have been sent to others.” The face of the embodied Word is often observed apart from his primary relational context and process “out of the world.” Then, of course, the focus on the Word shifts merely to what Jesus does and his teachings, both of which by themselves narrow down the Word without the relational significance of face. How Jesus was involved in this unexpected and seemingly arbitrary encounter, and why he was involved, are usually lost or ignored next to the miracle Jesus did. Yet, this miracle is really only secondary to the primary that it points to. The how and why underlying this common encounter illuminate the depth and significance of the face of Jesus’ “just as I am involved with you and have been sent to others.”

The face of Jesus’ heart opened to her and felt compassion for her person; and her situation was integrated into the primacy of her person. His feelings indicated the qualitative heart of his whole person, vulnerably present with his face in the human context, which cannot be narrowed down to what Jesus did. This also illuminated the depth level of his ongoing relational involvement face to face with those who were not whole and unable to function in wholeness, which Jesus made evident with Levi in the significance of Hosea 6:6. Without her son, this widow in the ancient Mediterranean world lacked value and would suffer social illness (*kakos*, as Jesus implied about Levi and Zacchaeus). Jesus responded to her by restoring her son—a further expression of the face of God’s whole relational response to the human condition.

In this seemingly limited moment, Jesus demonstrated more than his power over illness and death; and by this relational act beyond intervention, he demonstrated more than the limitations of a messianic role. The witnesses of this miracle were convinced that God had come to fulfill the covenant and messianic promise (Lk 7:16-17). Yet, the relational significance of what Jesus distinguished with this widow appears to be lost in their covenant and messianic expectations shaped by human terms, rather than the meaning of the covenant in God's relational response composed only in whole relational terms. This reflects the absence of whole theological understanding and, consequently, it demonstrates lacking what indeed signifies good news for the human condition. In other words, their working theology and gospel were fragmentary.

Even though this widow was at risk in her situation and circumstances—not an unimportant reality that should not be ignored—it was her primary relational condition apart from wholeness that Jesus *faced* as fulfillment of God's relational response of grace, composing the gospel to restore persons and relationships together to wholeness and what Jesus saves *to*. This is the distinguished depth and relational significance by which the embodied Word sends his family *into* the world to *face* the persons and relationships composing the human condition; and this vulnerable involvement necessitates the *ek-eis* face-to-face relationship with the face of the palpable Word for the family of Christ to be distinguished and have significance *into* the common human contexts prevailing for all persons, peoples and nations.

The face of the embodied Word unfolded *into* the face of the palpable Word, who then unfolded *into* the face of Paul with the relational outcome for his whole theology and practice to unfold *into* the church family of Christ, so that the face of the church would unfold *into* the world face to face. The face of Paul further demonstrated with the palpable Word their involvement *into* the world by directly intruding face to face, for example, with the plurality of religions in the ancient Mediterranean world (Acts 17:16-34). What unfolded is how and why the church today needs to unfold *into* the modern pluralistic world.

Paul did not shy away from major issues about human life that were raised and debated by religion and science (e.g. cosmology), because involvement with the world necessarily included facing any aspect of human life “just as I am and have been sent.” In the pluralistic context of Athens, he went face to face *into* the central public forum (*agora*) of the city to address the vexing mystery of human knowledge facing the Athenians at the Areopagus.² And the light Paul shared to illuminate the gap (cf. the dark matter of modern physics) of human knowledge for the Epicurean (a likely forerunner to physics, tending at best, if at all, to deism) and Stoic (religious materialism which was pantheistic) philosophers would not be an anachronism in the halls of modern science, because Paul was addressing the same epistemological and hermeneutic issues. Modern physics, for example, estimates that only 20% of the matter in the universe is known to humans, which is why scientists have put their hope in the Large Hadron Collider and the Higgs boson to expand their estimate. Yet this guesstimate is based on perceiving the universe through the lens of a quantitative interpretive framework from modernism; and this also perceives the same human species in enlarged context yet still from outer in

² A full discussion of Paul's interaction in this public forum is found in my study *The Whole of Paul and the Whole in His Theology: Theological Interpretation in Relational Epistemic Process* (Paul Study, 2010). Online at <http://www.4X12.org>, 106-110, 112-113.

(jointly with neuroscience), and likewise constructs human knowledge from the bottom up (comparable to the tower of Babel, Gen 11:1-4). All of this engages in a process of reductionism, the bias of which is ignored apart from the presence of the whole and thus without the benefit of its illumination.

By coming face to face with this part of the world, Paul demonstrated for us how and why to be involved with any part of or issue in the world. The face of Paul with face-to-face involvement would have felt right at home today in the critical issues of cosmology, anthropology and epistemology. No doubt he would be saddened by how little has changed in these issues and by how much reductionism prevails.

When Paul highlighted the Athenians' "unknown god" (Acts 17:23), he went beyond contextualizing the gospel in their culture. This opened the door to their worldview to address their epistemological gap (*agnostos*) and the related hermeneutic blind spot (*agnoeo*) in their perceptual-interpretive lens. Paul challenged the framework of their worldview with the whole epistemic source (top down, inner out, 17:24-30) necessary for epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction—just as *tamiym* (being whole) functioned and the *pleroma* (completeness) of God revealed for Paul (as discussed previously). Moreover, in this decisive challenge Paul points to the implied yet definitive framework of his theological discourse—the wholeness of the embodied Word and the palpable Word who transformed his ontology and function to distinguish his whole theology and practice.

The wholeness of his theological systemic framework is rooted in revelation initiated by God and thus based on whole knowledge from top down in the relational epistemic process, not on fragmented knowledge constructed from bottom up in, at best, a limited epistemic process. It was from this whole systemic framework that Paul addressed the Athenians definitively about epistemology, cosmology, theological cognition and anthropology, their nature and qualitative-relational significance, and the good news that sheds the Light on their unknown—which otherwise would remain mysterious dark matter without it (as modern physics must discover). The outcome from this whole systemic framework in Paul's theological discourse made conclusive the theology of wholeness, without which the human species will remain reduced and fragmented, unable to realize their ontology in God's relational whole from top down, inner out.

Paul's address in the midst of the Areopagus challenged the assumptions of the Athenians' epistemology and their view of the *kosmos*. He also affirmed part of their knowledge (acknowledging an unknown god), yet Paul strongly implied the insufficiency of their epistemic process in not pursuing this course of knowledge further in the *kosmos*. This implication is understood by the theological clarity Paul made definitive elsewhere, notably in his Romans epistle.

Whole theology is crucial for intruding in the world, especially coming face to face with other religions. Knowledge about God shaped or constructed by human contextualization is no longer excusable, even with the best of intentions (Rom 1:20; Acts 17:30). Paul was unequivocal about the communicative dimension in the *kosmos*: "For what can be known about God is plain [*phaneros*, manifest, open, public] to them, because God has shown them [*phaneroo*, not merely *apokalypto*]" (Rom 1:19). What God has revealed is irreducible and thus not subject to reshaping, reconstruction (or deconstruction), any other revision or substitute from bottom up as well as outer in. Yet

this was how the Athenians perceived God and interpreted how God functioned, evidenced in Paul’s critique of their practice: “God...does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is served by human hands...an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals” (Acts 17:24-25, 29). These were reductions and substitutes of God that fragmented the whole of God, thus keeping God in the mysterious unknown and embedding them in the human relational condition disconnected from God’s wholeness. Likewise, human persons in general functioned in this reductionism with their substitutes: “for though they *had knowledge about* God, they did not *relationally respond* to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise...they *reduced and substituted* the glory [qualitative being and relational nature] of the *irreducible* God for images *shaped or constructed by* a mortal human being...they *substituted* the truth about God for a *reductionism based on human terms functioning in the bottom up and outer in of* the creature rather than *the top down, inner out of the whole of* the Creator” (Rom 1:21-24, 25).

Paul exposed the underlying issue of these persons described above with the clarity of his theological discourse fighting for the whole gospel, which then necessarily also amplified his fight to confront how they indeed functioned as inexcusable (1:20) and inescapable of accountability (1:24a, 26a, 28; Acts 17:30-31). In other words, these human persons engaged the reductionism of sin, functioning in ‘sin as reductionism’ by reshaping, reconstructing or redefining the qualitative whole of Creator-God, as well as the whole of human persons from inner out created in God’s likeness. Thus, they made substitutes by human shaping, construction and terms from bottom up that function in counter-relational work/practices from outer in—often signifying the ontological simulation and epistemological illusion of prevailing alternatives from reductionism, as Paul theologically clarified in the rest of Romans. Even with any good intentions on their part for the common good, they only promoted ‘good without wholeness’ and thus reinforced and sustained the human condition of reduced ontology and function.

When Paul revealed the unknown God to the Athenians, he challenged the assumptions of their theological cognition and their interpretation of how God functions (Acts 17:24-27, 29). This also involved challenging their assumptions about the human person. Their quantitative perception of God in outer-in terms reflected their perception of the human person defined from outer in by what they do: “God...does not live in shrines made by human hands,” nor is “the deity...like...an *quantitative* image formed by the *outer-in doings* of mortals.” Furthermore, God does not function on the basis of outer-in doings merely on quantitative terms for a quantitative purpose, which thus should not determine how humans function: the qualitative God is not “served by human hands, as though he needed anything” (perhaps Paul had Psalms 40:6 and 50:8-12 in the back of his mind). The term “serve” (*therapeuo*, 17:25) means to wait upon, minister to, or to serve as a *therapon* (servant, attendant, minister). Yet, a *therapon* needs to be distinguished from a common or domestic servant (*oiketes*) and a servant-slave (*doulos*). *Therapon* denotes a faithful friend to a superior, thus one who is relationally involved with the superior and responds in relational terms to the desires and concerns of that person. Accordingly, Paul was revealing that God is not *therapeuo* by a human person defined from the outer in of what one does or has. This exposes the influence of reductionism defining persons by their outer-in doing, which, for Paul, was not the function of a *therapon*, no matter how dedicated in *therapeuo*. In this, Paul critically revealed the

qualitative God functioning from inner out who, therefore, is *therapeuo* by only a *therapon* whose relational involvement as a faithful friend defines a qualitative person functioning from inner out—that is, the vulnerable face of the person involved in face-to-face relationship together. By this, the global church today needs to be distinguished with whole theological anthropology to intrude face to face into the world with the significance to make it whole.

Just as Paul demonstrated to the Athenians, the process to deeper knowledge and understanding necessitates first confronting the influence of reductionism in a secondary epistemic dynamic of deconstruction and reconstruction. This secondary epistemic dynamic is conjoined with its counterpart, the primary epistemic dynamic of the universe, in order to vulnerably engage the relational epistemic process for whole knowledge and understanding. As Paul did this for them, and continues to do this for his readers, his complete theological discourse made definitive the whole systemic framework within which the relational dynamic of all life is enacted and engaged and thus makes whole, nothing less and no substitutes. When reductionism is put into correct perspective, then what is indeed good news is clarified, whereby the gospel of wholeness can be understood in its complete relational significance.

What unfolds is irreplaceable for the church to understand face to face, receive as its experiential truth, and respond as its experiential reality. The vulnerable face and intimate face to face of the palpable Word *into* Paul has provided the whole theology and practice required to unfold *into* the family of Christ in order to distinguish the church unfolding *into* nothing less and no substitutes—unfolding integrally face to face with the whole and uncommon God’s presence and involvement, face to face with each other in the church with the relational involvement of God’s whole and uncommon family love, and face to face with the world in the uncommon relational process of God’s whole family.

Unfolding *Into* Nothing Less and No Substitutes

In the pluralistic world of multiple cultures, ideologies and religions—all of which compete in the human comparative process—the church (local, regional, global) is challenged, if not confronted, to be distinguished to have significance beyond what’s common. This brings us back to listening more carefully to what Jesus declared as paradigmatic and axiomatic for all his disciples: “The measure you use is the *church* you get” (Mk 4:24).

The embodied Word came to us with nothing less than the whole of God and no substitutes for “the glory of God in the face of Christ” (as Paul made conclusive, 2 Cor 4:6). The church must examine closely the measure it uses for who came and what has come because that’s the only church it gets. The issues for the church involve both its Christology and soteriology and the often neglected underlying importance of its theological anthropology and its view of sin. Do the church’s measures distinguish the church in the pluralistic world and give the church significance for the fragmentary human context?

The church cannot expect to be whole in its life together with each other and to live whole *into* the world with anything less and any substitutes in its theology and practice. Just as the vulnerable and intimate face of the whole embodied Word transitioned *into* the vulnerably present and intimately involved face of the whole palpable Word, this face of God came face to face with and thereby *into* the face of Paul in the reciprocal relational process that composed the whole theology and practice for the church. Whole theology and practice with the face of the whole palpable Word are the only experiential truth and reality that unfold *into* the family of Christ, God's whole and uncommon family. The church today, with all its parts, is accountable to unfold *into* nothing less and no substitutes.

Paul fought for nothing less and no substitutes for the family of Christ and against both anything less than wholeness in the church's theology and any substitutes for wholeness in the church's practice, no matter the quantity and/or success of the church's parts. His fight unfolded with nonnegotiable relational imperatives for the church in order that the measures used by the church have the relational outcome that distinguishes its theology and practice "just as who came and what has come." "The wholeness of Christ" is the only measure (*brabeuo*) for the face of persons and relationships face to face "called to one body to be whole" (Col 3:15)—the imperative measure of nothing less and no substitutes. Integrated with this relational imperative is to "let the face of the whole embodied Word *into* the vulnerably present and intimately involved face of the whole palpable Word" also "be intimately involved [*enoikeio*] in you face to face," for the unfolding of the church's involvement together with "one another" and its relational worship "to *the whole and uncommon* God," in the primacy of ongoing relationships together with nothing less and no substitutes (Col 3:16-17).

Paul's joint fight for the whole of the family of Christ and against reductionism in its theology and practice is more necessary today than is perceived. Nothing less and no substitutes are continuous issues for the church because reductionism is an ongoing influence with alternatives of anything less and any substitutes—namely with ontological simulations of what's good for the church by 'good without wholeness', and with epistemological illusion in church theology and practice of sin without reductionism. The presence and influence of reductionism in the church is problematic to address and thus change, when reductionism's most subtle influence on the church is either not recognized or ignored in the following: Christians and church selectivity of, with and in the Word, which exposes shaping God's communication by fragmentary human terms over the primacy of God's whole relational terms, and thereby also composing relationship with God on our terms..

When Christians and churches in the pluralistic world become selective in receiving and embracing what God reveals in relational terms, then they become simply a religion subject to comparative religions. Selectivity is not unique to modern times but emerged from the primordial garden ("Did God say those words?"). This process has been engaged throughout the history of God's people—evolving with ever increasing subtlety and sophistication, namely by traditions and critical studies of the Bible, and simply legitimated by sociocultural influences or just self-determination. As from the beginning, however, selectivity utilizes a narrowed-down epistemic field for God's words ("you will not die, be reduced or fragmented") and a biased hermeneutic/interpretive lens

(“know good and evil...become like God”) to selectively form the basis for its conclusions (“good for wisdom”).

Christians and churches need to understand the reality that using selectivity as the measure of the Word involves the following:

1. Selectivity is a seductive measure that opens the door to “free” persons and churches to engage explicitly or subtly in self-determination, the illusion and simulation of which necessitates a selective theological anthropology of reduced ontology and function that transposes the primacy of persons and relationships in God’s whole relational terms to the secondary position under fragmentary human terms.
2. Selectivity is a self-protective measure that closes the door to being vulnerable with the face of the person and thereby imposes limits and constraints on face-to-face connection both with God and with others, the measured engagement of which is legitimated both by that selective theological anthropology and by selectivity of God’s terms for relationship together—which intentionally yet subtly engages relationship with God on one’s own measured terms, perhaps justified by pragmatism or even by the stigma of dogmatism.

The subtlety of selectivity’s seductive and self-protective measures makes it quite easy to pervade churches today where self-determination prevails, even in collectivist contexts. Moreover, this subtle practice is quite honestly even the popular choice in churches where not being vulnerable with the face of persons and in relationships face to face are the norm, with the practice of the exception even frowned upon or marginalized.

Christians and churches cannot take lightly the selectivity of the Word, because the relational consequences directly bear upon the integrity of their identity and thus their witness to others. When Jesus made it imperative for all his disciples to “be relationally involved face to face with one another—that is, love—just as I am vulnerably and intimately involved with you,” Peter immediately focused on Jesus’ previous words and asked “Lord, where are you going?” (Jn 13:33-36). Was Peter selective with the embodied Word, not listening to the face of the Word or paying attention to the primacy of face-to-face involvement together just as Jesus was with him? In reality, Peter engaged selectivity’s seductive measure to establish his discipleship by self-determination rather than face-to-face involvement, which then also exposed his self-protective measure not to be vulnerable with the face of his person (13:37-38). It is not surprising but to be expected that later Jesus asked Peter “do you love me?” with the emphasis on “Follow me in the primacy of face-to-face relationship together.” Yet, even these relational words Peter heard selectively by his self-protective measure in order to keep relational distance from the face of the embodied Word’s primary terms for relationship together; accordingly, Peter diverted the attention to secondary matters, “Lord, what about him?” (Jn 21:17-22).

Part of the major relational consequences from Peter’s selectivity of the embodied Word and the palpable Word emerged with the neglect of minority members of the church (Acts 6:1) and discrimination in the church, due in large part to Peter’s false distinctions that resulted from his selective listening of Jesus’ earlier words on impurity (Acts 10-11). And the issue of discrimination in the church wasn’t resolved theologically

until later (Acts 15), nor was there transformation in Peter's practice until Paul had to confront him face to face in God's family love (Gal 2:11-14). Christians and churches cannot be selective about applying these relational consequences from their own selectivity.

Indeed, selectivity of and in the Word vulnerably revealed by the face of Christ, combined with selectivity (if not neglect) of the palpable Word present and involved ongoingly today, are immeasurably consequential for the church (local, regional, global). It affects the heart of the church, whose identity is the family of Christ and whose witness is distinguished and has significance only in the primacy of persons and relationship together in wholeness, nothing less and no substitutes, just as the palpable Word is involved with them to unfold whole together face to face with each other and *into* the world.

As long as the church engages in selectivity of the Word communicated in relational terms, it will neither be distinguished in its identity nor illuminate its witness. No matter what quantitative factors give the church distinction in human contextualization, this distinction at best only highlights its self-determination—as demonstrated by the church in Sardis, whose church practice was highly successful but without the significance of wholeness. As previously illuminated by the psalmist, only “the unfolding of your words gives light” (Ps 119:130) to distinguish the whole ontology and function of the face of God (v.135)—who vulnerably unfolded *into* the face of the embodied Word, who integrally unfolded *into* the palpable Word together in order to unfold *into* Paul, so that the church will unfold with the palpable Word *into* nothing less and no substitutes. For the church to dilute this relational process and fragment this ongoing reciprocal relationship exposes the influence of reductionism in its selective measure of the Word; and this measure used by the church determines the prevailing identity and practice the church gets in its ontology and function together and thus has in the world today. Church whole ontology and function can only be distinguished by and unfolds directly from the unmistakable face of God distinguished in whole ontology and function. Anything less and any substitutes of the church emerge simply as just a religion.

Besides with his main disciples, selectivity of the embodied Word was a common experience for Jesus (e.g. Jn 6) and what he confronted and contended with (e.g. Mt 15:8-9); and this fight against reductionism extended *into* the palpable Word in post-ascension (e.g. Rev 2-3). As Paul continued fighting this selectivity (e.g. “nothing beyond what is written,” 1 Cor 4:6), this certainly included the oral tradition (e.g. the Jesus tradition of the early church), which was the main form of communicating the Word in a less literate context. With the palpable Word, Paul exposed in the church in Corinth that selectivity results in fragmentation, which reduces the ontology and function of the God, persons and relationships composing the church—which then is consequential for reducing their faith to just another religion. The church in a pluralistic world cannot ignore this consequence of the selective measure of the Word it uses.

Selectivity is appealing for Christians and churches in a religiously diverse context, especially where Christianity is the minority religion. A selective approach can soften any templates imposed on others for their conformity—templates that are also composed by selectivity, as Christian Jews imposed on Gentile Christians—the force of which was commonly exercised by Western missionaries (who used their own selectivity of the Word) and, even with good intentions, that had relational consequences still

reverberating to the present. Yet, in contrast to and also in conflict with colonial Western Christianity, the distinguished nature of the Christian faith, Christ's disciples and the family of Christ is the experiential truth of integrally (1) being a minority, that is, uncommon in ontology, as in the *ek* "out of" relational dynamic from Jesus' formative family prayer, and (2) about functioning uncommonly in the relational involvement of God's family love, in the primacy of relationships that intrudes face to face just as the face of the whole Word does—all for the relational purpose and outcome of wholeness for persons and relationships, not for their conformity to selective and thus fragmentary terms. Nothing less and no substitutes of this uncommon relational involvement affirms persons and seeks to build face-to-face relationships regardless of religious differences; and selectivity limits and constrains deeper connections and thus reinforces and sustains persons and relationship in the human condition, even while engaging in evangelism and proclaiming the gospel.

As prevalent as other religions (including ideologies and cultures) may be for a Christian minority, it is inadequate to address those persons primarily through their respective religion. Inter-faith dialogues, for example, must be engaged in relational terms with practice in the primacy of persons and relationships and secondarily in theological terms. Even in adversarial situations, they must be seen primarily as persons, with their face from inner out and be engaged in the primacy of relationships, with all other matters secondary even though still important (as Paul demonstrated at the forum in Athens). This experiential truth is the reality "just as" we consistently see Jesus (assuming no selectivity) interacting with others, even indirectly at first with the foreign woman who claimed crumbs fallen from the master's table and whom his disciples wanted no part of (Mt 15:21-28). The issues that emerge as primary then are less about religion and more about life matters, and those issues that directly affect all persons and relationships regardless of religion. To the extent that a religion addresses these life concerns, on that basis mutual ground emerges for a religious exchange, yet is still secondary to and never as a substitute for the primary connection of persons in relationships.

Furthermore, directly related to the issue of selectivity is the issue of continuity-discontinuity with the unfolding faith of God's people. Today in the global North, there is more discontinuity than continuity that can be highlighted, whereas in the global South there appears to be more continuity. Yet, generally speaking, the global North church reasons that discontinuity can also reflect progress and development from primal, naïve or unsophisticated thinking, all of which point to the superiority of 'the wise and learned' of the West (cf. Lk 10:21). For them, continuity is dubious and can even reflect continuity with primal religion and not Judeo-Christianity. Underlying their lens, however, is not an advanced theological anthropology but a reduced theological anthropology of the ontology and function of persons and relationships, which Jesus exposed in contrast to persons and relationships together in whole ontology and function (the significance of Lk 10:21). This essentially narrowed-down thinking and lens also reveals a weak view of sin that either doesn't understand reductionism—especially evident in a modernist framework with its assumptions—or ignores its presence and influence as a result of selectivity with the Word. The results are to be expected from the selective measure used—both as a seductive measure for self-determination and a self-protective measure to not be vulnerable—and anything more expected to unfold are

epistemological illusion and ontological simulation from the assumption of reductionism that “you will not be reduced or fragmented.”

The global South church also should be aware of its selectivity and awakened to its seductive and self-protective measures. Continuity should not be as much of a concern as unfolding with the face of the whole palpable Word *into* the primacy of nothing less and no substitutes for the church and those persons and relationships belonging to it. This even precludes continuity with prevailing practices from the surrounding context (such as culture) that reduce the primary.

Usually when discourse from global theologies and discussion by churches do mention sin, it is either in general referential terms or moral-ethical terms; and this limited conversation tends not to address the presence and influence of sin in their particular culture and thus that culture’s shaping of church theology and practice for persons and relationship. The consequence of silence (including of our human condition in the church) weakens the church’s view of sin (as in the global North church above) that does not listen to sin as reductionism, which includes neither listening to the person (reflecting a reduced theological anthropology) nor listening to the human condition (reflecting a fragmentary gospel and truncated soteriology). These lacks subtly shape the church with practice by persons and of relationships that unintentionally reflect, reinforce or sustain the human condition prevailing in the human context and now pervading the church (our human condition).

Yet, as Jesus promised with the Spirit, the face of the palpable Word will clarify and correct if we listen carefully to his relational communication in only relational terms—that is, listen face to face, without referentialization or selectivity of the Word. Therefore, just as the palpable Word in post-ascension communication critiqued successful, popular, doctrinally correct, dedicated, missional, activist, and status quo churches, we need to listen because those churches exist today in similar theology and practice. And we cannot deny the fact that the Spirit grieves when the church does not give primacy to persons and relationships, and therefore doesn’t practice their wholeness as God’s new creation family, in likeness “just as” the whole of who, what and how the uncommon God is (as Paul illuminated conclusively for the church, Eph 4:20-32).

The experiential truth and reality for Christians and the church are that we cannot talk about God’s presence and involvement, and know and understand the whole and uncommon God, by the fragmentary terms of selectivity. Nor can we without addressing the selective measures that counter the face of God and are contrary to the Word’s whole relational terms for both communication in self-disclosure and relationship with us—the relational consequence of which humanly shapes God in our theology and practice according to the image of our person and the likeness of our relationships. What needs to be addressed here is the subtlety of sin and the pervasiveness of sin as reductionism that composes our human condition in the church.

The church unfolds distinguished and with significance only with face-to-face involvement with the face of the whole palpable Word. The church unfolds ongoingly with the whole palpable Word only transformed in wholeness in the likeness “just as” the

trinitarian persons and their relationship together. Therefore, the church as God's whole and uncommon family unfolds with the ongoing vulnerable involvement of the whole palpable Word, distinguished in the significance of wholeness for persons and relationships together unfolding *into* their primacy of nothing less and no substitutes. And this relational outcome continues to unfold *into* the church with whole knowledge and understanding of the face of God, with the experiential truth of the gospel of wholeness, with the experiential reality of complete soteriology being saved from reductionism and saved to wholeness in God's uncommon family, whereby the church unfolds *into* the globalizing, pluralistic, fragmented world with the distinguished relational significance face to face to make the prevailing human relational condition whole.

Can this experiential truth and reality unfold *into* the church today? It will with the face of the whole palpable Word in the vulnerable measure of face-to-face relationship together with nothing less and no substitutes. Jesus promises that the measure the church uses will be the church it gets. So, "do not grieve the palpable Word by using a measure of anything less or any substitutes."

Chapter 7 The Gathering Church for the Ages

Thus says the LORD God, who gathers...I will gather others....

Isaiah 56:8

Whoever does not gather with me scatters.

Luke 11:23

Two overlapping and interrelated questions that need to concern the global church are these: (1) In the global North (namely Europe and the U.S.), why are churches decreasing in membership and/or member involvement?; and (2) In the global South, what are churches being filled with as membership increases? Why churches are filled or not filled, and what fills churches are concerns that the global church shares together whether its specific region is experiencing that condition or not. What fills a church today (or in the past) may not be sustained tomorrow (or in the present); and this is not a sociological pattern or cycle but the experiential reality of church theology and practice that needs to be understood deeper than re-forms and to go beyond contextualization in different regions and cultures.

If we are only concerned about filling up the church, then our understanding will not go deeper in church theology and practice than the Reformation, nor will church composition go beyond the sociocultural shaping from human contextualization.

In Europe, church attendance has declined to the point where the church could easily be seen as dying or dead—though an infusion of Christian immigrants from the global South perhaps is sparking some life in these contexts. In the U.S., the adult population to 35 years of age (the millennial generation) is increasingly less Christian and identified as unaffiliated with organized religion; this status is consistent throughout the U.S., even in the Bible-belt states. In spite of general church attendance being higher in evangelical churches—which should not be confused with greater involvement in those churches—the underlying issue of what fills or doesn't fill churches remains.

The disaffection of millennials (or any generation) dropping out of church is not surprising, given what churches offer and what those persons *need*. What persons need requires listening deeper to persons than what they merely want, and listening to their (our) human condition and the influence of reductionism, for example, in this modern and post-Christian age. In an information-oversaturated context, they don't need more information (even about God) and further associations, particularly those rendering them more as observing objects rather than participating subjects. Yet, participating as subjects should not be confused, for example, with contemporary worship where most participation is an end in itself without relational significance, particularly to God. What they need, if not always aware of wanting, are relationships with the significance of deeper connection and not mere association—that is, relationships with greater intimacy even though they may not want to make themselves vulnerable for such relational

connections. Human persons were created with the primacy of these relationships, so that they would not function “to be apart” from wholeness together (Gen 2:18). Those avoiding or running from such vulnerable connection turn to substitutes such as social media; not surprisingly, church practice often provides this substitute for those many persons filling our churches. For those wanting more in their life, however, or who are at least open to their need for more, the church can be the only good news for their relational condition.

If churches provided a non-fragmenting context and equal opportunities to grow as subject persons (in decreasing self-consciousness), growing more deeply involved in relationships of significance both with God and with those together in church, we would not see persons leaving (or staying distant within) the church but embracing the church for their wholeness as persons and in their relationships. We cannot give primacy to persons and relationships without this being the primary practice of the church. This is the challenge facing not only the U.S. church and the global North church, but also the global South church—the challenge of the global church as the family of Christ to address our sin as reductionism and to make whole our human condition.

The church as the family of Christ is not an assumption that the global South should automatically make for what fills its churches. African churches have shifted from a Western lens to a lens from African culture, and thus have learned to see church members as belonging to family.¹ Yet, the question remains if their persons and relationships are distinguished by their primacy in the family of Christ, or do they just have the distinction of their culture? In Asia, the emphasis of relationships is rooted in the family and at home, which then is extended or transferred to the church. Thus, Simon Chan states the following about grassroots Asian ecclesiology:

If previously an individual’s self-identity was defined by his or her network of family relationships, as a Christian he or she is now defined primarily by relation to the ecclesial community. If previously self-understanding took place primarily in the home, as a Christian self-understanding takes place primarily in the church as the communion of saints. Christianity, by introducing a new eschatological community that claims one’s ultimate (though not exclusive) allegiance, relativizes all other social relationships, including marriage and home.²

Yet, aside from a grassroots Asian theology, if church practice of persons and relationships is not distinguished by the theological anthropology of whole ontology and function, then it merely reflects, reinforces and sustains the limits and constraints of Asian cultures—cultures in which persons and relationships have been shaped by reductionism. Whether in Asia or Africa, therefore, the main issue emerges once again about what fills churches; and the global church must not assume a best-case scenario because of a primary focus given to family and relationships.

¹ Discussed in Samuel Escobar, *The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 128-141.

² Simon Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology: Thinking the Faith from the Ground Up* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 157.

Gatherers or Hunters

When “the LORD God, who gathers,” said “I will gather others” (Isa 56:8), God distinguished himself as a gatherer. To gather (*qabas*) involves gathering persons from scattered locations (notably in exile) and bringing them together to a central point of convergence (namely belonging together as God’s people). *Qabas* is not a call to gather (as in *qāhal*), the assembly (*qāhāl*) of which is translated by the Septuagint with *ekklesia*. Rather *qabas* is the distinct act of gathering that distinguished God as the gatherer. Thus, David lifted up this psalm to the LORD: “Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the nations” (Ps 106:47; 1 Chr 16:35).

God’s gathering response to “the outcasts of Israel” (Isa 56:8) demonstrated God’s relational response to the human condition of all persons, peoples and nations. “I will gather others” who are also apart from the relationships together in wholeness of God’s family. God’s relational response doesn’t merely extend a call to these persons but vulnerably acts to gather together persons who are apart in order to belong to God’s whole family. Furthermore, as the gatherer, God was neither hunting for others to claim for his family, nor gathering others merely to add to the family name or inhabit the family identity. Why God gathered others and how God gathered are indispensable for the church to understand because God’s gathering relational response was the antecedent for the church.³ God’s distinguished response was embodied by Jesus, whose whole person vulnerably involved the whole of God as gatherer in order to bring together the family of Christ.

