

The Gospel of Transformation
Distinguishing the Discipleship and Ecclesiology
Integral to Salvation

T. Dave Matsuo

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Contact:

www.4X12.org

tdavematsuo@4X12.org

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A Necessary Reintroduction to God's Whole

“I am bringing you good news...”

Luke 2:10¹

Whether good news is indeed *good* is relative to the person receiving the news. The value of good news most often is determined by the recipient. In fact, what is good news to some may be the opposite for others; obviously, who won the World Cup in 2014 did not bring news “of great joy for all the people” (as Lk 2:10 defined above). Furthermore, what the outcome is that results from so-called good news raises other matters which cannot be merely assumed to be good. Victories, for example, can be celebrated in destructive ways, or can bring out hubris or lead to a false sense of security.

The value of good news and its resulting outcome likewise need application to the gospel. It seems as if for many Christians the gospel has become more about ‘no bad news’ than good. We need to examine the assumptions made about our gospel and that we assume about its results both in our theology and practice. Accordingly, this study is less about the gospel we proclaim to others and more about the gospel we claim for ourselves, including its ongoing and unfolding results in our lives both individually and corporately. This is a critical examination we must not ignore and cannot avoid, because God holds us accountable for the whole gospel—accountable not only in our theology and practice but also in our ontology and function both as a person and persons in relationship together, most notably as the church. Therefore, all Christians, not only church leaders and academics, need to account for the following:

- Has our gospel been indeed *good*, which by necessity includes its outcome—good based not on our terms but by God’s?
- More importantly then, how congruent is our gospel and its unfolding outcome with the inseparable theological trajectory and relational path of Jesus?
- And how relationally compatible is our gospel and its ongoing outcome with the whole of Jesus (not mere parts of him) who irreducibly embodies the whole gospel and distinguishes its outcome in whole theology and practice—nothing less and no substitutes?

These questions do not point to options for us to consider whether to incorporate in our understanding of the gospel. The whole gospel reveals the vulnerable presence and intimate involvement of the whole of God, solely for the outcome of transformed relationship together in wholeness. Without any optional sense, these questions penetrate

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

to the heart of the gospel, “the gospel of peace *as wholeness*,” which Paul defined for the church (Eph 6:15); and by the nature of this gospel the questions illuminate the whole of God and God’s relational response of grace as the basis both constituting and distinguishing the Christian faith beyond what prevails in much of our theology and practice. Anything less and any substitutes are not good news and thus must be subject to God’s epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction for the transformation to wholeness.

Our Model of the Gospel

Let’s address (and confront as needed) our assumptions about the gospel we claim and practice, and then proclaim. Generally speaking, there are three models of the gospel that, I suggest, will be helpful to examine our gospel and its outcome. Our perception of the gospel and its functional significance in our lives is received on the basis of one of the following: (1) a *reduced* (or narrowed-down) model, (2) a *convergence* model, or (3) a *whole* model. Though each model may partially utilize another model in a secondary way, its primary determination of the gospel and its outcome emerge from that model. We need to understand the primary models we use and the assumptions made with that model.

1. Reduced Model

A reduced model of the gospel involves reductionism since certain assumptions (whether epistemic, philosophical, hermeneutical, theological or relational) are made that narrow down (either intentionally or unintentionally) the whole of who Jesus can be, was or is. On this selective basis Jesus’ whole person is reduced to parts of him (e.g. what he did or said) that thereby limit the gospel to those parts. In this fragmenting process, the truth of the whole gospel is imperceptible because our Christology is incomplete and its related soteriology becomes truncated. Our theology and practice lack clarity in this fragmentary condition and can only assume to have the significance truly distinguishing the gospel of Jesus Christ. The reality, however, even for the most well-intentioned Christians is that the good news and its outcome remain elusive as long as our biased assumptions reinforce this impasse to the whole of Jesus. The assumptions of a reduced model need to be challenged in order to get beyond this impasse.

Consider the following. When Philip brought the good news to Nathaniel, his response was noteworthy: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (Jn 1:46) Nathaniel assumed a narrowed-down model of the gospel that reduced Jesus to a prevailing stereotype disparaging Nazareth. Good had little value based on this common knowledge of Jesus’ human context, the bias of which also influenced Nathaniel’s perceptions of Jesus. The shape given to Jesus’ person (e.g. fragmented or incomplete), and thus the gospel he embodied, is critical to understand in order to get beyond any impasse to the full significance of the gospel and its outcome. While Nathaniel honestly acknowledged his bias, he remained open to the epistemic challenge from Philip to “Come and see” (i.e. expand his epistemic field) and thereby engaged the relational epistemic process to the whole of Jesus (Jn 1:46-51).

The relational outcome of Nathaniel's discipleship—that is, the discipleship based only on the relational terms Jesus revealed in the whole gospel—would not have emerged from a reduced model of the gospel. Likewise for us today, the significance of discipleship distinguished by the gospel embodied by the whole of Jesus is not the relational outcome that can emerge from anything less and any substitutes. We must understand in our theology and practice: whatever we assume about the gospel shapes its outcome in the discipleship we practice.

Nearly all of us start out with a reduced model of the gospel. Unfortunately, many Christians remain limited to narrowed-down knowledge and understanding based on epistemic, philosophical, hermeneutical, theological or relational assumptions; and, unlike for Nathaniel, these assumptions do not allow the depth of the gospel and its outcome to be distinguished in the full significance embodied by the whole of Jesus. These limits continue in our theology and practice, even in the academy, since by design a narrowed-down model operates as follows: (1) it is selective of the news it hears and sees, (2) compresses the significance of that news to only those selective parts, and (3) constrains the experience of the gospel's whole effectiveness to only certain areas of life, consequently reducing the relational outcome of the gospel's ongoing results in those who follow Jesus as his church. Within these limits the discipleship and ecclesiology of the whole of Jesus cannot be distinguished, though their epistemological illusion and ontological simulation may prevail in our theology and practice.

Epistemological illusions and ontological simulations evolve from reductionism as the substitutes used to counter (by design or complicity) the whole of God and God's whole. These substitutes re-form the whole on the basis of fragmentary terms and thereby re-present the whole by only fragmented parts as illusion and simulation of God's whole—working under the assumption that the whole is defined by the sum of its parts. They are further understood by the following:

Epistemological illusion: overestimating what we know or think we know, and the assumptions we make about that knowledge which preclude what should necessitate further definition and deeper understanding.

Ontological simulation: the substitutes we engage, usually based on epistemological illusion, that reduce wholeness in life to fragmentary practice while being (pre)occupied by the secondary over the primary, thereby only simulating whole ontology and function.

2. Convergence Model

A convergence model of the gospel attempts to go further in its knowledge and understanding. Whether it goes beyond the above limits depends on its assumptions and what converges. Whereas in a reduced model the main determinant of the value and nature of the gospel is human shaping (i.e. the recipient's terms), a convergence model opens this determination to the interaction between various sources, essentially human reason and God's revelation. The convergence of reason and revelation, however, is a variable process that does not stipulate which is the primary determinant of the gospel and its outcome. This model's design merely precludes an either-or understanding, therefore not only what converges but how they converge is critical.

Interpretation of the good news also involves the convergence of past and present, the past context of the gospel and the present context both chronologically and geographically. The contextualization of the gospel has become a major issue of convergence for contemporary understanding. Just exactly how much further a convergence model takes us in its knowledge and understanding than a reduced model pivots on its assumptions, notably about the function of human reason and God's revelation.

Consider the following. When Jesus asked his disciples about the gospel and "who do you say that I am?" Peter's confession of faith was notable, at least for the moment: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Mt 16:15-16). More significant for the knowledge and understanding of the gospel was Jesus' affirmation in response: "Blessed are you *for human reason* has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven" (v.17). Yet, Jesus' affirmation of Peter was short-lived because Peter used a convergence model for his understanding of the gospel. He correctly identified who embodied the gospel based on God's revelation; the revelations of God were the initial basis for Peter's discipleship (cf. Lk 5:1-11). The assumptions of his reason, however, quickly emerged as the primary determinant for the gospel and its outcome. As Jesus continued to unfold the good news of God's relational response of grace to the human condition—a response that would include the suffering of the cross—Peter reacted to correct Jesus by his convergence model of the gospel: "Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you'" (Mt 16:21-22).

Based on Peter's assumptions about what the good news of the Messiah would be and how it would unfold, what Jesus revealed was incongruent and in conflict with Peter's gospel. Therefore, in Peter's gospel Jesus could not go to the cross, and he attempted to prevent Jesus from fulfilling the full significance of the gospel, that is, on God's terms. Can you imagine a gospel without the cross? Peter did, and Jesus exposed the assumptions behind his thinking: "setting your mind not on divine things but on human things" (16:23).

Equally important for us today, while we couldn't eliminate the cross, can you imagine a gospel with only the cross? That cross, in reality, is the extent of the gospel for many Christians, perhaps not in theology but in practice. The results of such a gospel in theology and/or practice become narrowed down to a truncated soteriology—that is, limited to only what Jesus saves us *from* without the experiential truth and relational reality of what he saves us *to*. Moreover, a gospel with only a cross perceives Jesus mainly by his sacrifice, and defines both what he did and what we do as his followers with only a servant model of sacrifice (even with sacrificial love). Such a gospel is overly Christocentric, whereby his whole person is actually reduced and not magnified by overemphasizing the above at the neglect of the whole of God (the Trinity) revealed by Jesus for whole relationship together (cf. Jn 1:18; 17:6-8,26). Consequently, rather than taking us beyond the limits of our knowledge and understanding, this imbalance of reason (human shaping) over revelation in a convergence model increasingly shifts it to a reduced model.

The imbalance of Peter's assumptions over God's revelation embodied by the whole of Jesus emerged further to distort both his perception of the gospel and his understanding of its unfolding results "of great joy for all the people." Later at their

pivotal table fellowship leading to the cross, Jesus vulnerably revealed his whole person to his disciples as never before, and intimately involved the depth of his Self in deeper relationship with them by washing their feet (Jn 13:1-9). The gospel Jesus reveals here and its outcome he unfolds are not about the primacy of serving but only about the primacy of relationship together that is transformed to be both equalized and intimate.

The good news of *who* Jesus was was vulnerably revealed to them without the stratified relations that come with the title of “Lord”; and *what* Jesus was was intimately involved with them without the relational distance that comes with the role of “Teacher” (13:13-14). Jesus revealed the good news of the whole of God’s vulnerable presence and intimate involvement in ongoing reciprocal relationship together. What does Peter do with this good news? Once again Peter’s assumptions overrule God’s revelation: “You will never wash my feet”—because for Peter “your title as Lord and role as Teacher don’t allow you to be vulnerable and intimate with me, especially since I don’t measure up to engage you in such a deep relationship.” In other words, Peter’s convergence model still distorted his perception of the gospel, even extending his effort to prevent Jesus from going to the cross (Jn 18:10-11). And based on his gospel, Peter’s discipleship struggled to be distinguished in the significance that only Jesus determined. Few would question Peter’s discipleship, but even up to his ascension Jesus has to emphatically make imperative to Peter: “you, follow me” (Jn 21:22).

Peter’s imbalanced convergence model also distorted his understanding of the gospel’s unfolding results for all the people specifically in the church. Despite his proclaiming the gospel to all the people, its outcome was not equally applied by Peter for “the great joy of all the people.” The outcome for Gentiles was different than for Jews because Peter’s bias against the Gentiles assumed their distinction as being less—a bias that Jesus had to correct (Acts 10:9-16,28, 34-36). The distinctions from Peter’s assumptions fragmented his ecclesiology. In spite of Jesus’ hermeneutic correction of Peter’s theology, his practice remained in conflict with his new theology of the gospel and its results. Therefore, Paul finally had to confront Peter in his incongruent practice (*hypokrisis*) to clarify the truth of the whole gospel and its transforming results for all people (Gal 2:11-14).

What formed from Peter’s convergence model was an incomplete gospel that remained fragmentary as long as Peter allowed his assumptions to be the primary determinant over the whole of God’s revelation. Despite his commitment to follow Jesus and his dedication to serve his Lord, Peter struggled with a relative impasse in his reciprocal relationship with the whole of Jesus. The relational consequence ongoingly required his knowledge and understanding to have epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction, and his theology and practice to be transformed—even at this advanced stage in his discipleship. The transformation of his whole person only emerged from the whole gospel, and its relational outcome unfolded in Peter with the discipleship and ecclesiology distinguished only by the salvation of what Jesus saved him both from and to. This clarity of the gospel and its results was illuminated for Peter as he turned from a convergence model to a whole model (cf. 1 Pet 1:3,13-16; 2:9-10), a turn certainly facilitated by Jesus’ post-ascension correction and Paul’s loving confrontation (both noted earlier) that had a pivotal impact on Peter’s understanding (Acts 15:7-11; 2 Pet 3:15-16).

3. Whole Model

A whole model of the gospel may appear to flow naturally from a convergence model when in reality it may require an extended struggle. The struggle is not primarily with God's revelation—though secondary issues about the Word need to be addressed—but with human reason being the primary determinant for our knowledge and understanding, and with human shaping having the primary determination of our theology and practice. Any shift to a whole model actually involves a turn-around, thus precipitating ongoing struggle over what we give primacy to.

This primacy of reason over revelation is not always apparent and is easily obscured even by any main focus given to the Word. The issue critical to realize here is that what is paid attention to and ignored in this focus on the Word depends on our perceptual-interpretive lens. A lens operating primarily from human reason and its assumptions can only have a limited view and thus a narrower focus, as evidenced by Nathaniel and Peter. Further evident is the perceptual-interpretive lens of science that has a view limited to the universe, which is unlikely to pay attention to anything from beyond the universe or even allows for its existence; its field of vision is constrained to a narrowed-down epistemic field. Moreover, physicist Marcelo Gleiser stresses that even the scientific view of the universe itself is limited:

The combination of having a Universe with a finite age—the time elapsed since the Big Bang—and the finite speed of light creates an insurmountable barrier to how much we can know of the cosmos.²

The Universe we measure tells only a finite story, based on how much information can get to us (the cosmic horizon placing a limitation here) and on how much of this information we manage to gather (our technological prowess placing a limitation here)... The lesson here is distressing: not only are there causal and technological limits to how much we can know of the cosmos, but what information we do manage to gather may be tricking us into constructing an entirely false worldview. What we measure doesn't tell us the whole story; in fact, it may be telling us an irrelevantly small part of it.³

At best the perception from this type of lens can only be incomplete and its knowledge and understanding only fragmentary; at worst they are misleading, distorted or incorrect, all while being self-referencing. Gleiser further illuminates human limits:

The crack in the dam of mathematical perfection exposes the innards of human frailty, ennobling our attempts to construct an ever-growing Island of Knowledge... We can't always answer our questions by following a closed set of rules, since some questions are undecidable. In the language we have developed here, the truth or falsity of certain propositions is unknowable. As a consequence—at least within our

² Marcelo Gleiser, *The Island of Knowledge: The Limits of Science and the Search for Meaning* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 79.

³ Gleiser, 92.

current logical framework—we can't conceive a system of knowledge constructed with the human brain that is formally complete.⁴

And what this lens does clearly make evident is the need for epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction. God's revelation challenges our primary lens and prescribes for a lens change when our view is limited and our focus is narrowed by primacy given to human reason and related assumptions (cf. Rom 8:5-6).

A whole model neither dispenses with reason nor prescribes fideism (faith without reason). This model only and always makes reason secondary and revelation primary, with the former never the determinant for the latter. For this reason, this is a model we may readily resist or dispute, opting for a convergence model giving more significance to human reason. Certainly, giving primacy to revelation raises issues for the interpretation of the Word, and what or who assumes that determining position. Yet, this is not problematic for a whole model as long as it operates with the new interpretive framework (*phronema*)⁵ and interpretive lens (*phroneo*) emerging in relationship with the Spirit that focuses on the qualitative and whole over the quantitative and fragmentary—just as Paul made definitive (Rom 8:5-6). By the nature of this new lens, this perceptual-interpretive process involves engagement in the relational epistemic process with the Spirit over merely a conventional epistemic process narrowed to the limits of self-referencing explanations and conclusions.

Therefore, a whole model is not really the positive extension of a convergence model but rather the necessary turn-around change of it required to engage the whole (not narrowed-down) epistemic field in order for the whole knowledge and understanding of the gospel and for its results to unfold in whole theology and practice—namely, the gospel of transformation distinguishing the discipleship and ecclesiology integral to complete soteriology.

To engage the relational epistemic process for this whole outcome (over fragmentary results), a whole model necessitates its participant to be vulnerable, that is, open as a person (beyond one's role or purpose) and honest particularly about one's assumptions (as witnessed in Nathaniel)—hence the common resistance to this model. Essential to vulnerableness is also an exercise of humility that leaves our person open to the unknown, the improbable and the discomfort of having clarification and correction to our knowledge and understanding. God's whole takes us beyond our limited knowledge and understanding to a qualitative and relational depth that simply may be more than we want to face—therefore the common avoidance of this whole model by substituting a

⁴ Gleiser, 257.

⁵ Greek and Hebrew word studies used in this study are taken from the following sources: Horst Balz, Gerhard Schneider, eds., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990); Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975); R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., Bruce 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).

convergence or reduced model. This vulnerable humility certainly challenges more than our primary lens and gets to the heart of our person, most notably in how we define our person and, on this basis, how we see other persons and engage them in relationships (as witnessed in Peter with Jesus). Without our openness there is a relational barrier to engagement in the relational epistemic process with the Spirit that keeps us at relational distance or at an impasse with God's communication with us in relational terms. The content of God's communication reveals what God wants us to know and understand of the whole of God's relational response to the human condition, and to directly experience God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement with us in reciprocal relationship together. Anything less and any substitutes for this relational connection diminish, minimize or preclude this relational outcome. The unavoidable relational consequence is having neither the relational connection needed to receive the whole gospel embodied by God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement, nor the relational connection needed to respond in likeness to the whole of God.

All human endeavor, even for scientists, includes a common assumption otherwise known as faith: *the perceptual-interpretive practice that fills in the gaps (including uncertainty) in our knowledge and understanding in order for our explanations and conclusions to be useful, to have meaning and function.* Without the assumption of faith common to all humans, we are rendered to a passive or inactive posture, unable to receive and respond to our surrounding contexts and the interactions unfolding before us. In other words, without some degree of faith human life does not progress. Physicist Gleiser clarifies the issue between the science and faith dichotomy:

Much of the tension stems from assuming that there are two mutually inconsistent realities, one within this world (and thus "knowable" through the diligent application of the scientific method) and one without (and thus "unknowable" or intangible, traditionally related to religious belief).⁶

And he confirms the scientific interpretive lens:

...Both the scientist and the faithful *believe* in unexplained causation, that is, in things happening for unknown reasons, even if the nature of the cause is completely different for each. In the sciences, this belief is most obvious when there is an attempt to extrapolate a theory or model beyond its tested limits, as in "gravity works the same way across the entire Universe," or "the theory of evolution by natural selection applies to all forms of life, including extraterrestrial ones." These extrapolations are crucial to advance knowledge into unexplored territory. The scientist feels justified in doing so, given the accumulated power of her theories to explain so much of the world. We can even say, with slight impropriety, that her faith is empirically validated.⁷

For some that faith is somewhat blind (as in fideism); for others that faith is so measured that it limits the quality of life from unfolding, even in the midst of increasing quantity, thereby being predisposed (even biased) to the sight of the quantitative over the

⁶ Gleiser, 3.

⁷ Gleiser, 4.

significance of the qualitative. The faith assumed in a whole model involves a relational action in the epistemic process that signifies a person's vulnerableness to God's revelation of the unknown and the improbable, and to the discomfort of going beyond our present knowledge and understanding.

To go beyond our existing knowledge and understanding requires having our current epistemic field expanded. The whole gospel cannot emerge from a limited epistemic field that either does not allow for the gospel to be distinguished or is unable to account for its distinguished nature. That is, the whole gospel is distinguished beyond the common and ordinary since by its nature it is beyond comparison to anything existing in the human context, and indeed the universe. The gospel of Jesus Christ is incomparable news distinguished from beyond the known and probable—that is, beyond the universe and its limited epistemic field—and that distinguishes the whole of God, whose presence and involvement are incomparable and thus irreducible and nonnegotiable to human terms, shaping and construction. Therefore, the whole gospel and its whole outcome cannot be distinguished by anything less and any substitutes, or they will not be distinguished as whole but rendered fragmentary, narrowed-down, reduced—news that Paul declared as “really no gospel at all” (Gal 1:7, NIV). Accordingly, for a model of the gospel to be whole it must by its nature vulnerably engage the relational epistemic process of this complete epistemic field that distinguishes the whole of God and the whole outcome of God's relational response to our human condition.

Consider the following. The whole of God's theological trajectory and relational path were clearly distinguished in what I call ‘the strategic shift’ of God's thematic relational action. What would you do if you came face to face with the improbable (both religious and sociocultural) and were faced with the unknown (both epistemological and relational) that takes you beyond your knowledge and understanding? This was what and who a Samaritan woman faced when she encountered Jesus at Jacob's well (Jn 4:4-30).

Their noon encounter was not accidental, though the woman perhaps went to the well to draw water at the least occupied time because of her diminished social standing among the other women—due to an apparent contrary lifestyle (4:16-18). Jesus purposefully initiated this interaction and by design he broke through religious, sociocultural and relational barriers to be involved with her face to face (4:7-9)—that is, the face of the improbable vulnerably present to engage her (as in 4:27). She could have ignored Jesus at this point, resisted him or continued to face what would be the unknown for her. To respond and pay attention to the unknown would require her to break through the same barriers Jesus did, which she vulnerably chose to do to engage what and who was about to take her beyond her knowledge and understanding. By acting in vulnerable humility to engage Jesus, she demonstrated participating in a whole model of the gospel and its outcome that needs to distinguish all of our theology and practice, not merely for the future but for the immediate present.

The dynamics that unfold in this interaction are not referential to transmit information about God but are relational dynamics communicating knowledge and understanding of God—that which distinguish the whole of God in compatible reciprocal relationship together. Jesus not only embodies the gospel to her (“the gift of God,” v.10) but also illuminates the relational context and process necessary—not suggested or optional terms that are reducible or negotiable—to experience this good news of intimate relationship together (“who asks you...you ask him...he gives you,” v.10). The woman

responds from her limited epistemic field (“you have nothing...where can you get this”), but she also opens her lens to engage the relational epistemic process so that her assumptions don’t maintain a barrier to discover the face of Jesus (“Are you greater,” vv.11-12). Her initial openness allows Jesus to continue to reveal the relational significance of what distinguishes his gospel and its outcome both ‘already’ and ‘not yet’ (vv.13-14, cf. Jn 17:3). From the limits of her interpretive lens, she embraces this good news (“Sir, give me this water...never be thirsty or have to keep coming here,” v. 15), yet Jesus is taking her beyond her limits. In order to have this relational outcome she needed to be vulnerable as a person so as to be involved with Jesus face to face—that is, for the relational connection necessary for the whole of God’s relational action to be received and responded to (vv.16-18). Any disconnect by her would have created an impasse to the relational process constituting the whole of God’s revelation.

She doesn’t retreat from Jesus’ vulnerable presence or withdraw from his intimate involvement; and in his relational context and process her lens is expanded (or transformed) to see more of Jesus’ person (“I see that you are,” v. 19). This is the relational outcome that only emerges from face-to-face connection (cf. Num 12:6-8). As she acknowledges her assumptions from human shaping and further engages this relational epistemic process that expands her epistemic field (vv.20,25), she is taken beyond her limits and comes face to face with the whole of God (“I am he,” v.26): the improbable who is vulnerably revealed from inner out only in relational terms (not referential) for the whole purpose of compatible (i.e. vulnerable and intimate) reciprocal relationship together (vv. 21-24).

The transcendent God’s theological trajectory might be given consideration in referential terms (e.g. as in deism and some forms of theism) but this could only result in fragmentary information about God and not truly knowing and understanding the whole of God. Those having merely referential information about God are commonly considered to be wise and learned, which God does not consider of any significance to boast about (Jer 9:23-24, cf. Lk 10:21). Truly knowing and understanding God cannot emerge referentially but only in the relational epistemic process with God face to face; this was how God’s revelation to Moses was distinguished (Num 12:6-8). Without the face of God’s self-disclosure our epistemic field is limited, and our perceptual-interpretive framework and lens are narrowed down to explanations and conclusions that can only be the self-referencing work of human reason. These limits make us susceptible to “speak of things I did not understand, things too *distinguished* [*pala*] for me to know”—as Job learned when he tried to speak for God until he received epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction from face to face with God (Job 42:3-6).

It is crucial and pivotal for all of us to acknowledge and accept that God’s theological trajectory is inseparable from God’s relational path, and thus for us to be fully accountable for God’s revelation and its relational outcome. To know and understand the whole of God, we have to vulnerably engage the improbable theological trajectory and intrusive relational path of God’s vulnerable presence and intimate involvement that the whole of Jesus (not parts of him) embodied only in relational terms, not referential (Lk 10:21). And information about God or Jesus, whatever its quantity and scholarship, cannot substitute for face-to-face involvement in this intrusive relational path; nor, like

Job, can it speak and understand what and who are distinguished beyond human comparison.

The whole gospel is not for information but only for relationship. On this basis, its relational outcome takes us beyond, by means of epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction, to the transformation that integrally distinguishes Jesus' followers as whole persons in the qualitative image of God and his church family in whole relationship together in the relational likeness of the whole of God, the Trinity. This was the whole gospel vulnerably revealed to Paul in relational dynamics similarly experienced by the Samaritan woman: "Saul, Saul... Who are you? ...I am," (Acts 9:1-5). And this gospel's whole relational outcome unfolded from the Damascus road (Acts 9:6-18), and its depth illuminated as Paul distinguished its qualitative and relational significance for whole theology and practice—all while fighting against anything less and any substitutes from reductionism and its epistemological illusions, ontological simulations and counter-relational work (Acts 26:15-18; Gal 1:6-7,11-12).

This study unfolds with what and who unfolded with Jesus and with Jesus *into* Paul, which constituted both the truth of the whole gospel of transformation and the conjoint fight against anything less and any substitutes of the transformation to wholeness.⁸ Our discussion then is not a basic introduction to the gospel but a needed reintroduction to the whole gospel and the relational significance that needs to distinguish its outcome 'already' in our theology and practice.

From Transformation to Reformation

When God initiated the covenant relationship with Abraham to constitute God's people, the terms God revealed were relational imperatives for all who come together as God's family: "Walk before me, and be blameless" (Gen 17:1). This formed the good news—which the incarnation embodied—of relationship together that unfolded in God's definitive blessing face to face (Num 6:24-26). In God's relational words, "be involved with me in reciprocal relationship, and be whole (*tāmīym*)," that is to say, not reduced in ontology and function—notably fragmenting the person to what one does from outer in, and, on this basis, reducing relationship together to such secondary matter at the expense of the primacy of relationship defined by God's terms. How have God's people responded to God's terms for reciprocal relationship together, in conjoint function with God and with each other as family together?

As God's formative people, Israel soon revised God's terms by essentially replacing God's relational language with referential language, thereby reducing the terms for relationship (e.g. torah) to a code of what to do from outer in—that is, as a means for identity markers as a people (primarily as nation-state) and for their self-determination (cf. Jesus' critique, Mt 5:21-48). This re-formed the covenant from the covenant of love to a quid pro quo contract, and thus revised the book of Deuteronomy from a love story to a template of conformity (Dt 4:37; 7:7-9; 10:15; 23:5; 33:3). God was also reduced

⁸ For an expanded examination of the whole of Jesus, see my study *Sanctified Christology: A Theological and Functional Study of the Whole of Jesus* (Christology Study, 2008). Online: <http://4X12.org>. And for the integration of Jesus and Paul, see my study *Jesus into Paul: Embodying the Theology and Hermeneutic of the Whole Gospel* (Integration Study, 2012). Online: <http://4X12.org>.

mainly to a figurehead or reference point for their theology and practice (cf. 1 Sam 15:22-23; Ps 147:10-11; Jer 7:21-26). The relational consequence was to reshape the covenant relationship of love with God (Dt 7:7-9) to a covenant increasingly detached from the primacy of relationship and distant from God, such that the covenant became engaged in secondary matter merely in referential terms (e.g. Isa 29:13; 58:1-6). As a Jew, Paul later understood these reductions to the covenant and thus made definitive distinctions of who constituted God's people (Rom 2:28-29).

When Jesus embodied the gospel further with the strategic shift of God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement, the terms for relationship together were more deeply distinguished in 'the tactical and functional shifts' (to be discussed later) of God's thematic relational action to make whole God's family. The relational outcome of embodying the gospel was transformed relationships both equalized and intimate. These are the relationships that Jesus distinguished for following him and being his church (as Peter learned with difficulty). In subsequent history God's relational terms to be whole in the primacy of transformed relationship together were subjected to human shaping, the theology and practice of which require epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction. Such accountability of the church family is significantly revealed in Jesus' post-ascension discourse for ecclesiology to be whole (Rev 2-3, to be discussed later for our accountability today).

Not surprisingly, these nonnegotiable relational terms for God's family have undergone various re-forms throughout church history. One of the most pivotal re-forming of God's family came when God's relational terms were transposed to referential terms, with the relational consequence of the formation of Christendom by Constantine in the fourth century. The church-state (cf. Israel's nation-state) gained primacy over the church as family and set in motion the institutionalization of the church in reduced ontology and function, and its interrelated reduced ontology and function of human persons. Christian identity formation was a product of human shaping and construction, and Christian faith resulted from self-determination—not unlike Israel's history. And the gospel became fragmentary and the whole gospel was obscured, without the relational significance to make whole God's family. This process is an oversimplified account of the dynamic of turning away from transformation to re-formation.

Re-formation of Christian faith has been a prominent, if not prevailing, practice in church history that has determined the shape of church ontology and function. The Roman Catholic Church was embedded in a reduced ontology and function that resulted in fragmentary theology and practice—or fragmentary theology and practice resulted in reduced ontology and function—whereby the qualitative and relational significance of the gospel was obscured or lost. This distorted condition eventually precipitated what we know as the Reformation in the sixteenth century. The magisterial Reformers essentially addressed distorted aspects of faith in terms of salvation and formulated theology and practice to restore the primacy of faith in biblical terms. However, generally speaking, 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 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.

Moreover, the Reformers addressed a salvation limited mainly to what Jesus saved from (and not equally saved to), and thus formulated theology and practice for faith that did not have the same focus on ecclesiology (namely, the church as God's family). This skewed focus and imbalanced emphasis opened the Wittenberg door to the construction of multiple denominational re-forms, which further led to the prominence of the individual in theology and practice (e.g. even in spiritual formation)—with the modern shaping of individualism.