When Jesus lamented over the condition of Jerusalem, he declared “How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing” (Mt 23:37). As the gatherer, Jesus didn’t hunt for followers or just gather any disciples after his name (e.g. Jn 6:25ff). Jesus pursued persons who were apart (like Levi and Zacchaeus) and gathered them together to belong to his family in the primacy of persons and relationships. There was no other relational purpose for embodying the relational response of the God who gathers; and this uncommon gathering—which was objected to by traditionalists—was the only relational outcome of what Jesus as gatherer saved *to*. To proclaim this gospel is to gather others, without which makes the gospel fragmentary and incomplete.

Just as Jesus was relationally involved to “gather others,” the church as the family of Christ emerges and unfolds as the gatherer. The gathering church, however, is distinguished from the church as hunter—that is, to go after, claim, collect, accumulate, possess members to fill the church and its needs and goals. The distinction between gatherer and hunter is critical for what fills or doesn’t fill our churches. The gathering church is distinguished with the palpable Word as gatherer to be relationally significant for the ages of all persons, the diversity of all peoples, and the differences of all nations, the significance of which should not be confused with being relevant for what they *want* instead of what they *need*. When the church’s relational connection to the palpable Word is lacking, the church’s identity becomes ambiguous and shallow. That is, the persons of

³ Walter Brueggemann uses Second Isaiah (Isa 40-55) and Third Isaiah (Isa 56-66) to challenge the contemporary church to step out of its conventional tribalism and be countercultural, in *Mandate to Difference: An Invitation to the Contemporary Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 49-71).

the church become ambiguous and the church's relationships become shallow, no longer in likeness of the primacy of persons and relationship together in the whole and uncommon God. Without the primacy of persons and relationships together, the church lacks relational significance for others, who may be unaware of their need in their pursuit of what they want. This lack renders the church to be hunters to fill the church, often by accommodating others by giving them what they want over what they need. Yet, whatever results in filling the church is distinct from the relational significance of gathering others together just as Jesus was relationally involved, and therefore such results cannot be distinguished as the family of Christ—even though it is assumed in name as the body of Christ.

The reciprocal relational involvement with the palpable Word is irreplaceable for the church to function as the gatherer and not the hunter. The embodied Word was unequivocal in distinguishing the gatherer: “Whoever is not *relationally involved* with me is *contrary to* me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters” (Mt 12:30). That is to say, persons and churches who aren't relationally involved with the palpable Word don't gather but scatter. How so, and what is the significance of this for what fills or doesn't fill the church?

When Jesus illuminated casting out demons *just as* “by the Spirit of God,” he declared that “the kingdom of God has come to you” (Mt 12:28). Jesus distinguished his family that the whole of God has come to gather together, those who were in a fragmented condition apart from wholeness in their persons and relationships. Persons and churches who are involved relationally with the palpable Word function also with those others *just as* the Word in order to “gather with me.” Yet, why do persons and churches who aren't involved *just as* the Word “gathers others,” why do their efforts “scatter”? To scatter (*skorpizo*) means to dissipate, waste, that is, fragment the whole. For Jesus, if we are not involved with him in the relational purpose and process of gathering together persons who are apart from wholeness, then we are engaged on a different path from his relational path. Jesus made it imperative that “whoever serves me must follow me *on my relational path and be involved relationally* where I am” (Jn 12:26). Being his disciple and serving to make disciples of others cannot emerge from a different path—even with the best of intentions and the purpose to do what's good for the church. That different path would include anything less than or any substitute of how Jesus is involved to gather others for their wholeness. Anything less and any substitutes mean essentially to function contrary to his relational purpose and process of gathering, and thereby to *skorpizo* by reinforcing or sustaining the fragmentation of persons and relationship in God's whole family—scattering with the intention to fill the church.

The distinction between gathering and scattering can be ambiguous in the church, and their lack of clarity would have immeasurable consequences for churches, persons and relationships. *Skorpizo* is obvious when persons leave the church as a result of church practice. The subtle condition of *skorpizo*, however, exists among persons who still remain in the church because or regardless of the same church practice. It is ironic, yet not surprising, that churches can be composed by a ‘scattered filling’. The Word laments “How often I have desired to gather *my family* together!” and weeps “If you, even you *the church*, had only known *at this time* what would bring you *wholeness*,” yet still “Listen! I am standing at the church door, knocking *to come in and gather together my family*.”

Quite simply, if the church does not respond to the Word's relational response in whole relational terms, the church scatters.

To gather, lead together and take in (signifying *synago*) involves a distinguished relational dynamic that redefines the ontology of *ekklesia* and determines its function in likeness of the gathering God—the whole and uncommon God who is vulnerably involved only in whole relational terms in the trinitarian relational context of family and the trinitarian relational process of family love. The global church emerges as gatherer with the palpable Word, just as the embodied Word “saw the *others*, he had compassion for them, because they were *needy* and helpless, *as persons without the full relational significance of family*” (Mt 9:36). Based on this relational lens, the Word communicated to his family: “The harvest of *persons, peoples and nations* is plentiful, but the *gatherers* are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out *gatherers (not hunters)* into his harvest *to take them into his family*” (9:37). In reciprocal relational response with the involvement of family love, the global church unfolds as his family of interdependent gatherers, who grow, cultivate and gather together—neither independently nor separated from each other as hunters—the family of Christ only on God's whole relational terms, nothing less and no substitutes (as Paul illuminated for the global church, 1 Cor 3:5-14). The relational outcome is the gathering church for the ages, all ages of all persons, for the diversity of all peoples, and for the differences of all nations.

The Grassroots Dynamic and the Organizational Process

As Paul illuminated above, the global church as gatherer is not an individual (person or church) or freelance enterprise by local and regional churches that could contribute to the whole church. The gathering church functions from a base that all who belong in the family of Christ share together in, and thus are accountable to each other for. How this ecclesial base is perceived and constructed will determine the kind of church that unfolds.

There are three main ingredients that are integral for the church's base. Each ingredient is indispensable for having a complete base, the whole of which makes them inseparable and thus makes each of them insufficient by itself to form the church's base. Keep this in focus as we discuss the main ingredients that integrally compose the complete base necessary for the church to be, live and make whole: (1) family, (2) *koinonia*, and (3) accountability. Each of them has been discussed and emphasized in various ways, usually in static and structural terms, in the church's history. This history makes evident that how they are perceived and constructed for any ecclesial base will determine the church that unfolds—“the base you use will be the church you get.”

Family Base with Uncommon Interrelationships

When the church's base is rooted in family, there are various perceptions of family that have to be challenged. We cannot continue to base the church on our assumptions of family. In the global North, the family has undergone fragmentation—from extended family to nuclear family to an association of individuals—which renders the perception of family to practical insignificance, even though the idea of family may

have ideal significance. The reality is that all Western families are *interrelated*, nevertheless they don't all have *interrelations*. In the global South, the family (as noted above) has a primary focus, which takes families beyond merely being interrelated to engagement in interrelations. Yet, the perception of interrelations within the family varies between cultures. What is common among these cultures is the lack or absence of primacy for the persons and relationships in the family, thereby rendering them without much if any significance. In other words, global South families have interrelations but that doesn't necessarily involve having *interrelationships*. The lack of interrelationships is both insufficient for the church family base and also contrary to what's integral for the church as family. Most importantly, the interrelationships necessary to distinguish the church's family base emerge from uncommon relationships that are distinctly distinguished from the common relationships prevailing in all human contexts, South and North.

Based on global perceptions of the family, the church's family base would be constructed accordingly, with the church mirroring those limits and constraints. With uncommon interrelationships, however, the church's family base is distinguished from common interrelationships (where they exist), and connects beyond merely being interrelated and deeper than just having interrelations. On what basis can the church develop its family base with uncommon interrelationships?

When Jesus composed his church family on the cross by connecting Mary and John beyond being interrelated and deeper than their interrelations, he connected them in interrelationship to be vulnerably involved and intimately belong to each other as family. Yet, Jesus didn't merely construct another family in the prevailing perception of family. Rather, and this is vital for the church's base, he reordered the common family in order to raise up the new family required for the wholeness of the church, the family of Christ. This new-order family emerged before the cross when Jesus reordered his human-family of origin (or biological family). In that collectivist context the family was primary, and to bring shame on the family was a major sin—even unforgiveable in many contexts, as witnessed explicitly and implicitly today. That shame concerned Jesus' family at a key point in his ministry, so they went to control him, likely to preserve their honor (Mk 3:21). Jesus' pivotal response to them simply reordered his family (3:31-34). What transpired in this narrative is the unmistakable emergence of the new family of Christ. Beyond referential information about Jesus—which many Christians and churches may selectively ignore—this new-order family both challenges our assumptions about family and reorders our existing practice of family.

Jesus also further challenged our assumptions and reordered our practice, with relational words that usually have been selectively ignored. As we listen to his words, we should be clear that Jesus didn't eliminate the importance of our family of origin. In sociocultural terms, however, he did reorder our family practice and also reprioritized its influence on how Christians and churches function. Jesus clearly declared that the top priority for our involvement in relationships together is not with our biological family but with him in his family (Mt 10:37; Lk 14:26, cf. Mk 10:29-30; Lk 9:59-62). In reality, by reprioritizing family involvement and reordering its relationships, Jesus deepens that involvement in those relationships by restoring persons and relationships to their primacy in wholeness. The experiential reality of God's family love becomes the transforming basis for the depth of involvement in other relationships, whether with family or even

with enemies (Jn 15:9-12, cf. Mt 5:44). As Jesus emphasized, of course, sometimes those enemies emerge within one's own biological family when attempts to reorder one's family are made (Mt 10:36). The depth of this relational process will certainly expose any fragmentation in the family and the existing reduced ontology and function of persons and relationships composing the family. This is the relational significance of Jesus' critical purpose "to bring a sword," which appears to fracture the family when in reality it cuts open and exposes the reductionism in sociocultural families in order to make them whole (Mt 10:34-36, cf. Heb 4:12). Contrary to the limits and constraints of common practice, Jesus' words and response are the uncommon wholeness of Christ that Paul makes imperative for the church family to be whole (Col 3:15).

Family dynamics shape all human persons and, in most persons, become the primary influence determining how persons function in their relationships. These are the persons and relationships that fill the church and form its base, that is, until their assumptions about family are challenged and their practice of family is reordered by God's family love. Churches in the global North and South urgently need to face this determining condition and embrace the experiential truth of how their persons, relationships and church base can be changed from existing old-order family practices to the experiential reality of the new-order church family of Christ.

Only the new-order family distinguishes the family of Christ. This is the only family that integrates persons into the face-to-face interrelationships necessary for their primacy in wholeness (Col 3:10-14). In the ongoing relational process of God's family love, this new-order family with the palpable Word unavoidably challenges our assumptions about family and reorders our existing practice of family, both in the church and at home (1 Cor 3:16-23). As this new-order family becomes the church's base, persons and relationships will emerge belonging to the church with relational significance and thereby unfold transformed in wholeness in the primacy of the family of Christ (Eph 2:11-22).

Yet, the experiential reality of the church as the family of Christ does not unfold just by the church having this new-order family base with uncommon interrelationships. Two other ingredients are integral for this relational outcome.

***Koinonia* Base with Grassroots Interdependence**

When the primacy of persons and relationships is rooted in the new-order church family, at the heart of this integral process is the everyday unfolding of those persons and their relationships together. This infrastructure of the church family is the reciprocal relational process involving a grassroots dynamic, as opposed to an organizational process that structures church interrelations (not interrelationships) by the limits and constraints of the church as organization (e.g. its goals, plans, programs). The organizational process mainly emerges from church leadership (usually subordinating and even excluding others in the church) and operates from an infrastructure that is primarily quantitative and centered on its objectives—making persons and relationships secondary to the organization. Accordingly, the organizational process lacks qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness; and this gap operating in the church would inevitably narrow down church theology and practice with limits and constraints, which

can only reflect the church's reduced ontology and function and thus reinforce and sustain that reductionism in its persons (including leaders) and relationships.

In contrast and often in conflict, the grassroots dynamic flows from the primacy of the church's persons and relationships (including its leadership), which does not necessarily start out with qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness but is directly exposed to the qualitative and relational of life to grow and develop in their sensitivity and awareness. This relational outcome cannot be programmed, even with the best of intentions for what's good for the church. It only emerges from direct engagement that makes the church vulnerable in a reciprocal relational process with all the persons and relationships in the church; this vulnerableness then unavoidably threatens persons maintaining the status quo. Moreover, the grassroots dynamic may not meet desired goals or go neatly as planned. It may even cause a mess at times, but it will not make the primary secondary and will get to the heart of who and what composes the life of the church. Thus, the grassroots dynamic may sacrifice secondary matters—which would have primary value to a church organization—but it does not sacrifice the primacy of persons and their interrelationships together.

When the church wants to complete its base, it must engage the grassroots dynamic that integrally involves both the new-order family with uncommon interrelationships and the *koinonia* of the church's persons and relationships together. Like family, *koinonia* has been discussed and emphasized without much if any relational significance. Perhaps even more than family, *koinonia* is widely perceived and broadly assumed in church practice, such that it likely has simply been taken for granted in how the church is. This would not be unexpected in an organization structure and process. But when we engage the grassroots dynamic, *koinonia* is illuminated with perhaps more relational significance than most churches would want to have for its base—particularly in the global North, though the global South church is challenged in its base also.

The *koinonia* of the church that emerged from Pentecost involved the primacy of persons in uncommon relationships. What was uncommon was not the large numbers filling the church (Acts 2:41,47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1,7) but how they were gathered together in the new-order church family. Certainly “wonder and signs” were instrumental in gathering persons (2:43), yet what is illuminated here is the relational involvement of the palpable Word over just highlighting the power of the Spirit. Most important for the gathering church, in reciprocal relationship with the palpable Word, was how all persons were taken into the church family with the grassroots dynamic and relationally connected to each other in interrelationships at an uncommon depth (2:42). Their depth of involvement face to face distinguished their interrelationships in the reciprocal relational process such that the primacy of every person was gathered together and shared together in the primacy of relationship with everything they had (including every secondary thing, 2:44-47; 4:32-35). This uncommon involvement went deeper than communal living and beyond having a common purse, which certainly existed in the ancient Mediterranean world. These uncommon interrelationships composed the *koinonia* for the church that needs to redefine our perception of fellowship: by taking in each person with the grassroots dynamic, to participate and partake (*koinoneo*, the base word for *koinonia*) and, on this relational basis, established all persons as partners and partakers (*koinonos*, the noun of *koinoneo*) of their shared life together as family—the *koinonia* of the church, the only *koinonia* with the relational significance to distinguish the family of Christ.

To share together with everything they had, however, was not an end in itself that served as a template for their conformity. The involvement in their interrelationships at this uncommon depth defined their family love for each other and unfolded with the intimacy such that “If one member suffers, all suffer together with *that person*; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with *the person*” (1 Cor 12:26). This primary depth of involvement by all persons in their interrelationships together fulfills the relational purpose of *koinonia* to integrally connect and grow the interdependence necessary for the church family to be whole at the very grassroots of its persons and relationships. The relational outcome of grassroots interdependence is that the church *koinonia* shared, gave and provided for “all, as any had need” (Acts 2:45), so that “There was not a needy person among them” (4:34). *Koinonia* based on ‘sharing together with everything persons have’ includes both caring for persons in their secondary needs as well as their primary relational needs as whole persons. The depth of this *koinonia*, however, should not be confused with the ideology of socialism, though some practice may have similarity.

Grassroots interdependence exposes the church to the everyday needs of persons and their relationships, which includes the spectrum of their and thus the church’s human condition. By making these needs accessible, the *koinonia* shared together provides the urgent and ongoing opportunities to respond in the uncommon depth of God’s family love. Without grassroots interdependence, *koinonia* lacks the depth for the interrelationships in the body of Christ to empathize and have the face-to-face involvement in reciprocal covariation with each other at their grassroots. Both in the suffering and the honor of church members, if the covarying response by the *koinonia* is lacking because involvement and responses are skewed or selective to some but not others, then how can the church’s *koinonia* be defined, much less distinguished, as participants and partakers of their shared life together as the family of Christ? What kind of church unfolds from a fragmentary *koinonia*?

Paul extended the ‘*koinonia* with grassroots interdependence’ to the global church. The poorer Macedonian churches participated and the wealthy church at Corinth was challenged to further participate in this *koinonia* of interdependence by supporting the Jerusalem church in their grassroots needs. The relational basis for their response was that there would be an equitable (*isotes*) sharing together of resources in the global church (2 Cor 8:1-15). Interdependence was not a concept for Paul or an ideology, nor could it be composed by an organizational process. This depth of relational involvement was a serious issue for Paul since he fought conjointly for the wholeness of church as the family of Christ and against its reduced ontology and function, even just operating as the body of Christ (as in 1 Cor 10-13; Gal 2:11-14).

Furthermore, *koinonia* with grassroots interdependence is not optional for the family of Christ, though alternative interdependence has been constructed for the body of Christ by an organizational process. The latter has appeal to those who intentionally or unknowingly put limits and constraints on church *koinonia*. There is an immeasurable difference, however, between the following: covariation between quantified parts or variables in the church organization, and covariation among persons in relationships of the church family. For the church to have the relational significance necessary in order to be distinguished as the family of Christ, the church’s base must by its new-order family nature be integrated also with the *koinonia* composed with grassroots interdependence.

This raises the question for the contemporary church: To what extent do church family members share together in the primacy of relationship with everything they have?

I am quite certain that the early church's *koinonia* is of little to no interest in global North churches. Global South churches likely would have more interest in practical terms, yet have measured interest in relational terms. The issue involves the church's theology and practice, but more importantly the issue revolves around the church's ontology and function. What *is* the church? This goes further than identity of who the church is. Integrally related, How *is* the church? This goes deeper than what the church does. The further and deeper issues of what and how the church *is* get to the heart of the church's ontology and function.

Is the church the family of God or an organization (institution, if you wish) of God's people? Is how the church functions in likeness of the relational ontology of the Trinity, or modeled after an organizational structure and process? If your answer affirms the former, then you have to return to the question raised above for the contemporary church. How would you respond based on being a participant and partaker in God's family? Would you feel free (not obligated) to participate in and partake of everything about the family, or would you have measured or selective involvement? And would you feel free to share everything you have with the family, or would you say "OK, you can have this portion over here but the rest is mine"? This may not be a good comparison, especially in the global North, but how would your responses be interpreted and received if this were your biological family?

Moreover, we need to ask ourselves (individually and as church) if it is fair (*isotes*, as Paul defined) for there to be disparity between persons participating in the church. That is, should some persons have an abundance while others struggle with little? Do we take responsibility for caring for each other as family in the church? As Paul illuminated for the global church, is the material wealth of global North churches OK to maintain while global South churches struggle in meeting their physical needs? Do we cultivate interdependence or reinforce and sustain our independence, notably under the guise of Christian freedom? These are unavoidable questions that conflate in God's question of "What are you doing here?"

The ontology and function of God's family are whole and cannot be participated in and partaken of by persons in reduced ontology and function. Persons with reduced ontology and function are certainly taken into the family by the gathering church, but they must be transformed to whole ontology and function to belong to the family of Christ. Of course, belonging to an organization simulating the body of Christ does not require wholeness of persons and relationships. So, then, the question of how much do church family members share of what they have really involves and centers on this reality: What kind of person am I going to *be*, and how—a whole person whole-ly involved or a reduced person with fragmented involvement? If we choose to live as the latter person, then we don't want the new-order family but to just belong to an organization, even with its limits and constraints. And there are certainly many churches that will accommodate such persons to add to their number and fill their attendance. For such persons, however, God continues to ask "Where are you?"

Yet, you may still raise the question: Aren't you going to give a practical answer to how much church family members share of what they have? Yes and no! No, because a practical answer narrows down the issue to secondary matter. The family of Christ is

concerned foremost with the primacy of persons involved in uncommon interrelationships such that their depth of connection with each other integrates all of them in the grassroots interdependence of the whole of God's whole and uncommon family. Yes, because the secondary (including the things we have as well as do) must all be integrated into this primary, otherwise that secondary becomes primary in our life and consequently assumes primacy over our persons and relationships. Is this not demonstrated in our consumer world and global economy, which have shaped Christians and churches, if not controlled or enslaved them?

This is the relational consequence of choosing independence in church *koinonia* over interdependence, which was demonstrated by Ananias and Sapphira in the early church (Acts 5:1-11). The independence of such self-determination exists even in the collectivist contexts of the global South. Wherever present, it is contrary to the church family and *koinonia* base, and thus is in conflict with the church's uncommon interrelationships and grassroots interdependence.

Because the relational consequence of such practices on church family and *koinonia* directly affect the ontology and function of persons, relationships and churches, the church needs to be able to account for and hold accountable members' engagement in such practice. This requires the third ingredient to complete the church's whole base as the gathering church: accountability.

Accountability Base with Interdependent Synergism

The gathering church takes in persons of all ages, the diversity of peoples and the differences of the nations. These all converge in the church, bringing with them the spectrum of the human condition to add to the specific practices discussed above. Therefore, for the church family and *koinonia* base to unfold to gather together all these persons in the interrelationships and interdependence of wholeness and not be rendered to fragmentation, the church base must integrate accountability also for the church base to be complete and thus whole.

The early church and its leadership were not above making consequential errors. As the gathering church took in a diversity of persons different from them, they made mistakes in how different persons were integrated into the church's interrelationships of their shared life together. Whereas earlier "There was not a needy person among them," soon after in contrast to Hebrew church members "Hellenist widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food" (Acts 6:1). Later, based on traditional distinctions between Jews and Gentiles, discrimination against Gentiles emerged in the regional church—enacted both individually (even by Peter) and systemically (in church polity with what amounted to its Rule of Faith)—which countered the uncommon depth of the interrelationships of church *koinonia* and conflicted with the grassroots composition of the new-order church family (Acts 15:1-5). Gentiles were second-class church members, who were considered less and treated accordingly in church practice even after the Jerusalem council of church leaders (led by Peter) corrected church theology (15:6-31). This extended discrimination in church practice was also indirectly led by Peter (Gal 2:11-13), in spite of Jesus having directly corrected his theology earlier (Acts 10:9-16).

Given such consequential errors made by the early church and its leadership, the church (local, regional, global) could unfold transformed in wholeness only by being held accountable with God's family love and being given the opportunity to change with the palpable Word. This process involves by necessity that the church pay close attention to sin as reductionism, be aware fully of the spectrum of the human condition, and listen carefully to persons in self-consciousness. While this includes ethical and moral issues, it must go beyond conventional ethics and morality to encompass our reduced ontology and function and related fragmentary theology and practice. This is the breadth and depth affecting the church that need to be held accountable and changed. Therefore, it is indispensable for the church to complete its base with the irreplaceable relational process of accountability, so that the church has the ongoing opportunity to unfold whole.

The accountability defined here—which may differ in some aspects from the accountability practiced in the early church to further unfold the church—is not a program conducted by an organizational process. Nor is the means of accountability vested in leadership alone, who otherwise can insulate themselves from being accountable. In the grassroots dynamic, accountability is not controlled by the authority of church leaders. Accountability includes a process of authority constituted by the Word communicated from God, embodied in relational terms, and transitioned into the palpable Word. But church accountability is not structured by any authority other than “Christ is the head” (Col 1:18; Eph 1:22). On the basis of this relational process of authority, church accountability holds the whole church accountable with the Word, to the Word and for the Word. Accordingly and integrally, church accountability is irreplaceable by any other alternatives, because this indispensable accountability with the palpable Word integrates the reciprocal relational process that vulnerably involves the grassroots of all the persons and relationships belonging to the church. All are accountable in the church and reciprocally all have the responsibility to hold each other accountable (including leaders), in order to be directly involved in the interdependence of church *koinonia* so that all will experience the uncommon interrelationships of the new-order church family.

With its authority in the Word, the reciprocal process of accountability has no limits and constraints, that is, except for its defining involvement determined by God's family love—just as Jesus and the Father have loved us. Love certainly has been subject to abuse without grassroots accountability, and also inconsistently applied by subjective interpretation (e.g. demonstrated in situation ethics). These issues converge in the Word in order to determine ‘the measure we use’ necessary for the accountability process’ whole relational outcome. There are certainly hermeneutical issues when it involves the Word, yet the primary issue about clarity of the Word is the Word's whole relational terms in relational language over fragmentary referential terms in referential language, and thus letting God speak for himself rather than our speaking for God. On this relational basis and with this hermeneutical lens, accountability's reciprocal relational process has to be vulnerable and intimate, including equalized, in order to have relational significance for all persons and relationships in the church. This vulnerably inclusive process can unfold formally or informally, scheduled or unscheduled, directly or by other means of connection, but preferably face to face unless that is not possible. If, however, we avoid face to face in the accountability process, it reveals either not being involved by God's family love or not being involved in interrelationships with the relational purpose of church interdependence.

In addition, and this is vital to the reciprocal relational process of accountability, integral to accountability is the underlying purpose for interdependence. As the church gathers together persons of all ages, the diversity of peoples and the differences of nations, it has in its midst all these persons (including of a homogeneous church context) making up different parts of the body of Christ. For these different parts to be unified into one church body without fragmentation, it must involve the grassroots dynamic of interdependence—not simply engage an organic process. And for these different parts to be whole together as the church family of Christ, their interdependence must go beyond just the sum of these different parts because *the whole is greater than their sum*. This integral outcome is known as synergism. The underlying purpose of interdependence is the synergism of all the different persons the church has gathered—not a collection of parts that don't add up complete—so that together the church unfolds distinguished as the whole and uncommon church family of their whole and uncommon God.

Therefore, by the nature of its reciprocal relational process, church accountability must neither be arbitrary and engaged randomly, nor be self-centered, that is, engaged for the benefit of an individual in self-determination, or engaged at the expense of an individual either to shape their conformity or simply as an end in itself.

Interdependent synergism is the relational significance, the relational importance and the relational need of accountability in the church. The church does not unfold distinguished whole unless the church is being transformed to whole ontology and function. This process to wholeness requires the church and all its persons and relationships to be accountable and hold each other accountable for their reduced ontology and function, their fragmentary theology and practice. Thus, accountability in the church must be inescapable, and the relational involvement with God's family love will vulnerably pursue each other (including pursuing leaders) to make this an experiential reality in the church.

How 'church accountability with interdependent synergism' is structured in the church can vary. But it will only emerge with this relational purpose and outcome by the grassroots dynamic and should not be expected from any organizational structure and process. Certainly, the church is organized, yet that should not be confused with being an organization or institution; the church also has order, yet that must not assume an old order to substitute for the new order. Uncommon interrelationships distinguish the church family and grassroots interdependence determines church *koinonia*, and anything less and any substitutes must answer to the interdependent synergism of church accountability. When this reciprocal relational process integrally composes the church's base with the palpable Word, the gathering church unfolds and will continue to unfold transformed in wholeness in likeness of the whole and uncommon God—nothing less and no substitutes.

Gathering Myths and Scattering Realities

The reality that the Christian majority has shifted to the global South is still being processed by the global North, and not without difficulty. The experiential reality facing the regional church, North and South, involves whether it has been gathering or scattering persons of all ages, the diversity of all peoples and the differences of all nations. With the

shift to the global South, perhaps the experiential truth facing the global church and all Christians (not just the majority) involves, besides gathering and scattering, whether the current shift only reflects a cycle of the Christian population in history—a cycle that has no correlated significance to the church's function of gathering, yet which reflects a cycle reinforced and sustained by the church that in reality scatters. Both this experiential reality and truth must be addressed by the church because there are gathering myths to account for and scattering realities that need to be held accountable in the church local, regional and global.

To review our discussion about 'gather' (*qabas* and *synago*), the church is distinguished as a gatherer in likeness of God, who gathers persons scattered apart from wholeness, the whole of God's family. Those scattered apart are in a reduced and/or fragmented condition—including but also beyond just ethically and morally—that renders persons and relationships without wholeness in their ontology and function. To scatter (*skorpizo*) means to diminish and thus fragment the whole, whereby persons and relationships are reinforced or sustained in reduced ontology and function; and this reality can exist subtly in the simulation or illusion of gathering. These are the gathering myths and scattering realities that face the contemporary church and require the depth of our response in God's family love with the palpable Word.

The gifts (*charisma*) of the Spirit are distributed throughout the whole church among all gathered, an experiential truth which often eludes the experiential reality in the church body (1 Cor 12:1-11). Though these gifts are not evenly or equally distributed, all persons gathered in the church have *charisma*. The only purpose for *charisma* in the church is for interdependent synergism, in which all persons use their charism to gather the church family in uncommon interrelationships together to have *koinonia* with grassroots interdependence of the ages of all persons, the diversity of all peoples and the differences of all nations. The urgent issue for the church is not which of these persons have gifts—an existing tension between the global North church and global South church—but most important how are these gifts used: to gather or to scatter.

Skorpizo is more deeply rendered to fragment, which expands our lens of scattering to encompass any and all that (and who) fragment. Thus, those who fragment persons and relationships in reality scatter persons and relationships, even as they are gathered in the church. Therefore, the church urgently needs to expose those who use their charisma in the church under the guise of gathering and hold them accountable for the reality of scattering, even as the church may be filling up. In other words, there is an existing 'gathering myth of charisma' and 'scattering reality of scholarship' that shape the church (local, regional, global), which the church must no longer reinforce and sustain but redeem and transform to wholeness for the family of Christ to unfold—just as Jesus cleaned out the 'scattering' temple of its reductionism and fragmentation.

The Myth of Charisma and the Reality of Scholarship

Two notable areas that the church, by its relational nature, must address with family love involve the leadership by those perceived with charisma and ascribed as scholars. Whatever the extent of popularity a charismatic leader has or the degree of stature a scholar has, these leaders have filled churches and directly or indirectly have

shaped how the church gathers. What fills the church and how the church is gathered need to be examined to account for any gathering myth of charisma and scattering reality of scholarship. Certainly, these two areas don't account for all the gathering myths and scattering realities existing in the church, yet they are representative of who, what and how in the church are responsible for reducing and/or fragmenting churches and their persons and relationships.

When Paul addressed the fragmentation of the church at Corinth, two of the persons at the center of this fragmentation were Peter and Apollos (1 Cor 1:10-12). Apollos “was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures” (Acts 18:24, NIV), who would be the counterpart to a modern scholar in biblical studies. Though not intentional on Apollos' part, based on the high degree of stature he had in the church, Paul highlighted Apollos' stature as a central reason for the church's fragmentation (1 Cor 3:5-7). Persons gathered at the church centered on his esteemed stature as a scholar, which in reality scattered-fragmented the church. By the authority of the Word, Paul exposed this ‘scattering reality of scholarship’ and held the church accountable for the relational consequences both of reducing the basis for defining the ontology of persons and of fragmenting their function in interrelationships together (4:6-7, cf. 2 Cor 10:12). Perhaps Paul summarized best the scattering reality of scholarship with his declaration that “Knowledge puffs up *the individual*,” directly implying “at the expense of the whole of persons gathered together in interrelationships”—in contrast and conflict with “*family love builds up others in interrelationships together*” (1 Cor 8:1).

Scholars today typically assume that the knowledge they have is critical for the church, though much of that knowledge is often extra-biblical information. Even if biblical, what characterizes their knowledge is its narrowed-down epistemology in referential terms, which emerged from a narrowed-down epistemic field of the Word that excluded its relational language and terms. This narrow process imposed limits and constraints on the Word that reduced, fragmented or removed the Word from its relational context and process, the significance of which is for the only purpose of having relationship together.

This is the pivotal issue about the relational nature of God's communication in self-disclosure, the revelation which “the wise and learned” are unable to understand with their reduced interpretive lens in narrow referential terms; however, child-persons fully receive and understand with their open lens (without learned biases) in the primacy of whole relational terms—as Jesus made unequivocal about the Word (Lk 10:21, cf. Jn 5:37-40). Child-persons function vulnerably in the primacy of relationship while most scholars maintain relational distance and embrace the referentialization of the Word. Many today, however, will argue that critical interpretation of the Bible yields a more valid level of knowledge for the Christian faith, which warrants esteem and response from the church. The hermeneutical thinking is that the church should not return to the ‘first naiveté’ of premodern interpretation: a faith in what the text literally says.⁴ Yet, what is lacking in this knowledge are the words from God in whole relational terms that provide the experiential truth for whole understanding of God (as in Paul's *synesis*, Col 2:2-4)—the only boast of relational significance (Jer 9:23-24). And referential

⁴ See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 693.

information about God neither serves this relational purpose nor has this relational outcome, thus warrants no esteem or response from the church.

This dilemma existed even when Jesus taught with such depth that others were amazed. The skeptical response was “How does this man have such *scholarship* when he has never studied *in the academy*?” (Jn 7:14-15). Jesus distinguished his own teaching from the referential information of scholars, and clearly illuminated that his primary function in teaching emerged unequivocally from simply echoing the relational words from the Father—relational words communicated in relational language by relational terms rather than the referential terms used by scholars in the referential language of scholarship (7:16-18). Nevertheless, and we have to give account of this reality, a referentialized Word prevails in the academy and thus with what church leaders have been trained—contrary to what distinguishes Jesus’ own teaching. On the basis of this prevailing condition and these pervasive referential terms, fragmentary referential information about God has the perception of being authoritative—especially when enhanced by modern scholarship—such that it would be valuable to possess in this Information Age, regardless if it has little significance for the heart of the whole person and their relationships, or has no experiential truth of God in whole relational terms.

This then renders scholars to be ‘accumulators’ of knowledge in fragmentary referential terms, thus the more accumulated the better to try to cover the subject. This engagement becomes their primary function that then becomes preoccupied with the secondary. Such function by scholars, however esteemed and valued, is contrary to and in conflict with (1) Jesus’ primary function in teaching and thereby on a different theological trajectory, and (2) being gatherers of the family of Christ—in whole relational terms for the primacy of persons and their interrelationships together—and thus on a different relational path. Yet, these accumulators also accumulate (directly or indirectly) persons in church gatherings, which in reality only reduces those persons (in ontology and function) and fragments relationships (both with God and each other) that quite simply scatter the church. Persons who fall into this function, regardless of their accumulation of persons, are then also accountable for scattering—just as Jesus made unequivocal and imperative for us to address. Those who are taken in by accumulators—even for their own desire to accumulate information about God—also reinforce and sustain not being gatherers of the family of Christ, and thus are equally accountable for scattering.

As Paul illuminated for the church today, churches gathered by the knowledge of scholars (or similar leaders) are filled with individuals (including the scholar) defined in a comparative process by reduced ontology, whose function fragments relationships—even with the good intention of doing what’s good for the church, that is, good without wholeness. This exposes an underlying reduced theological anthropology lacking wholeness and related weak view of sin without reductionism, both of which conjointly mislead persons in the significance of their gifts and misguide them in the use of their gifts. This misuse of the Spirit’s gifts is in conflict with the Spirit’s vulnerable presence and relational involvement with each of them (manifestation, *phanerosis*) for the relational purpose to bring them together in synergism for their relational outcome as the family of Christ (the whole good of *sympheron*, 1 Cor 12:7). Even with acknowledgement of the Spirit’s work for the body of Christ, to disregard the relational purpose of the Spirit is to stop short of the Spirit’s *relational* work only for the family of

Christ. Therefore, the reality for such church gatherings is that their persons and relationships are fragmented and the church is being scattered. Whole ontology and function of persons, relationships and churches cannot emerge from reduced-fragmented ontology and function, and nothing more should be expected (even hoped) to unfold. This is the experiential truth facing the scattering reality of the misplaced value given to scholarship and misguided scholars.

Christians and churches must not continue to be misled. Gifted leaders come in various forms, yet some are perceived as having “more” charisma and evoke a broader response. So-called charismatic leaders have always been esteemed and have created followings, and this has engendered gathering myths in the church. The word of the LORD alerted Ezekiel to such gathering myths based on his esteemed charisma: “they talk about you *everywhere to everyone*, ‘Come and hear what the word is that comes from the LORD’. They come to you...*gather* before you...hear your words.... To them, you are like a singer of love songs, one who has a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument; they hear what you say, but they will not *respond any deeper*” (Eze 33:31-32). Jesus also attracted such a following but he exposed the gathering myth of such followers: “Very truly, I tell you, you *followed* me, not because you saw signs *from God*, but because you ate your fill of *what you wanted*” (Jn 6:26). Peter also enacted signs and wonders with the palpable Word that initiated the valid unfolding of the gathering church (Acts 2:43-44; 5:12). Yet, as Paul exposed, Peter’s charisma was also a source of fragmentation in the church.

Charisma, as commonly perceived, is misleading and rarely gives us a complete picture of that person. This lends itself to generating idealistic and unrealistic images, even constructing brands, that people esteem, the following of which engenders gathering myths. This apparently was the result of Peter’s charism, along with Apollos’ gift. We have a more complete picture of Peter’s person, as we’ve discussed through the course of this study.

The innermost of Peter’s person was defined by Jesus as “you of little faith” (Mt 14:31). Jesus also described him as an extension of Satan, who was shaped by human terms and thus preoccupied with secondary things that tried to reduce Jesus from the primary (Mt 16:23). Peter also presented himself as unworthy before Jesus’ whole person (Lk 5:8), which was more self-effacing and consequently not willing to make his person vulnerable to Jesus and thereby kept his relational distance (Jn 13:6-8). Typical of charismatic leaders, Peter should not be confused with being humble. He was boastful, and his boast exceeded and contradicted his practice (Jn 13:37-38), as well as was misguided (Jn 18:10-11) even though Jesus corrected his narrow views earlier (Mt 16:23). His track record raises questions, namely about the depth of his relational involvement of love with Jesus in the primacy of relationship together to define his discipleship, which still seemed preoccupied with the secondary (Jn 21:15-22). Then, at the height of his church leadership, his charisma was qualified with his relational consequence of fragmenting the church and its persons and relationships, when Paul exposed his *hypokrisis* (i.e. the function of role-playing) that revealed his self-conscious inconsistency and the undeniable contradiction of Peter’s theology by his own practice—consequential also in leading others in like *hypokrisis* (Gal 2:11-14).

What we need to learn from this picture of Peter is that charisma is not what we commonly think it is, and that following charismatic leaders is a misplaced faith that involves more myth than truth. The subtlety of this process is consequential for promoting illusions and simulation of the church body of Christ, which have no substantive relational significance for growing the church family of Christ. These gathering myths are not exposed apart from ongoing involvement in reciprocal relationship with the palpable Word, who gives us “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:10-16). This relational process is indispensable and its relational outcome is irreplaceable in order to understand the difference between gathering with Christ and scattering contrary to Christ—additionally, to discern respectively their myths and realities in the church, just as exposed in churches (counterparts to existing churches today) by the palpable Word (Rev 2-3, discussed previously).

Moreover, every person needs to learn that esteeming charisma and responding to charismatic leaders are not embracing the gifts of the Spirit with the palpable Word, who distributes charisma to every person for the synergism of the family of Christ. No matter what power, signs and wonders are performed by a few, the person of the Spirit grieves when our involvement is not in reciprocal relationship by the primacy of all persons connected in the uncommon interrelationships of the new-order church family, composed by their *koinonia* with grassroots interdependence (Eph 4:20-30).

The Spirit understandably grieves because what’s at stake here is “the gospel of *wholeness*” (Eph 6:15) that Christ whole-ly embodied for the complete salvation of what he integrally saved us from and to (Eph 2:14-22). The dynamics of gathering and scattering are not reflexive in a cycling of persons—which discounts any cycle of the Christian majority to the global South yet leaves unanswered what fills the church—but rather the dynamics are antagonistic in ongoing competition for persons, engaged in the conflict between wholeness and reductionism. Therefore, what raises the stakes in all this is the theological anthropology of the church: the primacy of persons and relationships together in whole ontology and function, or the fragmentation of persons and relationships in reduced ontology and function. “The theological anthropology the church uses will be the church it and its persons and relationships get.”

Accordingly, the compelling issue facing the global church is not the filling or non-filling of churches in the global South and North, respectively. Rather what needs to compel the church (local, regional and global) is resolving the issue of *what* fills the church, whereby gathering myths and scattering realities are exposed and held accountable with God’s family love in order to fulfill the interdependent synergism necessary for the church to unfold transformed in wholeness as the family of Christ. Anything less and any substitutes filling the church are scattering its persons and relationships.

Other Myths and Realities

Charisma and scholarship represent only the more prominent gathering myths and scattering realities in the church. Others can be identified and need to be accounted for in the church.

The emergence of Christendom (4th century) established the institutional church, which structured the church in a systemic-template of conformity. The institutional model

gathers the church with the limits and constraints that reflect, reinforce and sustain those composing the human condition. To the extent that this operates, the relational consequence is a gathering myth. The scattering reality of the institutional model today is a growing concern, yet the concern must not be limited to what doesn't fill the church (i.e. who left) but more importantly what fills the church. This issue is endemic to the institutional church in its existing forms.

From the Reformation emerged the organizational church as an alternative to and yet as a variation of the institutional church. The church organization was initially modeled after a voluntary association—associations that existed in human contexts throughout church history from the first century—and then increasingly also used models from formal organizations and business as they developed. The organizational structure and process are more efficient than any other structure and process the church has used. But, this efficiency requires preoccupation with secondary matters, which inevitably comes at the expense of the primacy of persons and relationships. Based on this focus and such priorities, how would you define church gatherings and what would determine what fills the church? Related, what would be the church organization's theological anthropology? The subtlety of gathering myths and scattering realities is difficult to account for when we (individually and collectively) are invested in the church organization and our investment is contingent on the church's success measured in secondary terms.

The organizational model was enhanced by the church growth movement with the principle of the homogeneous unit. Such church composition was not only more efficient but more convenient; and their conjoint function provided more calculated church growth, especially in a modern world where convenience prevails. Homogeneous church composition is a pervasive structure for churches that include gatherings based on culture, race, ethnicity, tribe, caste, ideology and so forth. With this as the norm, how uncommon are those interrelationships and how grassroots is their interdependence? These are different issues necessary to face, along with other issues involved in favoring a homogeneous church—whether the issues are structural, systemic, contextual, interpersonal or personal—particularly if persons are from a minority culture or race who have experienced discrimination or have been marginalized.

Homogeneous gatherings, on the one hand, avoid these fragmented relationships, whereby persons don't have to be vulnerable to their or others' disadvantage or threatened in their advantage. On the other hand, homogeneous gatherings cultivate the illusion and simulation of their relationships, such that they don't have to be vulnerable to grow further and deeper as whole persons in the primacy of whole relationships together. This conveniently allows persons and relationships to legitimize the limits and constraints that prevent them from being vulnerable both to other persons as well as their own person. The relational consequence for a homogeneous unit of whatever variation is a gathering myth disguising a scattering reality that reinforces and sustains the fragmentation of persons and relationships, even under the guise of promoting what's good for the church. How does the church unfold transformed in wholeness under this structure and process?

More specifically, for example, if a post-colonial church in the global South uses any of these models and their gifts are used in the manner discussed above, how will the post-colonial church be any different from the fragmenting colonial church, such that it will unfold transformed—beyond what prevails in the human context and condition? Relatedly, how will the grassroots church be any different from the Western church, such that it will unfold whole—beyond the sum of its parts?

If we cannot account for gathering myths and scattering realities in the church, then we have already been reinforcing and sustaining them, and consequently are bound to keep extending them invariably in the global church. The experiential truth facing the church, for which it is accountable, is the following experiential reality: The relational outcome of the new-order church family requires uncommon interrelationships, the uncommonness of which is ongoingly subjected to their commonization.

Uncommonness versus Commonization

The shared life together in uncommon interrelationships of God's family involves intimately participating in and whole-ly partaking of each other's lives. This also includes participating in and partaking of the life of God, in the primacy of the trinitarian persons and their relationship together. Intimately participating in and whole-ly partaking of God's life is problematic—as demonstrated by Peter when Jesus tried to wash his feet—which is not resolved simply in enhanced participation by our spirituality. The experiential truth of the whole of God is that God is both whole and holy; and the problem is the incongruity between the uncommon God and our common humanity—as witnessed in Peter's life shaped by his human terms and tradition. This immeasurable gap remained until the uncommon God was embodied for us to directly participate in and partake of the whole of God in face-to-face relationship together. The incarnation, however, did not resolve the problem by establishing a hybrid of the uncommon and the common—which is how Peter initially enacted his discipleship. The gap remains until common persons participate in and partake of the uncommon God's embodied relational response to redeem their condition and transform their persons and relationships to the uncommon condition in likeness of the whole and uncommon God.

This uncommonness is only this relational outcome and is irreducible to anything less (e.g. an attribute) and nonnegotiable to any substitutes (e.g. legalism). Otherwise our condition remains in the common and the gap continues to prevent intimately participating in and whole-ly partaking of God in shared life together. Therefore, until this uncommonness is our experiential reality, there is no gathering of, in and by the new-order church family of the whole and uncommon God.

Peter eventually was transformed whole-ly so that he emerged in whole theology and practice. He then understood in relational terms—beyond his previous referential terms shaped by his human tradition—that the church is “a holy *ethnos*,” people belonging and living together in God's own family (1 Pet 2:9). The gathering of the church for Peter was now “holy” (*hagios*), that is, separate from the common condition and thus belonging to the holy God. So, just as Peter came to understand in whole

relational terms that “he who called you and me is separate from the common condition,” it was vital in his new condition that all of us also “be separate from the common condition yourselves” (1 Pet 1:15). As illuminated from a more complete picture of Peter’s person, the process of being transformed from the common prevailing in his life, and the commonization pervading his theology and practice, to the uncommonness of Jesus’ person and the uncommon relationship of following Jesus, was indeed a struggle for Peter. Yet, Peter opened his person (i.e. his innermost “of little faith”) to vulnerably receive God’s family love (1:3), and the relational outcome made him vulnerable to the uncommon interrelationships of the whole and uncommon new-order church family of the whole and uncommon God.

We need to understand what unfolds from Peter and learn further from him how it unfolded. His redemptive change (old dying and new rising) from common to uncommonness whole-ly established Peter as a gatherer without myths, who used his charisma in ongoing reciprocal relationship with the palpable Word and not just in situations and circumstances. With his uncommon lens, Peter also saw the whole of Paul’s person and the whole in his theology, thereby understanding Paul’s uncommonness that a common condition could not (2 Pet 3:15-16). And don’t forget, this picture of Peter emerged after Paul lovingly confronted Peter face to face and held him accountable for his *hypokrisis*. How crucial is accountability to the church’s base for the interdependent synergism of the family of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 3:21-23)?

What we vitally learn and need to embrace from this further picture of Peter’s whole person is that commonization is pervasive, persistent and consequential in the innermost of persons and their relationships. Yet, *hagios* is not merely some spiritual condition that is an ideal attribute for us to have like God. To be separate from the common condition encompasses the prevailing condition in human contextualization—which includes but goes beyond being separate from the common condition ethically and morally—thus what prevails in all human contexts and the human condition with its full spectrum. Yet, to be separate from this common condition does not mean to be separate from those persons in this condition. This common condition also exists, pervades or prevails in the context of the church. *Hagios* involves not being defined and determined by this prevailing condition, and commonization includes being defined and/or determined by any and all aspects of this prevailing condition. In other words, to be uncommon is vulnerably exclusive—which should not be confused with being superior (as in exceptionalism)—and to be common is conveniently inclusive; and this means that the whole of uncommonness cannot be compromised by the reductionism in commonization or it loses its integrity. The distinction between them, however, easily becomes blurred both by alternatives of convenience and when we shy away from being vulnerable. Therefore, we cannot underestimate the influence and effects that commonization has on the church. To do so will reinforce and sustain its subtle fragmentary and counter-relational workings in persons, relationships and churches, even after their theology has been corrected (Peter would say ‘Amen!’).

Here again, the subtlety of reductionism must be exposed. This requires, as discussed in earlier chapters, listening to sin as reductionism, listening to the spectrum of the human condition, and listening to the person in self-consciousness, so that the breadth and depth of commonization existing in churches and its persons and relationships can be held accountable. Human contextualization and tradition shaped Peter’s person,

discipleship and ministry until uncommonness separated him from his common condition. For Peter, therefore, it is nonnegotiable for the uncommon church family to be separate from the common condition in its *koinonia*, its ministry and its witness in the common contexts of the world. Without this uncommonness, churches and their persons and relationships cannot be distinguished from the common, and thus they do not have the relational significance to witness to the experiential truth of the gospel of wholeness and the experiential reality of what they are saved *to*.

So, now the contemporary church is urgently faced with the vulnerable Peter in whole relational terms, the uncommon basis of which not only warrants our response but compels our involvement from the innermost, and thereby to be gathered together as family with uncommon interrelationships, composed in *koinonia* with grassroots interdependence, and relationally involved with each other for accountability with interdependent synergism (as Paul loved Peter).

Certainly then, uncommonness is neither a concept nor a doctrine merely to have as reference for who, what and how we are as persons, relationships and churches. The experiential truth is that Jesus calls his family “out of” the common in order to be whole, as Jesus prayed (Jn 17:14-16). To be separate from the common condition is to address the grassroots of our human condition and to make whole the ontology and function of persons and relationships fragmented in the human condition ‘to be apart’ from wholeness. Their uncommonness is the experiential truth needing to be the experiential reality in the church local, regional and global. The further experiential truth is that Jesus calls his family “out of the common” to be whole, so that he can send them “into the common” to make whole “just as I am and have been sent.” This is the truth and reality of the new creation, the uncommon condition of the church unfolding transformed in wholeness beyond just the body of Christ to integrally distinguish the family of Christ.

In this uncommon condition, the new-order church family unfolds as the gathering church for all the ages of persons, for the diversity of all peoples, and for the differences of all nations. Nothing less and no substitutes are uncommon, and, therefore, in reality anything less and any substitutes, even with good intentions, are persons, relationships and churches “who do not gather with me.”

Chapter 8 The Whole Witness for the Whole Gospel

**“The Spirit of truth ...will testify about me.
And you also must testify, for you have been with me.”**

John 15:26-27, NIV

**“So that they may be one, as we are one...completely one,
so that the world may know that you have sent me.”**

John 17:22-23

In his theological reflections about postcolonial criticism, Vinoth Ramachandra highlights the following:

The “we” in Christian speech always arises out of local contexts, but it is disciplined by our belonging to the global body of Christ. The church is the only truly global community, and it is largely a church of the poor. More spectacular than the resurgence of Islam—or the spread of New Age spiritualities in the Western world and Hindu or Buddhist nationalisms in the Indian subcontinent—has been the growth of indigenous Christian movements in the postcolonial South.

He also illuminates the following:

It was in the decades following decolonization that Christianity outpaced Islam in Africa. As I. M. Lewis has noted, the “total effect of the pax colonica, as much involuntary as intended, was to promote an unprecedented expansion of Islam,” and that “in half a century of European colonization Islam progressed more widely and more profoundly than in the two centuries of precolonial history.” The main bearers of African Christianity seem to have been the young, women, the oppressed and others lacking monetary and organizational power. This is in striking contrast with the spread of Islam in Africa or Hindutva among the Indian middle-class diaspora.¹

What Ramachandra points to is the grassroots witness that is instrumental in the central shift of Christianity to the global South, which is not apparent both to postcolonial critics and to those in the Western institutions interested in this shift. Yet, this grassroots witness does not answer the question of what those churches in the global South are filled with. Perhaps less apparent is what underlies the grassroots witness that integrally composes the witness necessary for the global church to have relational significance for the globalizing world.

In her analysis of the fundamental nature of nationalism, Eloise Hiebert Meneses points to the temporal condition of every state and empire of the last two millennia and the enduring condition of the church advancing toward the culmination of the kingdom.

¹ Vinoth Ramachandra, *Subverting Global Myths: Theology and the Public Issues Shaping Our World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 246-47.

With nationalism in the U.S. representing the Rome of our time, she raises the issue of Christian witness that does not fragment the gospel, and the need for an integral witness:

How are we to avoid syncretizing the gospel at the very place in which it is the most dangerous—the center of global power? Surely this will be possible only with the witness of Christian people from other places. It will be possible to remain truly faithful to Christ in America only by listening carefully to sisters and brothers from elsewhere and by receiving with humble acceptance a theology from the whole church.²

Yet, such an inclusive witness based on global theology does not necessarily either distinguish that witness as integral, or provide that witness with the significance needed to be whole in the prevailing fragmented human condition of the globalizing world. The whole theology and practice of Christian witness is not the quantitative sum of its parts, no matter how many global parts compose its witness.

In the reality of the globalizing world, what exists is not always what meets the eye, that is, aside from a biased lens. That reality exists also for the global church, namely in what is filling the church today and what is the nature of its witness and the gospel to which it witnesses.

If the church is to unfold as the gathering of the church family of Christ and not just some form of the body of Christ, the church by its nature must be distinguished by the gospel of wholeness: “My *uncommon* peace I give to you. I do not give to you *anything less and any substitutes*” (Jn 14:27). This peace as wholeness is the good news composed by Jesus in whole relational terms, which cannot be narrowed down to a referential peace or any other common terms. This whole gospel requires that its witness be congruent with its wholeness, which by its nature is the witness compatible with the whole and uncommon God embodied in Jesus and further involved in the palpable Word. What is this witness and why is it integral to the gospel?

The Nature of Witness and the Significance of Witnessing

The reliability of a witness and the validity of their testimony are certainly critical in a court of law. This significance is the nature of witness in jurisprudence, but the process of justice often has not involved this reliability and validity. When the news is reported, the reliability of the reporter and the validity of their report are indispensable for journalism to have credibility. Yet, it is common for most persons to receive the news reported and merely assume the reliability and validity of its information rather than question its reality. Christian witness includes these issues, but it also involves going deeper for its nature of witness and its significance of witnessing. Reliability of a witness, for example, can vary, based on a range from honesty to even good intentions, which is insufficient for compatible Christian witness; and validity is usually based on the facts, which is important but inadequate for congruent Christian witnessing.

² Eloise Hiebert Meneses, “Bearing Witness in Rome with Theology from the Whole Church,” in Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland, eds., *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 244.

The Experiential Truth of the Witness

When Jesus appeared to his disciples after the resurrection (Lk 24:44-48), he illuminated the Word for them so they could put together all the parts of his life (like a puzzle) to have whole understanding (the process of *syniemi*, v.45) of the Word—not fragmentary information or selective knowledge. This whole understanding went beyond the sum of this information about Jesus and deeper than just knowing the important things about him. Their whole understanding involved vulnerably experiencing the truth of Jesus’ whole person in face-to-face relationship together. Then the whole Truth declared: “You are witnesses of *my whole Truth*” (v.48), “you will be my witnesses to *the whole Truth in the global world*” (Acts 1:8), because just as “the Spirit of *my whole Truth*...will testify about me,” “you also must testify *concerning my whole person*, for you have been with me, *involved in reciprocal relationship together*” (Jn 15:26-27, NIV).

Along with the legal description of witness (*martyrion*, and to witness, *martyreo*), what is distinct of some witnesses (*martyrs*) is their participation in and thus experiential knowledge of something. The integrity of Christian witness is distinguished by the direct participation in and thus experiential knowledge of the life of Jesus’ whole person, the whole Truth, which will determine the reliability and validity of Christian witness. The truth of the early disciples’ witness had a two-fold basis: (1) they were eyewitnesses of the life of Jesus, and (2) they participated in and partook of Jesus’ life to experience his whole person, the primary basis of which composed the experiential truth of their witness (e.g. Jn 1:1-4). Since the Damascus road, Paul’s witness emerged from the experiential truth of direct involvement with the palpable Word in face-to-face relationship together—his whole witness based on his participating in and partaking of the whole and uncommon God, even though he wasn’t an eyewitness of the embodied Word. While our experience may not include the drama of Paul’s initial experience, it must involve the depth of his experience with the palpable Word in order to establish the experiential truth of our witness—the integrity distinguished by directly participating in and partaking of the whole of God in uncommon relationship together.

Christian witness based on these whole relational terms has the clarity that gives account of the complete significance (as in *syniemi* above) of Jesus’ whole person, thus the whole Truth in relational response to the human condition for the primacy of persons and relationships in wholeness. The relational significance of this good news testified in referential terms (e.g. merely in factual or doctrinal certainty) is rendered in a fog that makes its significance elusive, if not insignificant or irrelevant, for persons and their relationships. The difference in terms is a vital distinction for the Truth of Christian witness, whose nature is irreducible and whose response is irreplaceable with anything less than and any substitutes for the whole Truth. In other words contrary to conventional perception, the facts of Jesus’ life are not just propositional truth.

The embodied Truth cannot be reduced to a proposition, or the whole Truth is fragmented. But in fact the Truth embodied in whole relational terms the experiential truth of Jesus’ whole person for the only relational purpose and outcome of relationship together in wholeness. Only this experiential truth is the primary basis for the good news, and the factual information (notably in propositional and doctrinal terms) is only secondary (not necessarily unimportant) to this news—which in referential terms would be rendered unimportant due to a lack of relational significance (cf. Jn 2:23-25).

Therefore, the witness integral for this whole gospel relationally involves both the reliable experiential truth of direct compatible participation in Jesus' life with the palpable Word, and the valid experiential truth of intimate congruent partaking of his person in the palpable Word. This whole witness can only be composed by nothing less than this integral experiential truth; and the integrity of this whole witness cannot be based on anything less or maintained by any substitutes. Anything less is a secondhand witness lacking experiential truth. Any substitutes construct a dubious witness lacking reliability and validity.

The experiential Truth of Christian witness has challenged the church's witness throughout church history. The early church in Ephesus, for example, shifted the basis for its witness from the experiential Truth in whole relational terms to truth in fragmentary referential terms, whereby their witness was based on doctrinal purity at the expense of "forsaking *the primacy of relational involvement with your first love*" (Rev 2:4). Out of theological necessity, various issues of doctrinal purity occupied the Church Fathers as their primary focus, which apparently rendered their witness to the limits and constraints of the secondary and thereby reduced the whole Truth to their fragmentary witness lacking experiential truth. This narrowed-down referential condition and witness allowed for the emergence of Christendom and the construction of a church-state that subtly shifted Christian witness from doctrinal purity to the church institution. The integrity of the church's witness suffered immeasurably as persons were reduced essentially to conforming objects and relationships fragmented to relative insignificance by the primacy of the institution. This dubious witness became intolerable and precipitated the Reformation. The magisterial Reformers essentially returned the church's witness to its doctrinal basis, without necessarily restoring the primary relational significance of the whole Truth and the primacy of the experiential truth of the embodied Word in relationship together. Without the relational significance of the whole Truth, this newly re-formed doctrinal witness had no substantive testimony to challenge the emerging modernist framework. Instead, its witness was challenged by modernism. Two main reactions to modernism's rationalized challenge emerged: (1) fundamentalists retreated from it and reduced their witness in the world to terms limited to their narrowed-down context, which lacked the experiential truth of the whole Truth in relational response to the spectrum of the human condition in its sin as reductionism; and (2) evangelicals took up the challenge and shifted their witness to the primary focus of doctrinal certainty, which by the mid-twentieth century had reduced their witness to revolve around the reasoning of narrowed-down referential terms at the unintended expense of the primacy of the whole Truth, and thus at the unexpected loss of the experiential truth of the whole gospel and the whole witness required for it.

Christian apologetics has compromised the integrity of Christian witness more than it has challenged modernism. With essentially the same assumptions, this modern Christian witness has rightfully been challenged by postmodern practices. Yet, while the witness of postmodern theology and practice may have basis in experience on the local level, it lacks the experiential truth of the whole Word because its embodied Truth is not whole but fragmentary—lacking the reliability and validity to be of significance for persons and their relationships. Consequently, the modern witness is insufficient and the postmodern witness is incomplete, both lacking the integrity of the whole witness necessary to be integral for the whole gospel. This whole witness neither eliminates

apologetics nor denies the diversity of local experience, but rather puts them into whole perspective secondary to the priority of the following: (1) the primacy of the experiential truth of the whole gospel, not a narrowed down, partial or selective gospel, and (2) the relational significance required for persons in the primacy of their wholeness, not limited by their reason or surrounding context, in order to have the reliability and validity of their whole witness to the whole gospel and its experiential reality for all persons and their relationships to be whole.

The whole witness of the experiential Truth indeed challenges the church's witness of anything less and any substitutes. Beyond being an eyewitness, John illuminated their primary witness based on the experiential truth of compatibly participating in and congruent partaking of the palpable Word in reciprocal relationship together in order to be the reliable witness and to have the valid testimony of the good news of the whole of God's relational response to the human condition (1 Jn 4:13-14). And the palpable Word vulnerably present and intimately involved today wants to know "Where are you?" and "What are you doing here?" So, then, how would you define your witness to him who says "you also must testify to the whole Truth," and what would you say is the basis of your witness?

The Experiential Reality of Witnessing

If truth is not something we can experience, then that truth has no relational significance for persons and their relationships. Certainly, what some persons claim to experience as truth has no basis outside of their experience, thus that so-called truth has no significance for all persons; this is part of the issue with postmodern experience. If the whole Truth is not someone we experience, then the truth we claim has no relational significance for our persons and relationships; this is part of the issue with the primary focus of doctrinal purity, certainty and apologetics. The witness of such truth has lost its experiential nature—not to be confused with subjectivity, for example, as found in Schleiermacher—and no longer involves directly participating in and partaking of the truth, thereby rendering the nature of witness to the limits of observation and the function of witnessing to the constraints of observing. This would be sufficient for science and adequate in legal courts but insufficient and inadequate for the truth of the gospel. Such a narrowed-down process operates for science because it testifies to limited fragments of facts, from which the whole or greater reality can only be theorized. But it does not work for testifying to the full significance of the whole Truth, who cannot be reduced in his vulnerably disclosed ontology and function in whole relational terms to a mere Object in referential terms. Observers of the Truth, no matter how rigorous and scholarly, were not the witnesses whom Jesus declared "must testify about me because you have been *relationally involved* with me."

The reality even in this modern world is that the testimony of observers does not have the integrity of whole witness that is required for witnessing for the Truth (cf. Jn 19:34-35). Many observed the extraordinary ministry of Jesus and testified to what Jesus did (notably miracles) but were never relationally involved with him to experience the truth of being his followers. Obviously, those were not the witnesses that Jesus counted on to witness to the whole Truth in the world. Yet, much of Christian witness is reduced to the limits of observation, and its function of witnessing narrowed down by the

constraints of observing—that is, at a relational distance without the direct involvement of participating in and partaking of the palpable Word in face-to-face relationship together. With only the facts to report, albeit the facts or information about the embodied Truth, Christian witnessing has subtly lost its relational significance and struggles in its lack to be reliable and valid for witnessing to the whole Truth—the Truth who relationally responds in whole relational terms to the primacy of persons and relationships for their wholeness. What this essentially amounts to is what Paul declared with astonishment: those “turning to a different gospel” that has no relational significance to be good news (Gal 1:6).

Jesus told his disciples that when the Spirit of truth comes “he will testify about me *as my relational replacement*” (Jn 15:26, NIV), and “he will guide [lead, *hodegeo*] you in *the whole truth*” (*pas*, Jn 16:13). As Jesus’ relational replacement, the Spirit of truth does not testify in referential terms about propositional truth—which neoevangelicals either did not pay attention to or ignored with their modernist lens; rather the Spirit of truth witnesses to the further presence and involvement of the whole Truth in relational terms. In other words, the Spirit of truth is unequivocally ‘the Spirit of experiential truth’. The relational outcome of the Spirit’s witness, as the whole palpable Word, fulfills the experiential truth of Jesus’ promise to his followers that they will not be left as relational orphans (Jn 14:18). This experiential truth composed in relational terms by the Spirit’s whole witness becomes the experiential reality for those involved with the Spirit’s witnessing, the relational significance of which will lead them in the relational involvement with the whole Truth—not instruct them in propositional truth.

If the Spirit of truth only testifies to propositional truth, the experiential truth of not being relational orphans will not emerge as the relational outcome. Furthermore, with such limits the Spirit’s fragmentary witnessing will not lead to the relational involvement necessary with the whole Truth for relationship together in wholeness to be the experiential reality. Along with rendering persons to just be observers of the truth, the relational consequence of such witnessing is to be left as relational orphans, without the relational connection needed to participate in and partake of the whole Truth. These are the relational orphans commonly filling churches today, along with the observers of the truth witnessing on behalf of the embodied Truth reduced or fragmented from the whole Truth.