This re-formation set in motion the exercise of Christian freedom that (1) reinforced the reductionism of 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 (convenient truth for faith), for example, which conveniently composed a so-called Protestant ethic to converge with the Industrial Age: this then resulted in an unintended (but not surprising) convenient faith of consumerism.

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 narrowed down the Word's field of knowledge to the quantitative limit of referential terms. Thus, God's improbable theological trajectory became more and more probable, if addressed at all. At the same time, the relational path of the Word was ignored, resulting in a loss or lack of relational awareness and qualitative sensitivity. What evolved kept adapting in churches, thereby entrenching the human person in reduced ontology and function and further embedding faith to referential terms, while essentially relegating God to an Object position with only referential information about God as the basis for theology and practice.

The Reformation did not adequately distinguish the relational context and process of the whole of God, in order to distinguish God's relational language and terms for relationship together clearly from just referential language and terms for faith. The latter led merely to referential doctrines without the relational significance of God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement for the irreducible and nonnegotiable ontology and function, and theology and practice, of reciprocal relationship together in wholeness. 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 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 language; therefore, even though they were compatible to his theological trajectory, they essentially were on a different relational path than the Word—just as many church leaders navigate today.

Whether by design or an inadvertent by-product of the Reformers, there is a distinct fragmentation and underlying reductionism that emerged from the Reformation. And its major influence persists today, which we have not understood or simply ignore by our interpretive lens. Certainly, re-formation of faulty theology and practice is hard to resist, even when it has its own faults; and, of course, even re-form of the status quo has its appeal. Yet, it is important for us to come face to face with critical issues: What have the results of the Reformation done with God’s terms for reciprocal relationship together as family? And how do these results compare with what and who distinguished the whole gospel and its relational outcome of wholeness ‘already’?

The shift from transformation to re-formation is not commonly apparent because their respective theologies may not have clear distinction and thus appear similar, compatible and not contrary—especially if they have biblical labels. Yet, when what is distinguished (or not distinguished) in their practice is assessed, transformation is clearly distinguished over re-formation reductions and has the qualitative and relational significance beyond re-formation limits. Therefore, all re-formations and re-forms, notably from the Reformation, need to be accounted for and subject to the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction of the whole of God’s revelation (not as mere biblical referential terms), and to its primacy as the determinant for all theology and practice (as Paul made imperative, Col 3:15-16). In addition, we need to address any assumptions we have taken on from such re-formations that shape our theology and practice, and then openly be subject to this clarification and correction. Anything less and any substitutes can only be fragmentary and only have epistemological illusion and ontological simulation of what and who are whole—that is, whole on the basis of God’s relational terms and not merely referential terms.

Only the gospel of transformation emerges whole. Only the whole of Jesus distinguishes the gospel that transforms to make us whole in the qualitative image of the whole of God and the relational likeness of the Trinity. Nothing less and no substitutes can be whole theologically and ontologically or live whole relationally and functionally. We, as persons and church, are accountable accordingly in our ontology and function, in our theology and practice, and hereby distinguishing our discipleship and ecclesiology integrally to what Jesus saves us conjointly from and to.

From Wholeness to Reductionism

The Reformation arguably unfolded with distinction in church history. Yet, any distinction should not be confused with being distinguished (as defined by *pala* in Scripture, discussed further in chap. 2). Since the Reformers did not adequately distinguish the whole gospel and its relational outcome of transformation to wholeness, the results of many re-forms have labored under epistemological illusion and ontological

simulation; and they have struggled with their engagement in what constitutes counter-relational work. That is to say, they (and we thereafter) have labored under and struggled with the ongoing influence and effects of reductionism. This condition emerged and continues to evolve distinctly due to an inadequate view of sin that neither perceives reductionism as sin nor understands the sin of reductionism. Consequently, the sin Jesus saves us from and its redemptive outcome do not encompass reductionism. Not surprisingly, this is a common condition in our theology and practice because of the genius of reductionism to keep a low profile in its efforts against God's whole, even to take on the appearance of being whole (as Paul exposed, 2 Cor 11:13-15).

Reductionism emerged from the beginning in the primordial garden (a context seen as history or allegory) to challenge the words of God's revelation: "Did God say *that?*" (Gen 3:1) We cannot discuss God's revelation without addressing reductionism. As the embodied Word, Jesus ongoingly addressed reductionism's challenge. Thus, we cannot understand the whole of God's revelation without understanding what Jesus addressed and why he countered it; for example, the good news he brought with a sword to be divisive (Mt 10:34-36), and his forceful cleansing of the temple (Mk 11:15-17). Moreover, as Jesus extended *into* Paul, Paul extended God's revelation for the church with his fight both for the whole gospel and against its reduction (Col 1:24-29; 2 Cor 2:17; 4:2-6), which Paul made definitive as "the gospel of peace *as wholeness*" using the same sword (Eph 6:15-17).

In other words, reductionism cannot be ignored, taken lightly or assumed to no longer have determining influence, or else the whole of God's revelation, the whole gospel and its outcome of transformation to wholeness will be reduced, fragmented and rendered without significance—perhaps still with distinction but not distinguished. The challenge of "Did God say that?" set in motion this result, the consequence of which continues until reductionism is addressed and countered in our theology and practice.

As long as we do not fully understand what emerged in the primordial garden, our view of sin will not be sufficient to deal with reductionism as sin. The initial response to the challenge of God's revelation was essentially affirmative: "Yes, God did say that" (Gen 3:2-3). But reductionism persisted to extend the challenge effectively by promoting human rationalizing to re-interpret God's revelation: "OK, but this is what God really meant by those words" (3:4-5). This opened the door for human shaping of God's revelation and creation, and for human reason to be the primary determinant for our knowledge and understanding: the human interpretive lens "saw...was good...a delight...desired to make one wise," and on this basis these persons acted for self-determination (3:6). The consequence prevailing to today was the fragmentation of God's whole and the emergence of reduced human ontology and function.

God created human persons whole in two integral ways: (1) the person was created whole from inner out to be whole in ontology and live whole in function in the qualitative image of God (Gen 1:27); and interrelated, (2) these whole persons were also created not "to be apart" but in relationship together distinguished to be and live whole in the relational likeness of the whole of God, the Trinity (2:18,25). Whole human ontology and function, therefore, constitutes by the nature of God's creative action, both inseparable and integral, the whole person involved with other whole persons in relationships together of wholeness—"the *two persons* were both *vulnerable as persons from inner out and on this qualitative basis were involved with each other* and were not

ashamed, *disappointed, confounded or unfulfilled*” (*bosh*, 2:25). Reduced human ontology and function, however, re-forms the person from inner out to outer in, and on this more quantitative basis determines persons by the parts of what they have and do, consequently fragmenting the person from being whole and limiting persons engagement in relationships such that they cannot come together in wholeness—“the *lens* of both were *narrowed-down to outer in* and they *saw* that they were naked *in outer-in terms*; so they *made masks for their real person in order not be vulnerable, and thereby maintained relational distance between them*” (3:7-10).

The current re-forms of the person and relationships together in contemporary life are only minor variations of who and what emerged from the primordial garden. Epistemological illusions and ontological simulations of the person and relationships today—for example, as re-formed by modern social media—have further embedded us in reductionism and make it more difficult to recognize reduced ontology and function, not only in our theology and practice for humans but also as imposed on God. Any salvation that does not save us from reduced ontology and function neither has significance to God and the whole gospel, nor does it distinguish the whole of God’s relational response of grace to our human condition and its outcome of whole ontology and function. The ‘not good news’ facing us is this underreported reality: Anything less and any substitutes both *of* God and *from* God can never be whole and should not be expected to be anything more.

Therefore, the whole of God is still asking all of us today, whether in the church or theological academy, “Where are you?” (3:9)—not to locate us for referential information but to give us needed feedback on our person and relationships. Have our own re-forms transposed our human, and even God’s, ontology and function from wholeness to reductionism?

From Assumptions to Accountability

As evidenced in the primordial garden, while reductionism challenges the words of God’s revelation, God also challenges the assumptions made by those claiming God’s revelation and thus responsible for these relational words. God’s question demonstrated the vulnerable presence and intimate involvement of God and that God holds us accountable in ongoing relationship. So, what have we come to assume about God, the gospel and resulting faith that reflect having become more defined by our terms or, at the least, determined more by the human shaping of Christian movements, scholars and church leaders?

We have to start recognizing, acknowledging and addressing the assumptions we make (intentionally or unintentionally) that define our theology and determine our practice. Whether we accept this vital responsibility or not, we are accountable to God to openly answer where our person and relationships are, and to vulnerably receive any needed epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction to our faith. This accountability also intensifies when God further directly engages us, just as God pursued Elijah, with the question “What are you doing here?” (1 Kgs 19:9,13) And the most influencing assumption that we are accountable for involves the theological anthropology

(notably defining the person and relationships) underlying our ontology and function, our theology and practice.⁹

In the primordial garden reductionism re-formed theological anthropology from the qualitative whole of inner out to the quantitative parts of outer in; and on this fragmentary basis persons and relationship have been shaped and their identity and function constructed. As I implied earlier, this reduced theological anthropology pervaded God's people and even prevailed through much of church history. Where are we today and what are we doing here?

Whole theological anthropology was distinguished from the beginning in the primordial garden. Unless we understand what and who unfolded in this relational context, we become narrowed down to referential information and its limits. This referential lens narrows our view also of sin, consequently limiting our understanding of sin to the exclusion of reductionism and making us susceptible to reductionism and its counter-relational work—an omission of immeasurable consequences. This has become the prevailing presence designed to reduce, fragment, diminish, minimalize and otherwise obscure God's whole by rendering it undistinguished and thus without qualitative relational significance. Without integral understanding of whole theological anthropology from the beginning and sin as reductionism, we are narrowed down to the limits of reduced theological anthropology—that critical re-form constituting much ontology and function and constructing much theology and practice from the past to the present. Nothing whole emerges from reduced theological anthropology; and only fragmentary theology and practice can and should be expected from it. This urgently prompts the question, how long must we be diminished by and labor under the constraint of reduced theological anthropology?

There is more to consider in this Reintroduction chapter that will help in the process facing us, the implications of which will emerge throughout this study. Have you ever wondered where and how Christianity would be if the Reformation never happened? How would the church be today? Faith and the nature of salvation have certainly been redefined by the Reformation. Yet, in spite of theological changes the question remains, has our practice been distinguished sufficiently to be of any significant difference had the Reformation never occurred?

To extend our earlier discussion I state further: though not always apparent, the Reformation simplified our view of faith and narrowed our practice (e.g. without the burden of 'works'), with the unintended result of fragmenting both the person (as redefined by the faith one has apart from how one functions) and church further than arguably existed pre-Reformation. Such inadequate results, for example, precipitated more re-forms—notably Puritanism for the church and Pietism for the individual. These fragmentary efforts lacked wholeness, making evident an underlying reduced theological anthropology. Relatedly, yet not surprisingly, these practices also evidenced epistemological illusion and ontological simulation that reinforced reduced ontology and function and have embedded us deeper into the human condition—all of which can only be redeemed by the gospel of transformation to wholeness.

⁹ An expanded discussion of theological anthropology and its implications are developed in my study *The Person in Complete Context: The Whole of Theological Anthropology Distinguished* (Theological Anthropology Study, 2014. Online: <http://4X12.org>).

The magisterial Reformers were bold enough to challenge some prevailing assumptions in order to return to the Word of God's revelation as the definitive source for faith. They initiated this movement despite the long tradition of human shaping and construction that determined theology and practice contrary to this source. And they thereby were compelled by the Bible to oppose such theology and practice by human terms. Their return, however, to the primary source was limited by their own assumptions (epistemological, hermeneutical and theological, notably for theological anthropology), which were not held accountable. This soon led to further fragmentation and theological fog obscuring God's whole.

For example, if the Reformers' interpretive lens of the Bible did not perceive reductionism as sin—and thus include sin in the Bible as reductionism—there was neither salvation from the sin of reductionism nor redemption for reductionism and its counter-relational work. This limited interpretation means that atonement (as highlighted in Christ's sacrifice by the Reformers) did not include the functional removal of the veil that is necessary for face-to-face involvement in reciprocal relationship together with God, and that also removes the relational barriers to be whole as God's family (2 Cor 3:16-18; Heb 10:19-20; Eph 2:14-22). In these limited (narrowed, reduced) conditions, even with the best of intentions, the gospel is fragmented by an incomplete Christology and salvation is truncated, with faith rendered to referential condition and terms and not the relational terms and process of reciprocal relationship together to be God's whole. In other words, specifically the relational words of God's revelation, it is inadequate for the Bible to be only a referential source (even as the primary determinant) for theology and practice and expect their outcome to be whole. In referential terms salvation by faith alone is incomplete and misleading, which not only is unable to distinguish God's relational terms necessary for reciprocal relationship but in actual function conflicts with God's terms for relationship. The effects of not having the veil removed in our practice may not be apparent if our theology is considered biblically based or doctrinally sound, yet not inseparable from and thus integrated with our practice (as evident in Peter).

With similar consequence, 'prevenient grace' in Reformed theology makes grace irresistible for human response. But this re-formed position distorts the relational process of God's relational response of grace to unilateral action; this then further misunderstands God's relational terms for reciprocal relationship together, with major consequence for the practice of faith. Even though God's grace is prominent in theology referentially, relationally grace is not only easily taken for granted (an assumption not accountable) but commonly ignored as the ongoing relational basis and base for the practice of Christian faith in everyday life. The major assumption operating here—along with the critical assumption of theological anthropology—is about how God does relationships: mainly unilaterally without any human determination (implied in predeterminism), or perhaps bilaterally with the terms for relationship negotiable (implied in free will). The former assumption distorts God's relational nature and how God does relationships both within the Trinity and with human persons; the latter assumption misunderstands (intentionally or unintentionally) the irreducible and nonnegotiable nature of God's relational terms and how God does relationships as only reciprocal relationship. Both assumptions re-form the primacy of reciprocal relationship together to a secondary substitute with a narrowed-down unilateral or bilateral position, which thereby reinforces reduced ontology and function and fragmentary theology and practice.

In contrast and in conflict, the whole of God and the whole gospel and its whole relational outcome are distinguished only by whole relationship together; and its qualitative nature and relational significance are only constituted by God's relational terms for reciprocal (not unilateral or bilateral) relationship together both with God and with each other as God's family. Nothing less and no substitutes can be assumed to be whole—not even assumed with 'grace' and by 'faith'. God's relational response of grace is sufficient for reduced ontology and function to be made whole. Nevertheless, this relational outcome does not happen in unilateral terms but only as the outcome of our faith, that is, faith as the compatible relational response in reciprocal relationship. In other words, God's relational response of grace is sufficient only for ongoing reciprocal relationship together—just as Paul experienced in a key period of his life (2 Cor 12:7-9).

Fragmentary (incomplete or inconsistent) explanations and conclusions are what we should expect from a limited perceptual-interpretive framework, just as made evident even in modern science. An aspect of the Reformation that remained essentially unchanged from before this movement emerged was the re-formed interpretive framework and lens set in motion from the primordial garden. While the Reformation expanded the epistemic field to include the prominence of the Bible and the Reformers brought further hermeneutical perspective, this movement also basically gave (or at least allowed) prominence to human rationalizing and did not address the assumptions of the primacy of human reason. Accordingly, the Reformation was insufficient to address and prepare us to deal with the Enlightenment from the eighteenth century and the modernist interpretive framework and lens. Moreover, the Reformation's fragmentary results were also inadequate to distinguish the whole—in spite of any re-forming of God's theological trajectory for its grand narrative—and thus made it easier for postmodern lenses to shape and construct substitutes for God's whole. Such evolving results are neither surprising nor unexpected but need to be addressed with the significance of wholeness. Since postmodernism rightly challenged the assumptions of modernism, the issue is less about a metanarrative and more about further assumptions that continue fragmentation and prevent wholeness—including the epistemological illusions and ontological simulations of the whole from reductionism, which have existed in premodern, modern and postmodern theology and practice.

The challenge and accountability of all our assumptions remains a defining task facing us today—unavoidably face to face with the whole of God's vulnerable presence and ongoing relational involvement. If we are unwilling to receive epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction from the relational Word facing us, we cannot go beyond our current knowledge and understanding and be taken to the whole of God for the whole gospel and its whole relational outcome.

So, where are we today and what are we doing here? Has our theology and practice shifted from transformation to reformation? Has our ontology and function turned from wholeness to reductionism?

Section I God's Relational Context and Process to Transformation

Chapter 1 The Theological Trajectory & Relational Path to Whole Theology and Practice

The Lord bless you...turn his face to you and give you *the gospel of peace as wholeness.* Numbers 6:24-26, NIV

You show me the path of life, in your presence is fullness of joy.
Psalm 16:11

The gospel did not emerge with the incarnation; the incarnation embodied the good news that had already emerged. As noted in the Reintroduction, the gospel emerged with the formation of covenant relationship together with Abraham to constitute the relational terms for God's family (Gen 17:1). Yet, even then, this good news was already initiated before creation, as Paul later clarified in relational terms (Eph 1:3-6) that have been obscured or distorted by referential doctrine.

Our view of God commonly reflects a critical knowledge and understanding shaped by referential doctrine (notably deism or theism). This knowledge and understanding is critical because it both shapes our view of God's activity since creation and forms the basis for the gospel. The main issue involved here is knowing and understanding God's theological trajectory and relational path from the beginning. For deism, of course, God is distant, detached or no longer involved. The issue for theism varies with its re-forms, some of which in theology (notably in referential terms) and actual practice may similarly see God as distant, detached or no longer involved. Such theistic views also then need some epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction in order to get past human shaping and go beyond those limits of our knowledge and understanding.

What is critical for the gospel and its outcome is knowing and understanding the whole of God's theological trajectory and relational path. This is irreplaceable for whole theology and practice. To know and understand God's theological trajectory and relational path, however, requires us to return to God's relational context and process and to engage the primacy of that context and process on God's relational terms. The value of the good news is contingent on its defining context; and this news and outcome have depreciated in church history and the global church today due to primacy given to human contextualization and culture. The tension between God's relational context and human context having primary determination is an ongoing conflict, which must be addressed ongoingly in the conjoint fight for the whole gospel and against its reduction. The dynamic of reductionism is inseparable from the human context and by necessity must be addressed nonnegotiablely in order for the gospel to be distinguished whole and thereby for the human condition to be redeemed—that is, for the gospel's relational outcome transforming persons and relationship to wholeness.

This study engages the primacy of God's relational context and thus unfolds in ongoing conflict with reductionism; and this likely may also challenge, create tension or

be in conflict with prevailing theology and practice. What unfolds then throughout this study must be on the basis of God's relational terms so as to be distinguished from the primary shaping of human terms-contextualization.

God's Theological Trajectory Illuminated

When the focus is knowing and understanding God's activity since creation, the source used for this focus is crucial for perceiving God's actions. From the beginning this source has been problematic, as evident in the primordial garden when the epistemic field was narrowed down from God's terms to human terms. This narrowed epistemic field put limits on what can be known and understood of God's actions. Furthermore, the narrow field constrained the perceptual-interpretive lens from seeing the whole of God's presence and involvement, and, at best, limited it to only fragmentary parts of God's actions to perceive. As a result, this limited theological trajectory certainly affected the issue of the knowability of God, which in philosophical theology has reduced God to a negative theology—that is, perceiving God only in terms of what God is not or cannot be. In this reduced interpretive framework, any affirmations of God remain beyond human limits to know and understand. When the legitimate concern, however, is knowing and understanding the whole of God, there is only one valid source beyond our epistemic field that can have this reliable outcome beyond the limits of our existing knowledge and understanding.

Theology by definition should “take us” beyond human contextualization and its limits. Yet, the theological task often has been rendered to mere human contextualization, either by design (e.g. natural theology, liberalism) or by default (e.g. much of evangelicalism). Our perception of God and any related God-talk depend foremost on their primary source. Furthermore, our interpretation of the source must emerge from an interpretive framework compatible with that source in order for our knowledge and understanding of God to be congruent with this primary source. Of course, if our primary source remains from human contextualization, our interpretive framework will vary with the human context, thereby allowing for a wide range of interpretations and theologies similar to multiculturalism or even pluralism. *How* we do theology determines if indeed our theology is beyond human contextualization. The wording “takes us” can be misleading or confusing for theology. If our theology is the outcome formulated from human ideas, methodology and/or even experiences “taking us” to God, then our theology emerges (even unintentionally and unknowingly) primarily from human contextualization determining our interpretive framework—and what we pay attention to and ignore—that subsequently shapes our theological reflections and conclusions.

Theism, for example, has a theological trajectory of God distinct from that of deism. Yet, the source defining theism's trajectory could essentially be the same as deism's source—that is, human contextualization and its limits—but with different assumptions about what God is doing, can or will do. In other words, what our theological trajectory for God is may or may not be compatible with God's revelation, much less distinguish the whole of God's presence and involvement since creation.

If our source has been established from beyond human contextualization, then the following critical issue becomes unavoidable for compatibility of our interpretive

framework and congruence of our knowledge and understanding: On what basis and terms did the primary source beyond human contextualization emerge in the human context? Two main responses to this critical issue have, knowingly or unknowingly, occupied theology, one prevailing and the other elusive: the prevailing, (1) God emerged in human context primarily on a quantitative basis in referential terms to dispense information about God and life; and the elusive, (2) God emerged distinctly on a quantitative basis yet is distinguished primarily on a qualitative level in relational terms for Face-to-face communication in order for us to know the whole of God in the primacy of intimate relationship together.

The first response prevails because the biblical text as interpreted in referential language is the common interpretive framework from human contextualization; and this reflects the influence of reductionism that has narrowed down the epistemic field for the sake of certainty, if not convenience. The *referentialization* of the Word specifically narrows down the embodied Word to referential knowledge and information about what God does (e.g. delivers, works miracles, teaches, serves) and has (e.g. attributes, truth, power and other resources), and likely aggregates these parts of God in a narrow unity for greater explanation and certainty of that information about God (e.g. in systematic theologies or explanatory theories).

Theological reflections and conclusions emerging from the limits of a common or prevailing interpretive framework do not and cannot distinguish the qualitative whole of God (cf. Lk 10:21; Mt 21:24-26). For the God beyond human contextualization to enter and connect with the human context required an ‘improbable theological trajectory’ that is irreducible to anything less and any substitutes from human shaping and construction. Most notably in God’s revelation, God’s improbable theological trajectory is signified in God’s definitive blessing that is illuminated by the face of God (Num 6:24-26). This was the trajectory of God who communicated directly with Moses in face-to-face relationship together (Ex 33:11; Num 12:6-8), and who engaged Jacob intimately (Gen 32:26-30). This was the face whom the ancient poets sought, called on and illuminated (Ps 4:6; 27:8; 31:16; 44:3; 51:9; 67:1; 80:3,7,19; 105:4; 119:135). This is the irreducible face of God that illuminates unmistakably the now distinguished theological trajectory of God’s ongoing presence and involvement for relationship together.

The theological trajectory of God was not distant, detached or simply uninvolved. As improbable as it was, God’s vulnerable presence and relational involvement are illuminated *in* the human context but not *by* human contextualization and terms (even culturally). Nevertheless, throughout the history of God’s people, the vulnerable presence and relational involvement of God’s theological trajectory has been difficult to receive and respond to, much less to know and understand as the outcome of relationship together. Why so, when God has acted openly and directly?

There is a dynamic of creation that must be understood in relation to God’s theological trajectory. The human context created by God is not a closed context or system. This distinct context was created with the integrity to be whole, that is, open to the improbable and the whole of God, as well as with the freedom to receive other, even contrary, influences—namely from reductionism that narrows down the human context, closing the system and consequently separating from the improbable of God and being whole. This reduction and separation emerged distinctly in the primordial garden with the challenging question “Did God really say that?” (Gen 3:1, NIV)—an ongoing challenge

in the theological task that remains basically uncontested. This critical and pivotal challenge narrowed the epistemic field and closed it to the improbable and God's revelation, though this may not be apparent in referential terms. Up to that defining moment in human history, the Creator had not closed the human context to only God's determination and control (an issue for predestination, election, etc.) but rather allowed the human context to have freedom to be reduced from wholeness and make reductionist choices. This fragmentation continues in the history of human choices vis-à-vis God's revelation (cf. Jn 5:39-40; Lk 10:21)—notably emerging with rationalism, science and modernism. In each example, the human context was reduced essentially to a closed context/system, thereby narrowing the epistemic field for greater certainty of knowledge and explanation. The consequence was increasing separation from the improbable and God's revelation, and not surprisingly further establishing the human person as the arbiter of knowledge, along with shaping the truth and God while constructing them on human terms—all of which were only intensified by the Enlightenment. This human shaping and construction have been ongoing issues in the theological task to one extent or another—the critical fragmentation from reductionism that has been ignored, not taken seriously or just not understood. These are variations all emerging from the uncontested challenge “Did God really say [reveal] that?”

If God's theological trajectory never entered our universe and God never really said these words in the primordial garden, then the human context is free to shape its knowledge and be the primary determinant of its understanding of God, without accountability of itself to God. For example, as in “You will not die...your eyes will be opened...will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:4-5). If God does speak, share and self-disclose—that is, communicate in relational terms, not referential—then theology, the theological task and all who engage in it must by its basic nature account for God's communication in order to have the theological significance that distinguishes the whole of God, not the fragmentation of God from reductionism in human contextualization. The latter is the prevailing conclusion from the referentialization of the Word, that is, of God's revelation that narrows down the epistemic field of God's communication to generalized terms without its full relational significance.

The whole of God's theological trajectory points to three major issues unavoidable for all practice: (1) the integrity of the person (or Self) presented to others, (2) the quality of that person's communication to those others in that context, and interrelated, (3) the depth level of relationship this person engages with the others during the communication process. Theism is clearly distinguished from deism only to the extent that God's theological trajectory (1) presents the whole of God and not mere parts or fragments of God, (2) communicates the whole of who, what and how God is and not merely referential information about God, and inseparably (3) engages the whole of God's vulnerable presentation and relational communication in the depth of intimate relationship together—all enacted by the integral process of nothing less and no substitutes. If God is not distinguished by this theological trajectory, then our view of theism cannot have the significance necessary to be distinguished from seeing God as distant or uninvolved.

Since the primordial garden God's theological trajectory has been illuminated by the face of God to “give you *the gospel of peace as wholeness*”—that is to say in God's relational terms, “bring the change necessary for new relationship together in wholeness”

(the *siym* and *shalom* of God's definitive blessing, Num 6:24-26). This peace may appear incongruent with all the conflict generated by God in the OT. Rather than a personal and relational God, one's view may perceive an authoritarian God, even a totalitarian God, who renders human persons into submission or annihilation. The assumption in this view, however, not only revises God's theological trajectory constituting God's covenant of love (Dt 7:7-9) but also distorts *shalom* by assuming only a 'negative peace' (the absence of conflict). Negative peace is not whole but, at best, is only fragmentary and easily becomes a reductionist substitute (e.g. epistemological illusion or ontological simulation)—as emerged from ancient Greek philosophy, and which can be found in many irenic practices today.

Shalom is determined only by wholeness, that is, the wholeness God created in the beginning and whose theological trajectory seeks to restore from the beginning. This wholeness can only be understood in relational terms (as *siym* defines), which unavoidably requires the necessary conflict with any and all reductionism in order for the relational outcome of wholeness. This is the conjoint fight for the whole gospel and against its reduction that Jesus enacted further with a sword (not for negative peace, Mt 10:34) and that Paul extended with the same sword (Eph 6:15-17).

Moreover, in this conflict process God's theological trajectory reveals integrally who, what and how God is—that is, the righteousness (*sedaqah*) of God (cf. Ps 145:17). The righteous God from beyond the universe becomes vulnerably present and relationally involved in the human context to reveal the whole of who, what and how God is. *Sedaqah* is a legal term used in the context of relationships, thus signifying that the whole of God (as presented) can be counted on (as communicated) in relationship together (as intimately involved to complete the three issues for practice).

Righteousness needs to be understood as the relational dynamic that fulfills God's relational terms for covenant relationship together (as Jesus illuminated, Mt 5:20ff). As made imperative to Abraham, "*be relationally involved with me and be tamiym*" (Gen 17:1). 'Blameless' is the usual rendering of *tamiym*, which is likely narrowed down to behavior without ethical and moral sin—as in ethical perfection and moral purity. On this limited basis, many consider Abraham to be blameless and thus misconstrue "it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (Rom 4:3, cf. Job 12:4; Phil 2:14-15). However, in God's relational terms *tamiym* is to be whole and is integral to righteousness to determine in practice the whole of who, what and how a person is (as presented and communicates to others), and therefore can be counted on in the full depth of relationship together to be nothing less and no substitutes for that person. Being righteous then is being accountable for one's whole person in relationship together with God and with others—not about being perfect but being whole (cf. *teleios* in Mt 5:48). Therefore, righteousness is both integral to wholeness together and imperative for the three-fold practice of reciprocal relationship together. For the righteous God, this relational dynamic is who, what and how the whole of God's theological trajectory is distinguished (as the psalmist declared, Ps 145:17). And new relationship together in wholeness (as blessed from the beginning) is the relational outcome of the righteous God's theological trajectory. All this can only be constituted whole in the relational context and process of God's relational response of grace by God's relational terms, which also constitutes the whole gospel (the gospel of transformation to wholeness).

As the whole and righteous God's theological trajectory was illuminated by the face of God only for face-to-face relationship together, the good news of God's vulnerable presence and relational involvement unfolded completely in the embodied face of Jesus (as Paul made definitive, 2 Cor 4:3-6). This face turned to us not only in an improbable trajectory but in a unique relational path.

God's Relational Path Penetrates

The qualitative face of God illuminates God's theological trajectory, and this reveals to many a personal and even relational God. A theistic view of a personal and relational God is certainly assuring of God's presence and perhaps reassuring of God's involvement. Yet, such a view is insufficient to distinguish the whole of God revealed to us, and thus inadequate for whole theology and practice. A personal and relational God of theism can be simply presented in referential terms, which then only transmits information about God to us. As useful as this information might be considered, it has been narrowed down to a transmission process without the qualitative communication unique to the whole of God, who is both presented to us whole-ly (not totally) and involved intimately in the depth of relationship with us. Without the whole of who is presented and without the depth of relational involvement engaged by God, any information thought to be received from God can only be limited (e.g. to natural revelation and theology) or will be different, distorted, in contrast or conflict with God's whole revelation.