The relational significance of the Spirit of experiential truth witnessing to the whole Truth is both fulfilling and challenging. Since the experiential truth of the Spirit’s witness fulfills Jesus’ promise to his followers of not being relational orphans, this experiential truth must also be an experiential reality, or truth becomes only propositional without relational significance. Accordingly, in his determining family prayer Jesus prayed for the Father to “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” (Jn 17:17). Moments before his prayer, Jesus told his disciples that “you have already been cleansed by the word I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you” (Jn 15:3-4). The Word of God, the embodied Word, and the palpable Word together converge to compose the whole Truth only in whole relational terms and cannot be reduced to narrowed-down propositions in fragmentary referential terms; this integral convergence illuminates the experiential truth and reality of the whole of God, the Trinity. What distinguishes (sanctifies, cleans) Jesus’ followers from any commonization is the experiential reality of relationship together with the Word, the whole Truth, by whom and in which “the Spirit

of experiential truth will lead you in *the relational significance of the whole Truth.*” And their uncommon relationship together establishes their relational significance necessary for Jesus to “have sent them into the world” (17:18) on the relational basis of the experiential reality of their directly involved participation in and partaking of the whole Word; that is, in order for their witnessing to be “just as the Father sent me” (17:18, cf. 1:1), and therefore to have the same relational significance just as the Spirit of experiential truth witnesses to the whole Truth.

The uncommonness distinguished from commonization (as discussed in chap. 7) is neither a referential condition nor the condition fulfilled by propositional truth. Uncommonness is the relational condition that emerges only from the whole Truth who is composed by the whole Word—by whom Jesus prayed for his followers to be sanctified. The relational outcome is the experiential reality of the Trinity, who continues to be vulnerably present and relationally involved in and by the palpable Word for the experiential reality of our ongoing relational involvement in and partaking of the whole of uncommon relationship together with the whole and uncommon God in God’s whole and uncommon family. The relational significance of this unfolding relational outcome, led by the Spirit of experiential truth, distinguishes us in the experiential truth and reality of who we are and whose we are in wholeness together. This relational outcome alone fulfills Jesus’ promise and prayer, and thereby solely fulfills the relational significance required for the experiential truth of our whole witness and the experiential reality of our witnessing in, by and to the whole Truth.

The only purpose and significance of the Spirit’s presence and involvement is the experiential truth of his whole witness that testifies to the experiential reality of the whole Truth composed by the whole Word—none of which is fulfilled by referential terms with the primary focus on propositions and doctrines. The reality of the Spirit witnessing for the whole Word is palpable only in whole relational terms; and this reality is neither palpable in narrowed-down referential terms nor experienced by observing propositional truths. Based on the relational significance of the Spirit witnessing for the whole Word, our witnessing only has relational significance in the experiential reality of direct relational involvement with the whole Word, and not merely engaging parts of the Word in devotions or observing a referentialized Word in study and research. When this direct relational involvement is our experiential reality with the whole Word, then the relational significance of who we are emerges for witnessing to the experiential truth of whose we are with the whole Word as family together—no longer relational orphans, whose reality commonly existing in churches today is without the relational significance of direct relational involvement with the whole Word and, therefore, without the experience of belonging to the whole and uncommon Word’s family.

When we witness to the truth of the gospel yet can testify only about being saved from sin, that truth becomes just propositional and thus an incomplete gospel lacking its experiential significance. Moreover, that truth is both misleading and misguided—contrary to the Spirit of experiential truth leading and guiding in the whole Truth—because it fails to testify to the full nature of sin we are saved from. That is, it fails to include being saved from sin as reductionism. This truth of salvation is grossly misleading, because without being saved from reductionism we are essentially not saved from the primary nature of sin. This not only misguides our witnessing but, more consequential, it misleads those who claim this fragmentary gospel and misguides their

practice and fulfillment with only a truncated salvation. If our truth of the gospel includes being saved from sin as reductionism, then this must be, by the nature of sin, both the experiential truth and the experiential reality of having our persons and relationships redeemed from reductionism. The truth and reality of this experience, however, must by the nature of salvation then also include what the whole gospel integrally saves both *from* and *to*: from reductionism and to wholeness, since if we are no longer reduced in a fragmentary condition, the condition that has to emerge is the wholeness of persons and relationships together in God's whole and uncommon family.

Reductionism does not exist where there is wholeness and, conversely, wholeness does not exist where there is reductionism. They certainly do coexist in the human context but are mutually exclusive, which encompasses the pivotal issue between uncommonness and commonization. Therefore they cannot be combined in a hybrid condition. However, reductionism subtly misleads and misguides with epistemological illusions of truth and good news as well as ontological simulations of salvation and wholeness—an issue, influence and consequence that have yet to be either fully addressed or simply understood by the global church. Accordingly, we cannot witness to being saved from reductionism without the relational significance of being saved to wholeness, that is, the wholeness in likeness of the whole Truth, the whole Word, which the palpable Word leads and guides to completion in spite of the ongoing contention of reductionism. Certainly, the relational significance of witnessing can only emerge from the experiential reality of the wholeness of our persons and relationships—not the referential information or even propositional fact of this wholeness—which only unfolds from the experiential truth of the gospel of wholeness in relational response from the whole Word with the ongoing relational involvement of the palpable Word. Nothing less than this experiential truth can distinguish our witness and no substitutes for this experiential reality can compose the relational significance of our witnessing. Yet, the reality of reductionism's presence and involvement also coexists with the gospel of wholeness in ongoing contention in order to mislead and misguide with illusions of the truth of the gospel and with simulations of its salvation and the significance of its fulfillment for persons and relationships.

In contrast and conflict with the oft-subtle relational consequence of reductionism, the truth and reality of the relational outcome of wholeness fulfill the needed, if not longed-for experience of persons, relationships and churches to be whole—the fulfillment to be whole also needed in the shared ontology and function of all persons, peoples and nations. Whether the relational significance of the Spirit of experiential truth—witnessing to the whole Truth and for the whole Word—is fulfilling or yet to be, it is also challenging to our witnessing. Where then is the state of our witnessing today? What is its level of experience and to what extent does it have relational significance?

From the Lausanne Movement's last gathering in Cape Town (2010), its theological manifesto was expressed in "The Cape Town Commitment" to spell out what it means for the practice of ministry and mission. In Part II, it initially focused on "Bearing Witness to the truth of Christ in a pluralistic, globalized world," which included the following statement: "Because Jesus *is* the truth, truth in Christ is (i) personal as well as propositional; (ii) universal as well as contextual; (iii) ultimate as well as present."³

³ The Cape Town Commitment: Part II – For the World We Serve: The Cape Town Call to Action (posted 1/28/2011). Online at <http://lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment>, 11.

This is followed by a call to be people of truth, who must jointly *live* and *proclaim* the truth. If we can assume that this reflects the prominent state of witnessing by the global church today, we get an illuminating picture of its level of experience and the extent of its relational significance. Other than to say “personal as well as propositional,” there is no indication or even sense that the embodied Truth is experiential truth, much less the whole Truth. This lack or gap in their perception of the personal truth of Christ leaves the embodied Truth without the relational significance of the Truth’s only defining purpose to constitute anew the primacy of relationship together in wholeness. Without the experiential truth to fulfill the whole Truth’s defining purpose, the primacy of relationship together in wholeness eludes us for the experiential reality of participating in and partaking of the whole Truth—what needs to involve Cape Town’s statement “must *live* the truth.” The relational consequence of this lack of experiential reality leaves our witnessing without its relational significance to live fulfilled in wholeness and to help others to experience the truth and reality of this wholeness in a pluralistic, globalized world—what needs to distinguish Cape Town’s “must *proclaim* the truth.”

Witnessing that is disconnected in relational distance from the experiential truth of the whole Truth, and thus without the experiential reality of relationship together with the whole Word, is of no relational significance to the person of those witnessing and to the persons of those witnessed to—not to even mention its insignificance to the whole and uncommon God. We must never simply assume the reality of this relational connection, nor assume the ongoing involvement of our person and take for granted that our relationship together has relational significance. In terms of the state of our witnessing, perhaps there is secondary significance for those witnessing to the referentialization of the Word with the proclamation of propositional truths or related information, or even for those proclaiming the signs and wonders of the Spirit’s power at the expense of the Spirit’s person in his primary relational purpose and significance. Such secondary significance, however, is contrary to if not in conflict with the experiential truth of the gospel of wholeness and the experiential reality of what we are integrally saved both from and to—the whole salvation that the Spirit of experiential truth will lead and guide us to completion, just as the embodied Word promised.

Only the relational significance of the whole gospel’s relational outcome distinguishes the whole and uncommon God’s relational response of family love to the human condition and its full spectrum in the globalizing world, including to the full spectrum of our condition in the global church. When the full relational significance of the depth of God’s relational response is integrally the experiential truth of our witness of whose we are and the experiential reality of our witnessing to who we are, then, and not until then, the persons, relationships and churches of the global church unfold transformed to be whole together, to live this wholeness together in their human contexts, and to make whole the human condition in the world, while ongoingly making whole our human condition in the church. With this qualitative-relational depth level of experiential truth and this increasingly whole breadth of relational significance, Jesus affirms that “you also are to testify *concerning the whole Word* because you have been *relationally involved with the palpable Word*—just as the Spirit of experiential truth testifies *regarding the whole Truth*...and leads you in *ongoing involvement with the whole Truth*.”

Witnessing in the relational significance of the Spirit of experiential truth indeed challenges our witnessing today, both in what and who we witness to and how we witness. Yet, the challenge is inseparable from the fulfillment that the Spirit completes in our persons and relationships to compose churches in their primacy of wholeness. Any lack of this experiential reality has immeasurable consequence on the quality of our lives, which until fulfilled finds longing, shelter or escape along the spectrum of our human condition in the church—including in ministry and mission. Therefore, antecedent to the challenge of our witnessing is the challenge by the palpable Word to be fulfilled indeed with what we are saved *to*. This whole gospel converges initially with the whole relational terms of Jesus' determining prayer for his family to integrally compose the experiential truth of the whole and uncommon God and the experiential reality of God's whole and uncommon family (Jn 17:20-26). This prayer magnifies the experiential truth and reality of the whole gospel that needs to *be fulfilled* in the persons and relationships belonging to the church in order to distinguish their relational significance that will also be fulfilling to those in the world.

The Challenge of the Gospel to *Be Fulfilled*

The Word from God is communicated and composed in human contextualization only in whole relational terms. The communication of the Word both illuminated the whole Word in the beginning and highlighted in the beginning the primacy of relationship together central to the whole of God, by which human persons and relationships were created in likeness. The primacy of this uncommon relationship and its whole relational terms are what the Word embodied to compose the experiential truth of the gospel (Jn 1:1-5,10-14,18)—the whole gospel composed *in* human contextualization but which cannot be composed *by* human contextualization in whatever diversity or the gospel is fragmented. While many persons neither acknowledge nor embrace these propositional truths, even many who do still live in a fog without the illumination from the light in the experiential truth of the whole Word. These are persons who claim the gospel yet still are not fulfilled by the experiential reality of the primacy of relationship together embodied by the whole Word only in whole relational terms. The experiential truth of the gospel challenges those persons in particular, and all persons in all contexts, to be fulfilled in this experiential reality, so that their persons and relationships will directly experience (not just observe or be informed of) their primacy in wholeness—the uncommon whole central to the whole and uncommon God.

The fulfillment from the gospel is a unique experience, incomparable to other human experience; and its uncommonness is distinguished from commonization and incompatible with common practices for persons and relationships. This immediately challenges the anthropology of persons and relationships, as well as raises contingencies for their fulfillment. That is, this experience emerges only from the whole gospel that has not been reduced or fragmented.

There are different views of anthropology in a pluralistic world, yet a common perception promoted by the global economy prevails that centers on a consumer person reduced to a quantitative life of secondary things. This perception prevails only because of an existing anthropology shared by essentially all persons, peoples and nations of the

world. Regardless of differing views of anthropology that shape persons and relationships with different emphases and practices, there is at the core of all anthropology a shared ontology and function of persons and relationships that defines who and what they are, even though how they are may be expressed slightly differently. All human contexts involve persons at the center of their existence, as well as revolve around the interconnection of persons. This does not mean that persons and relationships always have primary priority in those contexts, or that their primacy is valued. Nevertheless, for human contexts the composition of all anthropology includes a shared ontology and function. The key question is, what is the nature and significance of the ontology and function of persons and relationships that is shared?

The global church is accountable to answer this question for its plurality, but not by promoting pluralism for its persons and relationships. That is, the global church needs to go deeper than any plurality defines and get down to its innermost—at the heart of what’s primary. While anthropology shares an ontology and function, theological anthropology defines what the nature and significance of this ontology and function are that all persons and relationships share, need and have to fulfill at the heart of their persons and the depth of their relationships. Now the critical question for the global church is: What is the church’s theological anthropology that defines the ontology and function of its persons and relationships, and how significant is this theology and its practice for the experiential reality of the primacy of persons and relationships in wholeness?

The whole gospel challenges the theological anthropology of persons, relationships and churches. When the whole Truth also revealed to his disciples that “I am the life” (Jn 14:6), the Life (*zoe*) distinguished his whole life from his innermost to his outer physical body in primary qualitative terms in contrast to the various parts, aspects and situations of his life (*bios*) from outer in in quantitative terms—yet Life not at the exclusion of his physical body, as some theological heresies promoted in the early church. The whole Life extended eternal *zoe* to those relationally involved with him for the qualitative relational outcome “that they may know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent,” which is not the quantitative longevity of *bios* commonly associated with eternal life (Jn 17:3). The good news composed in whole relational terms by the whole Truth and Life unmistakably centered only on “I came *for the relational purpose* that they may have *zoe*, and have it abundantly” (*perissos*, over and above, Jn 10:10); yet *perissos* should not be confused with comparative terms of *bios* but understood as the quality of life ‘over and above’ the quantity of *bios*. The quality of life in *zoe* from inner out is the heart of the whole gospel, and this uncommon life cannot be reduced to the quantity of *bios* from outer in (however prosperous and eternal) without fragmenting the gospel and thereby losing its significance for persons and relationships to be fulfilled in their primacy of wholeness.

The *zoe* of the gospel challenges the ontology and function of persons and relationships. Persons in reduced ontology and function are defined in primarily outer-in quantitative terms, who are focused on the parts, aspects and situations of what they do and have, including achievements and successes. Is *zoe* good news for them ‘over and above’ the abundance of *bios*? All persons share an ontology and function that need to be whole in order to fulfill the heart of their person and the depth of their relationships. *Zoe* offers them the quality necessary to fulfill their primacy of wholeness, yet they have to

want more than *bios* and be willing to make their *bios* secondary to *zoe* and thus be vulnerable with their ontology and function to the primary changes that *zoe* will make in the quality of their persons and relationships. Just as the whole *Zoe* made himself vulnerable to be intimately involved with the primacy of his person in relationship with us to give us *zoe*, we need to reciprocate compatibly in relational likeness to receive the quality of *zoe* to be fulfilled in wholeness—‘over and above’ the quantity of *bios*, its related reduced ontology and function, and what commonly prevails for persons and relationships in the pluralistic, globalizing contexts of the world. If the gospel we claim and proclaim does not challenge the ontology and function of our persons and relationships, then that gospel is neither composed with *zoe* nor whole, therefore without the significance for persons and relationships to be fulfilled in their primacy of wholeness.

The whole gospel, then, is not only challenging but indeed threatening to persons, relationships and churches in reduced ontology and function with a focus from outer in. There is both overt and subtle resistance to convert from an ontology and function based on the parts of what persons do and have, because when the identity and self-worth of persons (individually and collectively) are dependent on these outer-in measures there is great amount of investment made in *bios*—all of which would be lost by turning to *zoe*. The solution to this dilemma is to claim an incomplete gospel that fragments its wholeness and reconstructs its significance. The most common witness of such a gospel has been the testimony of a truncated salvation limited to only being saved from sin. Yet, as we discussed previously, the salvation from sin of this narrowed-down gospel is misleading because it witnesses to sin without reductionism that does not fulfill the need for wholeness in the shared ontology and function of all anthropology. This misleading limited gospel was instrumental for others to construct a social gospel to witness to the common good in order to fulfill the need of the human condition. The social gospel, however, is misguided because it commonly witnesses to good without wholeness, which then is also misleading since its witness neither addresses sin as reductionism nor saves from it in the good news it claims for the common good that is without wholeness.

Both of these alternatives (and others such as a prosperity gospel) to the whole gospel fragment its wholeness and reconstruct its significance, thereby witnessing more to what persons want or even desire without necessarily addressing what they need to be whole. The unintended consequence allows reduced ontology and function to be reinforced and sustained, while witnessing without either challenging this human condition (beyond ethical and moral terms) or fulfilling it at its heart. Certainly, therefore, this also removes the threat to our human condition of reduced ontology and function in the church and allows us to continue in fragmentary theology and practice, under the guise even of serving and glorifying Christ.

The spectrum of this condition existing in the global church needs to be accountable to the whole gospel and to claim its challenge, or else we will be witnessing to an incomplete gospel that is narrowed-down to be compatible to our preferences and to support our practices.

Witnessing to an Incomplete Gospel

Jesus cleaned out the temple so that his house would belong to his family of all persons, peoples and nations, to which the evangelist bears witness in the first part of the Gospel of John. The significance of the placement of his witness should not be lost on us—as happens in the synoptic Gospels, whose chronological accounts near the end of Jesus’ life often get filed away as referential event—because the evangelist was witnessing to the experiential reality of the gospel’s experiential truth introduced in the beginning of John. This composed the heart of the whole gospel that unfolds in the entirety of John’s Gospel.

The heart of the whole gospel converges with and unfolds in Jesus’ determining family prayer, recorded only in John’s Gospel to witness to the fulfillment of the whole gospel in the experiential reality of the church family of Christ (Jn 17). The only good news for the church in Jesus’ prayer is the experiential truth of his relational words “that they may all be one; as you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us” (v.21). The relational significance of this good news (good only with wholeness) for his family is that it both transforms the ontology of persons from outer in to inner out in likeness as the whole of God, and reorders their function in relationships in the same likeness of the whole and uncommon God. That is to say, again in relational terms and not referential terms, the experiential truth of the whole ontology and function of God becomes in irreducible and non-fragmented likeness the experiential reality of whole ontology and function for the persons and relationship belonging to his new-order church family. This relational outcome is the ontology and function emerging in wholeness from Jesus’ cleaning out of the temple to transform his family dwelling; Jesus’ assertive action in the temple represented the extent of redemptive change needed to counter reduced ontology and function and not to allow its practice to continue in his house, so that his family would be whole. In other words, therefore, the whole gospel fulfills the ontology and function of persons and relationships in their primacy of wholeness, and on the basis of the whole gospel’s significance it must challenge the ontology and function of anything less and any substitutes. The gospel’s challenge necessarily includes challenging the condition of our ontology and function in the church, likely also threatening our theological anthropology and its practice.

When our ontology and function in the church is based on a reduced theological anthropology rather than the whole gospel, what defines persons and determines relationships in the church become rooted in secondary outer-in parts and aspects of *bios*. These defining and determining parts and aspects are vested in what persons do and have. The comfortable news in this narrowed-down process is that it does not include the whole person and their relationships from inner out, for which this process is designed not to have primary concern. The bad news of this process is that the parts and aspects of persons are always measured in a comparative process, which limits persons to those comparative secondary terms and fragments their relationships to the constraints of a stratified order resulting from the comparative process. Not only does this limit persons and relationships to reduced ontology and function but it readily constrains them in this reduced condition. This is the relational consequence, for example, of colonial theology and practice, both for those colonized and those colonizing—the ontology and function of which the whole gospel challenges and threatens. Postcolonial theology and practice must

understand the significance of their gospel, or their ontology and function could also merely reflect, reinforce and still sustain this reductionism.

Reduced ontology and function in the church is expressed in explicit and subtle ways, as has been discussed in the course of this study. Many of these ways appear legitimate and thus pervade the church without the challenge and threat of the whole gospel (e.g. as seen in the early churches and their counterparts, Rev 2-3). When Jesus comforted his disciples with the good news, the whole Truth and *Zoe* also assured them as the Way. Thomas did not hear good news because he focused on referential truth and *bios*: “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” (Jn 14:5) With good intentions Thomas tried to specify the way from multiple possibilities. Given his focus, however, Thomas actually opened the door to fragment the whole Way into many other ways. Jesus had already clarified for them that the Way can only be defined in relational terms with whole ontology and function and cannot be opened up to include anything less and any substitutes (Mt 7:13-14). The whole Way is composed only by the experiential Truth and the ontology and function of *Zoe*.

The pivotal issue for persons, relationships and churches is summarized to this:

Either live in the ontology and function compatible with the challenge of the whole gospel and therefore congruent with its fulfillment, or claim an incomplete gospel that allows your ontology and function both to remain incompatible with the experiential truth of the whole gospel’s challenge, and to sustain a witness incongruent with the experiential reality of the whole gospel’s fulfillment.

This pivotal choice for the whole Way is irreducible from the whole relational terms composing God’s relational response for the experiential truth and reality of the gospel; and the choice is also nonnegotiable to any human terms shaping our reciprocal relational response to the primacy of persons and relationships together fulfilled by this whole gospel.

The whole Way gave this pivotal choice to Peter when he refused to allow Jesus to wash his feet. Given the intensity of Peter’s discipleship, his report card probably put him at the top of his class of Jesus’ disciples. So, in referential terms it is odd to hear Jesus tell Peter that “Unless I wash you, you have no share with me” (Jn 13:8). The key to Jesus’ response is whole relational terms over referential terms, and the key to Peter’s reaction is *bios* over *zoe*. Peter’s reaction exposed his practice from outer in shaped by his tradition and sociocultural context, which sustained his involvement with Jesus in the limits and constraints of reduced ontology and function. This prevented the primacy of his person and Jesus’ person and their relationship together to be whole. Jesus’ response in relational terms, then indeed, challenged Peter’s condition, which was incompatible with Jesus’ whole ontology and function and only simulated Peter’s involvement in their relationship together. In reality, Peter’s discipleship wasn’t vulnerably involved by his ontology and function from inner out and thus he had “no share with me”—that is, he didn’t participate in and partake of Jesus’ whole person in the primacy of relationship together in wholeness. Therefore, Peter’s fragmented practice in reduced ontology and function was challenged by the whole Way of the gospel, with the pivotal choice to be fulfilled in the primacy of his person and relationships and thereby to live in whole ontology and function.

Peter could not reduce the whole relational terms composing the Way of God's relational response for the whole gospel, nor could he renegotiate the whole relational terms of the Way for his reciprocal relational response to the good news of the primacy of all persons and relationships together belonging to the family of Christ. Yet, Peter struggled with his choice of the Way until he made his ontology and function vulnerable from inner out to the challenge of the whole gospel in order to be fulfilled in wholeness. The global church today struggles with its choice of the Way, still often claiming an incomplete gospel that allows the shared ontology and function among the diversity of its persons and relationships to conjointly (1) remain incompatible to the experiential truth of the whole gospel's challenge, and (2) sustain a witness incongruent with the experiential reality of the whole gospel's fulfillment in the wholeness of persons and relationships.

Certainly, like Peter, the global church is influenced in various alternative ways of practice by diverse traditions and sociocultural contexts. The pivotal issue again is not the reality of existing diversity but most significantly the reality of existing reduced ontology and function; and its resolution goes beyond the common notion of being counter-cultural or of multiculturalism. The subtle spectrum of reduced ontology and function prevails in human contextualization and thus pervades the plurality of traditions and sociocultural contexts. Contextualization of the gospel easily sustains this reduced ontology and function unless we can distinguish *zoe*'s ontology and function of the whole gospel from this reduction. And we cannot distinguish the experiential truth of this whole ontology and function until our persons and relationships are distinguished by the experiential reality of our ontology and function in wholeness.

From the beginning, human ontology and function have been shaped by self-determination. Even with a gospel of salvation by grace (faith not works), many of the ways of the church today continue to be shaped by self-determination—a subtle result of a reduced theological anthropology. Compounding this process is the modern development of convenience that promotes narrowing down our ontology and function. The reality of this convenience in the church has this consequence: It increasingly constructs a gospel tailored to the convenience of persons and relationships and, accordingly, has shaped more and more ways of the church—all of which unavoidably reinforce and sustain reduced ontology and function in the church and its persons and relationships, whereby the wholeness of the gospel is fragmented and its relational significance is scattered.

What also fragments the gospel of wholeness and scatters its relational significance are the homogenous ways of the global church. This includes the homogeneous composition of churches according to race, ethnicity, tribe, culture, class or caste, and age, even gender—or, relatedly, having a perceptual-interpretive framework and lens based on nationalism, the use of which enforces conformity to its template. Language may require a homogeneous composition as an initial practical necessity but this composition should not remain for the sake of convenience, particularly for succeeding generations. Discrimination, of course, forced homogeneous church gatherings out of necessity, for example, as experienced by African Americans during slavery and for years following, and also experienced by blacks in South Africa. Yet, even in such contexts, to remain homogeneous is to continue in their fragmentation of the

shared ontology and function of all persons, peoples and nations, in addition to sustaining persons and relationships in *their* likeness of reduced ontology and function.

This consequence emerges from whatever the homogeneous composition is based on. The reality facing these contexts in their homogeneous ways is critical yet subtle: on the one hand, it becomes (or is designed to be) a convenient context too comfortable to integrate, but, on the other hand, it prevents their persons and relationships to be fulfilled in wholeness and actually scatters them without relational significance rather than gathers them in the relational significance of the whole gospel. A homogeneous church does not witness to the relational significance of the whole gospel and cannot witness in its persons and relationships the fulfillment of the gospel of wholeness. Therefore, those in the Lausanne Movement, among others (particularly in the academy), need whole understanding (*synesis* from *syniemi*) to address the reality that the global church in its homogeneous ways is not and cannot be “bearing witness to the *whole* truth of Christ in a pluralistic, globalized world.”

The whole Way continues to challenge the diverse yet fragmentary ways of the global church, which are engaged in reduced ontology and function unknowingly or not. Again, the challenge should not be considered as emerging from the notion of counter-cultural or multiculturalism. When we examine church practice today, what is the ontological and functional basis for that practice? When we examine church ministry, what is the ontology and function of persons and relationships that you see the most? When you look at the church’s witness, what is the significance of the ontology and function that is highlighted and how it is presented? When we focus on the gospel presented by our church, how compatible is it to the experiential truth of the whole gospel’s challenge and how congruent is it with the experiential reality of the whole gospel’s fulfillment in the wholeness of persons and relationships? When we honestly ask ourselves what we personally get out of church, how fulfilling is it for our persons and relationships and their primacy? Of course, answering these questions assumes we are not biased by the limits and constraints of reduced ontology and function. In this sense, a hermeneutic of suspicion is a helpful practice to ongoingly exercise in family love.

Reduced ontology and function cannot distinguish the whole gospel or distinguish the new-order church family of Christ—distinguished by the primacy of persons and relationships together in wholeness. So, we cannot witness to this whole gospel, its challenge and its fulfillment until its relational outcome is the experiential reality of the persons and relationships belonging to the church family; and its lack or absence signifies a contrary reality that keeps persons, relationships and churches constrained in an incomplete gospel unable to be fulfilled. Inescapably then, we cannot avoid the shared ontology and function in all the persons, peoples and nations composing the church, nor preclude their presence in the church. That means unavoidably, we must (1) address the redemptive change necessary where diversity promotes and sustains reduced ontology and function, and (2) attend to the shared ontology and function of all persons and relationships in order to integrate them into the whole of their ontology and function in likeness of the whole ontology and function of their whole and uncommon God. The unmistakable experiential truth and reality are that reductionism and wholeness cannot be combined and that commonization and uncommonness cannot be blended.

When we define persons by what they do and have from outer in, we fragment the shared ontology and function of all persons and relationships. When we make distinctions in persons according to their diversity, we further fragment this shared ontology and function. When we determine relationships based on persons' achievement, resources, possessions and distinctions, we extensively fragment our shared ontology and function in a scattered condition without relational significance, such that we cannot claim the experiential truth and be fulfilled in the experiential reality for our ontology and function of "all be one, just as you, Father, are in me and I am in you."

Jesus' family prayer determines our persons in the uncommon ontological identity distinguished from the common of whatever prevails for persons and relationships in their surrounding contexts—the irreplaceable relational outcome from the *ek-eis* dynamic of John 17:14-18—and determines our relationships in the uncommon relational function of the very whole and uncommon God. His family prayer has to be the good (with wholeness) news that determines who and what all persons are in the church and how all relationships function in the church. At the heart of the church's infrastructure for all the functions and ways of the church is the whole and uncommon ontology and function in "just as" likeness of the whole and uncommon God. All the ways of the church must converge, if not collide, in the whole Way, so that the ontology and function that likewise emerged from the Way's cleaning out reductionism in his house will extend into and unfold in wholeness by the whole Word's determining family prayer.

So, when you look at the contemporary church, is it witnessing to the whole gospel or an incomplete gospel? The whole gospel with its challenge raises contingencies for persons and relationships to be fulfilled. First, they have to be vulnerable in their ontology and function from inner out. Next, they have to be willing to change and convert from any reduced ontology and function, whatever its source and influence. With redemptive change (old dying and new rising), then they have to be directly involved with their whole person in the primacy of relationships together in the church family and in the world—just as Jesus is with them and was sent—in ongoing reciprocal relationship with the palpable Word. As this relational outcome unfolds and fulfills persons and relationships in their primacy of wholeness, they will witness without shallowness or ambiguity to the experiential truth and reality of the relational good news "so that the world may believe that you have sent me *in relational response to their condition*...so that the world may know that you have sent me *to make them whole* and have loved them *with the depth of relational involvement* even as you have loved me" (Jn 17:21,23).

Of course, an incomplete gospel allows persons, relationship and churches to avoid these contingencies and not be threatened by the challenge of the whole gospel. At the same time, they could not be fulfilled in wholeness and thus their witness could never be whole. In response to them, the whole Way, Truth and *Zoe* would simply and sadly add, if not with frustration, "you have no share with me," "and whoever does not gather with me *in whole relational terms* scatters," because "the gospel you use will be the persons, relationships and churches you get."

Therefore, the pivotal choice is ours to make. And the relational outcome or relational consequence is determined by our choice, even if we avoid making it.

The Whole Witness of Family and *Koinonia*

When Jesus shared in his Olivet discourse about the last days, he revealed to his disciples that before this unfolds, the human context will be seductive, deceiving, filled with conflict and fragmented, even among those in the faith, and “the love of many will grow cold” (Mt 24:4-12). That is to say in relational terms, the relational involvement of love will become relationally distant, detached, separated from one another to pervade and prevail in all persons, and in relationships of all peoples and nations. His followers’ ontology and function will be challenged and threatened, if not deceived or seduced, by this human context. Those who remain (*hypomeno*) relationally involved with the palpable Word in what they are saved *to* will still witness to the experiential truth and reality of the whole gospel: “this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world as a testimony to all *persons, peoples and nations*” (24:13-14).

The key issue of the human context, which challenges, threatens, deceives and seduces his followers in their ontology and function from inner out, is the relational consequence of the primacy of relational involvement being narrowed down to relational distance, reduced to relational detachment, and fragmented to relational separation from each other. This pervasive and prevailing influence has had and continues to have immeasurable relational consequence on the global church and its churches, persons and relationships. The pivotal issue further emerges for all churches, persons and relationships: Either be vulnerable to the threat and respond to the challenge of the whole gospel for their ontology and function to be whole, or receive the challenge and threat of the human context and be deceived or seduced in the primacy of their persons and relationships to have their ontology and function reduced—evidenced most distinctly by the distance, detachment or separation of their persons in the direct involvement in relationships together, and evidenced subtly by the virtual involvement prevailing in social media. Those who meet the challenge and threat of the whole gospel, distinguished from that received from the human context, continue (*hypomeno*) to be relationally involved in the primacy of their persons and relationships to experience the truth and reality of what they are saved to—the relational outcome of which composes their whole witness of the whole gospel. Yet, to remain and continue to be relationally involved goes beyond just enduring circumstances and situations (e.g. hardships, even persecutions) associated with *hypomeno*, which by itself does not compose the whole witness for the whole gospel (as evidenced by the early church in Ephesus, Rev 2:3-4).