Therefore, to distinguish the whole of God revealed to us requires the integrated relational dynamic of God's improbable theological trajectory with the whole of God's relational path, which now further penetrates intrusively into our human contexts. This pivotal juncture is when God's revelation not only takes us beyond the limits of our knowledge and understanding but also deeper than we may feel secure enough to go. To distinguish the whole of God cannot emerge from a referential outcome of transmitted information but, by the nature of God's relational context and process, only emerges from the relational outcome of God's improbable theological trajectory inseparably with God's intrusive relational path. How compatible are our theology and practice to God's theological trajectory and how congruent are they with the relational path of God?

The ancient poet highlights God's revelation, not in referential terms but relational terms: "You show us the path of life, in your presence there is fullness of joy" (Ps 16:11)—relational words referred to as David's when Peter proclaimed the gospel (Acts 2:25-28). That path of life was what and who emerged from the relational context and process of the whole of God's theological trajectory in order to be vulnerably present and relationally involved. When these words are taken out of this relational context and process, they become just referential words—words with whatever distinction yet no longer composing the *relational* path of God's presence and involvement. And this relational path penetrates beyond even David's knowledge and understanding; that is to say, further than anyone expected (e.g. in messianic terms) and deeper than anyone could have imagined (e.g. as Peter previously desired on his terms). There is an irreplaceable distinction between the breadth and depth of God's relational terms and the limits of referential terms.

If our theology and practice are the outcome of relational connection and involvement with God's communicative action in self-disclosure—not merely from an authoritative Word or an inerrant Bible—then we are contextualized beyond human contextualization to the further and deeper contextualization in the now-accessible relational context and process of the whole of God. That is, this distinguished contextualization is the trinitarian relational context and process into which the whole of Jesus—the embodied communicative Word who vulnerably came to us to “take us” experientially to the whole of God—not only intimately contextualizes us but whole-ly constitutes us in relationship together. This relational dynamic involves us in the distinct integrating process of our human context converging with the primacy of God's relational context and process (as Jesus distinguished for his disciples, Jn 17:13-17), which I define as *reciprocating contextualization*. The significance of this gospel cannot emerge whole in referential terms but only in the relational terms initiated by God's improbable theological trajectory and determined by the embodied Word's intrusive relational path. Anything less and any substitute for the whole gospel neither distinguishes God's improbable theological trajectory and intrusive relational path, nor has significance for the human condition in our need to be made whole.

This is the theology that “takes us” beyond human contextualization and the human shaping of the gospel to the irreducible truth (read whole) of the gospel. Such truth has been problematic not only to establish with significance (not the same as certainty) but also to understand without reduction. The gospel cannot be distinguished from human shaping if truth is perceived through a reductionist lens. This is when human reason becomes primary over God's revelation. Biblical truth is distinguished whole as the embodied Truth (Jn 14:6) in qualitative relational terms, not referential terms; and the embodied Truth cannot be reduced both in form and in substance. For example, when the Truth takes on propositional form, it tends to be disembodied by reducing truth to something we possess, subscribe to and live by as foundational beliefs having certainty. Such truth becomes both disembodied and de-relationalized because it is functionally no longer about the Person who is vulnerably present and intimately involved with us—that is, with those who must by the nature of God's embodied self-disclosure respond reciprocally in likeness for relationship together. The embodied Truth is only for relationship and thus also cannot be de-relationalized. The relational outcome is to be contextualized and constituted in the trinitarian relational context of family and the trinitarian relational process of family love (as in Jn 8:31-36; 17:21-26). Anything less or any substitutes of this qualitative relational reality are reductionism of the Truth limited to human contextualization and shaping, consequently unable to “take us” beyond our limits epistemologically, theologically, ontologically and relationally.

The incarnation is the ultimate expression of God's communicative action. In relational terms, the incarnation does not consist of a series of events culminating at the cross. Moreover, the incarnation did not merely locate God in the human context. What unfolds in the incarnation is conjointly the qualitative and quantitative depth of the whole of God's relational presence and involvement, which cannot be reduced merely to events and/or to mere propositional truths and doctrines (e.g. atonement). The relational context and process of God are distinguished in the whole life and practice of Jesus; his intrusive relational path established the relational context and process of the triune God in order to know and experience the whole of God in intimate relationship together—distinguished

in Jesus' formative family prayer (Jn 17:20-26). Without this contextualization that Jesus composed in the human context, any other contextualization (e.g. in missiology and theology) would only be reductions epistemologically and ontologically of God's self-disclosure. The absence of the distinct integrating dynamic of reciprocating contextualization (between God's and human) results effectively in both disembodiment of the Word made flesh to referential terms and failing to grasp the whole qualitative-relational significance of the gospel, reflecting incomplete Christology. Any incomplete Christology is insufficient to account for Jesus' whole person and thus the whole of God's presence and involvement (cf. 2 Cor 4:6). This is an urgent issue in theology today that reflects the influence of reductionism of both God and the human person. And any gospel based on such a theology is not whole, at best proclaiming only a truncated soteriology that is inadequate to make the human condition whole—without the relational significance to warrant a claim of compelling good news. We therefore urgently need to address our assumptions of the incarnation that sustain our theology and practice.

Perhaps the summary text most widely used for the incarnation is "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (Jn 1:14, NIV). The Word didn't just appear and "lived among us" (NRSV) in the human context but "dwelled" (*skenoo*) with us for the sole purpose of relationship together (Jn 1:10-13). The latter half of this incarnation text has received neither the full significance nor the relational implications that must by necessity come with the incarnation. Merely referencing the incarnation's historical reality has become sufficient in much theology and practice. Jesus, however, did not allow his life and practice to be narrowed down (Jn 1:4-5), and he jolted such a religious status quo to awaken from a reduced perception of the gospel. A reduced gospel is shrouded in theological fog that makes practice susceptible to epistemological illusion and ontological simulation. By penetrating this fog the relational path of the whole of Jesus intrudes to embody the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction needed for whole theology and practice (Jn 1:18). An incomplete Christology neither penetrates the theological fog nor engages an intrusive relational path.

The most likely summary text for the gospel has been John 3:16. Here again, referential terms have prevailed in our understanding of the whole of God's depth of relational involvement ("so loved the world") and of the nature of God's relational response of grace ("he gave"), including the qualitative significance of our reciprocal relational response ("who believes in him") and what distinguishes its relational outcome ("eternal life") as made definitive by Jesus in clear relational terms (Jn 17:3). From the beginning, God's grace always engaged God's face (grace with face, as in Num 6:25; Ps 67:1), and God's love always involved face to face engagement. The relational outcome of God's face is face-to-face reciprocal relationship together, the whole of which involves knowing and understanding God face to face (eternal life). Anything less and any substitutes of both God and our person are reductionism, which devalues the gospel and fragments its outcome.

Whenever we do not pay attention to the competing influence of reductionism from human contextualization, we easily become subject to diminished ontology and function (as in reduced theological anthropology). With the lack or absence of a theological anthropology that is whole-ly compatible with Jesus' ontology and function in reciprocal relationship together, our ontology and function cannot be distinguished from our human context and thus are subject to wide interpretation or determination.

Such results would be compatible with postmodernism and its hermeneutic of suspicion but incompatible with the framework necessary to address a template imposing its narrow view epistemologically, hermeneutically, and theologically that constrains ontology and function. This would be insufficient for the hermeneutic of suspicion Jesus initiated to challenge our assumptions of theological anthropology (e.g. Lk 5:33-39). He continues to confront this condition in its need for redemptive change and also jolts the religious community in likely its most implicit condition limiting or precluding this change: the status quo and its underlying epistemological illusion of confidence or certainty and its interrelated ontological simulation of stability and permanence.

The above summary text for the gospel was added to the context of a pivotal interaction Jesus had that integrally jolted the religious status quo and embodied the intrusive relational path necessary to constitute the gospel of transformation—neither a gospel extended from tradition nor a gospel of re-formation. He confronted this status quo and challenged its interpretive lens. This was necessary because a gospel composed of anything less and any substitutes could not be compatible with God’s theological trajectory and congruent with the whole of God’s relational path. This pivotal interaction unfolded with Nicodemus (Jn 3:1-15).

Nicodemus represented his religious tradition and the effects of being embedded in the status quo of his religious community. Yet, Nicodemus apparently was dissatisfied with his knowledge and perhaps unsettled in his messianic expectations, such that he ventured out of this status quo to explore expanding his epistemic field to query Jesus (Jn 3:1-15). This epistemic process is critical to understand in this familiar encounter because it demonstrates the template imposed by the status quo to constrain any change beyond its conformity. No doubt Nicodemus knew that Jesus was a dissonant voice to the status quo, nevertheless he encountered much more than his lens, limited by the status quo, could understand epistemologically, hermeneutically and theologically. This implicit condition creates a hermeneutic impasse that makes it difficult to recognize the new, much less embrace it.

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

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

Jesus understood Nicodemus’ query and anticipated his questions that certainly related to God’s promises for Israel’s deliverance (salvation), the Messiah and God’s kingship in the Mediterranean world. Therefore, Jesus immediately focused on “the

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

The conversation that followed evidences a purpose in John’s Gospel to clearly distinguish and make definitive the whole of God’s thematic relational action of grace in response to the human condition—first, in continuation to Israel and then to the nations—that is, to unfold the history of God’s salvation. Yet, the language communicated in this conversation became an issue, and this proved to be revealing not only for Nicodemus but for all he represented—as well as for all who would follow, even through a postmodern period.

The notion of membership and participation in the kingdom of God being contingent on a concept “born again” was taken incredulously by this “wise and learned” leader, whose sophisticated reason was unable to process and explain in referential terms from a narrowed epistemic field. “How can” (*dynamai*, v.4) signifies the limits of the probable. Then to be told “you [pl] must *by its nature*” (*dei*, v.7, not *opheilo*’s obligation or compulsion), as if to address all Jews, was beyond the grasp of his reason. *Dei* points to the nature of the improbable. Even after Jesus made definitive (“I tell you the truth”) *gennaio anothen* as “born from above,” that is “born of the Spirit” (*ek*, indicating the primary, direct source, vv.5,8), Nicodemus was still unable to process the words of Jesus; the status quo continued to prevail (“How can,” v.9). Why? This brings us back to the interpretive framework and perceptual lens of “the wise and the intelligent.” He was unable to understand Jesus’ language because the words were heard from an insufficient interpretive framework limited to the prevailing assumptions of his knowledge and an inadequate perceptual lens constrained in focus only on the secondary in referential terms.

Jesus exposed this as the conversation continued: “Are you a teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand *the improbable and the primary*?” (v.10). How is Jesus’ question connected to Nicodemus’ question since “born again” (or from above) is not in the Hebrew Scriptures? With this rhetorical question, Jesus implied that from a valid OT perspective (namely “the covenant of love,” Dt 7:7-9) the thematic relational action of God’s covenant relationship would be understood; moreover, the relational outworking of *siym* for *shalom* from the LORD’s definitive blessing would be expected and apparent. Jesus was vulnerably extending this covenant relationship of love in wholeness together directly to Nicodemus (and, by implication, to all Jews) by communicating openly what he, himself, knew intimately by witnessing as a participant (*martyreo*, not merely by observation, v.11) in the life of God (v.13, cf. Jn 1:18). His communication was not with ethereal (*epouranios*) language but discourse (*lego*) in the human context (*epigeios*, v.12), yet with relational language. It was the qualitative nature of this relational language that Nicodemus was unable to understand with his perceptual-interpretive framework (cf. Jn 8:43). Nicodemus remained incompatible for relational connection, unable to engage Jesus with his conventional epistemic process.

The movement of God's thematic relational action in the covenant relationship of love had been consistently reduced to quantitative situations and circumstances throughout Israel's history—despite the fact that “the Lord set his heart on you and chose you” was not on a quantitative basis (Dt 7:7). In functional similarity, Nicodemus paid attention to the quantitative limits of human biology in probability terms reducing the person while ignoring the qualitative primacy of whole human ontology. Thus he demonstrated the same framework focused on the quantitative situations and circumstances probable for the covenant, whereas Jesus focused on the ontology of the whole person and the qualitative relationship signifying the covenant of love and wholeness together. The establishment of nation and national identity formation were the prevailing quantitative expectations of any messianic hope in the kingdom, with which, most certainly, Nicodemus came to Jesus that night. In contrast and conflict, Jesus focused on the whole persons (from inner out) necessary in new covenant relationship in wholeness to constitute the kingdom in its innermost—nothing less and no substitutes, which then required transformation (“born from above”) and not re-formation (shaped from below).

The prevailing perceptual-interpretive framework that Nicodemus represented made some critical assumptions about the kingdom besides the quantitative situations and circumstances probable for the covenant. The two most critical assumptions were relational barriers to understanding Jesus' relational language:

1. Membership in the kingdom was based on generational descent and natural birth in quantitative referential terms; to understand the qualitative functional significance of Jesus' relational language, his relational message (v.7) must be integrated with the incarnation's fulfillment of God's thematic action in relational terms of the covenant relationship of love (as summarized by the evangelist in Jn 1:10-13; cf. his discourse on those redeemed in Jn 8:31-36,42).
2. In addition, participation in the kingdom was based on what one did from outer in, and, accordingly, adherence to a purification code of behavior was imperative, especially for national identity maintenance; to understand the whole relational context and process of Jesus' relational language, his message (v.6) needs to be embodied in the vulnerable relational context and process of his whole person from inner out intimately disclosing the whole of God in the innermost (made evident in his further disclosure of the improbable, Jn 6:54,63).

In this latter relational disclosure, would-be followers came to a similar conclusion as Nicodemus: “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” (Jn 6:52) and “This *improbable* is difficult; who can accept it?” (6:60), compared with Nicodemus' “How can *this improbable* be?” (3:9)—all of which reflected these assumptions in quantitative referential terms from outer in that limited both their knowledge to the probable and their learning of the improbable. This is the implicit condition of the status quo, even as exists today in modern science.

What Nicodemus and the others were predisposed to by their perceptual-interpretive framework, and were embedded in as their practice and expectation within the limits of the status quo, was essentially a *salvation of the old*—a quantitative outcome

of reductionism. What Jesus vulnerably engaged them both in and with went beyond the status quo to the *salvation of the new*—the qualitative relational outcome of the whole of God’s relational response to not only Israel but to the human condition. God’s thematic relational work of grace embodied in Jesus for covenant relationship of love constituted the new covenant from inner out, the relationship of which was now directly and intimately involved together with the Trinity in the innermost to be the whole of God’s family (kingdom of those born of the Spirit, of the Father, of the Son). This is the whole gospel vulnerably disclosed by Jesus in relational language which jolted the status quo of *the old* represented in Nicodemus that night.

Nicodemus came to Jesus as “the wise and learned” in *the old*. He was now humbled by Jesus’ intrusion on his status quo condition with the improbable “born again or from above,” and by the necessary transition from old to new Jesus distinguished unmistakably in its relational language. Though that term itself is not in the OT, it is clearly evident that “a new heart” and the Spirit’s work for “a new covenant” and Israel’s kingdom (Eze 36:26-27, Jer 31:31-34) would not be unfamiliar to Nicodemus as Israel’s teacher. The meaning of Jesus’ relational message to Nicodemus (and the status quo) defined the needed transformation of human ontology for this new covenant relationship of love, which for Nicodemus functionally involved the transition from “the wise and learned of the old” to the qualitative framework and function of “the little children of the new” (cf. Mt 18:3-4)—undoubtedly a jolt to Nicodemus and the status quo. Yet, apparently, Nicodemus humbly transitioned to “a little child of the new”: first, to receive the whole of God’s self-disclosure embodied in whole by Jesus with a new perceptual-interpretive framework (Lk 10:21, cf. his vulnerability in Jn 7:50-52), then to relationally respond to God in qualitative involvement (cf. Lk 18:17, and his involvement in Jn 19:39-42).

John’s Gospel clearly illuminates the relational process of salvation from old to new in Nicodemus and what he is saved *to*. In this relational context, the evangelist almost seems to give a metaphorical sense to Nicodemus. Certainly, for all who follow, it is the whole relational context and process, necessary by the nature of salvation, to which to respond and by which to be involved in order to belong to the whole of God’s family. Unfortunately, we never hear if Nicodemus became one of the teachers of the old covenant and new, who relationally experienced following Jesus in the relational progression to the family (kingdom) of God, as Jesus defined for such teachers (Mt 13:52).

Jesus made it imperative for Nicodemus and the status quo that the redemptive change to be born from above was the only recourse available to be freed from the constraints imposed by any templates from tradition, the status quo and the old prevailing in human contextualization—that which constrains, shapes or conforms the new’s presence to the limits of the old, as Peter did (Acts 10:13-15, cf. Jn 15:18-20). This is where epistemological clarification and hermeneutical correction are needed, both for Nicodemus as well as for us today. Jesus was not pointing to a new belief system requiring Nicodemus’ conversion. Nicodemus could not grasp the meaning of Jesus’ words because his quantitative lens (*phroneo*) focused on the person from outer in (“How can anyone be born after...?”), and because his reductionist interpretive framework (*phronema*) was unable to piece together (*synesis*) his own Scripture (e.g. “The Lord your God will circumcise your heart,” Dt 30:6). This evidenced that Nicodemus was too

embedded in the status quo influenced by reductionism to understand—“How can these things be?”—even after Jesus said, “Do not be astonished...” which implied that a teacher of God’s Word would comprehend God’s whole if not fragmented by reductionism. Now the embodied Word from God (whom Nicodemus initially came to engage) made conclusive the epistemological clarification and hermeneutical correction essential for Nicodemus, Peter, Paul, Jews or Gentiles, for all persons: *be made whole from above or continue in reductionism*. Accordingly, John 3:16 can only be the summary text for the gospel if it distinguishes the gospel of transformation to wholeness.

There is a vital distinction that needs to be made to distinguish the gospel emerging from Jesus’ relational path: the distinction between ‘transformation from above’ and ‘re-formation from below’. If this distinction cannot be clearly made, then neither can the gospel of transformation be distinguished, nor can our theology and practice be distinguished on Jesus’ intrusive relational path and thus from the religious status quo. In Paul’s fight for the whole gospel and against its reduction, he made this distinction imperative for the ongoing redemptive change necessary to turn from reductionism to wholeness (Rom 12:1-2). The issue involved in this distinction was, for example, either conforming to the re-forms of the religious status quo (i.e. outward change and practice), or be transformed as a whole person (i.e. change and practice from inner out). The whole gospel is only distinguished by the transformation to wholeness.

The face of God’s presence and involvement has intruded unmistakably. While we may avoid making our person vulnerable to the Word’s intrusive relational path, the Word still penetrates to the heart of the whole person from inner out (Lk 2:34-35; Heb 4:12). The presence of God’s intimate relational involvement is inescapable and must be accounted for in our theology and practice—and relationally accountable notably in our ontology and function as persons.

Compatibility and Congruence for Whole Theology and Practice

The incarnation embodied the whole of Jesus whose ‘who, what and how’ constituted the gospel of transformation to wholeness. The face of God illuminated the whole of God’s improbable theological trajectory and the face of Jesus penetrated the depths of the human context with God’s intrusive relational path. This face brought the change necessary (as in *siym*) for new relationship together in wholeness (as in *shalom*), just as the face of God blessed from the beginning (Num 6:24-26). This theological trajectory and relational path compose God’s relational context and process in response to our human condition. Thus, God’s trajectory and path are not subject to revision by the human context or to renegotiation in human terms. Any re-forms of the gospel of transformation, therefore, are not on the same theological trajectory as God, and any re-forms of its outcome to wholeness are not on the same relational path as Jesus.

This intrusive face also embodied Paul’s defining encounter with the gospel on the Damascus road (Acts 9:1-6)—an encounter beyond both a Christophany and the referentialization of the gospel, which unfolded for Paul in ongoing face-to-face relationship together. As a Jew, Paul now received the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction necessary to perceive the whole of God’s blessing from the beginning. Integrally, this was Paul’s pivotal experience with the gospel that transformed

him from inner out as a person and as still a Jew (not a converted Jew, Rom 2:28-29), and that he distinguished as the gospel of transformation clearly distinct from any reductions, human shaping and re-forms of the whole gospel (Gal 1:6-7, 11-12; 2 Cor 3:16-18; 4:2-6; Eph 4:20-24). Yet, the gospel of transformation to wholeness did not unfold with Paul until he emerged from the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction of the assumptions defining his theology and determining his practice (e.g., Phil 3:4-6). Whole theology and practice did not emerge from Paul until he turned from reduced and convergence models of the gospel (Gal 1:11-14) to a whole model (Col 1:15-21; 2:9-10). In other words, in spite of the deep roots of Paul's religious identity (Phil 3:4-6) and his passion to serve his monotheistic God (Acts 26:9-11), Paul was not on the same theological trajectory and relational path as the whole of God. Rather, Paul was incompatible with the theological trajectory of whole monotheism and incongruent with the relational path of the face of God.

Whole theology and practice, as distinguished by God alone, does not emerge from referential terms but involves engaging the relational context and process of God's relational response of grace enacted just on God's relational terms. In the beginning, God created human persons to be whole and "not good to be *apart*" (Gen 2:18) from this whole in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole and holy God (Gen 1:27). From the beginning, the whole of God (the Trinity in whole monotheism) has responded in the relational dynamic of grace to bring the change necessary (*siym*) to transform our human condition to new relationship together in wholeness (*shalom*). This relational outcome unfolds only to the extent that God's relational response is integrally (1) received by us compatibly in God's improbable theological trajectory and congruently in the Word's intrusive relational path, and (2) reciprocally responded to by us whole-ly in God's relational terms and not fragmentary referential terms (often confused as faith).

This seems reasonable enough to engage our response of faith—that is, as faith has been re-formed in referential terms—yet often appears as insufficient basis for our reason to be involved in the depth of relational terms. The tension reason creates for faith in the context of relationship should not be ignored—turning some to fideism. The resulting relational distance, impasse or barrier becomes a formidable issue of incompatibility and incongruence that is insurmountable if not addressed directly and openly in relationship—as witnessed by various persons with Jesus (noted previously and expanded on throughout this study).

For example, the Enlightenment signified the primacy of reason that has been both a threat and challenge for the church—a threat to old ways of thinking and a prevailing worldview (as Copernicus challenged Ptolemy thus threatening the church), and a challenge of new ideas and new worldview, though not always signifying 'better' (as in the shift from theocentrism to anthropocentrism). In the new age of reason, the shape of faith was narrowed down, notably by John Locke who believed that human reason should be the final determinant for what we believe (in religion, ethics and politics).¹

While Luther and Calvin earlier turned to the Bible for the primary authority and content of faith, their interpretive framework was primarily referential and thus limited in focus to referential terms of doctrine. In spite of the Protestant principle of the authority

¹ For an overview of this period of history and its impact on Christianity, see Jonathan Hill, *Faith in the Age of Reason: The Enlightenment from Galileo to Kant*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

of Scripture alone, the Reformers and their followers interpreted God's revelation apart from the relational terms composing the whole of God's theological trajectory and relational path. Here again, the referentialization of the Word led to further fragmentation of beliefs among and even within churches. This was evidenced in the so-called Age of Confessionalism (late 16th century to late 17th century), when different groups became increasingly concerned with defining their own beliefs, or confessions, in contrast to everyone else's—views/doctrines on baptism as a specific example. This narrowed-down process evolved into a hardening of orthodoxy (templates for conformity, if you wish) within churches, which also caused splits against what was defined as official doctrine (e.g. Arminius' split with the Reformed Church over predestination). Pietism also raised suspicion of doctrinal orthodoxy, without necessarily returning to the whole of Jesus' intrusive relational path to define the primacy of relationship with God and to determine its spiritual formation. Later, in the twentieth century, as fundamentalism resisted modernism, there emerged from the use of a modern lens by neoevangelicals (notably Carl Henry) an effort to establish the certainty of faith and its source (an inerrant Bible)—re-forms still shaping theology and practice today.

What we need to learn to recognize from this history are the illusion (not illuminated) and simulation (not substantive and real) that not unexpectedly emerge from human reason, just as were set into motion in the primordial garden. All doctrines would benefit from a hermeneutic of suspicion—not primarily to expose templates for conformity, though that may be necessary—in order to account for their compatibility with the theological trajectory of the whole of God (as Subject and not mere Object) and their congruence with the relational path of the face of God (both vulnerable and intimately involved). Where beliefs and related doctrines have veered off this distinguished trajectory and path, they need epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction—though not by human reason as (Locke's) final arbiter but by God's revelation communicated only in relational terms, and not transmitted in referential terms (even if inerrant).

The tension between the primacy of human reason and God's revelation is ongoing. The position either assumes will determine our model of the gospel and the outcome we can expect for our theology and practice. As prevailed in the past and prevails today—notably from but not only since the Enlightenment—the need for certainty in our knowledge and conclusions is understandable, yet its pursuit must be understood as a need promoted by human contextualization in a narrowed epistemic field. On this basis, whoever speaks with authority warrants paying attention to—specifically the scholarship of “the wise and learned.” The matter of authority has been foundational in theology, yet what has emerged from the foundation of authority has not distinguished the whole of God and God's whole for the human condition. This lack or gap in theology is not an authority issue. Though authority is a crucial issue, it is not the most critical for God's revelation. Most critical is God's relational grace, and the fact or not of God's initiative, presence and involvement such that the whole of God can be known, understood and experienced in relationship together without human speculation, shaping or construction. This relational dynamic of grace is the functional difference between deism and theism, and the necessary basis and ongoing base for the theological task and theological education. Theology and its practice can only be a relational outcome of engagement in the relational epistemic process initiated by God's grace; and this is the

only engagement and outcome that have relational significance to God and, on this relational basis, that can be whole. Even spiritual disciplines and formation need deeper involvement in the dynamic of God's relational grace in order for the relational connection to know, understand and experience God in relationship together—a depth precluding epistemological illusion and ontological simulation.

The critical necessity in the epistemic process and theological task is for God's relational grace to prevail. For God's grace to prevail, it must by its relational nature (*dei*, not by obligation, *opheilo*) be the ongoing experiential reality that defines and determines our person and relationships in all our “weakness” (cf. Paul, 2 Cor 12:9), situations and circumstances in the human context, thereby being responsive to and involved with God on God's terms to experience, know and understand his vulnerable presence and intimate involvement—the relational context and process of God's grace. This relational outcome emerges only from ongoing involvement with the Spirit in the relational dynamic of reciprocating contextualization—the interrelated interaction between God's context and our human context (1 Cor 2:9-13). Anything less and any substitutes of this relational process shift it to our terms of human shaping and construction.

Contrary to common perception, grace is not action by God for unilateral relationship—an implied position of some Reformed perspectives. Grace only creates the opportunity for reciprocal relationship together, for which the recipients of relational grace are responsible and thus accountable; and this is why God has gotten angry and would “hide my face from them” (Dt 31:17), and why the face of Jesus wept (Lk 19:41; Mt 23:37) and the Spirit grieved (Eph 4:30). Faith in the transcendent and holy God is possible only by the relational grace of the righteous God, who is vulnerably present and intimately involved only for the purpose of whole relationship together. Faith is the relational response that must (*dei* not *opheilo*) be compatible with the transcendent and holy God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement in order for the relationship to be compatible (only on God's terms) and whole (nothing less and no substitutes). This is the inseparable challenge and accountability for both theology and practice.

The whole of God's thematic relational response of grace to the human condition unfolds in a theological trajectory and along a relational path that converge in the narrow gate and road of the incarnation—not to be confused with a template of doctrine, yet that cannot be divided or fragmented to “widen” the gate and road, for example, by negotiation to human terms. By the narrow gate and road, the improbable embodied in whole by Jesus was vulnerably disclosed (beyond *apokalypto*) in the distinguished relational context and process (to *phaneroo*) that fulfilled God's definitive blessing to his family to enact *siym* for *shalom*, that is, to bring the change necessary for new relationship together in wholeness (Num 6:24-26). The relational context and process distinguishing the Face of God involved the relational work of Face-to-face relationship that intruded on the probable (the common) and challenged them with the improbable (the Uncommon). For whole understanding—our indispensable and irreplaceable *synesis* (as Paul defined, Col 2:2-4)—it is necessary to follow this theological trajectory and relational path.

Crucial to understanding the theological trajectory of the distinguished Face of God now embodied in whole is understanding his relational language. For most persons, this initially requires a major shift away from referential language focused on quantitative information about God in order to receive Jesus' relational language involved in

communicating qualitative knowledge and understanding of God only in relationship—a significant difference for the epistemic process that needs to be accounted for. This shift is unavoidable if we are to follow the theological trajectory of the Face of God, because without shifting we would not be on the same trajectory.

Referential terms puts God on a different theological trajectory merely as the Object to be observed and for faith. The information gained and conclusions formed about God in this common epistemic process are shaped by the limits of what we know or can rationalize, that is, shaped by our self-understandings. In contrast and even in conflict, the relational terms of God's face unfolds in the theological trajectory as Subject (beyond a mere Other) to be involved in reciprocal relationship together Face to face, whose Face cannot be defined and whose relationship cannot be determined by our face. What we know and understand of God is distinguished in the relational epistemic process emerging from our involvement in reciprocal relationship with Subject-Face—whom the early disciples had issues distinguishing without *syniemi* (putting the pieces together) in its necessary relational epistemic process (Mk 8:17-18). The difference in these trajectories may seem unnecessarily nuanced when in fact the difference is immeasurable if knowing and understanding the whole of God are primary and therefore is composed by the relational Word. As Subject, God speaks for himself, and theology is contingent on God's communication in relationship. As Object, God's voice is mute and God's words are disembodied, de-relationalized, fragmented and otherwise subjected to human shaping in the theological task. As Subject, relationship with God is only on God's whole terms. As Object, relationship and relating to God is negotiated by reduced human terms, shaped by the probable down to a fragmentary condition; this is how Christ becomes divided, as Paul exposed in the reductions by the fragmented church at Corinth (1 Cor 1:10-13). To follow Jesus' theological trajectory as the distinguished Face, we must, by his nature as Subject, be involved with him along his relational path (cf. Jn 12:26). Yet, as seen consistently in Jesus' interactions, the relational Jesus embodied as Subject is both improbable (uncommon) and whole, and that is problematic for the probable (common) and fragmentary—an unsettling intrusion on what prevails (the common, as 'the wise and learned' and would-be followers discovered) and a jolt to the status quo (distinguished from the uncommon, as Nicodemus learned, Jn 3:1-15).

The Creator (for science) and the whole of God (for theology) emerge only in reciprocating contextualization, engaged with respective epistemic and ontological humility. This theological task cannot be undertaken from the observation of a scientific approach or from the relational distance of the rationality of philosophy, both constraining the heuristic process leading to the whole knowledge and understanding of God's self-disclosure (as Jesus declared, Jn 5:39-40). This outcome is only the relational outcome of reciprocating contextualization engaged in the relational epistemic process of Scripture with the Spirit. This relational process brings us face to Face with the distinguished whole of God from outside the universe to engage the improbable theological trajectory for direct involvement in the intrusive relational path of the embodied Word from and of God. Anything less and any substitutes put us on a different theological trajectory and relational path. If we maintain any relational distance to circumvent Jesus' intrusive relational path, we will find ourselves on a different theological trajectory—even if our doctrine appears to have certainty.

Evangelicals traditionally have deferred to the Word and its embodiment in Christ. Yet, *how* the Word was embodied goes further and deeper than objective history—not to be confused with an esoteric or supra-history—to compose the relational context and process distinguishing the whole of God and God’s creative, communicative and salvific action. Unless the qualitative and relational *how* of the Word’s embodiment defines our theology and determines our theological engagement and outcomes, our theology and practice will be on a conflicting theological trajectory and deviant relational path (as were the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, Lk 24:13-32).

Christian theology is distinguished when it understands the coherence of the triune God’s creative, communicative and salvific action, and therefore makes definitive the whole of God’s self-revelation vulnerably extended to us only for whole relationship together. Coherence in relational terms involves interrelating these pieces of the whole (*syniemi*, as Jesus defined and holds his disciples accountable for, Mk 8:17-19) for whole understanding (*synesis*, as Paul made definitive for the church, Col 2:2-3). The resulting whole theology is basically different from merely systematizing information in referential terms (characteristic of systematic theology). To understand God’s action—not fragmented or piecemeal but with coherence—is to know the whole of God from a qualitative-relational interpretive framework that vulnerably engages in the trinitarian relational context and process necessary for the relationship to whole-ly know God on God’s qualitative-relational terms—the relational outcome that eluded the early disciples (Jn 14:9). This relational outcome emerges, therefore, on the basis only of God’s grace (relational initiative) and not by human terms and effort (no matter how well-intentioned). Any determination by human effort (even in systematic theology) implies a shift away from the primacy of God’s grace for reciprocal relationship, consequently substituting human terms for God’s.

For example, the problem with depending on human reason in hermeneutics is that it minimizes the Other’s (Subject-God) horizon (i.e. God’s relational context and process) and thus gets into denying (and often masks) the Other’s terms by substituting one’s own terms. Not receiving Jesus on his own terms effectively disembodies him as Subject (perhaps not as Object) and removes him from the relational context and process he composed in relational terms, consequently reducing a hermeneutical circle to a vicious circle revolved around the human self, even inadvertently or unknowingly. God did not merely extend his revelation as an object (noted by only *apokalypto*) to be observed; if so, then this would warrant the scientific method as the best approach to the Bible. More importantly and significantly God communicated his self-revelations as Subject (distinguished by *phaneroo*, Jn 17:6) to be heard, received and responded back to in compatible relationship together congruent only on God’s terms.

This vital distinction between *apokalypto* and *phaneroo* will determine whether God’s revelation is separated from his given relational context and process, and consequently either disembodied by reductionism to mere propositional truths or concepts, principles and other abstractions, or de-relationalized from the primacy of relationship together by rationalizing in referential terms. In Luke 10:21, Jesus declared that the Father only *apokalypto* to children, yet God openly *apokalypto* to everyone and did not conceal from anyone. That is to say, Jesus is making the vital point that knowing and understanding God is not through human effort no matter the extent of God’s *apokalypto*; rather this relational outcome is experienced (1) only on the basis of God’s

initiating grace in relationship, and (2) by our compatible relational response to his relational self-disclosure (*phaneroo*), which is symbolized in children. This epistemic relational process with the Spirit in reciprocating contextualization involves the hermeneutical cone (further and deeper than a circle) with God's Word—oral, written and embodied—that must by its nature involve the reflexive relational process of reading, listening, interpreting as well as responding back relationally to Subject-God—neither to disembodied teachings, commands, propositions nor to merely observing a de-relationalized Object.

What we saw earlier unfolding in Peter—in contrast to what unfolded in Paul—is a pattern of his reshaping God's self-disclosures on God's whole terms, fragmenting the whole of Jesus and redefining his person in a narrowed-down epistemic field for a hybrid theology (cf. convergence model) based on the limits of Peter's reduced terms. Hybrid theology not only divides theology but also separates theology from function, such that its practice can be neither congruent nor even compatible with its theology. The expected consequence reduces theology and practice to a fragmented condition, thus preventing whole theology and practice. This fragmented condition goes unrecognized as long as one remains within the limits of understanding from one's knowledge or rationalizing. As Peter demonstrated, this fragmentation of theology may have doctrinal certainty and appear to be united, yet it is not whole. These are the results of epistemological illusion and ontological simulation from reductionism and its counter-relational work, which inevitably can only be in contrast and conflict with the whole of God (and God's theological trajectory) and the whole ontology and function improbably embodied in Jesus (and his relational path).

The contrast, and even conflict, between Peter's theology on his own terms and Paul's theology transformed by God's terms is no mere theological exercise. Theology today in the age of reductionism struggles to emerge definitively and, more important, flounders to be distinguished in its subject matter. Though Peter was in the ongoing presence of the face of Jesus, unlike Paul after the Damascus road, a veil still functioned between Peter and Jesus to make the whole of God's Face elusive for Peter both to make face-to-Face connection and to distinguish from inner out—a consequence despite the reality that Jesus removed the veil for intimate relationship together (2 Cor 3:16-18). This qualitative perception of God's Face and relational experience with God Face to face eludes many in theological engagement today, essentially for the same reasons as for Peter. While Peter was not one of the two Jesus found on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-32), he was often on a conflicting theological trajectory and deviant relational path. Many Christians, both theologically and in the practice of faith, are also on this road to Emmaus, having lost the qualitative relational significance of the whole of God's presence and involvement. Reductionism ongoingly obscures God's Face and interferes with face-to-Face connection by diminishing the primacy of relationship together—all while promoting substitutes for epistemological illusion in theology and ontological simulation in practice.²

This has become a crisis in theology distinguishing its subject matter and an identity crisis in practice having the significance in likeness of the whole of God. The

² An expanded discussion of theology in the age of reductionism, and its implications for the church and academy, takes place in my study "*Did God Really Say That?*" *Theology in the Age of Reductionism* (Theology Study, 2013). Online at <http://4X12.org>.

underlying sin of reductionism has been consequential epistemologically, ontologically and relationally, such that nothing less than a turnaround from the road to Emmaus, a turn back to the whole of God's improbable theological trajectory, and a return to the intrusive relational path of the embodied Word will provide the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction necessary for God's whole (see *shub* in the psalmist's relational plea, Ps 80:3,7,19; cf. Jer 31:18).

So, by what and whose terms have we been seeing God's revelation? On what theological trajectory and path have we put God? These are not mere academic issues; we are all responsible for our theology and practice. Therefore, we have to account for this most defining issue: How compatible is our theology with the whole of God's improbable theological trajectory and how congruent is our practice with the face of God's intrusive relational path?

Whole theology and practice has no other trajectory or path, even though the alternative may have the distinction of being biblically based and doctrinally sound. The fruit from the Reformation, more often than not, has not yielded in theology and practice what Jesus distinguished intrusively as 'the new wine' (Lk 5:33-39). As is characteristic of much tradition (not all) and as saturates the status quo, the residual taste of old wine has pervaded our theology and old wineskins have prevailed over our practice.

Basically, does the shape of our theology and practice, its subject matter and faith, have a different face than the face of God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement? And are they constructed on a different theological trajectory and path than God's, such that either face-to-face relationship together no longer has primacy or face-to-face relational connection is no longer primary?

Chapter 2 The Unmistakable Face of God

May God, in his improbable trajectory, make his face to engage us, that your relational path may be known in the human context and your salvation among all persons.

Psalm 67:1-2

What's in a face? Basically everything if seen as a subject from inner out; and essentially not very much if seen mainly as an object from outer in. This forms the basic and essential questions of how God is perceived and thereby who emerges and what unfolds from God's revelation.

Whenever we see anyone, we don't really encounter them until we see their face. Up to then, we may be introduced to different parts of them (parts of what they have or do) but the encounter doesn't take place until their face is viewed. And connection with them doesn't happen until their face and ours meet face to face. Otherwise, for example, we may share in the same space or activity at the same time but that is only a reduced convergence of our different parts without the significance of relationship together face to face (cf. social media today and even gatherings at churches and families). The significance of the face, however, and of face to face, depend on what view we have of the face. Consider the influence this has had on our theology and practice, and the impact it has made on the theological anthropology determining our ontology and function as a person, as God's family, and even God's ontology and function.

Introducing the Face of God

When we consider a face (even our own), the most immediate view we have focuses on that face from outer in. This focus commonly remains central unless there is a deeper profile of the face from inner out. Yet even with the basis for a deeper profile, until we are willing to go deeper into that profile, a face only gives us a limited view of a person. Hopefully, we are willing to go deeper than the face we see, for example, in the mirror each day, because that face doesn't define the whole person—though many make that assumption. This view and focus also apply to God's face. This points to our epistemic process and whether our epistemic field remains narrowed down or is open to go beyond our immediate view to engage a deeper profile of the face, namely the face of God. This chapter opens our epistemic field to engage the relational epistemic process necessary to distinguish the face of God unmistakably and thus deeper than commonly viewed.

Philosophical theology would dispute that God has a face, much less an unmistakable face. Its proponents' basis for this theistic view is important to understand as we consider what God has or has not self-disclosed. Their epistemic field is critical for the basis of their view. One skillful method to narrow the epistemic field is to expand the concept of uniqueness. This is accomplished by creating distinctions in categories such

that some particular distinction stands alone (a unique or new category) and cannot be compared to others in that original or common category. For example, modern science made a distinction in the category of what exists by creating the category of the improbable, whose uniqueness then could no longer be compared to what else exists. This made it easier to take the approach that the improbable no longer needed to be accounted for because it could not be known; and therefore the conclusion follows that it didn't exist—presumably based on probability, but it was a conclusion shaped more by a perceptual-interpretive framework from human contextualization since mathematics in itself imposes limits making it insufficient for conclusions beyond those limits.¹ Nassim Taleb further discusses the severe limitation to our learning from observations or experience, and the fragility of our knowledge based on probability, thereby creating a barrier to learning more from the improbable.²

Prior to the scientific method, the concept of uniqueness was expanded by Greek philosophy in the category of being. In contrast to our changing world of existence, Plato maintained there is a realm of being that is eternal and unchanging. A revised form of Platonism, known as Neo-Platonism, focused narrowly on the ultimate transcendence of God, all of which influenced early Christian thinking that there is one supreme transcendent God.³ This philosophical lens was certainly congruent for the monotheism of Judaism and Christian theology but the use of reductionism made it incompatible epistemologically, ontologically and relationally for the whole of God's revelation—most notably God's improbable theological trajectory and intrusive relational path. This narrow monotheism was unable to account for the triune God, and made it inconceivable to speak about the Trinity.

In a narrowed epistemic field the uniqueness of God's being cannot be accounted for and thus spoken about, much less known. The essence of that being, what it is and perhaps why, is beyond knowing and understanding—it is simply unique. Yet, this result was not only by design in making this distinction; underlying this method is the consequence from the epistemological, ontological and relational limits imposed by reductionism. The interaction between so-called designed results and the consequence of imposed limits cannot be ignored if we are to sufficiently address the following: the various critical issues converging to narrow the epistemic field and cloud our interpretive lens, and then adequately sort out these issues in the theological task in order to emerge clearly from any theological fog.

In classical philosophical theology, God was made distinct in the category of the divine and was relegated to it without direct connection to our changing world. This view addresses the basic issue of the knowability of God and has engaged this conversation by seeking to define concepts with precision and rigor of argumentation. Concepts historically attributed to God—such as omnipotence, omniscience, simplicity, immutability and impassibility—may appear to describe the God outside the universe, but

¹ For a helpful discussion on the limits of mathematics, see Marcelo Gleiser, *The Island of Knowledge: The Limits of Science and the Search for Meaning* (New York: Basic Books, 2014).

² Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable* (New York: Random House, 2007).

³ Tony Lane provides an overview of this development in *A Concise History of Christian Thought*, completely revised and expanded edition (London: T&T Clark, 2006).

in essence they tell us more about the unknowability of God. This fragmentary epistemology emerged in the formalization of negative theology.

When theologians speak of God with negations, they say, for example, that God's goodness, power and wisdom are not the goodness, power and wisdom of created realities or persons because God's are perfect and without any limits. As notably emerged from Aquinas, with roots in Aristotle, this forms the basis for philosophical theology.

In Aquinas' doctrine of divine simplicity, those within the universe cannot know the essence or being of God, nor are our words basically capable of speaking of the creator. This gave rise to the voice of negative theology. We can only make statements of negation, saying just what God is not or cannot be, thereby avoiding the limitation of language that is susceptible to falsifiability. In other words, Aquinas' doctrine is not a description of God because it consists entirely of negations or attempts to declare what God *cannot be*. It does not ascribe any attribute or property to God since it explicitly denies that God has any attributes or properties.

For Aquinas the matter of divine simplicity depends on the notion of God as Creator. Simply stated: If there is a God who creates, then there have to be irreducible differences between God and creatures. Such differences, for example, cannot be distinguished by anthropomorphism. Thus, God cannot be perceived rightly in our terms—neither thought of as being one of a kind of which there could be others, nor thought of as owing his existence to any thing. In Aquinas' words: "Now we cannot know what God is, but only what He is not; we must therefore consider ways in which God does not exist, rather than ways in which He does" (*Summa Theologiae*, Ia. 2, Conclusion).

This view, and related views, of theism can be discounted yet there is a valid concern that must not be dismissed. Any theistic view that can be discounted emerges from a narrowed epistemic field, which then makes God unknowable (or less knowable) and our statements about God essentially statements by default—saying either less of what God is or simply not saying much of any depth. Certainly, the face of God would be incompatible with negative theology and its unmistakable presence would render negative theology void. That raises the valid concern from philosophical theology that we must not dismiss while discounting negative theology. The following questions frame the issue: Does God indeed have a face or is this feature what we impose on God as a human construction? And if God has a face, has God's face been viewed mainly by human shaping? In other words, this raises the valid concern about anthropomorphism shaping or constructing our view of God, which we need to account for in our theology and practice.

It is certainly correct that the difference of God is irreducible to human terms; and it is a necessary intention for any theological task to clearly distinguish this difference in order not to fall into any epistemological illusion by being defined or determined by any anthropomorphism from human contextualization. The subsequent issue, however, of insufficiently knowing and understanding God is a critical condition for theology to confront—given God's declaration for human boast in Jeremiah 9:23-24—or be rendered to a different theological trajectory from God and consequently, at best, to ontological simulation of God's being and human being.

In response to the implication of the unknowability of God, Colin Gunton makes this statement:

One consequence of this for our language is that, as they stand, our words are simply incapable of speaking of the creator. That is the truth underlying what is known as the negative theology: that God can best be characterized by thinking away the limitations inherent in words designed—or so the theory goes—to speak of created things. However, what might appear to be a proper human modesty before the divine can turn into the supreme blasphemy of denying revelation. There is a fine line between a proper humility and believing that so long as we do not say anything positive we have somehow laid hold of, or come nearer to the truth about, the divine reality.⁴

This then raises the question of how knowable is God, given the whole of God's self-disclosure. According to God, knowing and understanding God is the only valid "boast" (*hālāl*, to boast, praise, celebrate) that humans can make (Jer 9:23-24); and Paul adds that in a comparative process this is the only legitimate boast humans have (1 Cor 4:6-7).

This refocuses on the whole of God's improbable theological trajectory and intrusive relational path. There is a necessary dynamic interaction between the transcendent God and the embodied Word. The *breadth* of God is his transcendence and the *depth* of God is his vulnerable presence in the human context and intimate involvement with human persons—that is, the depth constituted by the whole of who, what and how God is, the whole and righteous God distinguishing the Trinity. Both the breadth and depth of God are necessary and inseparable, thus ignoring one or emphasizing one over the other results in an incomplete or distorted view and understanding of God, certainly inadequate to define the whole of God—all of which is illuminated by God's face. Yet, the face of God fits in the category of Taleb's Black Swan (noted earlier), which constricts the improbable and creates a barrier to learning more of God from the intrusion of the improbable. This is evident most noticeably with the depth of God and God's action in human context, which consistently has been reduced of its qualitative and relational significance such that God's intrusive relational path is not accounted for, even if God's improbable theological trajectory is. The consequential lack of relationally knowing God was the primary concern that the face of Jesus addressed in his disciples face to face, highlighting his primary purpose (Jn 14:9; cf. Mk 8:17-18). Without the embodied Word in whole illuminated in the face of Jesus, theology is rendered speculative (contrast Jn 1:18) and the gospel is re-formed (contrast 2 Cor 4:4-6). A God of breadth without depth becomes functionally deistic; a God of assumed depth without breadth is anthropomorphic—with both resulting from human shaping and construction.

It is more than admirable not to speak of matters that we don't understand, most notably of God. Yet, we cannot claim to be unexposed to the Other distinguished from beyond all creation and the assumed *multiverse* of modern science. That is, this claim is unacceptable except in a narrowed-down epistemic field that does not account for the improbable. In this sense, we also are unable to speak of anything too distinguished (even by negation) since we don't know of it. Yet, epistemic and ontological humility are not witnessed here. The critical problem continues, in likeness of Job and Peter: Declarations

⁴ Colin E. Gunton, *Act and Being: Towards a Theology of the Divine Attributes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 36.

are made of God who is not understood, and are made to distinguish God who is not known, that is, declarations by default emerging from human contextualization and the human shaping and construction signifying the epistemological, ontological and relational workings of reductionism. This problem continues in a negative form of hybrid theology (cf. convergence model of the gospel) until the epistemic field is opened to the whole of God. Moreover, Gunton discusses why this negative way is not as negative as it claims.⁵ The key is understanding the way of causality by a process of analogy to construct from below a hierarchy from the lower levels of reality to the higher until its final cause is declared—a being who is totally other than it. As with Job and Peter, however, such declarations say more than they suggest, that is, speaking for this being who is not known and understood, therefore speaking more about oneself than the Other.

In support of Aquinas' thinking on divine simplicity, Brian Davies responds to contemporary theologians who do not agree:

Could it be that they are mesmerized by the formula “God is a person”? I suspect that many of them are, and that by God is a person they mean that God is an invisible being (like Descartes's “I”), very like a human one, though lacking a body. If that is what they do mean, however, they are seriously out of step with what might be called the traditional Jewish/Islamic/Christian concept of God. If that is what they mean, perhaps we might also ask them if there is any reason at all to believe that God exists? You and I, corporeal things, things the essence of which does not guarantee our existence, things able to change in various ways as time goes on, things with attributes that come and go, are all, surely, things which raise the question, “And how come they exist at all?” The doctrine of divine simplicity is part of a complicated answer to this question.⁶

In the philosophy of religion, such an omnipotent, omniscient, perfect God took creative action in the beginning to form the universe and all in it, after which this Being either left it on its own (deism) or continued to be involved with it—the extent of which varies with each specific view of theism. Both deism and theism depend on a particular interpretive framework which determines the epistemic process it engages. Perhaps deists need to return to monitoring the universe to listen to the signs of life coming from outside the universe. Yet, the classical theistic picture of God—as self-contained and all sufficient, impassible, etc.—is also not the God of thematic relational action found in the self-disclosures of the Word in and from the beginning that ongoingly distinguishes the face of God. The interpretive framework from human shaping and construction has dominated philosophy's voice in this conversation. In part, this speaks to the Copernican shift in astronomy (the earth revolves around the sun) and its influence on philosophy: theocentricity was replaced by anthropocentricity. The direction of influence was no longer from certainty of God to certainty of the self but now from self-certainty to certainty of God. Hans Küng identifies this *methodical beginning* emerging from the human being, the subject, one's reason and freedom, as a paradigm shift that culminates

⁵ Colin E. Gunton, *Act and Being*, 60-66.

⁶ Brian Davies, “Simplicity” in Charles Taliaferro and Chad Meister, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2010), 45.

in a radical critique of the proofs of God.⁷ Moreover, if we account for reductionism, it would be evident that human contextualization had previously been well established as the primary determinant. This formalization is just a later consequence of further narrowing the epistemic field to what we know and can rationalize.⁸

Davies rebuttal to “God is person” also applies to the face of God. God’s face (*paneh Yahweh*) signifies the whole of God’s personal and vulnerable presence and intimate involvement, revealed ongoingly solely for the purpose and function of face-to-face relationship together—not to transmit referential information for us to form (and reform) into doctrine. In the OT, on the one hand, God’s face has clarity: as Jacob experienced in direct interaction and named the place Peniel, The Face of God (Gen 32:30); and as Moses experienced in face-to-face relationship together (Num 12:8); and the ancient poet boldly declared (Ps 17:15); and as unfolds in God’s definitive blessing (Num 6:24-26). On the other hand, there is ambiguity about God’s face: not only of claims to have seen God’s face but that they lived to tell it, since God said “you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live” (Ex 33:20, cf. Jn 1:18); and yet Jacob confirmed that “I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared” (Gen 32:30, NIV). The OT does not preclude that God has a face. Yet, is face merely an anthropomorphic analogy used to represent God, perhaps as Davies claims about “God is a person”?

In Hebrew, face (*paneh* and *paniyim*) points to the front view of someone, the significance of whose presence involves the presentation of the whole subject and not mere parts of the person—or merely an outward re-presentation of a person, as emerged in the primordial garden (Gen 3:7) and later formed a mask (*prosopon*, as worn in ancient Greek theatre). The front view of God as Subject and not a side view as Object is irreplaceable to know and understand God. A righteous face constitutes the presentation of the whole of who, what and how the subject-person is, and therefore can be counted on to be that person as subject (not object) in relationship together. For God, the face constitutes both this ontological reality of the presence of God as Subject and the relational outcome of the intimate involvement of Subject-God in relationship. Can we claim with the ancient poet to “behold your face in righteousness...satisfied, beholding your presence” (Ps 17:15), and then to be satisfied with anything less and any substitute of our personal God?

Christian faith has to be involved further and deeper than in just the identity of God. If our faith is to go beyond referential terms and its narrowed-down epistemic field, then it has to connect with the front (*paneh*) of the whole of God as Subject—that is, connect directly with the face-presence of God revealed in face-to-face relationship together (cf. 1 Chr 16:10-11; Ps 24:6; 27:8-9; 67:1-2; 80:3,17,19). Therefore, two unavoidable interrelated issues of the face need to be addressed: (1) subtle anthropomorphism intrinsic to human contextualization and the fragmentary human shaping of God’s face in surrounding contexts, and (2) the face (*prosopon*) functioning as

⁷ Hans Küng, *The Beginning of All Things: Science and Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 43-53.

⁸ In spite of this history, philosophical theology will hear a clearer voice to respond to for engaging this conversation. This is demonstrated, for example, by current scholarly efforts to clarify how many voices from outside the universe there are. That work addresses the issue of the “Threeness-oneness problem” and involves the theological and hermeneutic issues of the Trinity. A descriptive overview of this work, in interaction with systematic theology, is found in Thomas H. McCall, *Which Trinity? Whose Monotheism? Philosophical and Systematic Theologians on the Metaphysics of Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

a mask (as in early Greek theatre) that presents the face of Jesus from outer in (e.g. a stereotype), whose identity may not be congruent or even compatible with the whole person behind the face-mask. The first issue is critical for trinitarian theology and the second is crucial for trinitarian practice. And both are interrelated for defining our theology and practice, notably the *prosopon* of Jesus' person, and determining our ontology and function, that is, as either whole or reduced. This is unavoidable because this was disclosed by "the light of the knowledge of the glory [qualitative being, relational nature and vulnerable presence] of *the triune* God in the face of Jesus Christ"—just as Paul learned in his theological task (2 Cor 4:6).

A face from outer in is just a re-presentation of a person (e.g. ours in the mirror), which may not be a deception but still cannot be counted on for the whole person. God's face from outer in (i.e. in referential terms) is a reduced face of an Object that cannot distinguish the whole of God, and thus does not have the deeper profile necessary to be distinct from anthropomorphism. Only God's face as revealed from inner out in relational terms distinguishes the whole of God as Subject—clearly distinguished from mere parts of God as Object. At the same time, God's face from inner out does not distinguish the totality of God, only the whole of God; *whole* is neither totality nor parts.

On the whole and uncommon God's theological trajectory and intrusive relational path, the face of the Trinity's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement turned to engage us in relationship—just as Paul experienced that pivotal point on the Damascus road. The relational outcome of new relationship together in wholeness only emerges when Subject-Face makes relational connection with our face from inner out (distinct from a face-mask) for Face-to-face-to-Face reciprocal relationship together. This dynamic relational response of grace has been the face of YHWH's ongoing definitive blessing from the beginning that unfolded in the gospel of transformation to wholeness with the embodied face of Jesus' whole person. In the OT, YHWH's face is clear but not fully distinguished. With the whole Word, however, the face of YHWH is fully distinguished (i.e. whole-ly not totally) unmistakably. That is to say, fully distinguishing not the quantitative face of God (from outer in) but the qualitative face of God (in the depth of inner out), whose likeness Christ's whole person bore in his embodied face (*prosopon*, 2 Cor 4:6; Col 1:15; Jn 14:9)—just as our human face from inner out bears our likeness as the subject-person we are. Thus, the *prosopon* of Jesus Christ should not be confused with the mask (*prosopon*) worn in Greek theatre but is only the fully distinguished counterpart to the *pane*h (face, presence) of YHWH, disclosing the front profile of the whole and uncommon Trinity.

Ongoingly, to say the least, reductionism obscures God's face and interferes with face-to-Face connection by diminishing the primacy of relationship together, even by our unintentional counter-relational work—all while promoting substitutes for epistemological illusion in theology and ontological simulation in practice. Therefore, the ongoing relational imperative for our theology and practice is simply stated by the ancient poet in relational terms: "seek his face always" (*pane*h, Ps 105:4, NIV)—the front view of God as Subject—rendered also "seek his presence continually," signifying nothing less and no substitutes for vulnerable face-to-Face-to-face involvement (cf. Jer 2:27). Only 'Face' distinguishes who, what and how the whole of God is vulnerably present and intimately involved, without which our view of God is limited (perhaps to negative theology) and lacking the significance of relational connection.

The Deeper Profile of God's Face

On this whole basis (distinct from fragmentary), I readily acknowledge my lens focused on both the person and the face of God, yet in a reverse dynamic than what Davies pointed to earlier. The 'person' and 'face' essential to God and distinguished in the Trinity are embodied by Jesus' whole person, who—as Paul made definitive theologically—is the exact and whole “image of God...in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:4,6). Yet, in spite of God's self-disclosure in the incarnation, the deeper profile illuminating God's face is commonly not distinguished in our view of Jesus. Given the primacy of the incarnation, what 'face' is perceived and received from the embodied Word is the critical challenge *of* face that defines and determines what unfolds with the Word.

The whole person and substantive face of Jesus are not concepts or anthropomorphism imposed on him but rather his vulnerable function as “the image of the *transcendent* God...in *his person* all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” (Col 1:15,19), “in *his person* the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Col 2:9). The full profile of Jesus' face is the epistemological, hermeneutical, ontological and relational keys to the whole of God's glory (being, nature and presence, 2 Cor 4:6). Moreover, his person as the image of God (2 Cor 4:4, Col 1:15, cf. Jn 14:9)—along with the person of the Spirit, Jesus' relational replacement (Jn 14:16-18; 16:13-15; 2 Cor 3:17-18)—is essential for the human person both to know the qualitative relational significance and to have whole understanding of what it means to be and function as the person created in the image of God. There are certainly irreducible differences between God as Creator and creatures. However, as the substantive face of Jesus vulnerably disclosed (e.g. in his formative family prayer, Jn 17:21-23, cf. Col 2:9-10), there is also an irreducible likeness between the persons of the Trinity and the human person (including persons together) created in the image of the whole and uncommon God (cf. Col 3:10; Eph 4:24). Anything less and any substitute for God or humans are reductions rendered to reduced ontology and function.

The person in whole ontology and function presents the further challenge *of* and *for* face in full profile. To meet this challenge our “ears” have to have priority over our “mouths,” which may not be as easy as it sounds. As the Father made imperative, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him” (Mk 9:7); and as Jesus made imperative for his followers: “Then pay attention to how you listen” (Lk 8:18), and “Pay attention to what you hear; the measure you give will be the measure you get” (Mk 4:24). In other words, it is imperative to listen before we speak, giving priority to the communicative messages (both in qualitative content and relational significance) from the complex Subject, which is a necessary relational dynamic in all communication; unfortunately, but not unexpectedly, this dynamic has been reworked in the human condition with assumptions that bias or preclude listening. Quietly, for example, ‘method’ in scholarship imposes concepts on what we seek to know, giving priority to its own perception (view of simple Object), thus it essentially speaks before it listens.

Furthermore, in this relational epistemic process our “eyes” are even a higher priority than our “ears” and must antecede both our “mouths and “ears” as the determinant for their function; this was the lesson Job deeply experienced (Job 42:3-5). Yet, this hermeneutic lens should not be confused with the priority of observation in the

scientific method. This has less to do with the function of sight and critically involves how and what we see, most importantly the person constituted in the full profile of the face. When Jesus defines “the measure” (*metron, metreo*) used above, he identifies his followers’ perceptual-interpretive framework and lens, which determines what we will pay attention to and ignore and, therefore, what we see, hear and listen to. That is, to listen carefully and to understand what Jesus says, we not only need to understand the horizon (e.g. the defining context) of where Jesus is coming from, but we also need to account in this process for the horizon of where we are coming from—and the defining and determining influence our own context may exert as it converges with Jesus’ context.⁹ Without knowing our own horizon and its influence on the framework and lens we use, we cannot openly listen to Jesus and Paul to speak for themselves on their own terms. ‘Method’, as noted above, signifies a generalizing bias of rationalizing from a scientific paradigm rooted in the Enlightenment, which reduces reality by narrowing down the epistemic field for better explanation. This modernist framework basically “speaks” before it listens, thereby defining the terms that determine the results—which predictably prevent or limit the essential relational outcome..

As these two horizons converge, the primary determinant of how the messages communicated are to be understood for the listener/reader must always come from the context of the speaker. Certainly, some secondary influence still remains from the listener’s side. Yet, in the relational epistemic process the hermeneutical dynamic involves successive interactions between listener and speaker, reader and text, in the reflexive process of a ‘hermeneutical cone’¹⁰ for further and deeper understanding. Throughout the process, however, the speaker’s context emerges as the primary determinant without negotiation with the listener’s side. Even with this priority, any assumed three-dimensional view flattens out when the Word is perceived in referential terms. Moreover, the 3-D dynamic of a hermeneutical cone/spiral regresses to a recurring cycle, if not a perpetual or even vicious circle. The Word’s intensity of meaning and depth of understanding emerge only from whole relational terms, which can only be received and thereby known by engaging the Word’s relational-specific context and relational epistemic process. Yet, this hermeneutic process is not engagement in referential terms but is involvement with the Word in reciprocating relational terms; and this hermeneutic function is fulfilled by the Spirit’s reciprocal relational involvement (as in Jn 16:14).