The witness of the gospel that Jesus defined to be proclaimed was the experiential truth and reality of “the gospel of the kingdom,” that is, God’s whole and uncommon family—which was contrary to the common prevailing messianic perceptions and expectations during Jesus’ time. Relational involvement with the palpable Word is the key to understanding the good news of the kingdom, and is integral for this witness to be the experiential reality of God’s family and not just a witness to its propositional truth and doctrinal certainty. As we learn from the church in Ephesus, the latter does not compose this whole witness, no matter how committed, dedicated and rigorous in referential terms. Moreover, as Paul clarified for the relational outcome of the whole gospel, it is inadequate for the church to be merely formed as family. It is also insufficient for the church to have merely a thriving fellowship with a popular witness to compose the primacy of persons and relationships needed for the experiential reality of

the church's witness to the complete good news of God's whole and uncommon family, not just the fact of the kingdom. We learn from the early church in Sardis that a vibrant reputation and popular witness do not have the relational significance of wholeness (1) to claim with validity the experiential reality of 'the gospel of God's family' and thus (2) validly to proclaim its experiential truth for persons and relationships to be fulfilled whole-ly (Rev 3:1-2).

Paul illuminated further the most significant relational truth that Jesus, the whole Way, Truth and *Zoe* of the gospel, alerted his disciples to anticipate: the Spirit of experiential truth witnessing to the whole truth that will lead and guide them in the experiential reality of being his family—the whole gospel's fulfillment of persons and relationships in the wholeness of the whole and uncommon God's whole and uncommon family. What Paul further illuminated emerged from the palpable Word, with the significance of this relational truth unfolding with the Spirit of experiential truth, to which the global church needs to listen completely without referentializing it or being selective about it, and to whom its persons and relationships need to vulnerably give themselves over fully in their ontology and function from inner out.

First, Paul clarified that the Spirit given to us does not compose a template for our conformity to measure up to, which would constrain if not enslave persons and relationships and cause fear of failure. Rather, the Spirit is directly involved in the primacy of persons and relationships as "the Spirit of adoption" to lead and guide them in God's whole and uncommon family, in order that they will not be relational orphans in the family of Christ, as the whole Way, Truth and *Zoe* of the Word promised. When Paul distinguished the Spirit in whole relational terms, he magnified the relational significance of the experiential truth that the Spirit unfolds: "it is that very Spirit *of adoption* bearing witness with our spirit [whole person from inner out] that we are children of God," not in referential terms of name only but belonging whole-ly in relational terms for the experiential reality by which "we cry, 'Abba! Father!'" (Rom 8:14-16) As Paul experienced as the reality in his own life, this relational outcome unfolds only from reciprocal relational involvement with the palpable Word to participate in and partake of the glory of God's qualitative being (signified by heart), relational nature (intimately involved) and vulnerable presence with nothing less and no substitutes (v.17).

Furthermore, the relational outcome of God's whole and uncommon family is needed not only for the spectrum of the human condition but also "For the creation *of the whole environment* waits with eager longing for the revealing *experiential reality* of the children of God," because all of creation has been subjected to reductionism also and is bound by its fragmentation and brokenness, waiting to be made whole (8:19-22). And only the witness of God's whole and uncommon family has the validity for creation to be restored to wholeness. Thus, the church family's response to the global environment is not optional but what emerges from the nature of who and whose it is.

The whole witness of the church family, however, unfolds just in the relational process composed only on the experiential basis of God's whole relational terms. The process of whole witness cannot be narrowed down to referential terms or the witness no longer has an experiential basis, thus it loses its relational significance to have validity witnessing both as the experiential reality and to the experiential truth of God's whole and uncommon family. Therefore, what the Spirit of adoption leads the family of Christ in must also involve the vulnerable relational process of uncommon relationships

together—which cannot be shaped by the diversity common to human contexts—because this relational outcome of family unfolds only from the primacy of uncommon reciprocal relational involvement with the palpable Word. This primacy of relational involvement is determined by the Spirit’s uncommon relational involvement, who then guides the church family of Christ into the depth of relational involvement together to incomparably distinguish (beyond all that prevails in the human context) the primacy of their uncommon interrelationships as family, in the direct relational likeness of the whole and uncommon God. This vulnerable relational process and depth of relational involvement are irreducible and nonnegotiable for the whole witness of the global church family, thus they cannot be shaped by the human terms of the church’s diversity or its witness is no longer whole to be of fulfilling significance for all of its own persons and relationships, for the spectrum of the human condition, and for all of creation.

When the embodied Word shared his family love on the cross, the completion of his relational work for salvation tore open the curtain in the temple and reconstituted the house of his family to be directly and vulnerably involved in the primacy of relationships together without *the veil* of any relational distance existing between them. What the whole Way, Truth and *Zoe* of the Word dramatically composed is the undeniable relational process of what he saved us to. With the veil removed, there were no more limits and constraints on participating in and partaking of the whole and uncommon God with God’s whole and uncommon family (Eph 2:18; Heb 10:19-22). If Jesus’ relational work has been reduced to a referential event, then these limits and constraints remain imposed on our persons and relationships. For many, such referentialization is a convenient practice that removes the threat of going deeper in relationships with a vulnerable ontology and function.

Once again, the Spirit—that is, the embodied Word converging with the Spirit *into* the palpable Word—is the key to the relational outcome of being fulfilled by this whole gospel. Just as Paul illuminated the transformation of the family of Christ in likeness of the palpable Word: “When one turns to *direct involvement with the palpable Word*, the veil *in relationships* is removed...where the *palpable Word* is *vulnerably present and intimately involved*, there is freedom *from the limits and constraints prevailing in relationships*...seeing the glory of *the palpable Word’s qualitative being, relational nature and vulnerable presence* reflected in *their persons and relationships together, as they* are being transformed into the same *qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole and uncommon God*; for this *relational outcome only* comes from *reciprocal relational involvement with the palpable Word*” (2 Cor 3:16-18).

This vulnerable relational process and depth of relational involvement in unfragmented and thus uncommon relationships together distinguishes the new-order church family of Christ, in order to (1) grow in the relational significance of their vulnerable interrelationships distinguished as God’s uncommon family (Eph 2:19-22), and (2) have the relational significance of their *koinonia* distinguished by their depth of relational involvement in grassroots interdependence as God’s whole family for which they are accountable with interdependent synergism (Eph 4:15-16). In Ephesians, what Paul made definitive for the church clarifies this experiential reality of the gospel’s experiential truth: the relational significance of both the interrelationships of God’s uncommon family and their *koinonia*’s grassroots interdependence of God’s whole family are inseparable and integrally required to fulfill the church and its persons and

relationships in the gospel of wholeness (Eph 6:15), and on this relational basis alone to compose their whole witness with the validity of the relational outcome of what the whole gospel saves them to (cf. 4:22-25; 5:8-9).

This experiential truth and reality of the new-order church family and *koinonia* continue to challenge, if not threaten, the global church. It can choose to be vulnerable to the threat and respond to the challenge of the whole gospel in order for its churches, persons and relationships to be fulfilled in the experiential reality that makes whole their ontology and function—what the whole Way, experiential Truth and ontology and function of *Zoe* saved them to only in whole relational terms, which and who cannot be reduced to referential terms and still be whole. Or the global church and its churches, persons and relationships can continue to receive the challenge and threat of the human context to shape their theological anthropology and practice, and thereby be deceived and seduced in the primacy of their persons and relationships to have their ontology and function reduced and their witness fragmented by an incomplete gospel. The relational consequence of the latter choice may or may not (depending on comfort level) leave churches, persons and relationships “with eager longing for the *distinguished emergence* of the children of God,” in order not to continue functioning as relational orphans without belonging and involved in the interrelationships of God’s uncommon family and in the *koinonia*’s grassroots interdependence of God’s whole family.

The Spirit of adoption in the palpable Word continues to be vulnerably involved to free us from our limits and constraints, whereby we will be transformed to the new-order church family that fulfills our persons and relationships in the experiential reality of whole ontology and function, in the experiential truth of the qualitative image and relational likeness of our whole and uncommon God. This is the gospel of wholeness vulnerably witnessed to us by the whole palpable Word for the only relational outcome that will be relationally significant and have the validity to unmistakably distinguish our whole witness in and for the whole gospel—in the very relational outcome of the whole Word’s determining family prayer “so that the pluralistic, globalized world may believe that you sent me in relational response to their condition ‘to be apart’ ...so that the fragmented world may experience the truth and reality that you have sent me to be relationally involved with them in family love in order to belong to our whole and uncommon family.” The palpable Word witnesses to nothing less and no substitutes in order for this gospel to be whole so that it will make whole all persons, peoples and nations and all their relationships, including all of creation, in the whole and uncommon God’s whole and uncommon family.

What is our response as the global church? And what do we claim and proclaim to define, determine and distinguish our witness? The palpable Word would like to know: “Where are you in your persons? How vulnerable do you make your ontology and function from inner out and keep your whole person primary?” and “What are you doing here in your relationships? How relationally involved are you and how much distance do you have in your relationships? Do you take my removing the veil seriously and keep it off in the primacy of relationships together?” This is the ongoing challenging and threatening involvement of the palpable Word in order to account for ‘the measure we use’ so that we will be accountable for ‘the gospel, the church and the witness we get’.

Indeed, the Spirit of experiential truth and adoption in the whole palpable Word is ready to lead and guide us in the whole truth necessary for the experiential reality of the depth of our relational involvement in the vulnerable relational process to permanently belong to and ongoingly participate in and partake of the new-order global church family for all persons, peoples and nations. This whole and uncommon relational process unfolds only without the veil of their distinctions reducing the primacy of their persons in whole ontology and function, and the relational consequence of fragmenting their relationships together with relational distance, detachment and separation in the comparative process and homogenous condition of stratified relations.

Chapter 9 The Uncommon Equality of the Equalizing Church

Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other.

Psalm 85:10, NIV

**Righteousness and justice are the *authority* of your *kingdom*;
love and faithfulness go before you.**

Psalm 89:14, NIV

***All in Christ are the new-order family...who reconciled us to himself through Christ,
and has given us the relational work of reconciliation.***

2 Corinthians 5:17-18

**Let us then pursue what makes for *uncommon* peace
and for mutual up building of *God's family*.**

Romans 14:19

When the global church emerges distinguished and unfolds with the palpable Word as the gathering church for all the ages of persons, the diversity of all peoples and the differences of all nations, the global church composes the whole witness for the whole gospel. With this experiential reality of the experiential truth of the whole and uncommon God, the new-order church family of Christ is relationally involved vulnerably with the human context “just as I am and have been sent.” The relational outcome of this vulnerable involvement by its nature unfolds only from the uncommon relational process that distinguishes the uncommon relationships together of the new-order church family. Into this uncommon relational process, all persons, peoples and nations can converge in order to merge in uncommon relationships together, so that they will emerge distinguished in the experiential reality of their primacy in the wholeness of the new-order church family of the whole and uncommon God.

Anything less than the uncommon will not compose the relational process required for all persons, peoples and nations to converge and compose the relationships together needed for them to merge. Whatever results from such less-than-uncommon efforts will neither be whole nor distinguish God’s whole and uncommon new-order family. So, what is this uncommon relational process of the uncommon relationships together distinguished by only the new-order church family? How this is answered by the global church will determine whether the relational outcome of its witness in the pluralistic, globalizing world will have relational significance for the shared ontology and function of all persons, peoples and nations—shared beyond their human distinctions and deeper than their outer-in differences.

We begin our response to this question and related issues with the focus by necessity on the experiential truth of the whole and uncommon God.

The Idolization of the Truth of God

When Paul engaged the pluralism in Athens at their public forum (Acts 17:16-34), he addressed the truth of God distinguished from what had become the common human shaping of God. The God embodied by Christ was too uncommon for many of those present, yet some responded to this uncommon God. The controversy centered on the uncommon God embodied by Christ continued to occupy the Church Fathers out of theological necessity in response to those who would reshape God in less than uncommon terms. What emerged from this contentious theological process formalized the experiential truth of God in Paul's witness into theological orthodoxy. Since orthodoxy of the truth of God did not end the controversy completely, its doctrinal propositions became idolized for theology and practice—the varying results of which then served and became essentially indistinguishable from the idolization of God, that is, shaped by those referential terms constructed by well-meaning Christians. For the most part, this human shaping of the truth of God was distinct from the experiential truth of God in Paul's whole witness, and thus would strain to be distinct from the idols of truth that Paul addressed.

The idolization of the Christian God seems to be a misnomer, an oxymoron that surely the truth would clarify and correct. Yes and no. No, if the truth has undergone human shaping, which is the significance of Pilate's response to Jesus about what truth is. Yes, if the truth is the embodied Truth, who composed the whole Truth only as the experiential Truth, who cannot be reduced to referential terms and contained in doctrine and propositions and still be distinguished from the human shaping of God, however good the intentions are in a pluralistic world. The critical issue here is the subtle process that narrows down the epistemic field of the truth of God, the process which first emerged in the primordial garden and has evolved subtly since. When the epistemic field to know God has been narrowed down, what can be known about God has limits and constraints based on that epistemic field. Certainly, the knowledge of truth from this limited field reduces the margin for error (or heresy) but it has also immeasurably diminished its relational significance by its constraints on the experiential nature of the whole Truth. Rather than embrace the experiential Truth of the whole and uncommon God, as some responded to Paul's witness, what emerges from a narrow epistemic field is a certainty of truth about God that is essentially idolized as the primary knowledge of God and its witness and ministry—as demonstrated by the church in Ephesus with its orthodoxy lacking the relational significance of the experiential Truth, having “forsaken your first love.” The truth of God idolized, however, is not the whole and uncommon God embodied by the whole and experiential Truth.

The idols (*eidolon*) that Paul pointed to in his witness were the common images and representations of gods shaped by persons, peoples and nations. The psalmist said “all the gods of the peoples are idols” (*‘eliyl*, Ps 96:5). Idols signify to be weak, deficient, and any such object idolized, at best, can only be a substitute for God. We have general perceptions of such idols today, perhaps not as distinct as those experienced by Paul. Yet, the critical issue about an idol is perceiving any god in a reduced ontology and function, or having an idol such as wealth and success as a substitute for God; and the crucial concern for the global church today is perceiving the Christian God with a reduced ontology and function. In whatever shape God is reduced, often subtly, from whole

ontology and function, the truth and reality of the Christian God becomes an idol. Moreover, when God is narrowed down to simply doctrine and propositional truths, however orthodox, this God is reduced to the shape of our human terms—even if by theological necessity to clarify errors and correct heresies. Anything less and any substitutes for the whole and uncommon God are made into an ‘idol’ who is fragmented, deficient, and neither whole in ontology and function nor distinguished from the common images and representations shaped by Christian persons, peoples and churches. This constitutes the idolization of God that the global church needs to address in unison with Paul, in order for the church, its gospel and its witness to be whole.

Anything less and any substitutes shaping the whole and uncommon God render the response of these Christians as idolization. The reality in a pluralistic world is that all gods serve a purpose for human persons, peoples and nations. Humans idolize gods (even such as education) to try to fulfill whatever purpose a god has for them—some more actively and radically than others, yet all with a common desire and hope for their god. This is also true for many Christians, who idolize the Christian God to try to meet their purpose—contrary to or in conflict with the relational purpose God has and fulfills in the experiential truth and reality of reciprocal relationship together in whole relational terms. This idolization of the truth of God has evolved in history such that the shape of the Christian God increasingly and subtly conforms to serve common Christian purposes, desires and hopes, even as a civil religion for a nation such as the U.S.

The Church Fathers’ shaping of the truth of God evolved, unintentionally yet not surprisingly, into Constantine’s construction of Christendom, shaping the idolization of the Christ God to serve the purpose of the church-state and fulfill its assumed divine destiny in the world. This gave birth to Christian nationalism, which idolized the God that emerged from the further narrowed-down epistemic field of the state-church. Within a narrow epistemic field there is an expedient connection between the certainty of orthodoxy and the certitude of nationalism, between its conviction and its hubris, its dogmatism and its bigotry. In nationalism, the shape of God is idolized by civil religion, which increasingly shapes the idea (and ideology) of God rather than the truth of God. It is the ideology of God over the theology of God that has assumed primacy in American nationalism, and its idolization has become the basis for what is commonly known (notably by experience) as ‘American exceptionalism’.

American exceptionalism is known globally mainly through the experience of the certitude, hubris and hegemony of U.S. actions around the world. What has emerged in this unique form of nationalism has an expedient connection to Christian orthodoxy. Because of what became idolized in orthodoxy, the idolized basis for American exceptionalism is the counterpart that essentially emerged as a by-product of orthodoxy’s human shaping of the experiential truth of God to narrowed-down referential terms. This underlying connection helps us understand the ideology of God that is idolized in American exceptionalism in order to fulfill God’s sovereign purpose in the world.

Kurt Richardson makes the following comments on American exceptionalism:

There are numerous “exceptionalisms” in the world, and for many today the American version has become a shibboleth to determine who is a “true American.” American exceptionalism is a doctrine based on Christian sources in biblical prophecy, ecclesiology, messianism and “Christendom.” This ideology is now called

“exceptionalism.” In this ideology, redeemer nation and visionary republic mark America as superior above all others. These Christian and biblical notions are then translated into civil religious discourse in order to create an ideology of an American “national character.” As such, American exceptionalism is not necessarily a partisan doctrine, although political partisanship has indeed led to a radical veering to the political right in its current incarnation. Exceptionalist ideology in the United States has nevertheless been embraced by both parties and can be seen in notions of Manifest Destiny and the myth of a reluctant empire covenantally bound to spread the rule of law and democracy around the globe. Indeed, this was one of the original implications of the ways that congregational polity and democratic polity became correlated.¹

Of course, the main global experience of American exceptionalism has been colonialism, along with its economic neocolonialism in the globalization process, both of which are currently chastened by other nations and global dynamics. Richardson comments on the misguided thinking of exceptionalism:

Although there is nothing particularly wrong with claiming a general providential advantage for Christian mission and service, it becomes apparent that a system moves into a new ethical realm when it claims for itself the kind of divine right, authorization or election that comes with special prophecy for a nation. The term *exceptionalism* signifies a divinely appointed existence for the nation. The idea of exceptionalism provides a guiding rationale and source of justification for the nation’s grandest domestic and foreign policies. But since many other “Christian” nations have claimed the same status, the American iteration is just one of many examples of the so-called exceptionalist fallacy. As the apostle states, there is “no distinction” among human beings before God since God is gracious toward all (Rom 10:12)—to think otherwise is fallacious, all the more of nations. Once a nation claims for itself a divinely ordained “exceptionalism” that arrogates to itself the duty to act in the sociopolitical realm, it implies the belief that there is an office or charisma that is above the law, exempt from natural justice or excepted from the demands of human obligation under certain self-defined circumstances.²

‘Empire’ has been the classic term used for exceptionalism. The building of empire should not be confused with the kingdom of God but that’s how it has evolved. Originally, the kingdom of God was designed for all nations (Gen 17:4; 18:18), yet Israel didn’t want to be God’s kingdom ‘for all nations’, or even ‘over all nations’, but to be “like other nations” (1 Sam 8:4). Israel’s nationalism substituted for the kingdom of God and thereby lost the relational significance of God’s whole and uncommon family, which Paul clarified and corrected (Rom 9-11, cf. 14:27). The ambiguity, however, of the kingdom of God in early church theology and practice continued within narrowed-down terms, whereby such a kingdom evolved into becoming synonymous with the empire

¹ Kurt Anders Richardson, “American Exceptionalism as Prophetic Nationalism,” in *Evangelical Postcolonial Conversations: Global Awakenings in Theology and Praxis* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 121.

² Richardson, 129.

built by Constantine—the empire-kingdom of God not so much *for* all nations but *over* all nations, hence the exceptionalism of Rome. And accurately identified, America is the modern empire of Rome that continues to appropriate the truth of God with idolization to legitimate its purpose and fulfill its goals.

Yet, all of the above should not be surprising and even should be expected, when the truth of God has been narrowed down from whole relational terms to the limits and constraints of referential terms—terms that reduce the whole and uncommon God to common human shaping. The commonization of God referentializes the experiential truth of God into the truth of an idol; and the common idea and practice of an idolized truth have no relational significance, even as it claims to have the truth—making relevant Pilate’s skepticism of what truth is. We should not and cannot expect anything more than what’s common, when we idolize God in our theology and/or practice.

Further distinguishing God from idols, the psalmist proclaims that only the whole of God is worthy of our relational response (Ps 96:4). That is, this is the whole and uncommon God who alone is *pala* (marvelous, wonderful, distinguished) beyond comparison yet who is vulnerably present and intimately involved with us in the experiential truth of God’s experiential reality to make us whole in new relationship together (96:1-3)—as promised in God’s definitive blessing (Num 6:26) and fulfilled by the whole and uncommon God’s relational response embodied by the whole Way, the experiential Truth, and the ontology and function of *Zoe*. Yet, the experiential truth and reality of God become elusive or are lost when the epistemic field to know God has been narrowed down.

The commonization of the truth of God into an idol has been consequential for the global church and all the ages of its persons, the diversity of its people and the differences of its nations. Whether in orthodoxy, Christendom, empire, nationalism or exceptionalism, the idolization of anything less than and any substitutes for the experiential truth of the whole and uncommon God results in claiming a God of weakened ontology and deficient function; and claiming or proclaiming such a weakened, deficient God has the relational consequence of all human persons and relationships losing their primacy to a condition of reduced ontology and function in likeness of a narrowed-down God. The loss of primacy for persons and relationships leaves all persons, peoples, nations and their relations subject to the conforming limits and subjugating constraints of the templates of orthodoxy, nationalism and exceptionalism.

The key in this whole process, and therefore at the heart of its solution, is the ontology and function of God. God’s ontology and function are the basis necessary for the theological anthropology of persons and relationships with the ontology and function in likeness of God, rather than God in likeness of their anthropology. This irreducible truth and nonnegotiable reality are, respectively, the experiential truth of God’s *whole ontology and function* and the experiential reality of human ontology and function transformed to wholeness in likeness of God. The experiential reality of this relational outcome is contingent on the ongoing experiential truth of the whole and uncommon God’s vulnerable presence and intimate involvement, which is distinguished only by whole ontology and function in reciprocal relationship together.

Based on nothing less than and no substitutes of the whole ontology and function of God, the global church has the urgent and pivotal opportunity to respond to the question involving what is the uncommon relational process of the uncommon relationships together unfolding distinguished only in the transforming relational outcome composing God's new-order church family. But we must maintain an ongoing qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness that anything less and any substitutes for God's whole ontology and function fall into idolization in one form or another, because this has become the default mode of persons, relationships and churches in practice whenever their theological anthropology is not whole.

As we proceed, you should also understand that you may become uncomfortable with what follows, if you've not already been discomfited. Uncommonness has this effect on persons, peoples and nations, as Paul witnessed with the Areopagus. When we start to get "comfortable," we fall into our default mode. That is, we become relationally distant from outer in, less sensitive to the qualitative and less aware of the relational, and thus we become engaged in ontological simulation of the reality and epistemological illusion of the truth facing us. The 'comfort' composed by God's whole relational terms, which is available to us with the palpable Word, is to feel more free to be who and whose we are—not necessarily relaxed situationally as "comfortable" implies. What follows requires us to be increasingly free to be in the primacy of who we are in whole ontology and function in the likeness just of whose we are—without being rendered secondary and thus fragmentary by the limits and constraints of commonization.

The Truth of God Unfolds in Whole Relational Terms

In the beauty of poetic structure, the psalmist illuminated the whole and uncommon God's integral presence and involvement with us in the human context (Ps 85:10-13). We need to sing his poetic truth because God's wholeness and uncommonness compose the truth of the gospel and distinguishes its relational outcome, by which we are fulfilled and we together witness in the pluralistic, fragmented world that "waits with eager longing for the *whole witness* of the *new-order church family* of God" (Rom 8:19).

When the psalmist points to the reality of God's salvation, God's glory (signifying God's qualitative being, relational nature and vulnerable presence) will emerge to be relationally involved in our context (85:9). This is how God's presence and involvement unfold before us: "Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other... righteousness goes before him and prepares the way for his steps" (85:10,13, NIV). What takes away the significance of this intimate poetic dance is when a referential lens views each key term as an attribute of God rather than the whole relational terms of God's involvement with and response to us for our salvation in relationship together in wholeness. Attributes do not compose this good news no matter how true those attributes are. Likewise, the attributes of God don't fulfill us by the gospel—only God's involvement and response fulfill in whole relational terms.

God's love and faithfulness are relationally interrelated ("meet together") because God's relational involvement (love) is consistently reliable in responding (faithfulness) no matter what, in order to compose the integral relational process necessary to respond to us in the relational significance for our salvation. Furthermore, these are not merely

propositional truths of God's promise and response, just information about God, and parts of what God does. God's love and faithfulness can be counted on throughout this relational process to be consistently involved with the whole of God for the whole relational outcome, because God's righteousness and peace are functionally inseparable ("kiss each other"). That is, the whole of who, what and how God is (righteousness) enacts this relational process with nothing less and no substitutes, and therefore can be counted on as the response of God's wholeness (peace). Righteousness is the key relational antecedent for God's integrity ("goes before him"), which defines the experiential truth of his vulnerable presence and purpose and determines the experiential reality of his relational involvement and response ("prepares the way for his steps"). And the wholeness of God's relational response has the relational outcome promised in this gospel to be fulfilled in wholeness.

The experiential truth of God unfolds only in the integral relational process of God's love and faithfulness being relationally interrelated, with God's righteousness and peace being functionally inseparable; and the convergence of the whole of God in this uncommon relational process composes the whole relational terms of the experiential truth of the gospel. Indeed, in the poetic truth of the gospel, "God's faithfulness springs forth from *the human context of God's vulnerable relational involvement of family love* and God's righteousness looks down from *the source of God's relational involvement with nothing less than God's wholeness*" (85:11).

On the basis of this uncommon relational process composing the good news, there unfolds further uncommonness of the truth of God that the global church needs to understand and embrace, and thus to further sing the poetic truth with the psalmist. As "love and faithfulness go before you," in wholeness "righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne" (Ps 89:14, NIV, cf. Ps 97:2). Once again, God's righteousness is not static (a foundation) in whole relational terms but unfolds in the relational dynamic with wholeness for the relational work of justice (*mishpat*). *Mishpat* signifies all the functions (such as a judicial process and government) necessary to integrate persons together in a collective order that serves their well-being according to prescribed terms (namely laws), to which all (including groups, organizations, systems and structures) in that collective order are accountable. God's justice could be compatible with common justice but is also beyond human justice because the *mishpat* of God is distinguished by the whole of who, what and how God is, and enacted only in wholeness and for the relational outcome of wholeness according to nothing less than God's whole relational terms. The latter involve not merely the laws of God commonly narrowed down to ethical and moral terms for conformity, but include those in addition to God's irreducible and nonnegotiable terms for the primacy of persons and relationships together in wholeness—which also go further than just human rights.

God's righteousness is the authoritative relational basis indispensable for *mishpat*. That is, '*mishpat* without righteousness' is not God's justice because it does not distinguish who, what and how God is in wholeness, and thus such justice is not enacted in wholeness. Without the authoritative relational basis of God's righteousness, any justice cannot be counted on both to be reliable and to have the validity of wholeness. God's uncommon justice enacts the substantive function required to integrate all persons and relationships (not some or a select few) in their primacy together in wholeness for the new-order family (the kingdom of his throne) of the whole and uncommon God. In this

uncommon relational process, God does not sit on his throne to dispense justice as the ultimate judge. In contrast, and even in conflict, God's "love and faithfulness go before you" makes the whole of who, what and how God is relationally vulnerable to be directly involved in relational response for the uncommon *mishpat* that integrally brings persons and relationships together face to face in the uncommon relationships of wholeness, distinguished just in the whole and uncommon God's family.

With the convergence in the integral relational process of nothing less than and no substitutes for God's love, faithfulness, righteousness, wholeness and justice, the experiential truth of the whole and uncommon God unfolds in whole relational terms vulnerably both in response to us and in ongoing reciprocal relationship with us. What unfolds in this uncommon relational process is not merely to set the precedent for what unfolds from us, notably with justice. This uncommon relational process is not about principles of how to live and what to do, especially just in ethical and moral terms, all of which would reinforce and sustain us in reduced ontology and function. *Who* unfolds in this uncommon relational process is for only the relational purpose of reciprocal relationship together in wholeness.

The whole ontology and function of God unfolded ultimately in the incarnation with nothing less and no substitutes. Yet, the relational significance of who came and what has come in wholeness continue to be narrowed down and thus fragmented in our theology and practice, therefore elusive in our experience. The global church needs to have whole understanding (*syniemi*, putting the pieces together for the whole) of all the implications of narrowing down the truth of God who unfolded whole-ly and in uncommonness, and then the church must urgently address all the ramifications of fragmentation in its theology and practice. As Jesus assured his disciples of the further unfolding of the palpable Word, he clarified unequivocally: "Wholeness I leave with you; my wholeness I give to you. *Be assured and distinguished in your theology and practice that I do not give to you the common peace as the world gives*" (Jn 14:25-27). When Jesus wept over the social context of God's people, he openly expressed his feelings: "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you wholeness—but now it *eludes your perceptual-interpretive lens*" (Lk 19:41-42, NIV). His feelings continue to be expressed today with the palpable Word and are directed at the global church and its persons, relationships and churches.

The experiential truth of the whole Word and his gospel of wholeness have unfolded in whole relational terms. And the experiential truth of who continues to unfold is the experiential reality that the whole and uncommon God does not direct us from his throne to rule *over* us, as is common for a king (cf. Lk 22:24-26). Rather the experiential reality of God is vulnerably present and intimately involved to lead and guide us in compatible reciprocal relationships together in whole ontology and function, in order that our response to each other in God's family and to others in the world will be congruent in love, faithfulness, righteousness, wholeness and justice with God's. Anything less and any substitutes will not have the relational significance distinguished only in God's whole ontology and function, nor will it distinguish the relational significance of our ontology and function transformed in wholeness.

‘Common Peace’ and ‘Justice without Righteousness’

Either the palpable Word is not involved to “teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you” (Jn 14:26) and to “guide you into the *whole* truth” (Jn 16:13), as Jesus promised, or we are not paying primary attention and listening in relational terms to the palpable Word in order to determine the measure we use in our theology and practice.

When Paul clarified the theology and corrected the practice of the church, he declared: “For the kingdom-*church family* of God is not *composed by such secondary* matter of eating and drinking *according to purity laws* but of righteousness, peace and joy in *reciprocal relationship with the Holy Spirit*” (Rom 14:17, NIV). Paul clearly sings here the poetic truth of the psalmist, though he also adds the experiential truth that unfolds in reciprocal relationship with the Spirit (in the palpable Word). What Paul addressed here is a specific issue in the church that had primary consequences on persons and relationships. This relational process unfolds with any specific issue since it involves the church’s basic theology and practice, which he clarified and corrected. Thus, we cannot overlook its relevance for the contemporary church and importance for its theology and practice.

First, Paul makes definitive the truth that the church family of God is not composed of secondary matter. The relational significance of this truth becomes obscured by realities in a church that relegate Paul’s words to ideal truth, which then makes it not a definitive truth but an impractical truth, perhaps an inconvenient truth. Certainly, organizing persons and coordinating relationships in a church require time and attention, and these commonly become (pre)occupied with secondary issues that invariably emerge as a fact of life in the church. What does a church do with these realities?

Paul’s next definitive truth would answer by implication that the church needs to redefine how it is composed and determine its composition on the primary basis of righteousness, peace and the Spirit of experiential truth. With the Spirit, the righteousness of who, what and how God is in whole ontology and function challenges (if not threatens) the ontology and function of those in the church, at the heart of who, what and how they are, whereby their righteousness can be determined in wholeness in order to determine who, what and how the church is in its primacy instead of by secondary matter. Yet, the primacy of who, what and how the church and its persons and relationships are is only composed by the uncommon peace as wholeness. There is a critical differential Paul makes that unfolds from the gospel of wholeness composed by the wholeness of God, which is integral for the church composed in its primacy of righteousness. Paul did not prescribe a common peace here that involved primarily the absence of conflict. Differentiated from a common peace is the uncommon peace distinguished only by God’s peace, which is distinguished not by the absence of conflict but by the presence of wholeness. This is the wholeness innermost of the uncommon God’s ontology and function (Phil 4:7) that constitutes the uncommon peace embodied and given by the whole Word to his church family. The wholeness of God is the uncommon peace that Paul makes the only determinant for composing the church (Col 3:15; 2 Cor 13:11; 1 Thes 5:23).

Conflict certainly is a reality in the church, not to mention the increasing conflicts throughout the world, which Paul had to face also. In these situations, is not the absence of conflict a positive condition? Yes, indeed, and Paul had to address such situations at times with only the absence of conflict (e.g. 1 Cor 7:15; 14:33; Rom 12:18; Ti 3:2; 1 Tim 2:2). Nevertheless, the absence of conflict cannot substitute for wholeness, nor is it ever sufficient to determine the church family of Christ. So, Paul doesn't advocate for a hybrid between uncommon peace and common peace, because the latter would compromise the integrity of wholeness and invariably fragment persons, relationships and churches in the primacy of their ontology and function—that is, in the righteousness involving the whole of who, what and how they are, also indispensable to integrally compose the church family (2 Tim 2:22). The absence of conflict may in fact compose who, what and how the church and its persons and relationships are in secondary terms, and commonly does for those trying to be irenic; but this must not be accepted as composing who, what and how they are in their primacy. Their primacy in the innermost of their ontology and function is the primacy of wholeness, which, by its nature, can be and is only composed by the uncommon peace of the whole and uncommon God—just as the peace of Christ embodied in himself and embodied his church family in wholeness together (Eph 2:14-22, discussed below).

The experiential truth of God's peace is wholeness, nothing less. The experiential reality of God's peace is uncommonness, no substitutes. This is the experiential truth and reality of the whole and uncommon God who unfolds in the gospel of wholeness in order to be relationally involved to gather together persons and relationships and integrate them intimately to belong to God's family in wholeness and uncommonness. Common peace cannot have this whole relational outcome, since by the fact of its definition it is incomplete and thus cannot go beyond the limits and constraints prevailing in the common context for persons and relationships. Therefore, common peace does not have the relational significance to engage the uncommon relational process integral for these uncommon relationships together. Only uncommon peace has the relational significance to be relationally involved in this uncommon relational process needed for this relational outcome of uncommon relationships together in wholeness. Even with good intentions, at best common peace is only a substitute for uncommon peace and should not be our focus and goal, perhaps idolized in what has become common practice.

This urgently raises the question, then, why is the global church, and any of its churches, persons and relationships, engaged in the practice of common peace as if it were primary? Common peace neither composes the church nor fulfills its persons and relationships and their witness in the world. Jesus weeps over the common practice that does not “make for wholeness,” including the church practice which emerges from a narrow perceptual-interpretive lens that does not differentiate uncommon peace from common peace (Lk 19:41-42). Paul adds a “therefore” to what is definitive for the church: “Let us then [*oun*, therefore] pursue what makes for wholeness and for mutual upbuilding of God's whole and uncommon family” (Rom 14:19). Paul was well aware of how misleading, even seductive, common peace can be (1 Thes 5:3, cf. Ezek 13:10). For Paul, the uncommon “wholeness of Christ” is irreducible for determining the innermost ontology and function (“rule in your hearts”) of the church and its persons and relationships in their primacy of wholeness (“members of one family”), and thus is nonnegotiable for their theology and practice (“called to wholeness,” Col 3:15, NIV).

Common peace is also misleading. As a substitute for uncommon peace, common peace cannot provide righteousness with the whole basis and relational significance of who, what and how to be. This lack or absence misguides churches and its persons and relationships into the practice with something less of who, what and how they are. In other words, the integrity of righteousness is compromised without the whole of who, what and how they are, and therefore cannot be counted on to be valid and reliable whether in relationship with God, in the church or in the world. Without righteousness in wholeness, what gathers in the church does not compose the church family but scatters it. While the absence of conflict among them may be encouraging, it is misleading because this common peace is misleading their practice away from what's primary into occupation with the secondary in its life together, ministry and witness.

The call to peace historically in peace movements essentially promoted only common peace. Peace ministries emerging from it for the most part engage only common peace, which do not involve the relational significance to help, cultivate and fulfill persons and relationships in their primacy. Some common peace efforts may include a truncated soteriology to point persons to what they can be saved from but lack what they can be saved to. Reconciliation does not necessarily address this lack, and it will not if such reconciliation does not establish persons and relationships in their primacy to be transformed in wholeness. Only the *redemptive reconciliation* of uncommon peace is adequate for this complete relational outcome. Thus, common peace misguides churches and its persons and relationships with engaging in something less and with settling for (or being resigned to) results of some substitute. This is not the call to peace that Paul made the only determinant for the church family of Christ.

Moreover, not only does common peace mislead and misguide, it is also incompatible with the justice integral for the truth of God who unfolds in whole relational terms to compose the church family of God. When Paul made definitive that God's church family is not composed by secondary matter, implied in the presenting issue of "eating and drinking" is the church's function to integrate all its persons in family together to serve their fulfillment according to God's prescribed whole relational terms—signified in God's initial laws and commands, which go beyond conforming to ethics and morality (cf. Mt 5:21-48). This function is the justice of God necessary to integrate all persons, peoples and nations of God's family. While God's justice is compatible with some functions of common justice, it is also beyond human justice since God's justice is distinguished by God's righteousness. The whole of who, what and how God is is constituted with God's peace, as the psalmist sings, and only on this basis enacts justice in wholeness for the relational outcome of wholeness just on God's whole relational terms, nothing less. This relational process of wholeness integral to justice makes common peace incompatible with God's justice since common peace cannot provide the wholeness to constitute God's righteousness—which is necessary for the authoritative relational basis to distinguish God's justice to function reliably and validly in wholeness. Without wholeness, the only justice that emerges with common peace is 'justice without righteousness'.

These interrelated dynamics are indispensable for the global church. Common peace is compatible with common justice but it cannot function with the church's justice both for the church's composition and for its whole witness in the world. At most, common peace serves just the common good, but this good is only without wholeness

since common peace is incomplete to be whole and thus unable to make whole. At best, common peace can only simulate and give the illusion of uncommon peace, and thus presume that it enacts more than justice without righteousness; this includes justice for human rights. The common justice of common peace then cannot be counted on to be reliable and to have the validity of wholeness, the lack of which must be resolved to serve the primacy of persons and relationships. Therefore, this is the reality facing us: When we try to present the church's justice with common peace, we reduce God's justice to the limits and constraints of human justice—subject to its fragmentation and its lack of significance for persons and relationships in their primacy, though it may serve them in secondary matter; when the church operates with common peace for common justice, it can only be occupied in the secondary; it doesn't have the relational significance to address, attend to, respond and care for, as well as fulfill what's primary for the church's own persons and relationships, and for those in the world.

As with peace, justice narrowed down from whole relational terms to referential terms is incomplete and fragmentary. God's justice is rooted in righteousness, which is constituted by uncommon peace. The integrity of justice depends on this righteousness—which is the basis that Jesus highlighted for the terms for justice to be enacted (Mt 5:20ff). Integrally connected to righteousness for its authoritative relational basis to be reliable and to have the validity of wholeness, justice involves the primacy of who, what and how persons and relationships are. Human justice does not involve their primacy but only their secondary parts.

The experiential truth of God is that this primacy is the only way that God functions. God's righteousness then cannot be understood without the wholeness of uncommon peace—they “kiss each other”—and this convergence “prepares the way for his steps” (Ps 85:13, NIV) in the relationally interrelated involvement of “love and faithfulness,” which “go before you” (Ps 89:14) to determine how God functions in justice. The experiential reality of God becomes elusive without this understanding because righteousness foremost defines the uncommon God's vulnerable presence and determines the whole God's relational involvement of love faithfully with the primacy of the whole and uncommon God's trinitarian persons and relationship together. We can count on experiencing the reality of God's presence and involvement with nothing less and no substitutes—without the righteousness of which God becomes elusive, unreliable, lacking relational significance for our primacy. Therefore, how God functions in righteousness determines God's justice by only the wholeness of persons and relationships in their primacy, with only the relational involvement of love and faithfulness. And the inconvenient truth and uncomfortable reality facing us are that justice without righteousness is justice without wholeness, which emerges from love without the faithful involvement of whole persons in whole relationships. Where is the global church in this integral relational dynamic unfolding from God in order for this indispensable relational dynamic to unfold in the church and its persons and relationships?

The work of justice by the church must, by the nature of God's family and not out of duty or obligation, unfold from God's justice *in* the primacy of the church family. If not, the church's justice work is merely justice without righteousness; even though this may be good in common terms it is still without wholeness, notably without the significance of involvement by the church's persons and relationships in the primacy of

their ontology and function from inner out—the primacy in the “just as I am and have been sent” likeness of the whole and uncommon God’s ontology and function. We cannot avoid the reality that all justice is not equal, nor can we revise the reality that justice by itself (i.e. without righteousness) promotes at best the common good without wholeness. We can argue that this would be an improvement over having no justice; but that would only provide a common basis both inconsistent with the church’s purpose and inadequate for the church’s mission.

When justice is enacted in pursuit of peace, the latter qualifies the former. Conventional peace, specifically, is the common peace that is still composed by the limits and constraints of the human context, the influence of which compromises the integrity of justice for an unequal justice that reinforces and sustains inequality. Such justice qualified by such peace can neither distinguish nor complete the church’s purpose and mission. Only when justice is enacted in conjoint function with the wholeness of uncommon peace does the church’s purpose and mission emerge distinguished—differentiated clearly from what commonly exists. And only on the basis of uncommon peace’s whole relational terms is the church’s function complete both within itself and in the world.

The justice of uncommon peace is what is truly ‘good with wholeness’ for the church and for the human condition. The global church, therefore, must not assume or resign itself to anything less or any substitutes, or else its theology and practice reflect selectivity of the Word, and its ontology and function for persons and relationships become fragmentary, thereby essentially engaging the church in promoting ‘sin without reductionism’ and thus in complicity with sin as reductionism—even reinforcing or sustaining the human condition. In the experiential truth of the whole Word, justice is unequivocally a relational term that distinguishes God’s irreducible and nonnegotiable terms for relationship, which cannot be narrowed down to just ethical and moral terms. The relational significance of God’s terms—as Jesus differentiated clearly from narrowed down terms (Mt 5:20-48)—can only be composed by righteousness and the involvement in their primacy is determined only by righteousness. Therefore, since this is how the whole and uncommon God functions with us, this is “just as” how God expects us to function in wholeness and uncommonness ongoingly in reciprocal relationship together both with the palpable Word and with each other.

Distinguishing the Difference

Based on this crucial functional experience from God and what our prevailing experience is, it should be apparent that the righteousness and its peace we use will be the justice we get, because the integrity of justice is contingent on righteousness. The implications for the global church of the justice it gets are far-reaching. Notably, ‘justice without righteousness’ serving ‘the common good without wholeness’ has prevailed in the globalizing world and has become the norm for the global church. What have been the results both in the global North and South? Not all justice is equal and is equally enacted and serves for the equality of all persons, peoples and nations. Should we belonging to the global church be accountable for more amongst ourselves, and witness to more in the globalizing yet fragmenting world?

For this reason and purpose, the whole and uncommon God states clearly to his people: “I will make justice the measuring line and righteousness the plumb line” (Isa 28:17, NIV, cf. 2 Kg 21:13; Amos 7:7-8). *How* the whole and uncommon God measures the life of his family is only with God’s justice and righteousness and thus only by justice with righteousness constituted only in the wholeness of God’s uncommon peace. *What* God measures does not focus on the secondary state of his family’s situations (as critical as they may be) but measures the primary condition of his family’s uncommonness in theology and practice and their wholeness in ontology and function. The truth and reality of God’s family’s condition reveals *what* composes God’s people in the pluralistic world, and determines *how* they live in the globalizing human context. Are the *what* and *how* ‘justice with righteousness in uncommon peace’ or ‘justice without righteousness in common peace’?

God’s measuring line and plumb line need to have in God’s church family today the clarity of Amos’ lens noted above. For example, the parameters of a prominent model (Mic 6:8) used by the church may not measure true and plumb for how they often have been perceived and constructed. As God’s people deliberated on how to regain God’s favor (6:6-7), *what* it revealed was *how* they determined their persons and relationships with a reduced theological anthropology for an ontology and function from outer in—as if that would have had significance to God’s ontology and function from inner out. This issue of theological anthropology is likely not even considered today in the perception of what follows, and thus the same theological anthropology used by God’s people above usually has constructed the parameters today of “what does the LORD require of you?” We need to examine “to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” also with our theological anthropology.

First, “to do justice,” that is, *asah*, to do, make, work, accomplish, even create, used here for what is simply the significance of justice. Yet, God’s justice involves having the relational significance that will have the relational outcome for persons and relationships in their primacy of wholeness. How then does this relational outcome emerge from those who merely *asah* justice? When the focus is on doing, making, working and accomplishing justice, the primacy of those persons and their relationships shifts from inner out to the outer-in secondary focus of doing justice—which pervades most calls for justice today. That is, what is revealed in this is how they determine their persons and relationships with a reduced theological anthropology that defines them by their participation in doing justice—in other words, a theological anthropology with a narrowed-down ontology and function from outer in. Without the primacy of their own persons and relationships from inner out, what significance will their doing justice have for other persons and relationships beyond their secondary situations, even with good intentions, dedication and enduring service? When we work from a reduced theological anthropology, we are subject to reductionism that shapes our doing justice without addressing sin as reductionism and subtly by engaging in good without wholeness.

In addition, and this is a key issue, what we do falls into a comparative process that measures us by the work we have determined. This means subtler engagement in self-determination, which, for example, may even influence our doing justice by trying to “create” justice in order to be successful in doing justice. This process is unavoidable when we reduce our ontology and function to outer in. So, what God requires of us is “to *live* justice from inner out by the primacy of our person in whole ontology and function,”

which doing justice from outer in by a reduced ontology and function cannot fulfill. And “to live justice *with* the righteousness” of the whole of who, what and how we are also necessitates the integral involvement of what God requires next.

Second, “to love kindness,” *hesed*, denoting an act of love, mercy or kindness. The act of *hesed* is usually demonstrated for family members and close friends but can be demonstrated in any relationship. What is the key to perceive in an act of *hesed* is that it presupposes the existence of a relationship between those involved. Where no relationship existed, the person acting in *hesed* treats the other on the basis of a relationship existing. In other words, the act of *hesed* is only a relational process composed in relational terms, and thus its relational significance is directly contingent on the relational involvement of the person sharing love. Mercy or kindness is not merely a good act that one does to benefit others; it is only the relational involvement of the person sharing for the relational connection with the primacy of another person (not just their need) in the primacy of relationship together. This relational involvement cannot be fulfilled by maintaining relational distance and by not making our person vulnerable to others. Nor can this relational involvement be simulated with an abundance of kindness or mercy. *Hesed* cannot be narrowed down from the relational terms that compose the love God not only expects from us but also from God himself.

Hesed expresses the whole and uncommon God in relational response to us with the vulnerable relational involvement to have relationship with the primacy of our persons. *Hesed* then is at the heart of God’s presence and involvement, and this primacy is the presence and involvement of our persons that God wants us to have a strong desire, delight, love, passion (*ahabah*) for in how we function from the heart of our person. “To love *hesed*,” therefore, vulnerably involves our ontology and function from inner out and unfolds vulnerably in the primacy of our persons and relationships in wholeness and for the primacy of others for their wholeness. Just as “*hesed* and faithfulness go before you, God,” our faithful relational involvement of love needs to go before us to distinguish the relational significance necessary for justice with righteousness to have the relational outcome of wholeness for persons and relationships in their primacy.

The primacy of persons and relationships in whole ontology and function is nonnegotiable for God’s family, yet this primacy has ongoingly been subjected to reductionism from the beginning. Making persons and relationships secondary and thus reducing their ontology and function have prevailed in the human context and pervades the global church today—with relational distance, detachment and separation its most significant relational consequences, which keeps persons and relationships from being vulnerable in their ontology and function. Ever since the primordial garden, sin without reductionism and good without wholeness have influenced and shaped God’s family and its persons and relationships, and now so the church family. The most prominent and yet subtle shape of reduced ontology and function is self-determination. This pervasive effort in the church has constructed ongoing subtle justification for itself (starting with “to make one wise”) in order to be sustained in the theology and practice of the church family. Perhaps the most subtle of this engagement is in the practice of love, and likely doing justice ranks high on this list also. What God integrally requires and expects from his family directly address this self-determination in its depth, getting to the heart of its subtlety in our practice.

Third, “to walk humbly with your God” underlies the other requirements from God, and it is likely more problematic than it appears. If we assume for ourselves a reduced theological anthropology, we also have to assume responsibility for the implications and consequences of reduced ontology and function. “To walk humbly” means to be accountable for all this “with your God.” The path our life will take can vary widely in common terms, yet in uncommon terms it comes together with the distinguished relational path that Jesus embodied for his disciples to follow (Mt 7:13-14, cf. Lk 13:24-27). What path our life will follow and how we walk on it will determine their evaluation measured by either common terms or uncommon terms. God’s uncommon terms use justice as the measuring line and righteousness as the plumb line on the relational basis of wholeness. For the whole and uncommon God, righteousness is the integral antecedent that “prepares the way for his steps”; likewise, who, what and how we are will reveal what path we take and will determine how we walk on it.

In common terms, our life follows a path of reduced theological anthropology, and how we walk on it is with narrowed-down ontology and function. The immediate implication for how we live is to shift from inner out to outer in, and the immediate consequence on our persons is to be defined by the secondary parts of what we do and have rather than the primacy of our whole person. The further implication is to measure our *self* accordingly, with the further consequence to measure others and to be measured by others on this fragmentary basis. What this composes is a comparative process that measures our self and others on a scale of more-less. With the desire to be better rather than less (or inferior), how we function opens the door to determining our self as best we can. In other words, to follow a path of reduced theological anthropology inevitably requires *self*-determination, even if we’ve been saved by faith over works and proclaim a gospel of grace. The functional issue is who, what and how we are today and the righteousness that is antecedent for determining the way for our steps.

If we are responding to our theological anthropology shaped by common terms that requires self-determination, how can we respond to God, who requires us “to walk” according to God’s uncommon terms? If we are engaged in self-determination, however subtly or unknowingly, how can we “walk humbly” when we’re trying to determine our self to be better rather than less? If the whole of who, what and how we are no longer composes the primacy of our person and our relationships, then on what basis can our involvement be significant to “walk humbly with your God *in relationship together*?”

In God’s whole relational terms, how can we respond with relational significance until we make our whole person vulnerable at the innermost of our ontology and function? In other words, “to walk humbly with your God” is “to walk vulnerably with the whole of who, what and how we are in the primacy of relationship together with your God.” This vulnerable walk was problematic for some of God’s chosen people, whom Jesus measured by justice and righteousness to reveal their reduced ontology and function from outer in, and to expose their self-determination that made secondary the primacy of their persons and relationships in the involvement of *hesed* (Lk 11:37-42).

The reality for all of us is that to respond vulnerably to what God requires is problematic with a reduced theological anthropology. There is no basis for relational significance until the whole of who, what and how we are composes our relational involvement with the vulnerable reality of our ontology and function from inner out—without embellishment, simulation or illusion. The competing reality countering our

persons and relationships in the church from being vulnerable is self-determination. When who, what and how we are become vulnerable, our righteousness kisses uncommon peace to be whole rather than embracing common peace to try to make us better. What emerges is the primacy of our persons (not our determined *self*) in the depth of *hesed*'s relational involvement for the primacy of relationships together. What unfolds from the primacy of persons and relationships in the wholeness of uncommon peace is the faithful relational involvement of love that leads to the ongoing relational outcome “to *live* justice with righteousness from the innermost of who, what and how we are in the primacy of our persons in whole ontology and function for the primacy of relationships together in uncommon peace” both in the global church and in the globalizing yet fragmenting world.

The whole and uncommon God's measuring line and plumb line require and hold us accountable for nothing less and no substitutes. When the global church's theology and practice are true and plumb, what emerges and unfolds from the church and its persons and relationships will flow in uncommon peace.

The Uncommon Peace of the Church

When the model of Micah 6:8 is used by the church based on a reduced theological anthropology, the church becomes composed by the righteousness of who, what and how its persons and relationships are in the terms of common peace. Common peace is not the peace that Paul made imperative to solely determine the church from inner out (Col 3:15). Only the uncommon peace of Christ distinguishes the church family of Christ (Jn 14:27, cf. 16:33) and composes the church family to be differentiated acutely from common peace (clean-cut by Christ's sword, Mt 10:34-38). Moreover, his uncommon peace exposes the simulation and illusion basic to common peace and causes its division for its real fragmentary condition of persons and relationships to be revealed in its existing reality (Lk 12:51-53). Contrary to common peace, uncommon peace is not a comfort zone or a place of convenience for the church family to practice its faith, because the wholeness of uncommon peace conjointly fights for the whole gospel and fights against its reduction to anything less and any substitutes, even if the latter is doctrinally correct. As embodied by Christ, this conjoint fight is for the primacy of persons and relationships in their wholeness of ontology and function and against their fragmentation, often subtle, to anything less and any substitutes in reduced ontology and function.

Only uncommon peace kisses righteousness in order for who, what and how the church and its persons and relationships are to be in their primacy of wholeness, and thus “to *live* their primacy integrally with justice” by the faithful relational involvement of family love—singing with the psalmist and dancing with Jesus and Paul. Therefore, the church family of Christ emerges and unfolds only *in* the relational significance of uncommon peace, *with* its uncommon relational process composed *by* its whole relational purpose *for* its uncommon relational outcome distinguishing persons and relationships together in wholeness as the whole and uncommon God's church family.

In Paul's conjoint fight of Christ's uncommon peace, he illuminated the relational significance of uncommon peace and its relational purpose, process and outcome definitive for the church and its persons and relationships to be whole together—without fragmentation and any relational distance, detachment or separation. This uncommon peace needs to compose the church's theology and practice today both in the fight for this primacy of persons and relationships and against their reduction in any way, the subtle reductions of which have eluded our understanding and fogged our perception. Without uncommon peace, the experiential truth and reality of the church family of Christ does not emerge and unfold, even though simulations of the church body of Christ may exist today or in the past.

Comparative Relations, Power Relations, or Whole-ly Relationships

Jesus' own disciples argued among themselves about "which of them would be the greatest" (Lk 9:46, NIV). "Be" is expressed in the Greek optative mood that expresses only a possibility or a wish rather than a probability, and comes with a high degree of uncertainty or contingency. The contingency becomes apparent as the disciples continued to debate about "which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest" (Lk 22:24). To be considered (*dokeo*) the greatest—or at least better than the others—is not a self-ascribed label but what emerges from a comparative process that measures persons on a common scale based on the parts of what persons do and have. The achievements and resources a disciple has, then, will determine one's position on the scale, and only the disciple in the highest position will meet the contingency to be regarded as the greatest (or at least better than the others) in this comparative system.

The comparative relations demonstrated by the disciples are composed from a reduced theological anthropology that defines persons by the outer-in parts of what they do and have. The fragmentation into parts signifies persons in reduced ontology and function, which underlies the basis for comparative relations and its composition—under which lies the critical determination our theological anthropology has. From the beginning, persons in reduced ontology and function were engaged in comparative relations: "you will be like God, knowing good and evil," and they compared each other "and they knew that they were naked" and thus different. When persons are rendered to their parts for their ontology and function, *distinctions* are made about them and the comparison of those distinctions both defines those persons as better or less and determines the relations between them. The relations between them based on their distinctions, regarded as better or less, require comparable distinctions; that is, this means that stratified relations (formalized into systems of inequality) have to be constructed to be compatible with the comparative process of those distinctions. This evolves only from human construction because God "made no distinctions," *diakrino*, to separate, treat differently and thus to discriminate (Acts 15:9).

Jesus understood the dynamics of the comparative process engaged by the disciples and the relational consequences of comparative relations; note also the comparative relations of the temple leaders and the relational consequence on those they considered less, and how Jesus responded to them (Mt 21:15-16). So, his first response to

his disciples was to interject a little child for their comparison—who surely couldn't measure up to the stature of the disciples—and then on this incompatible basis he decomposed comparative relations: “Whoever welcomes [*dechomai*, receives and accepts with respect] this *little person* in my terms welcomes, receives and accepts me on the same basis...for the least among all of you in comparative terms is the greatest in whole relational terms” (Lk 9:47-48). The relational significance of Jesus' response is clear:

The comparative process is incongruent with the church family of Christ, and human distinctions have no standing of better or less for the persons belonging to the church family, nor do such distinctions differentiate some persons to be higher in the church and others lower to not be distinguished; therefore, comparative relations (however stratified) are incompatible for the church's relationships composed by persons in their primacy of wholeness, the primacy of which is incongruent with any narrowing down of their ontology and function.

The reality Jesus illuminates for his followers is that anything less and any substitutes narrow down the church and its persons and relationships from their primacy of wholeness to a fragmented condition from outer in of reduced ontology and function—all of which emerge from a reduced theological anthropology (as the disciples had) that has been shaped by the limits and constraints common to the human context, composing the human condition.

Persons, peoples and nations create human distinctions, not God, and they construct the stratified relations and systems necessary to maintain those distinctions in their comparative inequality—not an inherent inequality, though some make that assumption to justify discrimination. Like the disciples, the church and its persons and relationships have intentionally or inadvertently reflected, reinforced and sustained the comparative relations prevailing in all human contexts. This existing reality has not been understood by the church as the unalterable norm of human contextualization, and thus the church has shaped the gospel increasingly according to the limits and constraints of that particular contextualization. The shaping reality for all human persons and relationships is that to be regarded as 'better' (or best, greatest) is enviable but to be considered as 'less' is a burden. Those 'less' must bear the limits and constraints of being measured by a “higher” template of standards for conformity imposed by those 'better', which composes a deficit model that subjects those 'less' to a deficit condition unable to regain 'more', much less to be cancelled.

A deficit model is an inescapable burden for those *different*, for example, when the standard of measurement is based on the color white or the gender male. How do persons, peoples and nations of color change their distinction and overcome their deficit condition in comparative relations with whites? How do females, even among those persons, peoples and nations of color, change their humanly perceived distinction and overcome their deficit condition in comparative relations with males? Moreover, it is crucial to understand that the condition of those who employ a deficit model are also rendered to a deficit condition, since this comparative process is engaged and enacted by those in reduced ontology and function—a deficit not merely from outer in (intrinsic to a deficit model) but in the critical condition of inner out.

The disciples didn't learn from Jesus' first response to them. So, they continued to engage the comparative process in their relations, notably imposing a deficit model on Mary (Martha's sister) when she responded to Jesus' whole person with deep relational involvement (Mt 26:6-13). Since the disciples still operated primarily from outer in without the primacy of persons and relationships, they considered Mary's action insignificant on their comparative scale and thereby *less*. Whether gender influenced their distinction of Mary is not apparent but their fragmentation of persons (including Jesus) into secondary parts (even engaging justice for the poor) over the primacy of persons and relationships in wholeness is unmistakable. On this fragmentary basis, they also reduced the whole gospel of its relational significance, which, in contrast, Jesus said that Mary highlights "wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world." Thus, Jesus not only affirmed Mary's person without distinctions, he also confirmed the relational significance of the gospel in the uncommon peace of wholeness and justice only with righteousness to distinguish unequivocally his family with the primacy of persons and relationships in whole ontology and function.

If bearing a deficit condition cannot be overcome in the process of comparative relations, it will either have to be changed or redeemed. One common recourse for changing this condition is to shift to power relations. Power relations, however, is also the means used by those in upper positions on the comparative scale to maintain a superior distinction over those considered inferior. Colonialism, for example, unfolded with power relations in order to impose a deficit model on persons, peoples and nations of different distinction to render them less and keep them in a deficit condition. Those less could use power relations to change their position or to even reverse positions with those regarded as superior, as witnessed in South Africa. Yet, what is common to both sides using power relations is that they incorporate a conflict model with the deficit model, therefore which doesn't change comparative relations but only changes its stratified arrangement. A conflict model assumes a dialectic that theorizes a synthesis for ideal equalized relations, but this has not materialized in its use. Power relations could be used to facilitate the conflict needed for change—which should not be confused with Jesus' sword and his redeeming process—but the resulting change at best can only bring a common peace lacking wholeness, which then at most only rearranges comparative relations with distinctions in a deficit condition still existing. In other words, inequality remains, although the form may have changed.

This has been a common consequence of the conflicts from communist power relations in the global South or with the expansion of the Soviet Union and subsequent Balkanization, and that emerged from the conflicts by the power relations of postcolonial nations such as India. The conflict from the power relations of American exceptionalism in building empire has consistently imposed a deficit model of democracy on global contexts for their conformity to American superiority; and similar power relations are used in its homeland to maintain its stratified system with a deficit condition for many of its own citizens in this presumed democracy. Race relations, for example, in the U.S. have grown in conflict during this recent period, reflecting a deficit condition of inequality still existing. The growing conflict could be and is engaged increasingly with power relations, since historically justice without righteousness and common peace without wholeness have not had the relational significance to bring the depth of change necessary for the relational outcome of the primacy of persons with equality without

being rendered to secondary distinctions. Moreover, gender inequality has been further surfacing in business and academic contexts in the U.S., notably in terms of opportunity, income and stature. This still-existing inequality reflects the unyielding stratification and power of its comparative relations, in spite of the feminist movement that has yet to render gender distinction secondary—which ironically, yet not surprisingly, remains also among African Americans in the civil rights movement.

What emerges from all this is the fact that power relations have not resulted in the change needed to remove the primacy given to human distinctions and for overcoming deficit conditions in comparative relations. The use of a conflict model has been a false hope and its related theory has been a false outcome that lacks the primacy of persons and relationships in wholeness. The shift to power relations only exacerbates comparative relations and further embeds persons in a reduced ontology and relations in fragmented function, yet power relations remain as the prevailing means for change—or to prevent change and enforce conformity. Clearly, Jesus understood these dynamics and their consequences for his disciples and such practice in his family. And he saw this pattern developing in his disciples and anticipated this emerging in the church and its persons and relationships, notably starting with church leaders.

When Jesus responded to his disciples' continued debate of having the greatest distinction, he added to his first response the use of power relations (Lk 22:25-30). Jesus highlighted leaders who “lord it over them; and those in authority *and power* over them are called benefactors.” Power relations are obvious when they “lord it over” persons but subtle when exercised as benefaction because of its implied quid pro quo; and this becomes even subtler when paternalism is used, for example, to help others. Jesus was critical of Greco-Roman benefactors who used their resources to gain power over (*exousiazō*) persons, presumably under the guise to do good (without wholeness). In whatever way power relations are exercised and commonly exist, Jesus made it unequivocal that they are contrary to the uncommon relational nature of his kingdom-family, and are in conflict with the uncommon relational significance of how he functions without the distinctions warranted for his superior position—the pivotal issue between him and Peter that emerged at his footwashing. And those who follow him on his whole relational terms must be vulnerably involved without such distinctions “so that you may *participate in and partake of my uncommon family and function just as I function to be relationally involved in justice with righteousness—not from relational distance on a throne—for the uncommon peace of God’s whole and uncommon family*” (v.30).