And Jesus’ context cannot be limited to historical human contextualization but needs to include “in the beginning” and his relational context from outside the universe constituted within the Trinity, which has been vulnerably accessible in the human context by the trinitarian relational presence of family love. His defining-context horizon is both nonnegotiable to human terms and irreducible to human shaping and construction; and thus his defining context is never subject to human context, even though it certainly is subjected to human contexts. This composes the three-dimensional lens required to

⁹ See a discussion on two horizons by Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 42–46.

¹⁰ This composite term is taken from what more accurately defines the process not as a circle but as a ‘hermeneutical spiral’, which James D.G. Dunn describes as a ‘three-dimensional cone’. “Criteria for a Wise Reading of a Biblical Text” in David F. Ford and Graham Stanton, eds., *Reading Texts, Seeking Wisdom* (London: SCM Press, 2003), 51.

distinguish the whole and uncommon Trinity, and anything less and any substitutes distort the view of God—making God’s presence and involvement ambiguous if not elusive.

With this trinitarian relational context and process in focus, consider the pre-Damascus-road Paul. Here was a Jew of religious conviction, impassioned to eliminate the embodied shape of his religious roots and the embodied reshaping of his religious convictions; he was dedicated to the demise of this new embodiment of Jesus—both Jesus’ distinguished Face and faces following—threatening his religion by redefining the terms. Consider the post-Damascus-road Paul. Here was a Jew of deeper conviction of faith, impassioned to eliminate instead the human shaping of the Face’s profile emerging from his religious roots and the human terms reducing the new depths of his faith and the whole gospel. What brought this change in Paul? The simple answer is *who*—the substantive Face, who not only turned and shined on Paul but who was vulnerably present and relationally involved directly in Paul’s life, Face to face. Certainly then, Paul experienced not merely a Christophany but nothing less and no substitutes of the substantive Face distinguishing the whole and uncommon God.

The challenge essential *of* Face in full profile goes unmet by merely embodying the Face. Certainly, the incarnation is essential theology; and in spite of how ‘critical’ (historical, form, literary) the embodied Word has become in biblical studies, no human shape or construct distinguishes the substantive Face unless the Face distinguishes his own Self. This profile goes further than the details of *what* the embodied Face disclosed of himself (notably his teachings and ministry) to more deeply account for *how* the Face was present and involved in the human context by the integral nature of *what* and *who* the embodied Face was. What unfolds from the Word and emerges clearly is the substantive Face, who distinguished the whole and uncommon Trinity in the qualitative relational significance essential to the trinitarian ontology and function of ontology and function of YHWH..

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

This becomes problematic for what we talk about for Jesus. For example, Jesus’ ethical practice is certainly special and would be beneficial to emulate. Yet, ethics is not what distinguishes the whole of Jesus, even though it is an important distinction commonly used for Jesus. There is an essential (critical if you wish) difference between a special Face and the distinguished Face. Both may be associated with the embodied Face (e.g. in a convergence model). A special Face, however, is attached to Jesus by a narrowing-down process from a conventional view inside the universe that attempts to

better explain Jesus, notably from outer in by what he does (hence ethics). Even with good intentions, a special Face is incompatible with the embodied Face from outside the universe—and though complimentary in christological discourse *about* the Face on narrowed-down fragmentary terms, it is still unable to speak *of* the Face in whole terms. The distinguished Face beyond human contextualization emerges only from the Trinity’s relational dynamic in congruence with the whole ontology and function constituting the full profile of the face of Jesus’ person from inner out. Therefore, the distinguished Face can only be distinguished when he distinguishes his Self in the constituting relational context and process of God’s relational dynamic, just as the embodied Face emerged. What emerges that is distinguished beyond a mere distinction of special?

In its relational context and process, the Trinity’s relational dynamic has unfolded from the beginning in communicative action, which is conjointly qualitative from inner out, yet not mystical, and always in relationship, never isolated or disengaged (e.g. as some spiritual disciplines imply). This nature of the Trinity’s relational dynamic is evident in the full profile of the global Face to fulfill the Trinity’s thematic relational response of grace with family love. What becomes further evident of the Trinity’s relational dynamic unfolding is witnessed in *how* the global Face distinguishes his Subject-person and *what* he distinguishes of the trinitarian persons, both of which are not distinguished by or in a special Face of whatever localized variation.

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

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

preserved” (Gen 32:29-30); the Face who is set apart and distinguished from any and all other faces, whose definitive blessing “shall put my name on *those in whole relationship together Face to face*” (Num 6:27); whose relational dynamic unfolds conclusively in the face of Jesus whom the prophet named ‘distinguished’. As this relational process unfolded, ‘what’s in a name?’ became inseparable from ‘what’s in a face?’ and thus God’s name only has significance (even in worship and prayer) when distinguished unmistakably by the Face. Is this the face of Jesus who is distinguished when we commonly close our prayers “in his name”?

Also important in the meaning of that which is separate, the process to be ‘distinguished’ implies that only the distinguished name can distinguish himself and cannot come from a value-attachment of a beholder. This was the issue others had with what is ‘wonderful’. When Sarah heard of her pending pregnancy from God, she used biological “science” to narrow down her knowledge for a conventional explanation from inside the universe. On this basis, she also spoke for the God from outside the universe, thereby making the face of God *un-distinguished*. Offended, God responded: “Is anything too ‘distinguished’ [*pala*] for the Lord?” (Gen 18:10-14). Job implied acknowledgment of the distinguished God (Job 21:22) yet he attempted to speak for what is distinguished (*pala*) from his view inside the universe, and consequently he also reduced the face of God to obscurity in the *un-distinguished* (Job 42:3).

Sarah and Job contradicted what the ancient poet understood, the poet who did not attempt to grasp the distinguished ‘from above’ on the basis of what can only be indistinguishable ‘from below’: “Such knowledge is too wonderful [*pil’iy*] for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it” (Ps 139:6)—which is an assumption negative theology makes apart from God’s self-disclosure. Yet, the underlying issue in these examples is less epistemological and is rooted in the primacy of relationship. It is indispensable to understand that the distinguished Face does not and cannot distinguish himself in isolation or disengaged from relationship. If he did, he would no longer distinguish *what* the whole of God is and *how* God is. Relationship is always primary for God, whether in the beginning for the God outside the universe or from the beginning for the God now also inside the universe. The God inside the universe presents the challenge of Face who is vulnerably present and relationally involved.

Furthermore, inside the universe the face of God becomes distinguished for those ‘from below’ when he emerges from behind what is signified by ‘the veil’—a metaphor for the relational barrier/distance preventing significant relational connection (e.g. Sarah) and deeper relational involvement (e.g. Job). The Face is not distinguished as long as a veil exists in the relationship, which results in not knowing and understanding God—that is, unmistakably as distinguished in the deeper profile of the face of Jesus’ whole person. Neither God’s face behind the curtain-veil nor our face in front of the curtain-veil allows for the relational connection necessary to be involved Face to face (cf. Heb 10:19-22). The relational dynamic of the Face converging with our face in Face-to-face relationship is disengaged when relational distance exists—either the relational distance of God’s face or our face. This relational dynamic was evident when Moses made relational connection with God Face to face without the veil, after which he had to cover his radiant face with the veil to meet the people who could only observe from their relational distance (Ex 33:9-11; 34:33-35). This relational dynamic was made conclusive by Paul for the

relational consequence of the veil's presence and the relational outcome from the distinguished Face removing the veil (2 Cor 3:13-18; cf. Mk 15:37-38).

This further presents the challenge not only *of* face but also *for* face. Vulnerable involvement in relationship without the veil was the unfolding relational dynamic of *how* the face of God was distinguished. The vulnerable presence and relational involvement of the distinguished Face integrally distinguished his own Face and composed the relational connection necessary Face to face for relationship together in wholeness—contrary to, and in conflict with, fragmented, separated or broken relationship with the veil.

The unfolding relational dynamic distinguishing the face of God became more definitive in relationship when the ancient poet requested from God: “Wondrously show [*pala*] your steadfast love” (Ps 17:7) or “Show the wonder of your great love” (NIV). The latter is easily rendered to comparative terms for a special distinction in the same category or kind of all love, hence the common pursuit for special love. Yet, the poet’s request implies for the relational dynamic of God to distinguish his own love, not merely to show a special love defined within the limits of all love in the universe. For the distinguished Face, there is still an element of mystery no matter how distinguished the Face is; and we can allow for and may be able to live with mystery for God. For love, however, we appear to need certainty and would not want any mystery about God’s love; and thus we try to explain God’s love in referential terms comparative to love inside the universe. Distinguished love cannot be constrained to these limited terms and, by its nature, will also still have an element of mystery no matter how distinguished by the distinguished Face. Yet, and this is important to embrace, this also accounts for distinguished love to be open-ended, that is, to be deeply experienced without limits or end, as only God can constitute (just as Jesus prayed, Jn 17:23,26). Nothing less and no substitute of this love is what the ancient poet requested from God. And any attempt to “fully” explain God’s love can no longer distinguish love from the God from outside the universe. Both the distinguished Face and distinguished love are contingent on God’s self-disclosure. Though God’s self-disclosure is complete in terms of being whole (*pleroma*, Col 1:19), we can never assume that the disclosure of the Face and love distinguished before us is complete in terms of the totality of God. Mystery remains by necessity for the distinguished Face and love, yet without the gap from anything less or any substitute of their being whole.

Additionally, distinguished love is not about the wonders of what God is capable of *doing*—another reductionism of God defined by what God does, which invariably engages a comparative process in human terms with distinctions of more or less, special or so-so. This reduced lens also reinforces the limited perception behind the issue “what has God done for me lately?” which is evident in Israel’s history. The reality of ‘all love’ is its conventional definition about *what to do*, in which quantity exceeds quality and by which sacrifice achieves its highest rank (e.g. the sacrificial love of *agape*). Distinguished love certainly involves action; this action of love, however, is relational action that only defines *how to be involved in relationship*. In contrast to love defined by ‘what to do’—that may benefit a need of another without being involved with their person—distinguished love engages the depth of relational involvement with the other person(s) with nothing less and no substitute of one’s whole person, and on this basis vulnerably sharing one’s self, not merely giving one’s deeds or resources. The depth of relational involvement unique to distinguished love to set this love apart from all love can be and is

fulfilled only by the face of God. This is evidenced in the covenant and *Torah*. The covenant was no mere framework for religious identity that the *Torah* served for its identity markers—although they easily become just that when perceived in referential language, as the people of Israel consistently did. The face of God turned to bring change and establish a new relationship together in wholeness, as promised, that is, the covenant relationship distinguished by love in the covenant of distinguished love (Dt 7:6-9). And the *Torah* is God's terms (*dabar*, Dt 29:1,9) for reciprocal relationship together Face to face—the *whole* terms distinguished by distinguished love (Dt 7:10-13), which Jesus made definitive in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:17-48).

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

This goes far beyond a special distinction of wonderful love from a wonderful person with a special face, even if that love is perceived to be from God. When the distinguished Face distinguished love, he integrally distinguished *how* the face of God is vulnerably present and relationally involved with other persons in the human context, and also *what* is the qualitative ontology and relational nature of the whole of God (as in God's glory) constituting the Face's relational response. No human terms and categories can define or determine the *how* and *what* of the distinguished Face.

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

Thus, when Paul directly asked Jesus “Who are you?” (Acts 9:5), he received a relational response beyond referential information about Jesus to have the relational epistemic connection to know the person in Jesus’ face. When Jesus unequivocally declared to the Father “I have made your name known” and “made your name known to them” (Jn 17:6,26), he was not referring to the transmission of information about the name but summarized his relational communication of the whole person to know only in relationship. The name in this ancient context is not simply an identity marker or title (cf. Gen 32:27-30; Ex 33:17-19). Name is indistinguishable from the person in relational language; yet in referential language the person is not always distinguished in the name. Jesus’ face presented only the person from inner out, and Paul’s experience of the whole person presented by Jesus defined his Christology (illuminated in 2 Cor 4:6).

A person presented to others can become confusing, however, and this presentation needs to be understood as a composite process influenced by two factors shaping the person presented: (1) the person’s surrounding context and (2) how that person desires to be seen by others in those contexts.¹¹ Tension is likely between these two influences on the shape of any person presented until that person establishes an identity compatible to, if not congruent with, the surrounding context. The person Jesus presented certainly was neither immune to these influences nor untouched by that tension between them. Yet, how much these two sources of influence shaped the person Jesus presented remains for many a christological problem.

This further challenges us in the ongoing issue of our interpretive framework and the epistemic process we engage, which Jesus already made imperative for seeing, understanding and responding to his whole person (Mk 4:24; Lk 10:21). The reality is that the ‘measure’ we use will determine the Jesus we get. Our ‘measure’, therefore, signifies our theological anthropology that actually antecedes our Christology and underlies the epistemic process of *who* and *what* we learn about or of the person presented. This is evidenced by the following: learning either quantitative information about a person from outer in and what he does in situations, or learning qualitative understanding of the person from inner out and how he is involved in relationships; either his referential words and teachings or his relational communication and messages; as a result learning about a less personal and fragmentary person or learning of the personal and whole person. This is the extent of the person defined from the working theological anthropology we use; accordingly, it also becomes the profile we can expect of that person. For the person presented by Jesus, the measure used is clearly definitive that results in either the further and deeper relational outcome (“still more will be given”) or the relational consequence of reductionism (“be taken away,” Mk 4:25).

Theological interpretation correctly focuses on Scripture as communication, which helps put a face on those words in Scripture to hear as distinguished words from the mouth of God (Dt 8:3; Isa 40:5; 55:11; Mt 4:4). Yet it is insufficient to stop at communication because this communication is always in relationship—the relational function which should never be assumed, taken for granted or ignored. Its importance is evidenced in three relational messages that compose the significance of every communication: messages (often implied) defining what the communicator says (1) about himself, (2) about the person addressed, and/or (3) about their relationship together.

¹¹ For a classic social psychological study to help understand the second influence on this process, see Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959).

These relational messages, whether explicit or implicit, are critical to understand since they provide deeper meaning to the content of the words communicated—for example, consider the relational messages in Jesus’ words to Zacchaeus (Lk 19:5, to be discussed in next chap.). This deeper meaning helps us interpret God’s relational purpose for the words communicated, which is necessary to establish their full context for whole understanding.

God’s communication always declares God’s relational nature, and this is enacted only in God’s relational context and process. Relationship, therefore, is not merely supplemental or supportive to the communication but the primary purpose for the communication. And what ‘face’ is put on the words of God determines what priority the relationship has. In terms of what ‘face’, it is critical to distinguish between anthropomorphisms in language *about* God (that result in allegorical interpretation) and the relational language *of* God. What may have the appearance of anthropomorphism in ‘the face of God’ is in reality the relational language of God’s relational nature, who created human persons with ‘face’ in God’s likeness only for relationship together (intrinsic to Gen 2:18,25).

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

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

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

2:9) and the hermeneutic necessary to be whole (e.g. 1 Cor 14:33; Eph 2:14; Col 3:15), which he made definitive also for the Athenians (Acts 17:23).

‘Embodying of the theology and hermeneutic of the whole gospel’ means to go from distant, or more abstract, to functional reality. This necessarily involves the strategic, tactical and functional shifts unfolding with the Word (to be discussed in the next chap.), which take us from quantitative-referential beliefs or concepts of God to the qualitative-relational experience of the whole of God—just as Jesus initiated the strategic shift with the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:21-26). The process of embodying is neither a conceptually distant reality nor an abstraction of reality, as the Samaritan woman witnessed (Jn 4:28-30). Relational embodying composes the theology of God’s presence further than the quantitative Object to be observed to the depths of this qualitative Subject present vulnerably for reciprocal involvement in relationship together face to face, with nothing less and no substitutes for either face.

Moreover, it is critical for our whole understanding to be unequivocal about the following: Embodiment emerged with the incarnation but was enacted in its relational dynamic even before the creation of the universe (as Paul clarified theologically, Eph 1:3-5). The whole of God’s thematic relational response of grace from the beginning is *the* relational context and process that by necessity integrally contextualizes the incarnation together with those in human history. Therefore, the embodied Face is inseparable and indistinguishable from the face of God from outside the universe, and from the Face engaged in creation in its beginning (Jn 1:1-3). Furthermore, the embodied Face is inseparable and indistinguishable from the Face who turned and shined on us in definitive blessing from the beginning to “bring the change needed to establish new relationship together in wholeness” (Num 6:24-26). God’s thematic relational response of grace can certainly be called a metanarrative. This can understandably raise suspicion. Yet, those who object to metanarratives are correct only insofar as they discount any ideological construction and functional shaping that impose a template ‘from below’ on the universe and all in it. In this regard, there is a place for a hermeneutic of suspicion to retrieve the words unfolding from outside the universe¹²; and the deconstruction of human shaping and construction today are both necessary and urgent. Deconstruction, however, is insignificant and serves no purpose if that is all replaced by other human shaping and construction. This is our predicament if we are limited only to views ‘from below’ inside the universe. Most important, if those objecting to metanarratives also discount the metanarrative of the relational dynamic from outside the universe, the relational consequence is the absence of the whole’s presence and involvement and thereby the loss of ‘what holds together the world in its innermost’—making any notion of the whole ambiguous and experience of wholeness elusive. If hubris does not make secondary the concern for the human condition, we need to speak less and listen more to the words from outside the universe unfolding from the beginning.

The whole of both the embodied Face and the gospel can only be seen, heard and understood in their relational beginning in God’s integral relational dynamic—the relational dynamic defining and determining nothing less and no substitutes—unfolding in the whole of God’s thematic relational response of grace to the human condition. Besides the hermeneutical issues identifying the whole of God and God’s communicative

¹² For a discussion on the hermeneutics of suspicion and retrieval, see Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 344-78.

action in self-disclosure, this dynamic identifies the relational problem many persons throughout Scripture evidenced: first, in maintaining relational barriers/distance in their relations with God other than Face to face (as critiqued in Isa 29:13), and second, having similar relational barriers/distance notably with the embodied Face vulnerably unfolded before their faces—that is, of those from his hometown (Mk 6:1-6), of his disciples (Jn 14:9), and of religious leaders (Jn 5:16-40). The question now facing all of us then becomes, **what is the deeper profile that distinguishes the whole of God’s face?**

As noted earlier about a face, a focus on God’s face in referential terms (outer in) remains central unless there is a deeper profile of God’s face from inner out. A referential view of God’s face does not tell us much about God and specifically for knowing and understanding Jesus’ whole person. This lack or gap was the relational issue for the early disciples, who followed a limited face of Jesus for three intensive years, prompting unavoidably “Don’t you now me even after I have been *involved with* you such a long time” (Jn 14:9). The disciples certainly knew volumes of information *about* Jesus, nevertheless they didn’t know the person in the face from inner out—perhaps a precursor to theological education. Yet, this limited view of God’s face and interrelated incomplete Christology continue to prevail in much theology and practice today.

If our view of the person in Jesus’ face is to be complete, and thus whole, we need to look to John’s Gospel for primary significance of christological study—which is problematic for a historical-critical approach. The Gospel of John provides us with God’s view from outside the universe. More than a narrative account of aspects of Jesus’ earthly life, John gives us the cosmological view that extends beyond the universe. It is from outside the universe that the Word emerges (not originates) and arrived in human context (Jn 1:1-4, 10). Though quantitatively embodied, the Word was not received relationally (v.11) because the whole Word functioned qualitatively from inner out, that is, further and deeper than a quantitative interpretive lens (focused outer in) pays attention to, or if it can, it simply ignores. John’s Gospel helps us understand that the incarnation of Jesus’ person is both an epistemological issue and a hermeneutic issue (vv.12,14,18).

The epistemic process of knowing the person presented is defined by either an outer-in framework primarily in quantitative referential terms, or by an inner-out framework primarily in qualitative relational terms. Interpretation of the life of Jesus is determined by each of these frameworks, and that framework forms our interpretive lens for the extent and depth of Jesus’ person it pays attention to or ignores. The consequence or outcome that unfolds is directly correlated to the perceptual-interpretive framework defining the epistemic process engaged and determining the hermeneutic employed. The quantitative framework with its outer-in lens is fragmentary and can only aggregate a view of Jesus from parts or aspects of his person; consequently this christological view is incomplete and lacks the whole person. The qualitative framework with its inner-out lens goes further and deeper in a relational epistemic process of *syniemi* (cf. Mk 8:17) for the whole knowledge and understanding of the person Jesus presented (*synesis*, cf. Col 2:2-4) to receive and connect in relationship together with the whole of God. This includes the three relational messages that deepen the qualitative presence and relational involvement of Jesus’ person and deepen our relational response in reciprocal relationship—just as Zacchaeus experienced from and with Jesus (Lk 19:6-10).

Therefore, the epistemological and hermeneutic issues are critical for the Jesus we pay attention to both in and from the beginning, as the evangelist made definitive at the

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

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

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

What defines the person Jesus presented emerges primarily with these three definitive issues, which integrally unfolded from the beginning and throughout the incarnation and into post-ascension—particularly *into* Paul. Aside from human shaping, Jesus’ person presents unmistakably the deeper profile of God’s face from inner out.

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

When Jesus’ parents finally realized that he was missing from their caravan returning home from Jerusalem, they went back to find him at the temple. This boy was AWOL (absent without leave/permission), and his parents clearly let him know what was custom and legitimately expected of him (v.48). Yet, while respecting them and affirming his involvement in their surrounding context (v.51), Jesus simply asked them the questions (likely as an extension of God’s questions and a precursor to his questions, noted earlier): “Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” (v.49). Hearing “must be in my Father’s house” probably was shocking to them—especially for Joseph in a normative patriarchal family. Thus it would be reasonable that “they did not understand...” (*syniemi*, v.50)—after all, at this stage they

had insufficient pieces to put together to understand the person Jesus presented (cf. Jn 2:1-5, to be discussed shortly). And apparently Jesus patiently accommodated them since he did not press the issue, at least at this stage (cf. v.51 and later in Jn 2:6-8).

While Mary and Joseph could not yet learn and understand the person Jesus presented, we have the opportunity to engage the relational epistemic process with the Spirit to begin the process of *syniemi* for the *synesis* of the whole of Jesus' person and thereby the whole of God. When Jesus said "I must be in my Father's house," he was neither identifying being in a certain place (like church today) nor merely defining certain things for him to do (as serving has become). These activities easily become reductionist substitutes that do not distinguish the significance of Jesus' action (cf. Mt 21:12-16). This interaction reveals that even before adulthood Jesus' face distinguished the person he presented in human contexts and clearly declared in relational terms (not referential terms) the identity of who and what he is. How so?

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

In addition, "to be" (*eimi* as a copula) also connects Jesus' person to the primary context that did define him: "be in my Father's house." The temple (or church today) is not a mere place but represents where God dwells intimately for relationship together (2 Sam 7:5-7; Jn 14:23; 1 Cor 3:16; Eph 2:21-22; cf. Mk 11:17). In this disclosure Jesus addresses two critical issues about the presentation of his person: (1) *how* that person is defined, and also (2) *what* defines that person. *How* his whole person was defined was not primarily by human contextualization (though secondary influence remained) but by a further and deeper context: "be *in*" identifies the whole of God's relational context of family. It is *in* this distinguished context that the main significance of the person presented is found—making secondary the influence of all human contexts. And *what* defined the person Jesus presented from this context was not about what he did (or the role he served) but rather who he was by being in relationship with his Father: "to be in my Father is *who* I am and by that nature *how* I must be," to paraphrase Jesus (cf. Jn 10:37-38).

In spite of all the things Jesus did—by which we usually define him—it was this relationship that defined his whole person (cf. Jn 5:19-21; 8:28; 10:38b; 14:20a; 17:21). As Jesus presented as early as twelve, "*who* his person is" was not Joseph and Mary's son but the Son of his Father together in the whole of God (the Trinity); and "*what* his person

is” was neither defined by human contexts nor by what he did in those contexts. To be defined primarily by human contexts and what one does in those contexts would be the result of reductionism; and re-defining Jesus’ person on these terms makes evident a theological anthropology of human shaping and construction that antecedes Christology to re-present Jesus’ person. Yet, even before adulthood, in the midst of tension with reductionist influence, the whole of Jesus’ person emerged.

This whole person also emerged on the Damascus road as the person Jesus presented to Paul, whose presence must by the nature of his person be understood further and deeper than a Christophany. Though Jesus’ parents did not understand the whole person presented vulnerably before them, Paul was accountable to *syniemi*, as we are. By presenting his whole person and presence to others, Jesus’ communication and level of relational engagement with them challenged their theological assumptions—most notably their theological anthropology defining their ontology and function, and the related critical issues of *how* they are being defined and *what* is defining them. Theological anthropology and Christology begin their integral convergence with Jesus’ person and presence emerging to make definitive theological anthropology, rather than theological anthropology re-presenting Jesus and re-defining Christology. The latter is from reductionism, that which ongoingly challenged the person Jesus presented to submerge his presence and that we have to account for in our theology and practice.

When we see the face of Jesus from inner out, this whole person keeps emerging to take us beyond a mere introduction to different parts of Jesus (namely his teachings and deeds) to encounter the face of the whole of God. Encountering the whole of God involved not only the deity of Jesus’ person as Son but equally involved the person of the Father. On this ontological and relational basis, Jesus was frustrated with Philip’s request to “show us the Father and we will be satisfied” (Jn 14:8). Obviously, Philip did not wake up that morning seeing God’s face as the ancient poet experienced (Ps 17:15). Jesus distinguished unmistakably the face of God, therefore “whoever has seen me, *the person in my face from inner out*, has seen the Father” (Jn 14:9). Unless we are willing to go deeper to engage the whole profile of Jesus’ face, we can only have a limited view of his person—and, like the early disciples, will not know him, and thus know and understand the whole of God.

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

As we go back to Jesus’ baptism, this may raise more curious thought about his need to “sanctify myself” (Jn 17:19). Why were these necessary for Jesus? Yet his

baptism was not the same baptism that John the Baptist called for (Mt 3:1-2, Lk 3:3), since he had not sinned and did not need to repent. By what was necessarily his relational action, Jesus fully identifies in public with those who have repented and are prepared to receive the kingdom of God—not by ritual observance but by relational connection. Accordingly, his baptism makes evident to them that the person he presents is whole, complete and can be counted on to be who, what and how he is—that is, what is insufficiently rendered in referential terms but is “fulfilled” (complete, make whole, *pleroo*) in relational terms as “the whole (*pasan*) righteousness” (Mt 3:15), which Paul made conclusive as Jesus’ whole ontology and function for the church (Eph 1:23).

Jesus therefore presents to them publicly in his baptism the kingdom of God (cf. Mt 12:28)—or in more relational terms, the whole of God’s family, as the Trinity converges openly in function in this distinguished interaction of the full presence of God (Mt 3:16-17). In the full significance of his baptism, Jesus discloses the trinitarian relational context of family and the trinitarian relational process of family love (“my Son whom I love”), as well as demonstrates the redemptive nature (the old dies and the new rises) of the relational progression necessary for his followers to the whole of God. Moreover, “I sanctify myself” in human contexts only for this purpose “so that they also may be sanctified” in their ontology and function to be whole and thus also be distinguished in human contexts—the only purpose and outcome which compose the relational significance of his words. In these same words, the face of Jesus composes the gospel of transformation to wholeness—which is the basis for the Father making this relational imperative at the counterpart experience of Jesus’ baptism: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!” (Mk 9:7, NIV)

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

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

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

Jesus’ response to Mary is no longer filial when he addresses Mary simply as “woman” (*gyne*, general term for woman, married or not). This redefines the nature of Jesus’ involvement with Mary from the human context to God’s relational context of

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

Yet, Jesus never removed himself from the human context (not to mean every situation), nor avoided the tension this created. This was not only the nature of his whole ontology and function but signified his particular purpose for his followers also to be whole in ontology and function in those contexts. Thus he was involved in his relationship with Mary and neither distanced his person from the sociocultural context represented in the wedding situation nor dismissed the cultural means used to define persons (in this situation, the honor of the wedding hosts who would have incurred shame without the wine). Contrary to an assimilation process, however, the significance of Jesus' involvement is directly a relational outcome of the nature of who, what and how he is—his whole person that is never defined by what he does (miracles) nor by what he has (e.g. the means to do miracles). Jesus then could respond to Mary and accommodate the sociocultural situation as long as his person was not reduced and his function not diminished or minimized.

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

How does his miracle fit this sociocultural situation? Did Jesus merely misuse his power in a rather insignificant situation with no apparent purpose? Or did Jesus diminish

his purpose by this miracle? Taken out of context, either explanation can be made. Yet, given our discussion of the person Jesus presented, how is this miracle in this situation—about wine at a prolonged wedding reception (commonly up to seven days), perhaps in overindulgent celebration since they ran out of wine—significant for who, what and how Jesus is?

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

Since this Gospel narrative is the first recorded miraculous sign of Jesus (Jn 2:11), this happened early in his public ministry and in the disciples’ involvement with him. Jesus used this situation to take the opportunity to build further and deeper relationship with his disciples. Given that Jesus did not define his person by what he did, the miracle was neither to draw attention to himself nor for the benefit of the general public (cf. Jn 2:9)—as if *apokalypto* were his purpose. This *semeion* was a disclosure of his whole person presented to the disciples for relationship together—as *phaneroo* indicates in “He thus revealed his glory” (v.11, NIV). While it may be clear how disclosing “his glory” could have helped the disciples theologically, what is the functional significance of “his glory” that would take them further and deeper into relationship together?

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

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

The main idea of ‘the glory of God’ denotes the revelation of God’s being, nature and presence to us, that is, the whole of who, what and how God is. Our initial

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

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

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

That which is God's glory is "his glory." Who, what and how God is is who, what and how Jesus is (Jn 10:38b; 12:45; 14:9). Yet it is critical to distinguish that this disclosure (*phaneroo*) is not about the mere exhibit (*apokalypto*) by Jesus of the ontology of God; and any Christology that is embedded only in this for foundational purpose is insufficient and incomplete. The person Jesus presents is the vulnerable embodiment of the functional whole of God's presence in relationship. Disclosing the whole of God in relationship is *the incarnation principle* of 'nothing less and no substitutes'; a complete Christology must also be 'nothing less and no substitutes'. This is who, what and how Jesus is and "his glory" disclosed in relational terms to his disciples for further and deeper relationship. Because Jesus vulnerably extended (the *how*) his whole person with heart from inner out (the *who*)—'nothing less and no substitutes'—to them for intimate

relationship (the *what*), the narrative of the wedding concludes with “his disciples *trusted* in him” (Jn 2:11)—not merely believed in him or had re-formed faith in him. That is, “his disciples could respond back and open themselves to him in further trust and deeper involvement”—not based on what Jesus did (a miracle) but based on his whole person and presence vulnerably presented to them. This was the further and deeper relationship together that Jesus opened to them in the relational epistemic process for the relational progression to the whole of God, who was illuminated only by the deeper profile of Jesus’ face to constitute this relational connection.