Jesus’ response anticipated what would compose the church today. He directed his response in particular to church leaders, their discipleship and their theological anthropology underlying their theology and practice, in order for their ontology and function to be whole. The uncommon peace of his church family cannot be composed with comparative relations or subtly by power relations. The pattern of such relations must be paid attention to by the contemporary church and its persons and relationships in order to reciprocally respond to Jesus for the irreducible and nonnegotiable primacy of persons and relationships in the wholeness of their ontology and function as the church family of Christ, without the fragmentation of distinctions. Only relations in whole relational terms can address what underlies human distinctions and their deficit condition.

The issue is less about change and more importantly requires redemption. Human relations need to be redeemed from the ontology and function fragmented by distinctions imposed on them, so that they can emerge with the following: ontology and function that have been transformed from inner out for the transformed relationships together both vulnerably intimate without distinctions and thus equalized without ‘better or less’, without stratified relationships and free from a deficit condition. Therefore, only these whole-ly, noncomparative and unstratified, relationships differentiate the church family of Christ in the uncommon peace of all its persons in all its relationships together with their primacy in wholeness.

Just as Jesus used his sword of uncommon peace and also cleaned out his house of commonization, the uncommon peace of his church family redeems persons and relationships from their fragmentation in reduced ontology and function to the uncommon wholeness of the whole and uncommon God. And nothing less and no substitutes for whole-ly (i.e. whole plus holy) relationships have the relational significance to be involved in the uncommon relational process necessary to compose the uncommon relationships together that have the whole and uncommon relational outcome distinguished only by the new-order church family of the whole and uncommon God—none of which and whom can be narrowed down to common terms. It is imperative, then, for the church to be cleaned out and redeemed from its distinctions, comparative and power relations, because these fragment its persons and relationships and subject them to the binding limits and enslaving constraints of reduced ontology and function. This redemptive change is required for the uncommon peace of Christ to be the only determinant for the heart of the church—the primacy of its persons and relationships together in wholeness (as Paul made imperative for the church, Col 3:15).

The whole-ly relationships of uncommon peace are not an ideal to hope for. Nor are they an unrealistic goal too impractical to work for. The experiential reality inescapably facing all of us is that the only solution significant for the comparative relations of human distinctions, and inevitable power relations and deficit condition, is their redemption. The experiential truth undeniably facing all of us in the global church is that only the church distinguished by the whole-ly relationships of uncommon peace has the relational significance to be the redeeming good news for persons and relationships fragmented in reduced ontology and function. Until the church embodies this experiential truth in its own persons and relationships, the church has no basis to be of relational significance for this experiential reality in the human condition needing redemption—regardless if its service and resources are the greatest.

In anticipation of the church needing first and foremost to clean out its own house so that it will unfold in the whole-ly relationships of uncommon peace for all persons, peoples and nations, Jesus established this priority for his family:

Before “you *address the fragmentation in others*” you need to “*address the fragmentation in your own theology and practice*. How can you say to *others*, ‘Let me *help you out of your reductionism*,’ while *reductionism continues* in you own life? *Don’t be a role-player [hypokrites]*, first *redeem the reductionism* of your own life, and then you will *be clearly distinguished to help redeem the reductionism from others’ lives*” (Mt 7:3-5).

Only the whole and uncommon relational basis of the whole-ly relationships of uncommon peace composes the church and its persons and relationships in whole relational terms. The whole relational terms of uncommon peace have been embodied by Christ and unfolded with the palpable Word to distinguish the relational significance and the relational outcome of the new-order church family. What distinguishes its relational significance and outcome?

The Relational Significance and Outcome of the Church's Uncommon Peace

The whole relational terms of uncommon peace are always subjected to a narrowed-down lens of reduced terms that both referentialize the truth and fragment the reality of the significance of what the church is and the outcome of how the church is. The latter terms shift uncommon peace to common peace, which is no longer compatible with the relational significance of the peace of Christ nor congruent with the relational outcome of his peace.

When Jesus, as the palpable Word, transformed (not converted) the divisive Jew Paul, his purpose was not for common peace to negate the conflict of Paul's power relations against the church—which Jesus received personally, “why do you persecute me?” Jesus' complete purpose in whole relational terms was for Paul's redemptive reconciliation from his fragmentation as a member of God's people to his wholeness as a person-child belonging to God's whole and uncommon family. And on the relational basis of this experiential truth Paul's whole witness would help unfold with the palpable Word the experiential reality of the new-order church family (Acts 26:14-18; Rom 5:10-11). This relational significance and outcome of the uncommon peace of Christ is what Paul illuminated definitively for the experiential reality of the church to be whole. The global church needs to take into its heart what Paul unfolded with the palpable Word (1 Cor 2:10-16).

The prominent human distinction among God's people, which fragmented them and stratified relations, was between Jew and Gentile, with the former better and the latter less. Paul made unequivocal that “Christ is our uncommon peace” and illuminated its relational significance for the church family composed by his uncommon peace (Eph 2:14-18). Peter, as we discussed, struggled with uncommon peace both in his theology and practice, and he maintained a common peace until he could not deny the experiential truth and avoid the experiential reality that “God has made no distinction between them and us” (Acts 15:9). The truth and reality of human distinctions facing us today are that all such distinctions emerge from human construction, the constructs of which we can neither ascribe to God nor have legitimated by God. Paul was instrumental in Peter's transformation to uncommon peace, just as he needs to be for the church's transformation today for the redemptive reconciliation of human distinctions pervading the church and shaping its persons and relationships.

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 its experiential reality to unfold 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 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 just on this experiential reality, they can proclaim and whole-ly witness to the experiential truth of this good news for human relations.

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 *the salvific work* of 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. Redemption is integral for reconciliation in order for relationships (including with God) to come together at the heart of persons in their ontology and function from inner out, which then requires persons redeemed from outer-in distinctions that prevent this relational connection. We cannot maintain distinctions among us and have this breakthrough in relationships for their reconciliation. All discussion about reconciliation must include this reality or there will be no redemptive change in our relationships. Therefore, the relational significance of ‘redemptive reconciliation’ is for the heart of persons now to be vulnerable to each other (including God) and come together in intimate relationships. Intimate relationships are the relational outcome distinguished by the redemptive reconciliation of uncommon peace. With God, intimate relationship involves going beyond conventional spirituality and a spiritual relationship to the following: the experiential reality of the whole person vulnerably involved ongoingly with “God in boldness and confidence” (Eph 3:12), rooted in the experiential truth of being redeemed from human distinctions, from their fragmentation and the deficit condition of reduced ontology and function, and then reconciled in wholeness together belonging in God’s family—“the *intimate* dwelling in which *the whole of* God lives by his Spirit” (Eph 2:22, NIV cf. Jn 14:23). Accordingly and indispensably, to have this relational outcome with God and with each other requires existing relations to be transformed to intimate relationships composed by the redemptive reconciliation of uncommon peace.

The relational significance of intimacy in church relationships should not be idealized, or even spiritualized, because this indeed uncommon relational outcome is at the heart of what Christ saves us to (integrally with what he saves us from). There is no good news unless the church is being transformed to intimate relationships together. This was the only relational purpose for Jesus when he cleaned out his house for all persons, peoples and nations to have relational access to God, for which the church is accountable to clean out its own house in order to “gather with me and not scatter.” Completing his only relational purpose for his house, on the cross Jesus also deconstructed his house by tearing away the prominent curtain to open direct relational access face to face with the whole and uncommon God (Heb 10:19-22). This irreversible breakthrough in relationship with God included removing the veil to transform relationships both with God and with

each other to intimate relationships together (2 Cor 3:16-18). The church and its persons and relationships are accountable for tearing down any existing curtain that allows them to maintain practice with relational distance as if in front of the curtain torn away by Jesus; and we also are accountable for removing any existing veil over our face in order to be vulnerably involved face to face in the intimate relationships together that Christ saved us to today and not for the future.

Moreover, implied in what Paul already illuminated and now continued to make explicit (Eph 2:19-22), there is one other involvement necessary to complete the relational outcome of transformed relationships together. Common peace allows (even affirms) human distinctions to operate as long as there is no conflict or disharmony in relations. Uncommon peace, however, negates those distinctions, removes their significance and does not accept their fragmenting presence in God's family. "Consequently, you are no long *defined and determined by distinctions like* foreigners and aliens but *are whole persons as full* citizens with God's people and *whole* members of God's family." The experiential truth of this relational outcome is not referential or just doctrinal, but composed in whole relational terms for the experiential reality of transformed relationships together to also involve equalized relationships integrally with intimate relationships.

God's family has become the vulnerable dwelling of the whole and uncommon God (as Jesus also made clear, Jn 14:23), yet this relational outcome has no relational significance as long as the curtain and veil are still present. God is vulnerably present and relationally involved for intimate relationship together. While we cannot be equal with God (perhaps the purpose for some in the practice of deification), we have to be equalized to participate in and partake of God's life in his family together. That is, we cannot be intimately involved with God from the basis of any of our outer-in distinctions. Those distinctions have to be redeemed so that we can be equalized from inner out and thereby reconciled in intimate relationship together; and this equalization is necessary to be transformed in relationships together as God's whole and uncommon family. The transformed relationships that distinguish the church family must then be both equalized and intimate. There can be no complete intimate involvement together as long as the veil of distinctions exists. Distinctions focus our lens on and engage our practice from outer in, unavoidably in comparative relations, which is incompatible with intimate relationships and incongruent with equalized relationships. Therefore, the experiential truth and reality of the redemptive reconciliation of uncommon peace involve the church in the integral transformed relationships together of equalized persons in equalized relationships, who are vulnerably involved in intimate relationships face to face, heart to heart as God's whole and uncommon family.

Indeed, based on the uncommon peace of Christ, 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. What emerges from the 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 experiential reality of this uncommon equality unfolds from the 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.

Gospel of Uncommon Equality Proclaimed by the Equalizing Church

Equality and equalizing may raise questions and concerns that this makes being equal the top priority for the church and the highest purpose for the gospel. My short response is yes and no. No, it doesn't if we are talking about 'common equality', which emerges from common peace and from social justice without righteousness that don't account for sin as reductionism and an underlying theological anthropology of reduced ontology and function. Yes, it does because we are only focused on uncommon equality, which unmistakably and undeniably emerges from the uncommon peace of Christ and his justice with righteousness—"He has abolished *the inequitable practice of the law* with its commandments and ordinances" (Eph 2:15)—in order to save us from sin as reductionism and save us to his family composed by transformed relationships together both equalized and intimate, so that persons and relationships are distinguished in their primacy of whole ontology and function and thereby belonging to the new relational order of God's whole and uncommon family. Yes, the church in uncommon equality fulfills the relational significance of its ontology (who and whose it is), and the equalizing church fulfills the relational purpose of its function (what and how it is)—fulfills by its uncommon peace of whole ontology and function. Do you have a better gospel and a greater function for the church?

Various conversations have taken place in the church and academy about wholeness and being whole. Yet, I am not aware of deeper understanding in theology and practice emerging from this conversation. Paul and his witness to "the gospel of peace" (Eph 6:15) gives substance to wholeness for the church and holds the church and its persons and relationships accountable to be whole, just as he did with Peter. If we don't want to hear Jesus weeping over us and saying "If you, even you, only knew today what would bring you wholeness" (Lk 19:42, NIV), then we need to pay full attention to the person Jesus transformed to witness to his uncommon peace and to help unfold his equalizing church in his uncommon equality for his gospel of uncommon equality. As we pay full attention, Paul takes us further and deeper with the palpable Word—likely "immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine" (Eph 3:20).

What uncommon equality, uncommon relationships and the uncommon church family share together with uncommon peace is the innermost of life centered on the very heart of persons and relationships in whole ontology and function—in likeness of the whole ontology and function of the whole and uncommon God (Eph 4:24; 2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10). What all persons, peoples, nations and all their relations have in common is reduced ontology and function. What all anthropology, whatever its variation, have at its core is this shared ontology and function. Thus the global church needs to keep this central in its theology and practice in order to respond to the heart of such concerns as Goethe's Faust inquired, "What holds the world together in its innermost?"

With its inquiry, science has been regarded as the key to unlocking the mysteries of life and what holds the universe together in the innermost. The confirming discovery of the Higgs boson this past year to explain why physical bodies exist at all has spurred physics to get to the core of dark matter in the universe. Yet, this heuristic process has not gained deeper understanding of the innermost of human life, perhaps even going in the opposite direction. Moreover, as useful as neuroscience's findings from the human brain are, they don't get to the heart of persons and relationships. By definition, theological anthropology should provide understanding for the innermost of life centered on the heart of persons and relationships. Unfortunately, our theological anthropology commonly tends to reflect, reinforce and sustain the shared ontology and function existing in all of the above—with Jesus crying over our theological anthropology for not knowing what composes the wholeness at the very heart of persons and relationships.

Paul illuminated the good news, “the gospel of peace” (Eph 6:15, cf. Isa 52:7), for the innermost of all human life (encompassing the universe) that gets to the very heart of persons and relationships, and that cosmologically “in him all things hold together” (Col 1:16-17). The wholeness of Christ is the definitive key to understanding the dark matter and fragmentation of human life, and the only solution to make whole the very heart of their ontology and function in the innermost of life together in wholeness (Col 1:19-20). What emerges from this gospel of wholeness is the good news of human equality, yet not the common equality composed still with the innermost fragmented and still of reduced ontology and function—a critical issue for those working for equality. The equality emerging from the gospel of wholeness is uncommon because (1) it involves the innermost of the fragmented human condition and (2) it restores that innermost condition at the heart of all persons and relationships to their new shared primacy in whole ontology and function.

The experiential reality of what emerges from the experiential truth of the whole gospel is only the uncommon equality composed by the uncommon peace of Christ in nothing less than wholeness of ontology and function. Anything less than wholeness is no longer whole at its heart but reduced, or remains reduced, in ontology and function. And what is contrary to and in conflict with this wholeness of uncommon equality are human distinctions. Directly addressing this defining issue is the basis, reason and purpose for Paul making definitive without equivocation the following in his conjoint fight for the whole gospel and against its reduction:

“For in the uncommon peace of Christ Jesus you are all in your innermost together the family of God...transformed from inner out at the heart of your ontology and functions to the wholeness of Christ. At the heart of your whole ontology and function, there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are whole together in your innermost in the wholeness of Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:26-28)—whole-ly new persons and relationships together “being re-newed and made whole [anakainoo] on the basis of experiential knowledge specifically [epignosis] in likeness of the whole ontology and function of its Creator. In that new and whole condition there is no longer Greek or Jew, and any other human distinction, but the wholeness of Christ determines all persons and relationships together in all whole ontology and function (Col 3:10-11, cf. Eph 1:23).

Human distinctions are a fact of human life, the prevailing reality of which has fragmented persons, peoples, nations and their relations from the very beginning. The reality of this fact, however, is that this fragmenting fact has emerged only because of the human construction of distinctions shaping the course of human history. Human distinctions are not a formative fact of the shared ontology and function in all humanity—that is, basic to that shared ontology and function that was already fragmented. Human distinctions have emerged from this common human ontology and function, and the global church must account for this in its theology and practice.

I like to ask Christians what color they think they will be in heaven. Assuming our resurrected bodies will be the same as our earthly bodies, except they will be whole like Jesus, my opinion is we will have our earthly color as given or allowed by God (evolution notwithstanding). That means also that we will certainly not all be white because there is no valid basis to think that white is whole like Jesus. OK, assuming our color, then my next question is what race or ethnicity do you think you will be in heaven? If you also said what you currently are now, that would be incorrect. Existing race, ethnicity, and other such distinctions are human constructs, which, as discussed, have been ascribed a distinct value (including for gender) measured by a comparative scale—that should not be confused with God’s measuring line and plumb line. God neither makes such distinctions nor allows us to use them to define and determine our ontology and function, as Peter and the early church learned and had to change. Therefore, no such distinctions or their value attached to color and gender will exist in heaven, nor are they compatible for God’s earthly family (cf. 2 Cor 10:12). Accordingly, irreducibly and nonnegotiable, the church and its persons and relationship cannot continue to reinforce, sustain and work to continue to maintain distinctions—even with good intentions for affirming diversity and supporting differences—and expect to compose God’s whole and uncommon family on the basis of reduced ontology and function.

We have to understand the often subtle reality that human distinctions are substitutes for the innermost of humanity, substitutes which fragment human life at the heart of persons and relationships in their ontology and function. These substitutes also serve as subtle simulations and illusions of ontology and function assumed in their primary condition, when in fact and experiential reality they only compose in secondary terms the reduced ontology and function for persons and relationships. Race-ethnic relations, for example, cannot be expected to be resolved beyond a simulation or illusion from common peace, as long as those distinctions are maintained preventing getting to the heart of the problem. The consequences of human distinctions, as discussed above, emerge along the spectrum of the human condition in its shared ontology and function, with inequality the defining consequence for all persons and relationships—whether individual, collective, institutional, structural or systemic. Inequality in race-ethnic relations exists because of these distinctions, thus equality cannot be achieved with these distinctions. The solution is not to be colorblind but to address what such distinctions signify, define and determine for human life.

What underlies all human distinctions and their consequences of inequality at all levels, which they all have in common in the innermost, is the inescapable fragmentary condition of reduced ontology and function. There is no substitute, simulation or illusion that can alter this condition and therefore resolve the existing inequality of persons, peoples, nations and their relations. And we have been recently witnessing, if not

experiencing, the increasing relational consequences of inequality around the globe (mainly from macroaggressions), and notably in recent days between U.S. college students (primarily with microaggressions). Yet, the global church must not be misled in its understanding and misguided in its response. What precipitates conflict relations is comparative relations composed by human distinctions. Whether these distinctions are self-imposed or imposed on others, or both, a deficit condition results, which may require power relations to maintain conformity or to try to change. At the center of all this fragmentation of persons and relationships is the defining practice of human distinctions; and at the heart of human distinctions are fragmented persons and relationships in reduced ontology and function needing redemptive reconciliation for transformed relationships together—the relationships composed only by both persons being equalized without distinctions and thus vulnerably involved intimately from the heart of the whole person. We should not be misguided to work for equality while distinctions are still used, which at best can only result in a common equality that lacks wholeness at the heart of persons and relationships.

The good news from uncommon peace is that the pivotal breakthrough in the human relations composing the human condition, our human condition, has emerged with the gospel of uncommon equality in order for the heart of all persons and relationships to be transformed (not simply reformed) together in their primacy of nothing less than whole ontology and function. As Paul called forth the new-order church family to proclaim ‘the gospel of uncommon equality from uncommon peace’, the equalizing church must itself be determined by the experiential reality of uncommon equality; this specifically involved transformed relationships both equalized and intimate, so that the church family can whole-ly witness to the experiential truth of this whole and uncommon gospel (Eph 6:15). Furthermore, as the context of Paul calling forth the equalizing church indicates (6:10-18), the equalizing church will not be equalizing unless it also fights against any and all reductionism: first, against anything less and any substitutes for ‘the gospel of uncommon equality from uncommon peace’, and next, against the inequality inherent in human distinctions that fragment persons and relationships at the heart of their ontology and function. The integral fight both *for* the wholeness of the gospel and *against* all reductionism is not optional for the equalizing church, because the relational outcome of wholeness for its own persons and relationships and for all persons, peoples, nations and their relations depends on it. The good news is not that we have been saved from ‘sin without reductionism’ and saved to ‘good without wholeness’.

One qualifying note should be added to clarify the equalizing church. As the new-order church family of Christ, the equalizing church is still the body of Christ. That is, the functional order that Paul outlined for the church to compose its interdependent synergism is still vital (1 Cor 12:12-31). The uncommon equality of the equalizing church does not mean that all its persons do the same thing and equally have the same resources, nor does everyone engage their practice (including worship) in the same manner. The new-order church is neither a homogeneous unit nor a monotonic composition. Diversity in what persons do and the resources they have are basic to the body of Christ. The key issue is not differences but distinctions associated with differences that limit and constrain persons and fragment the relational order of the church family from wholeness together. Having this diversity in the church is important

for the church's interdependent synergism, but each difference is secondary and must be integrated into the primary of the whole church, that is, the church in uncommon peace and uncommon equality (Eph 4:11-13,16, cf. Col 2:19). When differences become the primary focus, even inadvertently, they subtly are seen with distinctions that set into motion the comparative process with its relational consequences.

The line between diversity and distinctions has disappeared in most church theology and practice (including the academy's) today, such that the consequences are not understood or recognized. In whatever way those consequences emerge in the church (local, regional, global), they all converge in inequality of the church's relational order—if not explicitly then implicitly. This unequal relational order of distinctions is contrary to and in conflict with the uncommon peace of Christ. As Paul made definitive Jesus' salvific work for the church, Jesus embodied the good news in order 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.

Do you have a different gospel and function for the church than the peace of Christ: "he came and proclaimed peace to you *in a deficit position* and peace to those *in a better position yet still deficit condition*" (Eph 2:17)?

The New, Uncommon, Whole Relational Order of the Transformed Church

In June, 2015, nine African Americans in Charleston, South Carolina, were murdered at church during their weekly Bible study together by a white young adult proclaiming racial superiority. This macroaggression shocked many Christians and churches in the U.S. and evoked renewed calls for racial justice. Mark Labberton, president of Fuller Theological Seminary, responded in part: "Until our lives [including at Fuller] reflect a gospel powerful enough to eradicate roots of racism and violence, the faith we proclaim will be a marginalized impertinence."³

Indeed, the experiential truth of the whole gospel must first be the experiential reality of the church and its persons and relationships, including the academy and other Christian organizations. Yet, the issues of justice and reconciliation intrinsic to the gospel must go beyond ethical-moral terms and reach deep into the heart of persons and relationships in their ontology and function; and getting past the secondary into this primacy requires the redemptive change of our theological anthropology. If we want justice with righteousness, then the gospel of the uncommon peace of Christ and integrally its uncommon equality also require this experiential reality in the church: the new, uncommon and whole relational order for the church to be distinguished as the new creation family of Christ, whereby its gospel will have the relational significance for all persons, peoples, nations and their relations to be made whole in their innermost.

³ Quoted from "Out of Anguish, We Commit to Change," posted 6/22/2015, <http://fuller.edu/offices/President/From-the-President/2015-Posts>.

The gospel that Jesus vulnerably embodied only in whole relational terms centered on the innermost of the child-person, who differentiated the heart of the person from inner out and, thus, who lived neither by the bias of human distinctions nor by a naïve lack of discernment. Jesus declared with excitement that the key to receiving and understanding God’s revelation is the vulnerable openness of the child-person, who is not predisposed by the limits and constraints of the epistemic bias (or trained incapacity) of those regarded as “wise and learned” (Lk 10:21). Also, Jesus disclosed in these relational terms that those who compose his family are distinguished child-persons, who have been redeemed from distinctions and thus humbly live at the heart of who and what they are without embellishment (Mt 18:1-4). Jesus further differentiated that the heart of those child-persons compose the heart of worship and its relational significance, those with distinctions regarded as having better practice and knowledgeable resources (Mt 21:15-16). Then, Jesus addressed his disciples’ concern for distinctions and their need for redemptive change as church leaders—leadership differentiated clearly from the greatest distinctions only by the child-person signified “like the youngest” (*neos*, Lk 22:26).

By centering on the child-person, however, Jesus did not reverse the relational order of his church family, which servant discipleship and leadership commonly imply in narrow referential terms of what to do. In reality, Jesus composed the new (*neos*) relational order for his church family of those new persons redeemed from distinctions and re-newed (*anakainoo*) to the wholeness of Christ (Col 3:10-11). The new persons in wholeness are the only church leaders who can “equip [*katartizo*, restore, put in new order and make complete] *the persons and relationships of the church in its relational purpose and function*, for building up the *family* of Christ, until all of us come to the *whole relationship together* of our faith *distinguished by the whole Word*, to full maturity *on the basis of the only* measure of the fullness, *completeness, wholeness* [*pleroma*] of Christ” (Eph 4:12-13). This uncommon relational process and outcome in whole relational terms cannot emerge and unfold with, from and by distinctions, notably the greatest.

Paul is clear about “those who commend themselves *by the comparative process*. But when they measure themselves *by their distinctions*, and compare themselves with one another *based on their distinctions*, they do not understand” (*syniemi*, 2 Cor 10:12). That is, those who use, reinforce and sustain distinctions do not put together all of the relational words of the Word to have the whole understanding (the process and outcome of *syniemi*) of the whole gospel and its relational outcome of wholeness for persons and relationships together from their innermost to their outermost. The *syniemi* that Paul helps us to have involves the unbridgeable gap between conforming to distinctions from outer in and being transformed from distinctions in the innermost to the outermost.

Child-persons re-newed without distinctions at the heart of their ontology and function, and their transformed relationships together in which they are integrally involved with both equality and intimacy, are who and what the new, uncommon, whole relational order of the church involves, and how it functions. By the experiential reality of this relational order of its persons and relationships, the church is distinguished as transformed in its innermost. Therefore, on only this relational basis and experiential reality, the church has the relational significance to proclaim the gospel of uncommon peace with uncommon equality for the fragmentation and inequality of all persons, peoples, nations and their relations in the pluralistic, globalizing world, and to call for

justice with righteousness and work for the uncommon good with wholeness. This uncommon relational process of the distinguished relational order of uncommon relationships together is not the naïve ideal of a child but rather the experiential reality of child-persons—who are not defined and determined by the human context’s commonization—vulnerably living from their heart the experiential truth of Christ’s gospel of uncommon peace in the good news of uncommon equality.

The life of Jesus before the cross embodied in whole relational terms ‘Jesus as the equalizer’. The death and resurrection of Jesus embodied with the palpable Word the new creation of persons and relationships from inner out in order to embody in whole and uncommon relational terms ‘the church as equalizer’ for all the ages of persons, the diversity of all peoples and the differences of all nations, “just as I am and have been sent.” Along with Paul, the palpable Word inquires, “Where are you in your ontology and function?” and “What are you doing here to be the church as equalizer?”—or do you have a better gospel and a greater purpose and function for the church?

The measure of Christ we use will be the gospel we get. The gospel we then use will be the relational outcome for the church and its persons and relationships we get, and thereby the relational significance that the world gets. Anything less than the wholeness of Christ will yield an incomplete gospel that does not save us inclusively *from* sin as reductionism and save us exclusively *to* the wholeness of persons and relationships together in the whole and uncommon God’s family. Anything less than the complete gospel of the wholeness of Christ will substitute for its whole relational outcome for the church—with a substitute that does not transform the church’s persons and relationships together at the heart of their ontology and function from inner out to compose the new, uncommon, whole creation church family of Christ.

Further Implications of the Church as Equalizer

The trajectory that composed the experiential truth of God’s vulnerable presence in the human context and the path that composed the experiential reality of God’s relational involvement, and the relational outcome of God’s vulnerable trajectory and relational path, are at stake here. That is, God’s righteousness, which kissed uncommon peace to integrate justice with righteousness in wholeness, is at issue here—which also unavoidably includes our righteousness.

The global church is urgently faced with professing the whole and holy (uncommon) God, claiming the whole gospel and its uncommon relational outcome, and thereby proclaiming the experiential truth of God’s presence and involvement and the experiential reality of relationship together in wholeness. Or we of the church can profess something less of God to idolize, claim an incomplete gospel, and settle for its common result, whereby we can only proclaim the truth of God and the reality of our life together without the relational significance of their primacy in wholeness. If we profess the latter, there exists an inequality about God shaped by common terms; and therefore there is an existing inequality common to all of our persons and relationships that we have to accept, resign ourselves to, or simply have no significant basis to change. Is this what many segments of the global church are going through today, knowingly or unknowingly?

Yet, the reality is that the global church cannot expect equality when its God exists in inequality.

Throughout their history, God's people and church family have narrowed down the whole of God and shaped the uncommon God by commonization. The Word embodied nothing less than the experiential truth of the whole and uncommon God, who cannot be narrowed down and idolized in comparative terms. The whole Truth embodied no substitutes of the experiential reality of God's vulnerable presence and face-to-face involvement composed only in whole and uncommon relational terms, which cannot be limited or constrained in a narrow epistemic field and referentialized. When we open our persons and relationships to be vulnerable to the whole and uncommon God, then the equality of God is distinguished (*pala*) beyond all human terms, distinctions and comparison. The relational significance of the equality of God is that God both created persons and relationships in his likeness of equality in their innermost, and now is the equalizer of persons and relationships who are no longer equal in his likeness.

In an expanding universe and a contracting world, the global church must examine its theology and practice to understand whether its cosmology goes beyond the dark matter of the universe (or even multiverse), and its anthropology goes deeper than the common function of the human brain found by neuroscience; and then examine if its practice gets beyond the common practices for persons and relationships prevailing in the human context. If our theology and practice do not get beyond these limits and constraints and go deeper, then they remain narrowed down in a narrow epistemic field with incomplete knowledge and understanding both of God and human life in their innermost.

The inequality of persons, people, nations and their relations is the prevailing condition, signifying the human condition for all persons, peoples and nations. And the efforts for equality, even by the church, have not made significant change in this condition. Social and racial justice, for example, have had good intentions but the fact is that inequality still prevails, and whatever good has resulted from these efforts still is good without wholeness. The reality we need to embrace is that all justice is not equal and is not equally enacted, nor is their relational outcome equality. More importantly, there are underlying issues that the church has not addressed, whether we have not recognized them or simply avoid them.

Foremost underlying is the issue of our theological anthropology and on what basis we define persons and determine relationships, as we have been discussing. As long as we use human distinctions, our theological anthropology remains narrowed down to the outer-in parts of persons and relationships without the heart of their primacy. As long as human distinctions remain prominent in the church (e.g. by roles, gifts and other resources) and compose its gathering (whether culturally, ethnically, racially), the church will not unfold transformed in wholeness. For example, even if our theology does not include distinctions as its basis yet our church is composed primarily on cultural, ethnic or racial terms, then our practice is incongruent with our theology. The experiential reality of our practice confirms the experiential truth of our theology, and we cannot and should not expect anything more to emerge and unfold from the church.

Consider this existing fact. When our practice does not address the innermost of human life and get to the heart of persons and relationships, then our practice becomes occupied-preoccupied with secondary matters (not necessarily unimportant yet still

secondary) over relational involvement with their primacy. The reality then is that our practice reflects and thus reinforces or sustains fragmentary parts of persons and relationships, notably with the distinctions in comparative relations for the deficit condition of inequality. Underlying this dynamic is the issue of righteousness. For the presence and involvement of God to distinguish the whole and uncommon God, what is required is God's righteousness. As the psalmist sang, God's righteousness kisses wholeness and therefore "the whole of who, what and how God is goes before him and *distinguishes his practice.*" Just as for God, the integrity of our practice is contingent on our righteousness. Who, what and how we are goes before us and determines our practice—as the psalmist sang of God—including our faithfulness, the relational involvement of our love and the composition of our justice.

Who, what and how we are is the central concern that Jesus has for his followers, which is summarized in his Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7). Our righteousness must be differentiated from the practice of reductionists (5:20) to distinguish the whole of who, what and how we are—not parts or something less of who, what and how we are. Underlying the defining issue of righteousness is the matter of human will, which God endowed to all human persons equally. From the beginning in the primordial garden, human will was exercised to reshape the whole of God and redefine the uncommon God's terms for relationship together, thereby composing sin as reductionism. This autonomy was exercised by God's people to narrow down God's whole and uncommon relational terms for covenant relationship. That's the self-autonomy of reductionists that Jesus differentiated in their practice of who, what and how they were (5:21-48). What inevitably emerges from self-autonomy shaping God and narrowing down his relational terms is the practice of self-determination. Self-determination of who, what and how we are is the righteousness Jesus exposed (in chap. 6), which he said is incompatible for his followers' practice and incongruent with their innermost because self-determination is contingent on a comparative process and relations that require inequality to determine "the greatest"—as the disciples needed to learn. In other words, Jesus makes unequivocal that our righteousness cannot be composed and established by self-determination—a critical issue that involves our theological anthropology. In conjoint function, the choice we make to determine who, what and how we are in practice will also require at some point justification for our practice and/or conforming others to our practice. This is the self-justification that Jesus integrated (7:1-6) to the free choice for self-determination. The engagement in this practice of who, what and how we have been, are and will be can be explicit or subtle, finding expression in the spectrum of anything less and any substitutes for the heart of our persons and relationships in their primacy of wholeness.

When we choose to maintain and promote distinctions—whether individual or collective distinctions—we are claiming the critical ingredients necessary to engage in self-determination for constructing our identity in who, what and how we are. Even if distinctions were imposed on us—for example, as the dalits in India, the natives and slaves in the U.S., the indigenous in South Africa—they could only be imposed on our situations and circumstances but we decide whether to consent to them in our innermost. To reject such distinctions is to claim the equality of who, what and how we are determined by God. To accept any distinctions is to claim our own determination of who, what and how we are on a narrowed-down comparative basis that composes inequality,

the measure of which results in a deficit condition for all engaged—even for disciples regarded as “the greatest.”

The autonomy to construct our identity raises two specific issues that are consequential for the church and its persons and relationships. First, having the freedom of choice has been synonymous with democracy, which has been directly identified with Christian freedom. Yet, the freedom of Christ and democracy should not be conflated, because democracy (in theory at least) advocates for freedom of choice that also includes choosing reduced ontology and function that constrains being free; whereas freedom in Christ excludes such choices in order to be free (Jn 8:31-36; Gal 5:13; 1 Pet 2:16). Freedom of choice is not an end in itself, notably for oneself in self-determination (individually and collectively), which is the nature of democracy that composes persons and relationships unequally embedded (if not enslaved) in a common deficit condition. The fight for human rights has been mostly about having only this freedom of choice; and the church must differentiate its engagement in human rights or its efforts will only reinforce and sustain the reduced ontology and function constraining being free. Freedom in Christ opens the door to be involved in relationships together that are equalized at the heart of persons and relationships in likeness of the whole and uncommon God (2 Cor 3:16-18). This innermost identity in wholeness together emerges only from the freedom of Christ in ongoing choices of the relational involvement that, as Christ made definitive, composes his church family; and these choices to be freely involved in equalized relationships are neither synonymous with democracy nor the relational outcome of democracy.

This leads to the second issue about freedom of choice to compose the church, which could result in the body of Christ but would not be the family of Christ. The freedom to compose the church and determine its identity may be consistent with a democracy, but these are not options available to distinguish the church family of Christ. When a church chooses to construct its identity on the basis of distinctions (self-imposed or imposed by others), this autonomy claims its own determination of who, what and how the church and its persons and relationships are on a narrowed-down comparative basis that reinforces, sustains and composes them with the relational consequence of inequality and a deficit condition in their innermost. What does this say about a hierarchical model or organizational-business model used for the church that requires distinctions for persons and relationships? What does this mean for the race/ethnic-based and culturally constructed churches, whose distinction is the primary basis for their composition and identity?

To focus on only one example among others, the African American church has had a long history in its struggle from slavery to freedom in order to have the freedom of choice to determine its current composition and identity. What was at the heart of many slave-based churches, however, was their rejection of that contemptible distinction and deficit condition to determine who, what and how they were in their innermost, despite the enslaving limits and constraints of their situations and circumstances.⁴ In other words, in the freedom of Christ they freely claimed their uncommon equality in Christ while they survived in the common inequality of a democracy. Unfortunately, the African American church evolved more on the basis of surviving in common inequality than on

⁴ This perception can be gained from Cornel West and Eddie S. Glaude Jr., eds., *African American Religious Thought: An Anthology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

claiming their uncommon equality. Yet, this should be expected because this church transitioned from a slave-based church that mainly rejected its distinction to a race-based church that accepted its distinction. By accepting its distinction, it also claimed its own determination of who, what and how they are, or at least hope to be, which required engaging the comparative relations that composed inequality and assuming its deficit condition. Generally speaking, the African American church can be described in its practice by its self-determination to climb from a deficit condition to a higher, better, greater condition in its pursuit of racial justice and equality. I'm sure that few, if any, in this church feel they have succeeded in their determination.

What is also apparent in the African American church, and others like it in the global North and South, is the lack of understanding (the *syniemi* Paul made apparent, 2 Cor 10:12) of the implications of accepting, maintaining and promoting distinctions in the church, and using such a distinction to compose the church and construct its identity. In God's uncommon peace and justice, distinctions (*diakrino* in Acts 15:9) mean the reality to separate, treat differently and thus to discriminate; and this intentional or unintentional discrimination could likely be an inconvenient truth and uncomfortable reality for many Christians to embrace in their relations—just as Peter still experienced in his distinction until Paul confronted him. What cannot emerge from comparative relations is equality because by its nature it only composes inequality and only results in a deficit condition. As long as the African American church uses its race distinction, it will not experience the uncommon equality of Christ in the primacy of its persons and relationships from their innermost to their outermost. Moreover, whatever justice it has achieved is without righteousness and whatever good it has brought is without wholeness, because the church in its outermost lacks the relational significance of its innermost. Its own race prevents this church from going deeper in their innermost with the slave-based church and moving further in their outermost than their fore-parents could have imagined. Therefore, whenever we choose to maintain and promote some distinction about us, we claim what is critically needed for our self-determination in the comparative relations of all persons, peoples and nations, the irreversible condition of which is a deficit inequality in the heart of our ontology and function.

The freedom we use—either of democracy or of Christ—will be the equality we get. The equality we use—either common equality or uncommon equality—will be the who, what and how of persons and relationships we get. The righteousness we use will be the church we get—as Jesus made the experiential truth and reality for his followers.

The church as equalizer holds us accountable for our distinctions and confronts us in our self-determination because the choices for both imply and are consequential of the following:

1. They are incompatible with the uncommon peace and equality of Christ, who saved us from reduced ontology and function and saved us to wholeness together in the heart of our ontology and function.
2. They are incongruent with the new, uncommon, whole relational order of the transformed church family of Christ.

3. They are contrary to the good news for all the ages of persons, the diversity of all peoples, the differences of all nations, and all their relationships to experience wholeness in their primacy from inner out.
4. They are in conflict with the redemptive reconciliation needed for the transformed relationships together, both equalized and intimate, composing the relational outcome of this gospel of wholeness and uncommon equality.

Therefore, the church as equalizer by necessity confronts us and holds us accountable, because this is the relational outcome of the experiential truth of the uncommon God's vulnerable trajectory and the experiential reality of the whole of God's relational path to respond to us in whole and uncommon relational terms—which we do not have the freedom to reduce or renegotiate. Thus, Paul is emphatic about our choice for globalizing the church: “pursue [*dioko*, follow eagerly, endeavor earnestly to acquire] what makes for wholeness and for mutual upbuilding *of the transformed global church family*” (Rom 14:19).

The experiential truth of this uncommon equality of persons and relationships in their primacy, and the experiential reality of the equalizing church for its persons and relationships in wholeness both converge to embody the church as equalizer in likeness of Jesus as the equalizer. Equality distinguishes the innermost of the whole and uncommon God and is at the heart of God's relational response to our human condition. The church as equalizer distinguishes the innermost of God's likeness and extends the heart of God's relational response to the fragmentary condition of all the persons, peoples and nations in this pluralistic, globalizing world—just as Jesus prayed for his church family.

As the global church emerges on the relational basis discussed above, by these whole and uncommon relational terms the global church and all its churches, persons and relationships unfold transformed in wholeness—nothing less and no substitutes.

Chapter 10 The Integrity of Globalizing the Church

**I, therefore...beg you to *live the life worthy of Christ's calling...*
making every *practice* to maintain the oneness of the Spirit in the bond of wholeness.**

**There is *the whole* body and *the whole* Spirit, just as you were called
to the *whole* hope of your calling, *the whole* Lord, *whole* faith, *whole* baptism,
the *whole* God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in the whole.**

Ephesians 4:1-5

***Leaders* to equip the saints...until all of us come to the oneness of the faith
and of the *relational* knowledge of the Son of God,
to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ *in wholeness*.**

Ephesians 4:12-13

So, “Where are you today?” “What are you doing here in the globalizing world?”
And how is the contemporary global church engaging the nature of sin and the human
condition?

Globalization certainly involves more than an economic movement and
encompasses political, cultural, technological and ecological processes. The church lives
within this globalizing world and has been itself undergoing further globalization. Yet,
the modern globalizing of the church has raised issues about the true *globalness* of the
church’s identity and its theology and practice.

While advocating for a global Christian family, Todd Johnson also makes a case
for a global Christian identity:

Increasing contact between Christians around the world sparks reflection on identity.
Christians see ways in which they differ (ethnicity, language, denomination) as well
as ways in which they are the same (practice, core theology, creeds). When we adopt
a common global identity, we begin to tear down cultural divisions and work toward
reconciliation.¹

At the same time, Johnson states that Christian identity is a dual identity:

The Christian life is lived out both locally and globally. It is obvious that
Christians live in a particular city in a particular country, speak a particular language,
and belong to a particular denomination or network (or none at all). But, at the same
time, all Christians are tied together by a common faith, by a common commitment
to one Lord and Savior.²

¹ Todd M. Johnson and Cindy M. Wu, *Our Global Families: Christians Embracing Common Identity in a Changing World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 78.

² Johnson, 83.

In its practice, Johnson defines what a global Christian family is not:

- It is not simply the sum of the thousands of local expressions of Christianity.
- It is not created by stirring old forms of Christianity into a melting pot; it represents something new over and above previously existing forms of Christianity.
- It is not a mosaic, since that metaphor conveys a picture of neatly juxtaposed and unchanging cultural forms of Christianity. Instead, differences are fluid and are caught up in ever-shifting global interactions.
- It is not an alien global force suppressing difference; our shared experiences can be anyone's authentic Christian experience.
- It is not the opposite of diversity; rather, it harmonizes diversity. Far from hovering abstractly above the planet, our global Christian family is a place where we all meet.³

In terms of the globalness of the church's theology, Tite Tiénou raises this question:

Why has Christian scholarship paid so little attention to the "majority of Christians"? Is it because few Christian scholars, even theologians, agree with Andrew Walls that "the future of the Christian faith, its shape in the twenty-first and twenty-second centuries, is being decided by events which are now taking place in Africa, in Asia, and Latin America, or which will do so in the near future"? What would happen to Christian scholarship and theology if all Christian scholars and theologians (from Northern as well as Southern continents) really believed that the future of Christianity no longer depends on developments in the North?⁴

Tiénou's response includes:

The full participation of theologians and scholars from the new centers of the Christian faith presents a number of challenges. It may be useful, therefore, to review some of these challenges by asking the question, Why, to use Walls's words, is "the rule of the palefaces untroubled" in Christian theology and scholarship? In my mind, "the rule of the paleface" continues because of the paradox observed by Kenyan theologian John Mbiti: "The Church has become kerygmatically universal, but is still theologically provincial." Perhaps this paradox helps explain why relatively few people realize that the change in Christianity's center of gravity "has not only statistical but theological implications as well" (Frostin). One may indeed

³ Johnson, 81.

⁴ Tite Tiénou, "Christian Theology in an Era of World Christianity," in Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland, eds., *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 44.

acknowledge that the theological implications of this reality should lead to the development of Christian theologies from Africa, Asia, and Latin America (McGrath). Nonetheless, the theologies of the Western “province” of the church continue their dominance, even if today “Western theological leadership of a predominantly non-western church is an incongruity” (Walls).

Christian theology and scholarship will remain provincial as long as some major challenges continue unaddressed. These include the following: The West’s “hegemony postulate” (Frostin), the West’s self-perception that it is “the center,” the perception of third world scholars as “purveyors of exotic, raw intellectual material to people in the North” (Kalilombe), and the “dialogue of the deaf” (Mazrui) between the West and the rest of the world.⁵

He concludes:

Today, authentic Christian theologizing and provincialism are incompatible. We can, therefore, ill afford to continue on a path where we have colliding “arrogant regionalisms” (Quéau) in current world Christian theologizing. Let us move forward, then, in Christian theology as if we truly belong together. But how do we do so?⁶

Tiénou and Johnson point out what exists and what is needed for the globalness of the church’s identity and its theology and practice. Yet, in their suggested steps to move forward, they also appear to stay within the limits and constraints of our human condition in the church—steps not without hope for change though perhaps not understanding the underlying issues that need redemptive change for the globalizing of the church. This integrity requires getting to the innermost of the church and to the heart of its persons and relationships in their primacy.

The globalization of the church needs to be differentiated deeper than the majority shift from the West to the South, and it must be distinguished beyond the sum of its parts in both the South and the North as well as from any hybrid construction. When Jesus cleaned out his house to make it the dwelling in covenant relationship together for all nations, he illuminated the integral antecedent to the uncommon peace of Christ that would compose the church family of Christ for all persons, peoples and nations without their comparative distinctions, yet without losing their diversity. The unity that Paul begs for above is not expressed as a reminder in referential terms to maintain in church doctrine and to advocate in referential language by church leadership, both of which are without relational significance. Paul expresses in the depth of relational terms what Jesus transformed *into* Paul: the wholeness of Christ composing the whole of who, what and how the church is in its unity, oneness (*henotes*)—the oneness distinguished only by wholeness together and differentiated from anything less than whole relational terms. The primary identity of the church’s righteousness is Paul’s deep concern over any secondary identity of the church’s diversity (cf. Rom 14:17), the secondary practice of which must always be integrated into the primary of who, what and how the church and its persons and relationships are (cf. 14:18-20).

⁵ Tiénou, 45-46.

⁶ Tiénou, 50.

The integrity of the church's identity with its theology and practice is based on an ongoing dynamic determined by a globalizing process. This globalizing process of who, what and how the church is can move either in the direction beyond what exists in order to be complete and whole; or it can move in a narrowed-down direction within the limits and constraints of what exists for a partial (or provincial) identity or a broader identity with a sum of its global parts that does not add up to the whole—even if constructed by a hybrid composition. Another way to say “what exists” is the common practice for persons and relationships that prevail in the surrounding contexts (local, regional, global) of the church. Existing culture, for example, imposes limits and constraints on the church and its persons and relationships unless they go beyond this common prevailing—not necessarily rejecting all parts of that culture but making culture secondary and integrating it into the primary without redefining what's primary to God and the church family of Christ.

The globalizing process can engage the church either in the limits and constraints of the common, or in being redeemed beyond to the uncommon. The integrity of the church's identity and its theology and practice depends on what direction it moves.

Who and What Converge in the Global Church

As we have discussed in this study, who and what converge in the global church determine how the church and its persons and relationships will be. The pivotal issues for who and what converge in the church involves whether or not their primary source is composed by what exists, that is, composed by the commonization in the globalizing world. The church and its persons and relationships live in the common, and if their commonization is who and what converge in the church, and composes their theology and practice, there is incompatibility with the gospel and incongruity with its relational outcome.

When the gospel was proclaimed by the early church, the gospel's experiential truth was composed by the experiential reality that “You will not let your Holy One see decay” (Acts 2:27; 13:35, NIV). The uncommon One constitutes the whole gospel, and the gospel's uncommon Source composes its relational outcome of his uncommon church family: “if the root is holy, then the branches also are holy” (Rom 11:16; Eph 2:21, cf. 1 Pet 2:9). Paul does not merely reference back to Jesus' metaphor (Jn 15:1-8) but extends the depth of the integral relational connection between the church and its source—its relational Source and his church family, its uncommon relational Source and his uncommon church family, its whole and uncommon relational Source and his whole and uncommon church family. Who and what converge in the church and how their theology and practice are composed must be compatible with the uncommonness of the gospel of wholeness and congruent with its uncommon and whole relational outcome of the church and its persons and relationships in their primacy of wholeness.

The integrity of globalizing the church rises with the uncommon Source to be distinguished beyond the common and clearly differentiated from the commonization of its churches, persons and relationships. The church's global identity cannot go beyond what exists until it is distinguished by the uncommon One. Who, what and how the church and its persons and relationships are cannot be differentiated in their righteousness

from inner out until they experience the reality of redemptive change rising with the uncommon One in wholeness. Therefore, the uncommonness of who and what converge in the church is the key for globalizing the church, and foremost who converges in the church must be the uncommon and whole of Jesus. In other words, not simply any Christology whatever its global source, but only complete Christology can account for the uncommon One.

If the whole and uncommon Jesus does not converge in the church, then the globalizing process of the church moves in a different direction, and the gospel it claims is not the experiential truth of the whole gospel, thereby composing who and what converge both in commonization and with inequality. If the uncommon and whole Jesus does not converge in the church, then the globalizing process of the church revises the gospel's relational outcome and follows a different theological trajectory from Jesus' in its theology, and a different relational path from his in its practice. The theology and practice composing the integrity of who and what converge in the global church can only be distinguished by the uncommon and whole Jesus and will unfold in relational significance only with him in reciprocal relationship together by his uncommon whole relational terms. In this irreplaceable relational process, the whole and uncommon God embodies the heart of the church's global theology and global practice.

The Heart of Its Global Theology

The theological task challenging the global church is to transition from the dominance of Western theology to the prominence of global theology. This transition may appear to be easier for the South than the North, when in reality it will be a struggle for both to go deeper than how the theological task is conventionally engaged. If what converges in the church is to be of theological significance, the task cannot remain narrowed down to Western terms and the transition cannot simply be inclusive of as many theologies as are available (notably from the Majority World), and presume that the sum of those parts will be the whole composing global theology. That assumption continues to reinforce and sustain Western terms, which certainly have not had the theological significance of wholeness for the church (locally, regionally or globally) and its persons and relationships.

The integrity of what converges in the church was crucial to Paul in his fight against anything less and any substitutes composing the church. As the person transformed by Jesus to integrate all the ages of persons, the diversity of all peoples and the differences of all nations into his whole and uncommon church family, Paul would neither reduce nor compromise who and what converged in the church just to be able to claim a global distinction for the church. He made imperative that what converges be contingent on the uncommon One, who converged to constitute the church integrally in the theological significance of the wholeness of Christ and in the relational significance of the word of Christ in uncommon whole relational terms (Col 3:15-16).

For Paul, only the uncommon whole of Jesus is the measure ("rule") to determine the theological significance of what converges in the church for its innermost to be whole. The uncommon whole of Jesus is the heart of the global church and complete Christology is the heart of its global theology. Yet, the uncommon whole of Jesus and complete Christology have been and continue to be problematic for the church and its

persons and relationships. Certainly, Jesus is perceived in diverse ways by different people, some focused on certain aspects while others emphasizing different aspects.⁷ The problem emerges when Jesus is limited to those aspects and the shape of Jesus is narrowed down from his whole person to those fragmentary parts—just as Paul addressed the problem “Has Christ been divided?” (1 Cor 1:13), which has shaped Western Christology. This is the underlying issue of contextualization of the gospel, which results in this incomplete Christology. No matter how many diverse Christologies converge in the global church, their sum does not compose the complete Christology that distinguishes the uncommon whole of Jesus’ theological trajectory and differentiates his relational path. Only this complete Christology composes the heart of global theology that goes deeper than any local and regional Christology and is beyond their cumulative understanding.

The christological problem involves more than how Jesus is perceived and gets to the depth of how Jesus’ person is received in the uncommon whole relational terms by which he vulnerably shares his whole person with us in relationship—not by common referential terms that perceive Jesus dispensing information about him and God to compose our Christologies. That is, common to all persons, groups, peoples and nations is a shared human ontology and function that Jesus addresses to make relational connection with the primacy of our persons regardless of our secondary distinctions. Unless we in our primacy experience the reality of how Jesus is, we will not have the theological significance to compose the experiential truth of who and what Jesus is. This integral relational and theological process involves the perceptual-interpretive framework from our theological anthropology that composes the primacy of persons and relationships in whole ontology and function. When the uncommon whole of Jesus who converged in the church is whole-ly received in relationship only on his terms, the complete Christology of who converged will be the measure determining what converges in the church’s global theology deeper than local and regional theologies and takes it beyond its cumulative understanding (as Paul illuminated, Phil 4:7).

The Christology we use will be the gospel we get, along with who and what converge in the church. The uncommon peace and equality of Christ composing complete Christology emerges from the gospel of wholeness and uncommon equality to unfold in the full soteriology of the ecclesiology of the whole, the complete theological significance of which converges in the global church. Foremost in who and what converge is the whole and uncommon God distinguished only by the Trinity, not by an overly christocentric Christology.⁸ God’s whole relational response to the human condition emerged initially with the good news of covenant relationship together based on whole relational terms (*tamiym*, Gen 17:1-2); and God’s full response to our human condition was embodied by the whole Word and now brought to completion by the Spirit in the palpable Word. Jesus did not take credit for this relational response to our human condition because it vulnerably involved the whole and uncommon God, the Trinity,

⁷ For a sample of diverse christological perspectives from around the world, see Gene L. Green, Stephen T. Pardue and K.K. Yeo, eds., *Jesus without Borders: Christology in the Majority World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014).

⁸ How some in the Majority World address the theological significance of the Trinity is discussed in Gene L. Green, Stephen T. Pardue and K.K. Yeo, eds., *The Trinity among the Nations: The Doctrine of God in the Majority World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015).

nothing less and no substitutes (e.g. Jn 12:44-45, 49-50). Accordingly, we should not highlight just Christ in our Christology, nor should we assume only Christ converged in the church (e.g. Jn 14:17,23; Eph 2:22). The wholeness of the Trinity and the equality of the trinitarian persons integrally distinguish the theological and relational significance of the good news of transformed relationships together. This involved not only the response by the whole and uncommon God but also required God's whole response to the breadth and depth of the human condition, our human condition, and to the sin as reductionism—not sin just in ethical-moral terms, and further than honor-shame—prevailing in persons and relationships from the beginning.

The dynamic relational process and ongoing relational outcome of the Trinity's uncommon theological trajectory and whole relational path converge in the relational context composing the church to determine the integrity of who and what converge in the global church. It is in the Trinity's likeness embodied in the face of Christ that the global church and all its persons, peoples, nations and relationships together are transformed new in their primacy of wholeness—not composed by their secondary parts and distinctions. Thus, the likeness of the whole ontology and function of the Trinity also composes the heart of our theological anthropology, which is indispensable for the integrity of who, what and how the church and its persons and relationships are in their primacy of wholeness and equality together. When this integral theology both whole and uncommon is the heart of the church's global theology, its theological significance unfolds in the heart of the church's global practice.

The Heart of Its Global Practice

Since the whole of God and not merely part of God constituted the gospel of wholeness and uncommon equality, the relational outcome of who and what converge in the global church must also—by the nature of the Trinity's wholeness and equality and not out of obligation or duty—be whole and not merely parts of the church and its persons and relationships. The experiential truth of *nothing less* than the whole and not just part of God's presence, and the experiential reality of *no substitutes* for the whole of God's involvement by engaging just secondary parts, integrally compose the heart of who and what converge in the church and are definitive for *how* the church and its persons and relationships are also to be present and involved in their practice. Anything less and any substitutes compromise the integrity of who, what and how they are in their primacy of wholeness, even with traditional and esteemed parts assumed to be indispensable.

In order for mere parts of the church or of persons and relationships not to make assumptions about the primary focus and involvement of their function, their theological anthropology will need to have the significance in likeness of the whole ontology and function of the Trinity to ongoingly help them distinguish the primacy of persons and relationships and thereby differentiate primary practice from the secondary. Without this integral theological and relational process, in reciprocal relationship with the palpable Word, the integrity of who and what converges in the church is commonly compromised.

The global church's practice cannot be reduced to practice for persons and relationships prevailing in human contexts, nor can it be negotiated in its primacy with any common practices deemed important, if not necessary. These practices impose limits and constraints on the church and its persons and relationships that prevent them from

global practice. The consequence is to engage in a narrowed-down practice that is either provincial or for the common good without wholeness; or it could be some hybrid of both, for example, which imposes a provincial template on those different for their conformity, or which reduces everyone from their primacy in order to be defined in their plurality (as in multiculturalism), which can only presume their integrity in wholeness and significance of equality.

The gospel of wholeness and uncommon equality emerge directly from the wholeness and equality constituting the ontology and function of the Trinity, and therefore the gospel's relational outcome unfolds in direct likeness of the Trinity's wholeness and equality. Wholeness and equality are not mere ideals or just referential identity markers for the global church but rather the determining heart of the church family of Christ (just as Jesus prayed), from which emerges and unfolds the church's global practice for the primacy of all its persons, peoples, nations and their relationships together. The church and its practice cannot be global unless they are composed in wholeness and with equality. Yet, what renders these to mere ideals or reference points is to view them from a narrowed-down lens of the common, which consigns them to the hereafter—contrary to the truth and reality of Jesus' defining prayer for his global church family to be experienced today “so that the world may believe.”

The uncommon globalizing of the church must be differentiated from the common globalizing world in order for the globalization of the church to be distinguished. What distinguishes the whole and uncommon God's family in a globalizing world is the primacy given to persons and relationships in its purpose, priority and function—the practice of which is ongoingly subjected to commonization. The integrity for distinguishing the globalization of the church is defined and determined only by the wholeness and equality of the Trinity, who transformed the innermost of the church at the heart of its persons and relationships to their primacy of wholeness and equality. The integrity of wholeness and equality can only be composed in uncommon whole relational terms to differentiate the globalization of the new, uncommon, whole relational order of the church family in likeness of nothing less and no substitutes of its God.

On this uncommon whole relational basis, the church is accountable to join with Jesus to clean out its fragmentation and inequality of persons and relationships to become the family dwelling for all persons, peoples and nations in their primacy. These are the experiential truth of who and the experiential reality of what converge at the heart of the church's global practice. In this irreducible and nonnegotiable process of redemptive reconciliation, the global church increasingly builds—perhaps along with yet beyond the Habit for Humanity—‘Uncommon Dwellings for Humanity’ that will grow and mature the ages of all persons, the diversity of all peoples, the differences of all nations, and their relationships together in their primacy to be whole and equalized in the reduced ontology and function shared by all humanity.

In the globalizing world, the globalization of the church both challenges the church's presence to be vulnerable to the sounds and silence of the human condition, including our narrowed-down condition, and holds responsible the church's involvement in relational response to the full spectrum of this condition evolving from the beginning. Listening foremost to persons in their consciousness and relationships, what the global church hears from the beginning are persons embedded in their outer-in distinctions and

confined to relational distance, separation and brokenness (“were naked and covered up their persons with one another”). The common relational consequence that emerges throughout the full spectrum of this condition is the existing fact and prevailing reality of ‘relational orphans’, who also pervade the church needing to be made whole and equalized (cleaned out of its fragmentation and inequality) for its globalization as the family dwelling for humanity. Relational orphans are also who and what converge in the church, and they remain relational orphans until the church’s global practice gathers together all persons, peoples and nations in direct relational connection, equalized relational involvement and thereby intimate relational belonging in the whole and uncommon God’s whole and uncommon family.

As the church and all its persons and relationships unfold in their global theology and practice based on uncommon whole relational terms, the integrity of globalization of the church is distinguished in its wholeness and equality in likeness of the Trinity’s wholeness and equality. The uncommonness of this relational outcome fulfills Jesus’ defining prayer for his church family both in their life together and extended to the world, in the present and sojourning together as family in uncommon whole relational terms into the future, “just as I am and was sent.”

Until this relational outcome is the experiential reality of the global church, Jesus keeps knocking on church doors for the relational connection and involvement necessary to enjoy new life together.

The Globalizing Church Celebrating in a Fragmenting World

The economic globalization of the world has increasingly widened, even accelerated, the gap between the rich and the poor—apparent even in the U.S. with growing poverty and homelessness, while the poor around the world unknowing of their poverty have experienced the fact of poverty. The reality of this gap has further fragmented the lives of the haves as well as the have-nots in their common shared ontology and function. Yet, Jesus said that this inequality will always exist in the human context and thus must not preoccupy his family’s involvement in caring for the poor at the expense of the primary (Mk 14:6-9, cf. Dt 15:11).

The church has been called to make whole the fragmenting world, with even all of “creation waiting with eager longing for the *relational response* of God’s *whole and uncommon family*” (Rom 8:19). The global church’s call to make whole, however, is contingent on the globalizing church family being whole at the heart of its persons and relationships, and thus living in their wholeness and equality. From the church’s innermost to its outermost, this involves the irreducible and nonnegotiable primacy of all its persons and relationships together. The foremost priority of the church family that composes the globalizing church is celebrating their primacy in transformed relationships together both equalized and intimate. And the first relational involvement and response in celebration is worship of the whole and uncommon God—the ongoing reciprocal relational involvement with the Trinity’s vulnerable presence and intimate involvement with the primacy of our persons and relationships.

Mary's person (Martha's sister), neither limited nor constrained by sociocultural distinctions, engaged this primacy with the relational involvement of her whole person responding to the whole of Jesus' person—which Jesus defined as “involved in [*ergazomai*] good *relational* work [*ergon*] to me.” That is to say, Mary was intimately involved in the primacy of relationship with Jesus on the uncommon relational basis of ‘good with wholeness’—which is inadequately rendered merely as “she has performed a good service for me” (NRSV). Mary's wholeness and equality converged with those gathered as the church family of Christ to magnify the relational significance of the gospel of wholeness and uncommon equality, and its relational outcome composing the globalizing church family with all its persons, peoples, nations, and their relationships in nothing less and no substitutes of their primacy from their innermost to their outermost. Foremost in their primacy is the relational significance of their worship response to the Trinity dwelling vulnerably and intimately with them in whole and uncommon family together. The primacy of Mary's person in wholeness and equality and the uppermost priority of her relational involvement are the integral basis for Jesus to also magnify Mary's relational significance for the globalizing of his church family to unfold with her integrity.

The globalizing church celebrating in a fragmenting world may appear somewhat incongruous, at least untimely, notably where suffering or persecution is taking place. Globalizing the church, however, unfolds with integrity by the uncommon peace of Christ, who and what converge in the church for the primacy of its persons and relationships no matter what secondary conditions exist, and situations and circumstances surround them. Along with this basis for celebrating, the Spirit in the palpable Word is ongoingly present and relationally involved for reciprocal relationship together so that those belonging to the global church will not be relational orphans (just as Jesus promised). That's why Paul made it unmistakable that “God's family is not about secondary practices but of the integrity of our righteousness, our wholeness and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17). With the experiential reality of the whole gospel's relational outcome, together with the palpable Word, the globalizing church has joyful relational basis to be celebrating—and needs to celebrate its wholeness and uncommon equality for the fragmenting world to witness the hope to be made whole and equalized. Without celebrating the experiential truth and reality of who and what converge in the globalizing church, the global church's witness cannot be the whole witness necessary for the whole gospel.

The globalizing church in the integrity of transformed relationships together, indeed, converges with the psalmist to

“Sing joyfully to the whole and uncommon God,
in the whole righteousness orchestrating your relational steps;
It is beautifully fitting for those not fragmented to praise God the Subject
—not to idolize some part of God as Object—
Praise the whole of God with the diversity of your instruments
and your different music
—but in wholeness and equality as the globalizing church—

Sing to your present and involved God the new song,
composed in uncommon whole relational terms,
and shout, clap, dance, even cry, with joy!” (Ps 33:1-3)

And the globalizing church also converges with Mary to

“Sing to the triune God the new song
—the song congruent with your transformation—
Sing to the Trinity with praise face to Face,
Witness ongoingly to the good news of the Trinity’s salvation.
Make known in significant relational terms the Trinity’s innermost vulnerable
presence among the nations, and distinguished involvement among all peoples.”
(Ps 96:1-3)

Then, let the global church gather whole-ly in the transformed relationships together of the ages of all its persons, the diversity of all its peoples, and the differences of all its nations to celebrate singing the experiential truth of the whole gospel and the experiential reality of its relational outcome in wholeness and uncommon equality with this song composed with the palpable Word:

The Global Church Celebrating

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

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

Chorus 1:

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

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

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

Chorus 2:

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

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

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

Chorus 2:

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

[everyone shouting, clapping, dancing to the Trinity]

Yes! Yes!! Yes!!!
All persons, peoples and nations.⁹

⁹ ©2016 Kary A. Kambara & T. Dave Matsuo. Sheet music in printable pdf is available at <http://4X12.org>. For the global church in transformed relationships together to further celebrate singing the new song to the whole and uncommon God intimately, my wife (Kary A. Kambara) and I also wrote another worship song, composed in the key of Jesus with the Spirit and sung with Paul (2 Cor 3:16-18): “‘Singing’ the New Song” (Worship Songs, 2011), Online at <http://4X12.org>.

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