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

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

As Jesus experienced, the pressure to be redefined by reductionist influences is ongoing. Consequently, Jesus was vulnerably responsive to someone for relationship only on his terms, though he was vulnerably involved with anyone. Later in Jerusalem, many persons believed in him because of the miracles he was doing. Despite their response to him, “Jesus would not entrust himself to them” (Jn 2:23-25). Their response was not to his whole person (“his glory”) and for relationship on his terms. For Jesus to respond positively back to them would have necessitated redefining himself by their reductionist terms, which would not have involved relationship further and deeper with the whole of God. Jesus never compromised who, what and how he is for the sake of gaining followers (as in Jn 6:25-66). These were not the kind of followers he came to call, since his vulnerable presence and relational involvement constitutes the call to be whole, which then necessitates the call to be redefined, transformed and made whole in the depth of his relational context—while in human contexts.

Moreover, by necessity Jesus’ whole ontology and function address the issue of being able to distinguish a person’s source of validation, confirmation and affirmation. What is our primary source of these and as a result where do we functionally entrust the ontology of our person and the personness or -hood we practice: the human context or God’s context? Jesus’ unwillingness to respond back to the desires of these so-called followers is a vital distinguishing indicator of leadership in contrast to those who build a following on reductionist terms, albeit with good intentions. It also points to the significance we give to ‘serving’ in order to validate, confirm or affirm our discipleship, despite Jesus’ clear relational terms for serving him (Jn 12:26). This further helps us distinguish in our life and contexts the difference between what I call ‘*discipleshipisms*’ (the reductionist substitutes signifying our terms) and what is the clearly distinguished

discipleship of Jesus' call to "Follow me, *my whole person*" in ongoing reciprocal relationship together face to face. For Jesus, discipleship is nonnegotiable to our terms and is irreducible to anything less and any substitutes for whole ontology and function.

The revelation of the glory of God in the face of Jesus constitutes the whole profile of God's face that is irreplaceable to distinguish unmistakably the whole of God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement for face-to-face relationship together. Even the most rigorous of spiritual disciplines will find God's presence elusive apart from engaging this deeper profile of God's face. We all are accountable for this face ("Don't you know me yet?"), whether or not we are willing to go deeper to engage God's face beyond an anthropomorphism to connect in relationship with our face beyond a face-mask. 'Beyond our face-mask' is pivotal for relational connection because our face from outer in can have many forms; and this can render our face to illusion and simulation even as we worship. For example, Jesus exposed this illusion and simulation in those who worshipped with "their lips" from an outer-in face, all while the heart of their person from inner out was "far from me" (relationally distant, Mk 7:6-8). Connecting with the unmistakable face of God requires compatible faces that are involved together in the relational process distinguished only by God's relational terms—even over well-established religious traditions, as Jesus exposed.

The challenge *of Face* thus distinguishes inseparably the unavoidable challenge *for face* in order for the relational outcome of the gospel to be distinguished.

Connecting with the Face of God

In human life and practice, the surrounding context (namely culture) commonly establishes the priorities of what is important. To the extent that our identity is shaped and our function is determined by these priorities, we can say that we are products of our context or times. In our period of human history in the global context, the priorities of this larger context are having a profound effect on the priorities of the local context—partially positive but mainly negative. The limited positive effect involves helping people to look beyond a provincial identity and function for connection in the global community—albeit an elusive connection, if not an illusory community. The negative impact has been the conflict or the reduction that global priorities have had on any qualitative and relational priorities in the local context, therefore increasingly shifting, embedding and enslaving persons in the secondary (mainly for quantitative gains). And, as neuroscience would confirm, this development is taking its toll on the minds and bodies of those affected.

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

The current period of globalization in human history is neither unprecedented as commonly perceived (cf. humanity in the beginning) nor sufficient basis to expect significant change as some propose (cf. the tower of Babel, Gen 11:1-4). Jesus connected this local family to the definitive larger context and deeper change necessary for human identity and function to become involved in the qualitative-relational whole, and therefore in what is primary and not merely secondary—namely, whole persons in the primacy of relationship together.

Consider the interactions Jesus had with two of these close followers and examine the relational distance or depth of relational connection they had with the face of Jesus. These two were sisters, Martha and Mary, whom Jesus loved along with their brother Lazarus (Jn 11:5). When defined by what they do, these sisters are commonly characterized as different types: Martha oriented to a life of activity and service, while Mary by a life of contemplation and worship. We get a deeper and different understanding of their persons as Jesus interacts with them face to face in relationship. How they functioned in relationship together reveals where they truly are, and also deepens our understanding of the relational significance of Jesus' whole ontology and function.

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

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

The person Martha presented to Jesus was based on her role and what she did, which she seemed to perform well. By defining herself in this way, she focused quite naturally on her main priority of all the hospitable work (*diakonia*) to be done, that is, her service or ministry (*diakoneo*, Lk 10:40). This work, on the one hand, was culturally hers to do while, on the other hand, it was an opportunity for her to serve Jesus. Yet, defining her person by what she did and the role she had also determined what she paid attention to and ignored (from her perceptual-interpretive framework) in others, and thus how she did relationships with them. More specifically, Martha stayed within the limits of her role in relationship with Jesus, whom she related to based on his role, all as determined by her local context. In other words, Martha did not engage Jesus and connect with him in the quality of relationship made accessible to her from his larger and thus primary context.

This can be seen clearly in their second interaction when Lazarus died (Jn 11:1-40), to which we turn before continuing in their first interaction.

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

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

This was the critique that Jesus had for *how* Martha functioned: “You are *occupied* and distracted by many things; there is need of only one” (Lk 10:41-42). Jesus refocused Martha on what is primary and redefined for her what is necessary, irreducibly and nonnegotiable. This obviously created conflict with the priorities of her cultural-perceptual framework. Jesus does not directly deny Martha her framework but shifts her

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

The primacy of relationship is inseparable from discipleship as defined and determined by Jesus, especially for those who are committed to serve him (Jn 12:26). This necessarily involves the call to be redefined from outer in to inner out, transformed from reductionism and made whole in relationship together—in other words, the gospel’s deep change of transformation to wholeness. For Martha, who shaped relationship together as a hospitable servant of Jesus, this implied her need for redemptive change. Though she took a small step to connect initially with Jesus in their second interaction, she needed to be redeemed (set free) to be involved in the primacy of whole relationship together with Jesus as Mary was. Moreover, this included her relationship with Mary and seeing her person from inner out also. In their last time together at another dinner given in Jesus’ honor, Martha continued to stay in her traditional place among the women to serve, even though the dinner was not in her home (Mk 14:3; Jn 12:2). Whether she was still occupied by the secondary is not clear; but she did not complain about Mary not serving, who was involved further and deeper face to face with Jesus in the primacy of relationship (Jn 12:3; Mk 14:6).

With all her dedication and good intentions, Martha essentially related to and served Jesus with reductionist substitutes and practices. In terms of how she related to Jesus under the influence of reductionism, what she paid attention to and ignored about both her person as well as Jesus’ person, including about their relationship, Martha inadvertently functioned to reinforce counter-relational work. Such practice takes place all too commonly among God’s people, even while serving Jesus. This raises the concern about what it means to serve him and a pervasive issue we readily practice when serving Jesus: defining ourselves by serving, and thus being focused primarily on the work to be done while guided by a servant model. Jesus says “whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be” (Jn 12:26). In these words he communicates a necessary condition to serve him is to follow him and be where he is; that is, as discussed earlier, this is the function of relationship in ongoing intimate involvement with his whole person. Serving does not come first to define what it means to follow Jesus. The word “to serve” (*diakoneo*) comes from the word for minister, servant, deacon (*diakonos*) and has the emphasis on the work to be done, not on the relationship between Lord and servant. This transposes the primacy of relationship to a secondary priority based on defining human persons by reduced ontology and function.

This is a vital distinction for all his followers. Because in defining what is necessary to serve him, Jesus is also clearly definitive about what is insufficient to serve him: to focus primarily on the work to be done, or on related situations and circumstances, no matter how dedicated we are or how good our intentions. Jesus did not discount the particular service Martha was doing but *how* she engaged it. *How* we serve is just as important as whether we serve or not. Therefore, any reductionist substitutes and practices for serving him are not an option. For all his followers, Jesus makes paradigmatic for serving and imperative for discipleship: *the function of intimate relationship together as the primary priority*, which is not understood in John 12:26 by referential language but only in the relational language of Jesus' relational messages about (1) his person, (2) our person, and (3) our relationship.

While Jesus called Martha to his whole person for relationship, Mary already extended her person to Jesus for this relationship—whom Jesus fully receives, “Mary has chosen what is better” (Lk 10:42). The word for “chosen” (*eklegomai*) denotes simply the act of selecting Jesus, the naming of Jesus as the one desired, and thus expressing favor to his person chosen. Mary paid attention to Jesus' whole person and focused on being relationally involved with him—the primary priority. And Jesus completely affirms her relational action: “and it will not be taken away from her” (v.42). “It” is a relative pronoun (*hostis*) from the basic relative pronoun *hos* (he who), which provides a better rendering for this context: “and he who is chosen will not be taken away from her.” The accessible Jesus vulnerably extends his whole person to her for relationship together.

Yet, Mary's choice was not a simple one to make. She cannot be characterized merely as a different personality type from Martha, which predisposed her to extend herself to make better connection with Jesus. In these two interactions Martha actually demonstrates more initiative than Mary. They also were both constrained by their sociocultural context to the same fixed role. Mary had neither the privilege of an optional role nor could she be an exception. This is the reason Martha legitimately expected Mary to be like her, and why she tried to manipulate Jesus (“Lord, don't you care...”) to make Mary fulfill her role (Lk 10:40). What was culturally hers to do was culturally also Mary's.

Moreover, household roles and expectations were only part of the pressure Mary faced in her surrounding context. Mary seemed to ignore the work (*diakoneo*) that was culturally hers to do and chose instead to engage Jesus in a manner not customarily available to women. That is, she also goes against the religious culture by sitting at Jesus' feet in order to be taught by the Rabbi (Lk 10:39); this is a privileged place forbidden for women and reserved only for men, particularly disciples (note also, that serious disciples usually were training for leadership). This takes place during an important period in Jesus' ministry when he has intensified his private teaching of his disciples in preparation of their forthcoming leadership. Imagine then what his disciples thought (or even said in protest) when Mary sat next to them. Surely at least, they must have said to themselves: “What is this woman doing? Who does she think she is?” On the other hand, if they accepted her actions, her person would have been defined at the bottom of the comparative scale—as the least among them since these disciples were concerned about “who was the greatest.”

Yet, Mary is willing to risk ridicule and rejection (even by Jesus) by going beyond any religio-cultural constraints in order to pursue the person Jesus. She

effectively doesn't allow reductionism to control her life and merely do what is expected and comfortable—that is, to diminish her person and limit her relational involvement. By her choice, she clearly acts only on what is important and necessary: the whole person in the function of intimate relationship together. Jesus fully receives her person for this relationship and, in openly doing so, teaches his disciples not only a lesson on the relational priority of discipleship but also on the relational function of leadership—lessons noticeably absent in theological education today..

Her whole person functioning in intimate relationship with Jesus is even more evident as we see them in further interactions. Returning to Lazarus' death and their second interaction, Mary quickly goes out to meet “the Teacher” who has asked for her (Jn 11:28-29). When she sees him she says the same opening words as Martha earlier (vv.32,21). These are her only spoken words, but not all she communicates to Jesus. When she sees him, “she fell at his feet” (v.32) and says the above while “weeping” (v.33a). Mary makes her whole person vulnerable and fully shares her heart (likely including some anger) with Jesus, which Martha doesn't seem to do even with the same words. This points to the non-verbal relational messages qualifying their words that Mary communicates profoundly with Jesus, thus deeply moving his heart to make intimate connection with Mary (vv.33b,35,38). In these relational messages, Mary vulnerably opened her person from inner out, withholding nothing (even the negative) from Jesus, and simply laid her person bare before him whether it was appropriate or not. This was not a time to be restrained or to be measured in her relational involvement in any way. In these moments, she experiences her Teacher (*didaskolos*) more deeply and came to *know* him as never before—the relational outcome of intimate friends. Their intimate connection is qualitatively distinct from the connection between Martha and Jesus moments earlier. This is the relational outcome in redeemed relationship of the whole person functioning in intimate involvement together.

Mary deepens her intimate connection with Jesus in a third interaction, which demonstrates even further how vulnerable her whole person is made to Jesus (Jn 12:1-8, par. Mt 26:6-13; Mk 14:3-9). Whether she follows the lead example of the prostitute (Lk 7:36-50) or acts spontaneously from her own creative heart, Mary makes another difficult and also costly choice (Jn 12:3). With the cost of the perfume (“worth a year's wages,” v.5) added to her decision, she again acts contrary to prevailing cultural form and practice to literally let her hair down to intimately connect with Jesus—inappropriate conduct for both of them—and humbly with love attend to his needs. Mary is engaged in the deepest relational work of a disciple, which Jesus defines clearly for his disciples as “a beautiful (*kalos*, in quality and character) thing (*ergon*, work of her vocation) to me” (Mt 26:10, parallel account) because her action unfolds in the primacy of relationship.

Mary's action demonstrated the most relationally significant practice of *diakoneo*, in which she served Jesus while intimately involved with his person more than ever before. She gave her person to Jesus, and Jesus not only received her person but also received *from* her person. This continued to contrast with Martha's *diakoneo* (Jn 12:2), though not to diminish that kind of service. Yet, we need to understand the ongoing choice of function involved here. Mary grew further in her person and experienced more of this relational outcome because she would not allow the counter-relational work of reductionism to prevent her from this opportunity to make intimate connection with Jesus face to face. Without the restraints of reductionism on her heart, she seized the

opportunity of the vulnerable presence of Jesus' whole person (as he said, "you will not always have me," 12:8).

Love functions this way, it always makes the person and the relationship most important—regardless of the need and work to be done. This is how Jesus functions with us and how he wants us to follow him and be with him. Thus, once again, the accessible Jesus not only received Mary's person for intimate connection in the priority of their relationship, but he also clearly makes this relational process more important than even ministry to the poor—but not its reduction to outer-in serving because this involvement like Mary's is how poor persons (among others, including Jesus) need to be served. Apart from Judas Iscariot's motives (Jn 12:4-6), this was important to learn for the disciples who tried to reprioritize Mary's act (Mt 26:8-9). While at this stage just days prior to Jesus' death the disciples certainly have learned about wholistic ministry, they have yet to understand the significance of Jesus' whole person (thus theirs also) and the primary function of intimate relationship together (cf. Jn 14:9). They would change but not without difficulty, and certainly not without redemptive change for the transformation to wholeness.

Going Deeper Face to Face

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

The compatible response to God's self-disclosure receives the whole person Jesus presents from inner out, in the same openness of one's own whole person (in child-like significance noted above). Receiving Jesus' person with the openness of the whole person is to be relationally responsible to vulnerably engage Jesus in all his self-disclosures—as witnessed in Mary, in contrast to Martha and other disciples—and to fully connect them together in order to understand the whole of who, what and how God is. This understanding from the relational epistemic process is defined by the term *syniemi* denoting putting together the various disclosures by Jesus into its whole, like putting together pieces of a puzzle for a view of the whole picture. We need *syniemi* to understand the whole person Jesus presents in the various pieces of his life and practice, that process which his early disciples failed to engage for deeper understanding (as in Mk 8:17). Yet, *syniemi* is a function of the whole person, not merely the mind and the use of

reason. The heart's importance to signify the involvement of the whole person (composed by "in spirit and truth," Jn 4:23-24) is defined by Jesus as fundamental for *syniemi*—"hearts hardened...fail to see...fail to hear" (Mk 8:17-18); and the failure of heart function in those who lacked *syniemi* describes those to whom Jesus spoke in parables (Mt 13:15).

Before the relational outcome for Job experiencing God in relationship Face to face, there was Moses in open interaction with God (Ex 33:11ff). Moses engaged the relational epistemic process with God's disclosures in Face-to-face relationship (Num 12:6-8). Both Job and Moses were important antecedents for Paul's Damascus road experience and subsequent transformation, providing his roots in the whole of God's thematic relational response. Most significantly, this is the Face who confronted Paul on that road for his epistemological clarification and hermeneutical correction, and the Face to whom Paul responded in the relational epistemic process ("Who are you, Lord?" Acts 9:5)—without his reductionist framework and lens—in order to listen to Jesus for the Face-to-face relational connection needed to be made whole. This is the Face that Paul, the learned Pharisee, certainly had information *about* from God's definitive blessing (Num 6:24-26), but whom his own face apparently had long avoided in Face-to-face relationship to deeply know; his experience signified his own challenge *of* and *for* face. Even though Paul's information *about* God from the *Shema* was correct in his monotheism, the Face challenged his monotheism, clarified it and deepened it beyond Paul's reason and imagination. This did not change Paul from monotheism but changed his perceptual lens and interpretive framework to be qualitatively and relationally whole. This is the nature of the Face and 'the challenge *for* face' in his relational work; and this is the relational outcome of vulnerable involvement together Face to face. The Face turned to Paul and shined on him on the Damascus road to bring him the change needed for new relationship together Face to face with the whole of God and God's whole. On this relational basis of Face to face, not on the basis of mere information (even if correct), the whole gospel for Paul embodied nothing less and no substitutes (Gal 1:11-12, cf. Mt 26:13). Anything less and any substitutes for Paul was in reality "no gospel at all" (Gal 1:7, NIV).

Paul defined Moses' experience as temporary, not fragmentary but transitory (2 Cor 3:7,13); and the relational difficulty of not having direct relational connection with God is signified by 'the veil', which Paul used to indicate counter-relational work (2 Cor 3:13-18). The relational connection without the veil was completed and made whole when the Face emerged whole-ly embodied in the relational work for the permanence of intimate relationship together Face to face (Jn 17:3,26). What Job learned qualitatively and experienced relationally (Job 42:5), along with Moses, were the integral aspects of (1) the definitive nature of God's self-disclosure and (2) the constitutive relational context and process of God's communicative action. The unfolding of the Word from God was always a relational dynamic, not a mere dialectic, that cannot be reduced from its relational context and process and still be definitive. That reduction involves renegotiating the Word's relational process to be shaped or constructed by human terms. On God's terms, the Word can speak for his own Self only in God's relational context and process. And the embodied Face speaks for himself secondarily as the object-Other in confirmation of the primary that more significantly communicates as Subject to be received in wholeness (neither fragmented nor disembodied and derelationalized) and to

be responded to and experienced in whole relationship together Face to face. What Moses and Job were introduced to was now complete and made whole in new relationship together. This is *what* and *how* Jesus embodied as the whole of God's Face; and as the relational outcome of Paul's ongoing relational experience with the Face initiated on the Damascus road, this is *Who, what* and *how* Paul further embodied with the Spirit (Eph 1:17-18; Col 1:25).

A related term to *syniemi* is *synesis*, which denotes the ability to understand concepts and see the relationships between them for the understanding of the whole, whole understanding. Paul's clear purpose for the church was defined for us to have the necessary understanding of the whole (*synesis*, Col 2:2-3; cf. 1:9) in order that we would specifically know (*epignosis*, not just have information about, cf. Eph 1:17) the full significance of the various pieces of the mystery of God disclosed in the distinguished face and person of Jesus the Christ. *Synesis* is inseparable from the relational dynamic of *syniemi* and is thus only a relational outcome, not the result merely from the ability to reason (cf. Col 2:4; Eph 1:18). Paul claimed to have this *synesis* (Eph 3:4) but only as the unequivocal outcome of openly engaging the relational epistemic process from Jesus with the Spirit, which was initiated but not completed on the Damascus road (Gal 1:12; Eph 3:3,5). Yet, not all *synesis* activity is meaningful. During Paul's fight against reductionism in the church and for the whole significance of the person of Jesus ("Has Christ been divided?" 1 Cor 1:13), he reminds us that some *synesis* is fruitless—notably the perception, discernment and comprehension of the rationalists (1 Cor 1:19-21). This suggests that *synesis* from a reductionist interpretive framework, determined 'from below' solely by the effort of human rationality, results in mere epistemological illusions of the whole. While such fragmentary observations and theories may have limited usefulness in particulate matters (e.g. in science), they are insufficient for understanding the whole in the innermost, God's whole and the whole of God in the person Jesus presented. The resulting consequence for Jesus is *re-presenting* his person, as demonstrated at the church in Corinth and down through church history.

Synesis is necessary for understanding the whole of Jesus' person as he presented but it is not always sufficient for presenting that person, depending on the 'measure' we use. As defined by Paul's relational purpose for the church, for those who vulnerably seek to know and understand God—as Subject presented, not merely an Object—*synesis* is necessary by the nature of (not out of obligation) relationship together. Hence, *synesis* is the reciprocal relational responsibility for which all Jesus' followers are accountable, and must not by its relational nature be undertaken apart from the relationship. The level of understanding requires engaging the relational epistemic process, which the early disciples above failed to do, notably along with "the wise and the intelligent," even in the academy today. Therefore, *synesis*, *syniemi*, or any other interpretive response, must be engaged in ongoing relational interaction with God for the relational outcome to be of significance for knowing and understanding the whole of God. In relational function for the relational epistemic process, this means the reading, exegesis, interpretation and involvement with Scripture (namely as the communicative Word unfolding) always necessitates being engaged (nonnegotably) with the Holy Spirit, who mediates the interaction in the relationship—just as Jesus and Paul both made unequivocal (Jn 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-15; 1 Cor 2:10-12). Jesus' followers' relational responsibility defines the reciprocal relational work ongoingly engaged together with the Spirit, and accordingly

the Spirit's own relational presence and function are certainly not to be forgotten, diminished or minimized in this relational process, not to mention be given lip-service. Such distinguished involvement also means that the Spirit needs to be pursued as the ultimate determiner for knowing and understanding God Face to face, which includes transforming our relational response to the new relationship together in wholeness promised by the face of God, and now fulfilled by the distinguished Face in the whole person Jesus presented. This is who and what Paul himself experienced from inner out in relationship and therefore further made definitive in the innermost (2 Cor 3:17-18; 4:6).

This understandably raises the issues of subjectivism (and the projections assumed by faith) overtaking reason in the epistemic process; and of reader-response 'in front of' the narrative of the unfolding Word ongoingly dominating the hermeneutic process; and how these matters can be accounted for to allow the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction needed to distinguish the presenting of Jesus' whole person from a substitute *re*-presenting his person. As noted earlier, philosophical theology raises the further question of the use of 'person' to define God in the doctrine of simplicity, since person is associated with assumptions of the human person that essentially re-present God as not being simple.¹³ Similar assumptions can also be used to re-present Jesus' person in our image, which makes evident how our theological anthropology antecedes our Christology and underlies the epistemic process of the Jesus we get.

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

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

The integral reality of presence does not emerge from the Object, who is neither vulnerably present nor relationally involved but embodied simply to be observed and be the object of any faith, theological and biblical study. In pivotal contrast, it is the Subject's vulnerable closeness and relational involvement that ongoingly defines this integral reality; and the experiential reality of his presence only has significance in relationship, which then necessitates reciprocity compatible with his presence—as opposed to mere belief in the Object. This may require reworking our theological anthropology of defining the person from outer in to inner out and of restoring the primacy of relationship. Moreover, the Subject-person's presence opens to others an integral reality beyond what may appear probable, seem logical or exceed the limits of

¹³ See Brian Davies, "Simplicity," in Charles Taliaferro and Chad Meister, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 44-45.

narrowed-down thinking in a conventional mindset (e.g. from tradition, a quest for certainty, or even just habit), consequently the depth of his presence is often reacted to by attempts to reduce it to the probable, the logical, and to renegotiate it to familiar (and more comfortable) referential terms,¹⁴ or reacted to simply by avoiding his presence—all of which refocuses the primary attention to secondary things about his person at the loss of his real presence. Openness to his presence requires a compatible interpretive framework and lens that are conjointly qualitative and relational; and this primary focus necessitates ongoing engagement in the process of integrating the secondary into the primary (PIP).

On this basis then, ‘presence’ is least observed by those at a relational distance from the person observed and is most experienced by those relationally involved with the person presented. This is the reality that Jesus made definitive in Luke 10:21, which we need to take seriously for the epistemic process if we truly want to know and understand God. The relational connection of those involved with his presence deepens ongoingly in this process:

When it is necessarily made from one’s whole person without the absence of mind or loss of reason, and made in the hermeneutical cone with the epistemic humility affirming the primary determination by the Word to communicate whole knowledge and understanding—while openly engaged with any of one’s fragmentary information for the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction necessary to be whole in one’s knowledge and understanding.

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

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

The dynamics of this relational outcome are distinguished most clearly by Mary, whose significance is vital for our relational epistemic process to Jesus’ person and presence. Further understanding Mary and her relational significance are indispensable for our epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction. The interaction unfolding between Jesus and Mary initiates the relational outcome of the gospel, which is why their involvement is vital for us to understand and embrace in claiming, celebrating

¹⁴ In life in general, Iain McGilchrist locates this activity in the dominance of the left brain hemisphere. *The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Modern World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 140.

and proclaiming the experiential truth of the whole gospel—which indeed transforms to wholeness. On his way to the cross, Jesus stopped for this table fellowship together. As you recall, Peter previously had difficulty affirming Jesus’ whole person from inner out without distinctions (Mt 16:21-22). All the disciples had difficulty responding to Jesus’ person in the primacy of relationship together at this table fellowship—that is, all the disciples except for Mary. Her discipleship had already clearly emerged at an earlier table fellowship, in which she decisively broke through the constraints of human distinctions in a deficit identity and redefined her person in relational connection with Jesus (Lk 10:38-42). The relational progression of her discipleship took her deeper into the relational path of Jesus to “Follow *me*” and be with his person in the primacy of relationship together—rather than making the primary focus serving—just as Jesus clarified and made a relational imperative (Jn 12:26). Primacy given to serving over relationship is a contrary relational path to Jesus’s relational path that the other disciples often engaged, as demonstrated by their main focus in this pivotal fellowship. The primacy, however, of Mary’s relational involvement with Jesus deepened from disciple (in servant discipleship like the other disciples) to friend (as Jesus distinguished, Jn 15:15); and this constituted her ontology and function in wholeness to be vulnerable and intimate in new relationship together with Jesus face to face as never before. Her vulnerable and intimate relational work would be extended later by Jesus to the other disciples at his footwashing, also for the primacy of relationship together and not for serving as commonly interpreted (Jn 13:1-17).

As Martha apparently served in the role of her distinction (Jn 12:2), Mary cleaned Jesus’ feet in an act somewhat parallel to the former prostitute (Lk 7:36-38). Mary’s action might be considered customary for guests to have their feet washed at table fellowship; if this all it were, Jesus would not have magnified it (Mk 14:9). Mary’s whole person from inner out, in person-consciousness (not in self-consciousness) with its lens of qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness, perceives Jesus’ whole person without distinctions of “Teacher and Lord” (cf. Jn 13:13)—which also demonstrated her *syniemi*, *synesis*, and *epignosis* of God’s whole presence (as Paul clarified above for the church). Not restrained by self-consciousness (as many of us are) her whole person thereby responds to his innermost person (cf. Jn 12:27; Mt 26:37-38). In this relational context and process with Jesus, the whole of Mary’s person from inner out, without the human distinction of gender and the secondary distinction of disciple, steps forth. Yet, her whole person could not be celebrated until she broke through the constraints of this dominant distinction and went beyond the limits of this secondary distinction in order to shift from self-consciousness to person-consciousness. Once again, her person further acts contrary to prevailing cultural form and practice to literally let her hair down to intimately connect with Jesus—inappropriate conduct for both of them that necessarily distinguishes the whole gospel’s relational outcome.

It was critical for Mary to embrace person-consciousness over a pervasive self-consciousness, and to engage its lens of inner out instead of a prevailing outer-in lens in order to affirm personness and celebrate whole ontology and function. Equally important, this was necessary for her own person to live whole and thus be able to perceive and respond to Jesus’ whole person without distinctions—those barriers preventing intimate relational connection. If Mary doesn’t embrace personness and celebrate her whole person, she doesn’t embrace the innermost of Jesus and celebrate his whole person

defined beyond those parts of what he does (even on the cross) and what he has (even as God). In other words, without Mary's conscious action in personness this interaction cannot unfold with the significance of the relational outcome distinguishing the gospel, that is, only the gospel of transformation to wholeness.

As Mary celebrates the whole person (both hers and Jesus') without outer-in distinctions, she involved her person with Jesus' in what truly signifies being "naked and without shame" (as originally created, Gen 2:25), that is to say, vulnerable and intimate without the relational distance and barriers signifying the self-consciousness of "naked and covering up" (and related face-masks, as substitutes for being whole, Gen 3:7). Mary celebrates being "naked and without shame" in the relationship together constituted in the beginning, fragmented from the beginning and now being reconstituted to wholeness. This celebration is not just a further taste of the new wine fellowship composed by Jesus but the celebration of its flow shared vulnerably and intimately as family together, the new creation family 'already' (Jn 14:18,23; 17:21-23). Therefore, the significance of her involvement and Jesus' response must be paid attention to because it initiates this relational outcome of new relationship together in wholeness without the veil—the veil that Jesus is soon to remove to constitute God's new creation family from inner out without distinctions (2 Cor 3:16-18; Eph 2:14-22; Gal 3:26-28; 6:15; Col 3:10-11). And even though the theology had yet to be formulated for Mary, its functional significance was whole-ly embodied by her.

In spite of the experiential truth of the gospel unfolding, the other disciples object to such involvement together since they are focused on the outer in of self-consciousness, which gives priority to the secondary of servant discipleship over the primacy of relationship together (Mk 14:4-5). There is no celebration for them, only the obligation of duty (serving the poor, cf. "fast and pray" at the first new wine table fellowship, Lk 5:33-39). Even the taste of new wine is only a memory for them, as Jesus' whole person is overlooked (notably at this critical point) and rendered secondary to serving (Mk 14:7, cf. Lk 5:34). Jesus' rebuttal in relational language is revealing and magnifying.

Jesus stops his other disciples from harassing her and defines clearly for them that Mary is engaged in "a beautiful thing to me" (Mk 14:6, NIV). It is misleading, if not inaccurate, to render Jesus' words "performed a good service for me" (NRSV). Jesus is not speaking in referential language focused on the secondary of servant discipleship. "Beautiful" (*kalos*, quality) and "thing" (*ergon*, work of vocation or calling) signify the quality of Mary's work. Yet, what is this work that Jesus deeply received and the other disciples rejected? First, Mary was not focused on the quantitative from outer in and thus not in self-consciousness about breaking cultural form or the expense of the perfume. Nor was she concerned about performing a good service. Her person-consciousness was focused on the qualitative from inner out, thereby focused on the whole person and the primacy of relationships. Her "beautiful thing" involved the quality of her relational work, which she engaged vulnerably and intimately not *for* Jesus or even *to* him but directly *with* the whole of Jesus in reciprocal relationship Face to face to Face. Mary's significance as a person and in her discipleship unfolds as she (1) celebrated Jesus calling her to personness, and (2) celebrated the relational work of her primary vocation with the qualitative depth of her whole person without distinctions, in reciprocal response to Jesus' whole person for the primacy of relationship together in wholeness without the veil, in order to (3) be vulnerable and intimately involved with the whole and holy God to

celebrate life together in God's whole family—and therefore fulfilling the challenge of Face and *for* face.

The dynamics of the quality of Mary's relational work converge to compose the above three-fold celebration. Her relational work provides the hermeneutical, ontological and functional keys to celebrating the whole that emerges solely from the relational outcome of the whole gospel. At this stage, the other disciples are still on a different relational path from Jesus, engaged in a fragmentary gospel while (pre)occupied in a renegotiated calling of self-conscious secondary work. Their lack of qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness, with related relational distance, has an unmistakable relational consequence (Jn 14:9), contrary to the whole of God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement embodied by Jesus (Jn 17:2-3) and what Jesus prayed to compose his whole family (Jn 17:20-26). Mary's relational work is integral to constitute persons in reciprocal relationship together as composed by the experiential truth of the whole gospel. On this qualitative relational basis, Jesus magnifies Mary's person as a key to the significance of the gospel's relational outcome of new relationship together in wholeness, necessarily in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the Trinity (as Jesus embodied and prayed): "Wherever the *whole* gospel is proclaimed, *claimed and celebrated* in the whole world, *her whole person's vulnerable and intimate relational work* will be told as a reminder *to illuminate the whole ontology and function that necessarily unfolds from the relational outcome of the gospel of transformation to wholeness*" (Mk14:9).

The significance of Mary is not her gender, yet it does prompt the question: Where is this person in the gospel proclaimed by the church and why is she not highlighted by the church and celebrated in the church, whether local or global? I suspect gender has a role in this lack; and even though gender is not Mary's significance it does point to a likely key for leading the church to wholeness, which we will have to address (to be discussed later). Nevertheless, we should not be distracted from the primary reality: Mary's significance is distinguished only in her whole theology and practice, which was constituted only by her whole ontology and function. It is not the name of Mary that Jesus magnifies but her person-consciousness integrally vulnerable and intimate in whole theology and practice, and thus her whole ontology and function integral to her personness transformed by the gospel. Mary is not mentioned in Paul's letters, but the significance of her whole person—engaged in whole theology and practice as the relational outcome of the gospel that composes the church in new relationship together in wholeness—this whole significance of her person is indeed magnified in functional clarity and theological clarity by Paul. With her whole person assuming the lead, she initiated the relational outcome of the gospel that became the experiential truth of the whole of Paul and the whole in his theology and practice. Jesus *into* Paul is inseparable from Jesus *into* Mary.

Mary's whole theology and practice illuminate the keys for celebrating God's whole. Her qualitative hermeneutic lens, her heart in the innermost of ontology, and her function from inner out were the keys both to engage God's relational context and to be involved in God's relational process necessary to celebrate the whole person without distinctions, new relationship without the veil to be whole together, and the whole and holy God in vulnerable and intimate reciprocal relationship Face to face to Face—all with nothing less and no substitutes. Her person-consciousness with qualitative sensitivity and

relational awareness in the primacy of relationship together was distinguished from the other disciples' self-consciousness engaged in secondary matter over the primary. The contrast between Mary and the others illuminates the conflict between the whole gospel and its reduction, which is the significance of Mary that Jesus magnifies and that Paul fights both for and against. Yet, this significance has not been sufficiently embraced and this fight has not been adequately engaged by the church to celebrate God's whole. The church's theological anthropology and view of sin as reductionism are the central issues involved, for which we continue to remain accountable in our theology and practice and must give account in our ontology and function.

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

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

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

The keys Jesus' integral person presents—which Paul develops further—need to be understood as conjointly theological and functional since these aspects should always remain together—though being functional has often not been part of the theological task. Most notable, as discussed above, when the complete Christology defines our theological anthropology, it by necessity also determines our whole ontology and function for

relationship together face to Face with the whole ontology and function of God, nothing less and no substitutes.

Since the incarnation there have been various forms and shapes that discipleship has assumed—as evident even in Jesus’ interactions, notably with Martha and Mary. In “Follow me,” however, following is nonnegotiable to our terms and his person is irreducible in ontology and function. On this basis, Jesus’ relational imperative for discipleship to be involved ongoingly with his whole person becomes intrusive for our person—and perhaps no longer good news associated with the gospel—because it requires the unmistakable relational connection face to face to distinguish discipleship—in other words, as the relational outcome of the whole gospel and thus integral to salvation. On this relational basis, therefore, the face of Mary’s discipleship is illuminated by Jesus to distinguish the gospel of transformation to wholeness—also necessarily for defining disciples of whole theology and practice today.

This relational outcome emerges, unfolds and is completed only because Jesus’ whole person distinguished the unmistakable face of God and, therefore, the whole of God’s vulnerable presence and intimate involvement for reciprocal relationship together in wholeness as God’s family (just as Jesus prayed for his followers, Jn 17). And in his summary text of God’s theological trajectory and relational path, the first part of the psalmist’s prayer (Ps 67:1-2) has been responded to in these relational terms, beyond what he asked or could have imagined.

The early disciples have not been alone in the limited face of Jesus they saw mainly from outer in. Jesus’ question to them (and to us) “who do you say I am” (Mt 16:15) still remained essentially unanswered in relational terms, even though they knew the correct information about Jesus in referential terms. Their lack of relational connection with the whole person distinguished in Jesus’ face from inner out had only one result: “Don’t you know me yet?” Indeed, not knowing and understanding the whole of God in the face of Jesus has been a pervasive result for Christians, church leaders and scholars—even after years of study, contrary to the Word of God (Jer 9:23-24; Jn 15:15; 17:25-26).

As the unmistakable face of God, Jesus’ whole person not only presents us with the challenge *of* the Face in deepest profile but equally confronts us with the challenge *for* our face to be compatible with his whole person and congruent with our whole person. Fulfilling this challenge *of* and *for* face completes the relational equation for the whole gospel’s relational outcome of new relationship together in wholeness face to face. Anything less and any substitutes *of* Face and *for* face cannot add up together to be whole.

Chapter 3 The Irreducible Subject of the Word

I am he, the *person* who is speaking to you.

John 4:26

One of the ironic issues in recent theological and biblical studies is either the lack of clarity or even the absence of their primary subject matter. Much of the gap in subject matter reflects an earlier shift from theocentricity to anthropocentricity, which further reflects the influence of reductionism. This has led to an increasing focus on secondary areas aside from Scripture that have preoccupied theological and biblical studies. In his concern for contemporary NT studies, Markus Bockmuehl makes a plea for returning to its own object of study, the text of Scripture, yet to read the text in a further and deeper way.¹

Moreover, this fragmenting includes a disconnect between theological and biblical studies. What Paul critiqued in the Corinthian church—for example, “Has Christ been divided?” (1 Cor 1:13)—speaks to dividing theology from its determining source in Scripture—“Nothing beyond what is written” (1 Cor 4:6). This interdependent and indispensable relationship has been separated, treated as distant or casual in significance, and its function between biblical and theological studies essentially absent. Markus Bockmuehl further observes today: “Much theological and biblical scholarship does not now pay even lip service to the once universal conviction that Christian theology is at its heart an *exegetical* discipline.... For its [early church] theologians, the study of Scripture was both source and destiny of their reason and wisdom.”²

The major reason for this fragmentation is the pervasive influence of reductionism in human contextualization. Characteristic of reductionism, the shift to secondary matter gets us preoccupied (even with good intentions) with related secondary areas *about* the subject matter over the primary subject itself. This interpretive lens results, therefore, in paying less attention to or ignoring the Subject, thus respectively the lack of clarity or the absence of the primary subject matter. Not surprisingly, this happens even when God's theological trajectory is identified because that theological trajectory is not conjoined with God's relational path. This critical detachment puts God on a trajectory as just an Object that can entitle theological and biblical studies, and be identified and referred to in them; yet, the focus neither illuminates the subject matter nor has much, if any, significance to what/who is primary.

¹ Markus Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word: Refocusing New Testament Study* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006).

² Markus Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word*, 88.

Until God's theological trajectory is integrated with God's relational path, God as Subject remains elusive or lost—the purpose of reductionism. Contrary to reductionism's goal, the engagement of the Subject of the Word does not occur by reading the text of Scripture as mere object for study. This connection is the outcome that emerges only by relational involvement in the text as God's communicative Word—that is, communicated by the Subject of the Word, which a mere Object does not enact. This certainly requires a pivotal shift away from a primary quantitative interpretive lens merely observing an Object to a qualitative hermeneutic having relational significance to God and able to understand God's relational terms communicated in the Word by its Subject.

The necessary shift away from solely a quantitative framework must include a shift to a framework that is both qualitative and relational. This does not involve movement into subjectivism, for example, involving only a subjective hermeneutic pointing to mysticism or a form of Gnosticism—as Paul has been perceived to utilize by some—or even fideism. Such subjectivity includes a reader-oriented approach 'in front of the text', by which the reader defines meaning and determines understanding. In the eighteenth-nineteenth centuries, Friedrich Schleiermacher attempted a shift toward a qualitative-relational framework by reopening the relational door to the Other. However, he tended to shift too far toward subjectivity by giving more determination to the human consciousness of subject-reader in his "art of understanding".³ Certainly a subjective hermeneutic must be adequately accounted for and given balance. Yet, the reality and fact of persons (notably Paul and God) involved in relationships still require more than a quantitative framework and rationalist hermeneutic. Contemporary readers as persons themselves need to go beyond functioning as observers of information in order to engage also the qualitative context and relational process irreducibly essential for deeper and more complete understanding. This does not require us to close down our mind but this shift necessitates to open up our whole person.

This two-fold epistemological focus on God thus necessitates both a chastened quantitative approach and a vulnerable qualitative engagement in an integrated perceptual-interpretive framework for a compatible hermeneutic. This is what Paul identified as qualitative wholeness of mind, a whole *phronema* (see Rom 8:6; 12:2). This whole *phronema* provides the necessary qualitative lens and mindset, *phroneo* (Rom 8:5), for inner-out ontology in order to integrate parts into the whole for understanding, a process rendered by the term *synesis* (Col 2:2)—that is, whole understanding of God, God's relational response to the human condition, and thus the gospel (Eph 3:4-6). The process of *synesis* is not the coherence of merely referential information but is understanding the coherence of the relational dynamics of all Scripture—and as it unfolds here in the whole of Paul's life and practice; therefore *synesis* conjoins Paul's gospel of wholeness (cf. Eph 6:15) to the human relational condition enslaved in reduced human ontology and function.

This process of study for whole understanding (*synesis*) of God is therefore a relational epistemic process—a process that can neither be reduced to only the quantitative, nor function with assumptions of human ontology from outer in. Jens

³ For a brief description of Schleiermacher's position in modern hermeneutics, see Anthony C. Thiselton, "Biblical studies and theoretical hermeneutics" in John Barton, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 1998), 95-113.

Zimmermann concludes also from his examination of our hermeneutical heritage:

Knowledge in general and knowledge of God in particular are existential and relational. Knowledge, in other words, is not defined according to a modern scientific model of detached, neutral observation, but knowing requires that the knower be involved with the thing known.⁴

In recent years, Kevin Vanhoozer, among others, has advocated theological interpretation for more coherent understanding from the convergence of biblical and theological studies. He defines such reading of Scripture simply as coming to hear God's Word and to know God better.⁵ This process is rightly simple, yet to engage this process as relational is not the requisite involvement readily pursued, nor can that involvement be pursued readily. Such pursuit easily becomes misguided, particularly when assuming a reductionist ontology of the person. Nevertheless, these concerns are much-needed qualitative shifts for deeper understanding, which is further signified by the concern for wisdom in hermeneutics.

In a common concern by a group of biblical scholars and theologians for wisdom in the interpretation of Scripture, David Ford and Graham Stanton share their working view:

More widely, wisdom is about trying to integrate knowledge, understanding, critical questioning and good judgment with a view to the flourishing of human life and the whole of creation. Theological wisdom attempts all that before God, alert to God, and in line with the purpose of God.⁶

Kevin Vanhoozer takes us even further by defining wisdom as an understanding of the whole. He says contemporary epistemology needs to recover two notions that have been neglected: (1) understanding (a grasp of meaning) and (2) wisdom (an understanding of the whole).⁷

Daniel Hardy points also to the primacy of the Scripture for a 'density of meaning' in which the texts open a new depth of meaning beyond other focuses in biblical interpretation. This density of meaning for Hardy conveys more than simply a quantitative 'extensity of meanings' found in the Scripture but suggests a qualitative 'intensity of meaning' in which "both God and humanity are joined, both heaven and history, not simply by way of assertions about them, but as dynamically interwoven and

⁴ Jens Zimmermann, *Recovering Theological Hermeneutics: An Incarnational-Trinitarian Theory of Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 131.

⁵ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 19-25. For an overview of theory of interpretation and its history from which a proposal for the recovery of theological hermeneutics is made, see Zimmermann, *Recovering Theological Hermeneutics*.

⁶ David F. Ford and Graham Stanton, eds., *Reading Texts, Seeking Wisdom* (London: SCM Press, 2003), 2-3.

⁷ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 340.

mutually operative.”⁸ For the intensity of meaning, Hardy recognizes the need for the academy to be freed from the constraints of a merely quantitative interpretive framework, as well as from the reductionism of both the text and in practices/projects which distract from the text.

Yet, the qualitative significance of understanding wisdom in Scripture needs to be distinctly addressed in the integrated relational context and epistemic process of God, which can only be engaged with epistemic humility without, for example, the primacy of reason. This is why Jesus jumped with joy when the Father’s self-revelation made relational connection with vulnerably engaged “children,” not with the detached or measured engagement of “the wise and intelligent” (Lk 10:21). We today are challenged by this same process. That is, Jesus points to the necessity of the “hermeneutic of a child” who is vulnerably engaged essentially in a relational epistemic process. This hermeneutic certainly does not eliminate reason but puts rational interpretation into its rightful whole created context of relationship; thus in doing so, it does not disembodify the text (the revelation of the Other) from its subject matter (the communicator as Subject in relationship). Just as a child vulnerably engages this relational context by the relational process of trust (not to be confused with fideism), this relational involvement with epistemic humility opens up our whole person to outcomes of learning, understanding and experiencing whom/what we can know, count on, and be defined and determined by—as well as provides ongoing feedback of the significance of these aspects.

Rational interpretation alone tends to disembodify the object of the text from its relational context and process, ironically, for example, by a quantitative framework embedded only in history that is unable to see the whole. This reduces the ontology of the person in the text to merely an object in effect by fragmenting the whole person into component parts without understanding the object-Other as communicator-Subject self-disclosed for relationship together. This not only disembodies but also de-relationalizes the Subject. However, engaging the Object of the text also as Subject is a function only of relationship, the relational involvement of which is irreducible and essential in order to grasp meaning and understand the whole. The fragmentation by rationalistic thinking signifies the human shaping or construction of the text, knowledge of God and understanding the whole, by efforts essentially of self-autonomy, self-determination and even self-justification. This is the hermeneutic of “the wise and intelligent” exposed by Jesus, which still challenges us today. Paul also addressed this reductionist function in wisdom and its perceptual-interpretive framework when he echoed Psalm 94:11 to counter reductionism in the early church (1 Cor 3:20) and its relational consequence (1 Cor 4:6; 8:1; 14:36).

This critique does not extend the existing issue between reason and faith but deepens the issue in order to address the underlying problem for both faith and reason. Nor is this an attempt to traverse Lessing’s “ugly, broad ditch” (the gap between reason and faith)⁹ but to deepen the ditch by defining faith only as the relational involvement of trust—just as Jesus did above—and thus also to redefine the gap with God indeed existing even for many professing mere faith.

⁸ Daniel W. Hardy, “Reason, Wisdom and the Interpretation of Scripture” in David F. Ford and Graham Stanton, eds., *Reading Texts, Seeking Wisdom* (London: SCM Press, 2003), 72-76.

⁹ Gotthold Lessing, *Lessing’s Theological Writings*, trans. by Henry Chadwick (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1956), 55.

This points to the limits, if not impasse, in the hermeneutical process that prevent the relational connection necessary for further flow to deeper outcomes beyond merely what we know, to more significantly whom we know. Understanding and wisdom involve more than acquiring knowledge (even as so-called truth and moral imperatives) and must involve a deeper epistemology to have a grasp of the meaning of God's self-revelation, and thus an understanding of the whole, the whole of God and God's created whole.

Knowing and understanding Subject-God as our subject matter remains elusive or lost as long as God's theological trajectory is detached from God's relational path. Also critical to this relational epistemic process, detaching this theological trajectory from the relational path vitally disconnects us from the vulnerable presence and intimate involvement of the Subject—even while observing the Object. This disconnect is a critical condition existing both in churches and the academy—with vital signs either unrecognized or left unattended.

The Referentialization of the Word

The ancient poet sets the focus for us that puts God into perspective. This poet made the request of the LORD to utter: “say to my innermost, ‘I am your salvation’” (Ps 35:3). If the poet had been focused on his surrounding situations and circumstances, what he requested would have been a referential statement transmitting information merely about what God does—that is, deliver him from his negative situations and circumstances. Since his request was for the LORD to speak to his innermost (*nephesh*, the qualitative of God distinguished in the human person), he wanted only relational words from God, not referential. The relational response he wanted from God did not necessarily make his situations and circumstances unimportant but clearly secondary to the primacy of relationship together; therefore he was able to affirm God's righteous involvement in their relationship in spite of his continued troubles (Ps 35:28).

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

These relational messages integrally compose the heart (innermost) of the whole gospel, the depth of which is necessary to respond to the breadth of the human condition. And the gospel unfolds from the beginning with nothing less and no substitutes; otherwise our gospel is not whole, not a gospel at all, as Paul declared (Gal 1:7). Curiously then, this raises a question mark about the early disciples. As noted earlier, these disciples lacked knowing Jesus the person even as they engaged their discipleship

with intense commitment (Jn 14:9). Obviously, the Word was embodied before them, yet not necessarily *with* them on his relational path. Any form of detachment (e.g. relational distance) from the Word's relational path ensures disconnection from the Word as Subject, and thereby relates primarily to the Word as Object—in spite of their activity level together. This all-too-common relational consequence among Jesus' followers occurs when the Word is transposed to a different language and terms (e.g. Mk 8:14-17).

God as Subject constitutes the Word in relational terms on an intrusive relational path, whereas God's theological trajectory in referential terms only composes the Object of the Word. This distinction emerged initially in the primordial garden to refocus those human persons' view of God, which is crucial for us to understand for our theology and practice today.

Basic to what emerged from this beginning to shape theological engagement was their lens: the interpretive lens refocused from the inner out to the outer in by a quantitative interpretive framework that reduces the epistemic field from God's whole relational terms to fragmentary referential terms. Even if God did really say 'that', 'what did God really mean by that' became the issue. The shift to the latter refocused the theological task to pursue theological significance with a reduced lens. This lens from this quantitative interpretive framework emerged along with the construction of a new language in referential terms (i.e. referential language) that substitutes for God's relational language. This replacement language—signified by “you will not die for God knows that when you...” (Gen 3:5-6)—(re)defines 'what God really means by that' and thereby determines what God says. In other words, referential language speaks for God rather than God speaking for God. How does this dynamic from referential language work?

It has become increasingly apparent to modern scientific research that the language we speak shapes the way we see the world and even the way we think (not necessarily producing thought).¹⁰ This points to the function of language not merely as a means of expression but also as a template imposing a constraint limiting what we see and the way we think. In his study of neuroscience, Iain McGilchrist states about language:

It does not itself bring the landscape of the world in which we live into being. What it does, rather, is shape that landscape by fixing the 'counties' into which we divide it, defining *which* categories or types of entities we see there—how we carve it up.

In the process, language helps some things stand forward but by the same token makes others recede.... What language contributes is to firm up certain particular ways of seeing the world and give fixity to them. This has its good side, and its bad. It aids consistency of reference over time and space. But it can also exert a restrictive force on what and how we think. It represents a more *fixed version* of the world: it shapes, rather than grounds, our thinking.¹¹

This modern awareness provides us with some understanding of the dynamic of referential language—how it works and what effect it has—that was set in motion from the primordial garden. The origination of referential language unfolded as God's

¹⁰ Reported by Sharon Begley in “What's in a Word?” *Newsweek*, July 20, 2009, 31.

¹¹ Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and his Emissary*, 110.

relational language is narrowed down and God's command (*sawah*, Gen 2:16) is redefined from communication in God's relational terms to the transmission of information in referential terms. Detaching the command from Subject-God (or de-relationalizing it) removes God's words from their primary purpose only for relationship together. The command was clearly God's communication for the wholeness of their relationship together, not the mere transmission of information (the purpose of referential language) for humans to know merely what to do (the focus of referential terms). This inaugural referentialization of God's words (command) was extended later by the people of Israel whenever they transposed the commandments from God's relational language to referential language, and consequently shaped the covenant in narrow referential terms—essentially de-relationalizing the covenant from ongoing relationship with Subject-God.

The shift to referential language opened the door to shape, redefine or reconstruct the so-called information transmitted by God to narrowed-down interpretation—what God really meant by that is that “your eyes will be opened”—that is, to reduced referential terms that implies speaking for God on our own terms (signified in “to make one wise”). When referential language is the prevailing interpretive framework for our perceptual-interpretive lens, then this shapes the way we see God's revelation and the way we think about God's words—as modern science is rediscovering about language. Conjointly and inseparably, referential language also puts a constraint on our lens, thereby restricting what we see of God's revelation and limiting how we think about God's words (“you will not...”). This dynamic from referential language obviously redefines the subject matter in the theological task, and certainly continues to constrain its theological engagement. Any explanations and conclusions that emerge from the theological task in referential terms merely reflect the theological reflections of referential language. Any such theological statements have no theological significance; they only attempt to speak for God—most prominently with the illusion or simulations from reductionism (“you will be like God”).

This pursuit of theological significance that was put into motion in the primordial garden needs to be accounted for. In referential language, theology's subject matter is narrowed down to terms that are disembodied (derelationalized), fragmentary or elusive, without distinguishing the whole Subject, if theology has a distinct subject matter at all. This is the designed purpose of referential language, and its use in the theological task has unavoidable consequences epistemologically, hermeneutically, ontologically and relationally. This dynamic of referential language was illuminated by Jesus in a crucial interaction with those “who had believed in him” (Jn 8:31-45).

In this highly visible text—yet consistently seen with limited understanding—Jesus distinguished between those following him in relational terms and those believing him in referential terms. The defining issue for the latter group was exposed in Jesus' question to these believers “Why do you not understand my *speech*” (*lalia*, v.43), that is, “Why is my language not clear to you?” (NIV) The answer was not simply “because you cannot accept my word” (as rendered in NRSV). The underlying issue is the constraint of referential language restricting their ability “to hear my word *in relational language*.”

Jesus had just made definitive to them what distinguishes his followers in relational terms: “If you continue in *the relational language of my word*, you are truly my *followers, involved with me in relationship together on my relational terms*; and you will know the *embodied truth* [not derelationalized, generalized and propositionalized], and

Subject-Truth will free you” (8:31-33). Redemption interpreted through the lens of referential language is fragmented to deliverance from situations, circumstances and sin—which these Jewish believers no longer *saw* their need for (v.33)—and also is refracted neither to see the sin of reductionism nor to include the relational significance of what we are redeemed for and thus saved to: to be freed to become permanent members of God’s family as his very own daughters and sons (vv.34-36). The restricting limits of referential language inescapably makes us unable to understand the Word’s relational language in the theological task (including personal Bible study), and this has far-reaching consequences epistemologically (not knowing the Truth), hermeneutically (unable to interpret his words to understand God’s revelation), ontologically (not to be free from reductionism and made whole) and relationally (not to experience whole relationship together in God’s family). And Jesus unmistakably connected this dynamic of referential language directly to its originating source in the primordial garden (8:44).

Accounting for the referentialization of the Word in the pursuit of theological significance is both needed today and problematic. Three other examples help us understand how this skewed pursuit has shaped all levels of the theological task¹² and also exposes our need for redemptive change in any theological engagement, as illuminated above by Jesus.

The first example involved Jesus and a rich young ruler (Mk 10:16-22, par. Lk 18:18-23). After this man presumably *saw* the significance of Jesus’ blessing of the children, he pursued Jesus for eternal life, that is, for his own theological significance. He certainly went to the right source to validate his pursuit. However, when he wanted to have this theological significance, he focused on the task of ‘what to do’ to gain theological significance: “What must I do?” (v.17) Jesus answered him in relational language but the rich young ruler responded back in referential language according to the constraints of a theological anthropology defining him by what he did and had. The relational consequence was no theological significance based on ‘what to do’—a result commonly overlooked or misinterpreted in referential language that also leaves many of us searching for significance.

In the second example, a lawyer tested Jesus in theological engagement (Lk 10:25-29). He wanted to be distinguished in theological discourse so he asked Jesus a question similar to the rich young ruler. Jesus refocused him on the law but only in relational terms, not the referential terms of the lawyer’s tradition. Since the lawyer wanted to establish his significance (“justify himself,” v.29) in the theological conversation, he asked Jesus for more information, that is, for referential knowledge to use in his theological task. In other words, when the lawyer wanted to be theologically significant, his lens focused on having ‘knowledge’ to demonstrate his theological significance. Jesus’ response identified the existing gap between the convention of theological conversation (discourse) that depends on fragmentary knowledge, and the relational terms of his words that involve wholeness in both theology and practice (10:30-37). In the context of this commonly known text, Jesus illuminates for the theological task the theological significance of relational language that is clearly distinguished from the epistemological illusion of theological significance based on ‘knowledge’.

¹² Anyone, from old to young, who seeks to sort out their beliefs, gain their meaning, or put them into practice is engaged in the theological task.

The third example involves a magician named Simon who converted to Christianity (Acts 8:9-19). After becoming a Christian, Simon *saw* the significance of Peter and John's impact on the people by laying their hands on them to receive the Spirit. In spite of Simon's past of amazing people with his magic, his action now to secure the means to impart the Spirit needs to be understood more broadly. Certainly, Simon wanted the significance of Peter and John. Whether or not it was for the primary purpose for others to receive the Spirit, Simon misguidedly pursued theological significance. Consequently, he focused on technique/method ("lay my hands") to have this theological significance. As Simon learned in his theological effort, with the narrow lens determining any theological task there is no theological significance based on 'methodology'.

These three examples summarize what has traditionally constituted the theological task: (1) based on 'what to do', (2) based on 'knowledge', and (3) based on 'methodology'. In one way or another, separately or jointly, these all reflect a variation of what emerged in the primordial garden. The influence and workings of reductionism (including its counter-relational activity) put into motion—prominently in the dynamic of referential language—consistently raise two critical, undeniable and inescapable issues needing ongoing accountability in the theological task:

1. The strength of view of sin necessary to address sin as reductionism and to account for any sin of reductionism; therefore, having a lens of sin irreducible to human contextualization and nonnegotiable to human terms.
2. Basic to the theological task is our theology. Ironically, as demonstrated in the primordial garden, the critical key to significance in the theological task, and to the nature of our theological engagement, is our theological anthropology defining the person from inner out (with the functional significance of the heart) based on *who* the person is in the qualitative image of God and *what* persons are in the primacy of whole relationships together in the relational likeness of the whole of God—not reducing the person to outer in defined by what one does and has, and on that basis limiting engagement in relationships to secondary function, noticeably with relational distance in the epistemic process.

In the midst of the referentialization of the Word that was put into motion in the primordial garden was Subject-God's voice in relational language pursuing those persons for the sake of theological significance: "Where are you?" (Gen 3:9) God's voice continues to resound today, pursuing us for theological significance, yet communicating only in relational language. Our response must not by nature be in referential terms that follows the relational distance found in the primordial garden, with its weak view of sin without reductionism and fragmented view of the person from outer in. Those who do not vulnerably account for *where* we are in the theological task—*where* in relational terms, not the referential terms of what we do, our knowledge and methodology—will continue in the contrary flow set in motion from the primordial garden, on a different theological trajectory and relational path than the vulnerable presence and intimate involvement of the whole of God.

Transforming to the Language of the Word

Where we are as a person is the key to how we engage in relationships; and the integrity of both person and relationships have been compromised by social media today,¹³ which should chasten our use of the Internet. Consider further, when we focus on listening to the words in language, we may or may not be focused on communication from another. Words in referential language are commonly what we use to transmit information to talk *about* something and to express how well we can talk about it, notably to explain it. *It* can also be *about* someone, such as God, in our discourse. Yet that other being remains impersonal if the focus is not on communication; the focus on words in referential language becomes an I/we-it relation rather than the I/we-you relationship involving communication. In referential language the other is just an object while in relational language the other is always a subject. This distinction is critical for determining the message unfolding in the words in and from the beginning.

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

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

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

¹³ This was made explicit recently by Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), and by Jaren Lanier, *You Are Not a Gadget: A Manifesto* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010).

1. Cosmological

As John's Gospel records (Jn 1:1-4) and Paul affirms (Col 1:16-17), the source of the Word was conjointly from outside the universe and the source of the universe's creation (Jn 1:10,18; 3:19). This cosmology is integral to the full identity of the Word and the quality and depth of the creative action communicated by the Word—whose dynamic context and process are unfolding from this source (notably recorded in the Gospel of Jn 1:4-5, 10-11,14,18; 3:19). Neither the identity of the Word can be reduced nor can the Word be detached from this source and still compose the Subject of the Word. This beginning is vital for understanding what unfolds.

Given the source, the Word cannot be reduced to be defined or determined in any manner by anything in the universe. If it were, this would result in the following: The Word is part of the universe itself; or diminished to some aspect (e.g. category, order, species) of creation, even created itself; or otherwise anthropomorphized in human terms. The parameters of the universe can only narrow the perception of reality outside the universe (if perceived at all), which would constrain God in a box of human shaping and construction. Any of these reductions is consequential for the unfolding of the Word, reducing the qualitative depth and relational significance of the message that we call the gospel. Moreover, given the source, it is only the Word in the beginning that defines and determines the universe and all in it, that is, only on God's terms and not on human terms. The cosmological nature of this message unfolding with the Word necessitates our epistemic humility and requires our ontological deference.

Therefore, only on this basis does the message of what unfolds and why become definitive. *What* the Creator created and *why* are understood not by the mere transmission of information by the Word in the beginning but only as the cosmological source of the message in integrated communicative-creative action as Subject for the primacy of relationship together. This integrated dynamic integrally constitutes the relational nature of the message unfolding with the Word—and if detached, no longer relational, if reduced, no longer whole.

2. Relational

What the Creator created and *why* emerged in the beginning only as 'the starting point of relationship'; therefore the what and why are inseparable from the communicative action that unfolds with the Word. The relational nature of the Word ongoingly engages in communicative action, not in the transmission of information. In further and deeper unfolding of this relational dynamic, the Word embodied this relational communication in the vulnerable self-disclosures of the whole of God (Jn 17:4, 6-8; Col 1:19; 2:9). In his crucial prayer-communication to the Father, what the Son completed (*teleioo*) in revealing God was not to merely exhibit God as Object for observation in order to have some information or knowledge *about* God; that quantitative revelation is signified by the word *apokalypto*, which only refers to the object revealed. The Son, however, vulnerably *phaneroo* the Father, that is, more deeply "disclosed you to those whom you gave me"—referring specifically to those to whom the revelation is made in this relational context and process. *Phaneroo* signifies the further and deeper unfolding of the Word as Subject for the sole purpose of relationship together. Therefore,

the nature of the message unfolding with the Word is always relational: “who came from the Father...” (Jn 1:14, NIV), “who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known” (Jn 1:18), “God so loved...gave his Son...send the Son” (Jn 3:16-17), “I am...to the Father” (Jn 14:6), “...they may know you...” (Jn 17:3), “I have made your name known to them...so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them” (Jn 17:26), “...what is heard comes through the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17), “Let the word of Christ dwell in you” (Col 3:16), “Listen! I am standing at the door *of your heart*, knocking; if you hear my voice and *respond to me*, I will come in to you *for reciprocal relationship together*” (Rev 3:20).

Our understanding of the message unfolding with the Word from the beginning does not emerge from the textual words in referential language. This is not merely having referential knowledge and information about God but critically involves the distinguished process of whole-ly knowing God as Subject, which is only the relational outcome of deep involvement in relationship together as Jesus’ prayer above makes definitive (notably of eternal life, Jn 17:3). Therefore, communication from the Word is composed by the primacy of relational language and only secondarily by referential language. The significance of relational language defines, on the one hand, the qualitative ontology, relational nature and vulnerable function of the Word (signifying his glory, Jn 1:14) and, on the other, defines *what* was created and *why*. To define these secondarily by only referential language immediately diminishes what was created and minimalizes why, along with fragmenting the Word as Subject who created in the image and likeness of the whole of God. That is to say, referential language essentially disembodies and de-relationalizes the Word unfolding from the ontological Source in the beginning and the relational nature from the beginning, thereby fragmenting the Word, for example, to teachings and then further disembodied (dismembered parts) into doctrines. Though the teaching and doctrine are *about* the Word, their referential language no longer embodies the whole Subject of the Word for the primacy of relationship together. The implication is that the secondary becomes primary, which in actual practice favors human terms more than God’s relational terms. The relational consequence is relational distance that diminishes, prevents or even precludes the involvement necessary for qualitative relationship—the relational distance demonstrated in epistemic, exegetical, theological and discipleship activities both in church and academy.¹⁴

The reality is compelling, despite not prevailing: we cannot substitute referential language for relational language and have the relational outcome of intimate relationship together. We need to transform to the language of the Word as Subject. Even neuroscience recognizes the limits and consequences of referential language with the development of prose, in contrast to qualitative communication expressed in poetry, singing and music—all of which predate prose in the development of communication.¹⁵ Does this speak to the prominence of poetic style in significant portions of Scripture?

¹⁴ Decades ago, Helmut Thielicke tried to make the same point to his students: “The man who studies theology...might watch carefully whether he increasingly does not think in the third rather than in the second person...Consider that the first time someone spoke of God in the third person and therefore no longer with God but about God was that very moment when the question resounded, ‘Did God really say?’ (cf. Genesis 3:1). This fact ought to make us think.” *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 33-34.

¹⁵ See McGilchrist, *The Master and his Emissary*, 94-132.

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

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

These relational messages are vital to distinguish because they qualify the content aspect of all communication—even qualify the content humans transmit with referential language. The content alone of the words “follow me” easily become redefined by our terms, as demonstrated by prevailing inadequate interpretations for discipleship. Words by themselves, apart from the context of relational messages (e.g. distinct voice intonation, the look on one’s face, whether face to face or looking away), have less meaning, perhaps no meaning, or may even mean the opposite.

As these relational messages are received and understood from the person communicating, there is a deeper basis for knowing that person and a fuller understanding of how to respond back.¹⁶ The significance of this relational language is found no more conclusively than in the Word’s likely most compelling communication to us: “Follow me.” And this study can be defined essentially as the unfolding of these relational words, which Paul hears not in referential content but in the distinguished relational messages from the Word—thereby transforming in the Word’s relational language.

The relational language of the Word is deeply composed of these three relational messages that integrally qualify the self-disclosures of the whole of God and help bring to light the needed understanding of God’s whole thematic relational response to the human condition unfolding with the Word. Besides within the surrounding context, the deeper significance of the Word’s words emerges in the relational context of understanding what

¹⁶ The conceptual dynamics of human communication are discussed in a classic study by Paul Watzlawick, Janet Helmick Beavin, Don D. Jackson, *Pragmatics of Human Communication: A Study of Interactional Patterns, Pathologies, and Paradoxes* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1967).

the Subject of the Word says of himself, or about other(s) or the relationship together, implied in his communication. The relational nature of the language and the messages from the whole Word are irreducible and nonnegotiable for the relational outcome constituted by the Word, in and from the beginning, of the relationships together necessary to be whole, God's relational whole only on God's relational terms. This relational dynamic from outside the universe is vulnerably present and relationally involved with the unfolding of the Word to define and determine the whole nature of his message in the gospel—the whole of Who and which Paul (as Mary embodied earlier) hears from inner out, relationally receives and vulnerably responds to.

3. Whole

When physicist Stephen Hawking gave up his quest to discover a grand unifying theory (GUT), he correctly concluded that this was not possible with the limited framework of science, and that human shaping and construction can only be self-referencing, and therefore inconsistent and incomplete.¹⁷ Only a view from outside the universe could speak of the whole both of the cosmos and in the innermost. This would appear to provide those who affirm God's revelation the view necessary for the whole in order to be whole and live whole. Yet, this wholeness is neither the theology of the Word and related theological anthropology, nor their correlated practice that prevails in the church and academy today. This absence or lack continues to demonstrate the pervasive influence of reductionism and its counter-relational work in understanding the unfolding of the Word in the beginning and his relational work from the beginning. In other words, this is an absence or lack to listen to the message of the whole gospel, which exposes the presence of gospel substitutes from our human shaping and construction (cf. Paul's situation and claim, Gal 1:6-7, 11-12).

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

¹⁷ Discussed in Hans Kung, *The Beginning of All Things: Science and Religion*, 15-24.

determined by human shaping and construction, even with theological certainty and the ontological simulation and epistemological illusion advanced by it.

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

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

Intruding from outside the universe, the whole gospel emerges from the beginning. ‘In the beginning’ put into motion the relational dynamic of the thematic relational action of the whole of God, whose relational response of grace unfolds from this ‘starting point of relationship’. To fast forward, the whole of God’s thematic relational response of grace was enacted ongoingly throughout the OT to converge in the embodying of the Word as Subject in order to be fully disclosed and fulfilled. The integral relational work of the Word of God that unfolded in the incarnation must be contextualized from the beginning to fully understand the whole of God’s (thus Jesus’) relational work composing the gospel.

The relational dynamic to bring change and establish whole relationship together was vulnerably embodied by Jesus, the Word unfolding, to intimately disclose (*phaneroo*, not merely *apokalypto*) the whole of God to completely fulfill God’s thematic relational response from ‘the starting point of relationship’. This is light unfolding in the Word (Ps 119:130; Jn 1:4): in the beginning, being the whole of God (Col 1:19; 2:9); relationally fulfilling “the light of the whole gospel” from the beginning and vulnerably embodying the whole of “the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Cor 4:4-6); who has “turned his face to you” to live whole in the world and make whole the human condition (Jn 14:27; 16:33; Col 1:20; 2:10; 3:15; Eph 2:14; 6:15)—just as the gospel of wholeness was definitively enacted from the beginning (Num 6:26).

This is the whole gospel composed by the Subject of the Word in the qualitative significance of relational language. And the gospel of wholeness, unfolded with the Word

by its cosmological nature in the beginning and by its relational nature from the beginning, emerges whole only in this relational language. Based on this relational source, nothing less and no substitute can be definitive of the relational message that the whole of God communicated with the Word. Referential language, and its reliance on quantitative words to transmit information, is incapable of communicating the relational language of the Word and is deficient in accounting for the Word's relational work. Furthermore, referential language is rendered impotent for the qualitative-relational significance necessarily involved in the whole of God's definitive blessing to bring change and establish the new relationship together of wholeness; perhaps these referential words serve a benedictory function but without relational significance.

Implications in Theology and Practice

To help locate where we are and need to be in the theological task in terms of relational language, we can establish a working definition of theology. With the convergence of the various words, statements and declarations from God highlighted throughout our discussion up to now, the definition of theology has been unfolding. Not to be confused with 'process theology', the composition of theology emerges with the following:

Theology emerges from the intimate reflection (not a quantitative analysis) on the outcome of receiving and responding to God's communicative action in relational terms (cf. *theaomai*, Jn 1:14), not from measured consideration of mere information in referential terms (e.g. *eraunao*, search, look into, try to find out, Jn 5:39)—the most significant reflection of which involves and implies the further relational outcome of knowing and understanding God in qualitative relational terms. On this basis, theology needs to be understood beyond the task of formulating doctrines and constructing systems informing us about God in order to get to the depths of theology's relational significance: making definitive the coherence (*synesis*, cf. Col 2:2-3) of God's self-revelations vulnerably communicated to us as the Subject of God's Word in relational language only for the primacy of relationship together.

If this is the integrating basis for the subject matter of theology, then the theological task by necessity requires the relational context and process of the Subject, not the mere information about the Object. Therefore, the task of making definitive the coherence of God's revelations in relational language involves conjointly the ongoing congruence with God's improbable theological trajectory and compatibility with God's intrusive relational path.

The initial task of theology is to clearly define its own subject matter without the influence from human contextualization to fragment (or distract it from) its subject matter, and without the shaping from human contextualization to obscure its subject matter. Integral to distinguishing its subject matter, the theological task necessitates engaging the definitive (not conventional) epistemic process made accessible by the Subject that will have the relational outcome of knowing and understanding the Subject (not merely the Object) of its subject matter. This epistemology is indispensable for the theological task and essential for theology and its related practice. Basic to this (and any)

epistemology is our qualitative interpretive framework and the relational hermeneutic used to engage God's relational epistemic process only on God's relational terms, in contrast to (and even conflict with) a limited epistemic process with a narrowed epistemic field in referential terms. For too long, the dynamic of referential language has fragmented or obscured the subject matter of theology, and consequently relocated many in the theological task to a different theological trajectory and relational path than the whole of God.

The existing gap between the convention of theological discourse in referential language and theological engagement in relational language is insurmountable. That is, the whole of God from beyond the universe is not distinguished by the limitation of terms within the universe. Even though physicist Stephen Hawking ostensibly has given up his search for a grand unifying theory due to the limits of self-referencing, efforts in the theological task continue in referential language—further prompting God's question "What are you doing here?"

Since the emergence of referential language, the dynamic of its influence and workings has permeated even human development (including the brain) along with its primary purpose to construct substitute developments in theology. As discussed, referential language is fragmentary and disembodies the Word into parts (e.g. teachings, doctrine), which it attempts to aggregate into some unity or so-called whole (e.g. in a systematic or biblical theology). This fragmentation and disembodiment are noticeably evident in textual criticism (historical, form, literary), which embeds us in the secondary without understanding the primary (as defined by God). For George Steiner, this secondary critical reflection is the interpretive crisis that results in the loss of God's presence—a condition he identifies as 'a Secondary City'.¹⁸ More critically, the use of referential language in the quest for certainty (e.g. in foundationalism and philosophical theology), which presumably would more accurately describe and represent the Word (e.g. in propositionalism and criticism), cannot be more than self-referencing, inconsistent and incomplete; that is, this is the consequence once it disembodies and derelationalizes the Word as Subject and hence disengages from the Word's relational context and process vulnerably disclosing the whole of God—the detachment of God's theological trajectory from the relational path, which results in disconnecting from God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement.

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

¹⁸ George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

Essentially, it can be said that referential language was not “designed” for the further development of qualitative communication in relationship but in reality went in the opposite direction that takes us away from qualitative relational connection. Historically, the referential language of prose evolved after poetry, and early poetry was sung, the qualitative significance of which was basic to communication in relationship and not the mere transmission of information.¹⁹ This speaks further to the significance that many portions of the canonical Word are poetry; communication is the key, not transmitting information, which in the Bible singing and music also constitute in the innermost (e.g. Judg 5:3; Ps 27:6; 30:12; 108:1; Eph 5:19; Col 3:16). This raises the issue of the effectiveness of prose in theological discourse. Perhaps contrary to Steiner’s own use of prosaic language, he states the following conviction:

It is, I believe, poetry, art and music which relate us most directly to that in being which is not ours. Science is no less animate in its making of models and images. But these are not, finally, disinterested. They aim at mastery, at ownership. It is counter-creation and counter-love, as these are embodied in the aesthetic and in our reception of formed meaning, which put us in sane touch with that which transcends, with matters ‘undreamt of’ in our materiality. ...All good art and literature begin in immanence. But they do not stop there. Which is to say, very plainly, that it is the enterprise and privilege of the aesthetic to quicken into lit presence the continuum between temporality and eternity, between matter and spirit, between man and ‘the other’.²⁰

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

The hermeneutic of a child that Jesus makes definitive for the theological task is a challenge, and likely threat, to most in theological engagement. Yet, this necessary hermeneutic for relational language does not eliminate reason but rather puts rational

¹⁹ See Oliver Sacks for a discussion on perfect pitch, tonal communication and protolanguage, *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008); see also Edward Foley, *From Age to Age: How Christians Have Celebrated the Eucharist* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1991), 9.

²⁰ Steiner, *Real Presences*, 226-27.

²¹ McGilchrist, *The Master and his Emissary*, 105.

thought into its rightful created context of relationship; for example, not disembodiment (derelationalizing) the words about Object-God from the relational words from Subject-God. The prevailing dichotomy between reason and faith is a construction from referential language, whose distinction-making in referential terms has narrowed the lens giving definition to both reason and faith. Lessing's 'ugly ditch' reflects this dichotomy.

As a child engages the rightful created relational context with the relational process of trust (not blind faith or fideism), that is with vulnerable relational involvement, this person engages a heuristic epistemic process to learn, understand and experience whom he or she can count on in reciprocal relationship to extend that trust (cf. Ps 119:130). The hermeneutic lens of this person ongoingly counts on who, what and how God says of himself to *be* in relationship (as in righteousness), nothing less and no substitutes, thus removing the need for speculation about God. In addition, this hermeneutic also rightly holds God accountable to *be* God in relationship together (e.g. in the relational epistemic process), to be whole-ly with certainty. In the dynamic of the hermeneutic of faith, the epistemic field and process are openly engaged in reciprocal relationship; on these relational terms, neither God does all the work nor do we in the theological task. Therefore, it is vital to understand that accountability in the theological task is by necessity both ways. As God pursues us for theological significance with 'Where are you?' and 'what are you doing here?' there are times in the relational epistemic process when we need to ask God 'where are You?'

As we address these interrelated issues in our theological task, our subject matter will be unmistakable and the purpose of our theological task will become congruent with God's incomparable theological trajectory and compatible with his distinguished relational path. The relational outcome will be knowing and understanding the whole of God for the composition of whole theology and practice—clearly in contrast to and in conflict with any other definition and determination in the theological task. This relational outcome, however, only unfolds in relational terms. Therefore, for the Subject to have clarity and not be obscured in our theology and practice, God's theological trajectory cannot be detached, fragmented or otherwise reduced from the whole of God's relational path. Accordingly, if this relational path indeed involves the whole of God, the relational path can only be intrusive—intrusive not only in the human context but intruding vulnerably in our ongoing lives and intimately with our person from inner out and with our relationships.

The Subject Intrudes

The nature of being a subject is to be who, what and how that person is. To be a whole subject is to be the whole of who, what and how the person is both from inner out and in relationships with others. The Word as Subject cannot be reduced or else the Word no longer composes the Subject in the whole ontology and function of this person. The most that would remain in a reduced Word is the Object. The Word as Object is neither composed for relationship with others, nor can others have reciprocal relationship together with a mere Object of reduced ontology and function. There is no relational connection, ongoing relationship and reciprocal involvement together without the Subject. This reduced condition is all transformed by the vulnerable presence and

intimate involvement of the irreducible Subject of the Word, who constitutes the whole gospel and its whole relational outcome.

This may or may not be received as good news. The whole of God as Subject cannot just be observed from a relational distance, or merely be quantified in referential terms, because the nature of the whole Subject is intrusive—and intrusive both to persons defined from outer in and unavoidably in their relationships. Without this intrusive relational path, the Subject no longer has clarity and becomes elusive, even though the Object may have focus in our theology and practice. However, as the Subject intrudes in our lives, persons and relationships, the heart of our theology and practice is composed—that is, when received and responded to as the Subject in reciprocal relationship together.

Good news may be based on its composition. Good news for the human condition, however, can be based only on the depth of its significance to compose the fulfillment of the human condition. Our beliefs or notions about the gospel tend either to make major assumptions about it so as to render the good news merely, for example, to a headline composed with only a sidebar and obituary in the news, and consequently a gospel without full significance for the human condition. Or we take liberties with the gospel in autonomous efforts to shape the gospel for our (individual and collective) determination and justification so as to render the good news merely, for example, to another op-ed article in the newspaper, and, as a result, not really a gospel for the human condition. The former composition reduces the gospel and the latter renegotiates it, both of which perceive the gospel in referential terms through a myopic lens—the prevailing interpretive framework and perceptual lens. The result commonly existing is a pervasive gospel of a popularized Jesus.

In relational words and language, the gospel is a relational dynamic beyond the proclamation of a static proposition; and it is simply irreducible to referential terms or else the significance of its relational response is fragmented and its wholeness is lost. When this happens, the distinguished Face does not turn and shine to bring new relationship in wholeness but becomes an ambiguous or elusive Face needing human shaping. Moreover, then, the whole gospel is a relational dynamic solely on God's relational terms, which are nonnegotiable to human terms, or else its relational response is no longer to make whole the human condition but becomes determined by the human-shaping influence of the human condition. From the beginning, the gospel distinguishes the unmistakable Face's relational outworking and fulfillment of *siym* (i.e. the transformation) and *shalom* (i.e. to wholeness, Num 6:24-26) by the embodied Word as Subject, who is irreducible to nothing less and no substitutes. And for this gospel to be fulfilled in whole required the unmistakable Face in deepest profile to be vulnerably involved in the intrusive relational path of the embodied Subject of the Word. If the depth of this relational path cannot be fulfilled in referential terms by an Object, then what kind of gospel do we have without the ongoing intrusive involvement of the Subject?

In the highlight of Israel's history (liberation from Egypt), Moses affirmed that the LORD "has become my salvation" (Ex 15:2). In a low point in his personal history, the ancient poet wanted the distinguished Face to turn to his innermost to experience the same affirmation: "say to my innermost, 'I am your salvation'" (Ps 35:3). Both of them expressed their feelings in the most qualitative form (and the earliest) of human communication: song and poetry. Referential words in referential language (a later development in human communication) were inadequate to express the depth not only of

their hearts but the qualitative-relational depth of God's salvation. Moses' song was a prelude to the communication in their relationship together in which God spoke directly to Moses, Face to face (Num 12:6-8). Their direct relational involvement together was a precursor of what God saves *to* conjointly with saves *from*. These early experiences capture the initial relational significance, if not always the qualitative significance, of the dynamics of God's thematic relational response signifying the gospel. The dynamic that unfolds from these experiences, along with others like Abraham's, has even further and deeper qualitative-relational significance that distinguishes the gospel unmistakably in wholeness (the *shalom* of God's definitive blessing), and thus inseparably from the whole, God's relational whole. As we fast-forward, the distinguished Face's relational outworking and fulfillment of *siym* and *shalom* intensify.

While the identity of the Face was always clear, the clarity of God's face and involvement fully became unmistakable when the Face intruded as the Subject of the Word. What the qualitative and relational significance of the gospel are was unclear until the incarnation. Yet, understanding both its qualitative significance and relational significance remained an issue throughout the incarnation and Paul's time, and remains an issue for us today. This lack of understanding remains until a compatible shift occurs integrally with the gospel.

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

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

Strategic Shift

Moses' experience of God's direct involvement with him in Face-to-face relationship was a precursor to the strategic shift of the gospel. This strategic shift clearly emerged with the Samaritan woman (initially discussed with the whole model of the gospel in the Reintroduction, Jn 4:4-26). In the shift from a place (like the mountain, tabernacle, or Jerusalem), and from situations and circumstances, the whole of God becomes vulnerably and relationally accessible for ongoing involvement in direct relationship Face to face. This makes the transcendent God accessible to all peoples and

persons regardless of their human distinctions from outer in, on the one hand, which certainly opened up a unique opportunity for this woman, viewed as a person of despicable race-ethnicity, debased gender and likely denigrated character. On the other hand, however, this was unique access only for the relationship-specific involvement from inner out in the primacy together of God's family, for which this woman would have to shift from outer in to be compatible. This then makes the holy God accessible for relationship only to those who respond in the innermost of Jesus' relational context and process—in other words, relationship only on God's terms (cf. Jn 8:31-42). Was this good news or bad news for this woman?

The relational significance of God's strategic shift is magnified in this highly improbable interaction. For a Jewish rabbi to engage a Samaritan woman one-on-one in public required an act of *redemptive reconciliation*—that is, to be freed from constraints of the *old* (and what defined them), and thus opened to vulnerably engage each other in the relationship of the *new*. Jesus tore down the constraint of “double jeopardy” (double discrimination based here on ethnicity and gender, without even considering her apparent social ostracism) for her and gave her direct access to a highly improbable, though ultimately unique, opportunity: unrestricted connection and intimate relationship with the whole of God.

As the interaction unfolds, it becomes increasingly vulnerable face to face. When her emerging person began to understand (*theoreo*) a deeper significance of the person engaging her (v.19), she turned the focus to God and the existing structure of religious practice (v.20). Yet, her focus should not be limited to the issue of worship but necessarily involved the accessibility of God. Perhaps she had doubts about accessing God if she had to participate in the prevailing practice. Any ambivalence at this point would be understandable, given her social standing in the community.

In relational language, Jesus vulnerably engaged her to reveal that the *old* (prevailing religious tradition and way to see things) was going to be changed (Jn 4:21-22), and that the *new* “is now here” (4:23-24). The strategic shift in the holy and transcendent God's presence was embodied vulnerably with her in a highly improbable encounter—improbable both in God's action and in human thinking. As Jesus disclosed the qualitative and relational significance of his whole person in his pivotal “I am” relational message to her (v.26), the whole of God's ontology and function became vulnerably accessible for ongoing involvement in direct relationship Face to face. The same relational dynamic was also extended improbably to Paul on the Damascus road, which raised similar issues for Paul in his religious tradition, as for the woman in hers, but with further implications and consequences. This shift to the new relational context and process, however, necessitated (and still necessitates today) terms significant for compatibility in order to distinguish relationship together from prevailing human terms, self-definition and determination. In the strategic shift of the gospel, there is no relational progression with the whole-ly accessible God without these ongoing relational terms: “in spirit and truth” (4:23-24).

These familiar terms cannot be limited to worship in traditional terms because Jesus takes worship beyond its traditional context (v.21). Worship is not location-specific but relationship-specific in its primacy. While the latter was always intended by God to constitute the worship signified in the tabernacle or temple, the location had become the primacy to constitute worship that only secondarily signified relationship with God. The

relational distance or lack of relational involvement with God emerges unmistakably in worship when perceived from inner out (cf. Mk 7:6-8). This practice engaged in relationship without the heart, the innermost of the person that Jesus made definitive in relational language by the term “spirit,” (cf. the poet’s *nephesh*, Ps 35:3).

Jesus made clear that worship of (and all relational involvement with) the whole of God must be on these terms. These are neither optional nor ideal terms but “must” (v.24); not *opheilo*, out of personal obligation, duty or moral compulsion but *dei*, unavoidable, necessary by the nature of things, that is, by the nature of God and this relationship. Since Jesus disclosed the whole of “God is spirit,” this raised the issue again of access to the transcendent God. How do these terms functionally bridge the gap of transcendence to access God? If Jesus were not speaking, we could suspect anthropomorphism. The Samaritan woman then expressed her confidence (*oida*) that someday the Messiah “will explain everything to us” (*anangelo*, to disclose freely, openly, v.25). Jesus responded even deeper by vulnerably disclosing his whole person to her: “I am he, the *person* who is speaking to you” (v.26). And what Jesus made clear were the terms “in spirit and in truth.”

This process may appear somewhat circular without resolving in function the issue of access to the transcendent God. It will remain without functional significance if the focus is only on the content of Jesus’ words. When Jesus said “I who speak to you,” the term for “speak” (*laleo*) is contrasted with a synonym term *lego* (“to say,” discourse involving the intellectual part of the person). *Laleo* does not emphasize the content of the speech but rather focuses on the reality of communication taking place (as opposed to no communication, cf. Heb 1:1-2). This focus on the factual act of communication makes the function of relationship primary, which is neither to discount what Jesus said nor to disregard the terms (“in spirit and truth”) disclosed as necessary. The significance of this is to account for and pay attention to the relational context and process, the nature of which are necessary for these terms. In other words, “I am he, the *God is spirit* who is speaking to you” was vulnerably disclosing both the relational context “out of” (*ek*) the holy and transcendent God for direct access, and then the relational process “back to” the whole of God for intimate relationship together—the “out of-back to” relational dynamic constituting the whole of Jesus’ person, who composes this relational connection.

The functional significance of “in spirit and in truth” can only be understood in the relational significance of the holy and transcendent God’s thematic action fulfilled in the incarnation of Jesus’ whole person (cf. Ps 33:11b). Though the Samaritan woman expressed no understanding of these words in his speech, she was experiencing their functional significance in their involvement together.

This raises two important questions. What if Jesus’ person were something less or some substitute of God, or what if the person Jesus presented in his life and practice were anything less or any substitute of his whole person, even as God? The former has been an ongoing theological issue, which Jesus’ first century adversaries tried to establish about him. Any revisionism of Jesus makes discourse about an accessible God insignificant, if not irrelevant. The latter question is a functional issue that essentially has been ignored. Yet, its critical importance has theological implications about the reliability of our Christology, and more importantly creates a functional problem of integrity for the relational involvement of trust. How reliable is your knowledge of someone if the person presented to you is anything less or any substitute of the who, what and how of that

person? Moreover, how can you trust someone in a relationship if you can't count on that person's involvement to be beyond anything less or any substitute of the whole person?

Jesus demonstrated to this woman that his involvement with her was nothing less and no substitutes of his whole person. This was congruent with his ongoing self-disclosure of the whole of God and, specific to her, opened access to the transcendent "God is spirit." Something less or any substitutes would not have fulfilled this function for her, much less fulfilled the whole of God's thematic action for all humanity. The implication is "I who speak am [here to openly disclose to you that spirit]."

The incarnation makes accessible the presence of the holy and transcendent God. The glory of God in Jesus' whole person makes evident the heart of God's being, the core of the whole of the triune God, functionally for relationship (cf. Jn 1:14). The vulnerable presence of the very heart of God is the truth of who and what God is, and the functional significance of nothing less and no substitutes; and the intimate involvement of the very core of the whole of the triune God is the truth of how God is, and the relational significance of nothing less and no substitutes. The heart (core) and truth of God in the Subject Jesus are not revelations (*apokalypto*) of mere information but vulnerable self-disclosures (*phaneroo*) only for the intimate involvement necessary in relationship together as family. Thus, the ontology of "God is spirit" is disclosed by Jesus to be in function both vulnerably present and intimately involved. And the Samaritan woman could count on the reliability of who was disclosed to her because nothing less than and no substitutes for the heart and truth of Jesus' whole person fulfilled this function in the trinitarian relational process of family love. This was what she was experiencing from Jesus as the heart and truth of her own person opened to him. Those who respond back to God in this new relational context and process must by its nature function in likeness: "in spirit and in truth."

This strategic shift is made functional foremost in worship, which is the *what* of Jesus (the Father said) to pay attention to necessary in "the kind of worshippers the Father seeks" (v.23). In function, worship practice is the prime indicator of our ongoing reciprocal relational involvement with God, which is the *why* of Jesus (the Father said) to pay attention to necessary for the kind of relationship the Father seeks to experience together.

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

In other words, without reciprocal relational involvement our worship practice (or any practice) has no relational significance to Subject-God—no matter how demonstrative, vibrant or intense—though perhaps is related to the Object of worship (or faith and service). Without the qualitative function of our heart, our practice has no

relational involvement with God—no matter how much activity, time and effort for God. The distance of our heart is always consequential to relationship with God—not to mention, to the qualitative significance of our practice. Life and practice in God’s likeness is only about relationship; whole life and practice must then by its nature be the function of relational involvement, thus of the heart. And the depth of relational involvement is always inversely proportional to the extent of distance our heart has. Moreover, the distance our heart keeps in a relationship is the primary indicator of the quality of our involvement in that relationship. The function of our heart thus becomes both integral and integrating for relational involvement, for what is necessary by nature to make relationships significant, and for what is basic to function in whole life and practice.

The heart (core) of the person is the “spirit” disclosed by Jesus that is necessary and intrinsic to “God is spirit” in order to be involved with the Father (Jn 4:23-24). By vulnerably disclosing the heart of God’s being, the core of the triune God, Jesus made evident the transcendent “God is spirit” (this self-existing spirit distinct from all his creatures, who alone has life within himself and is the life-giver) as the present and involved “God is heart” (cf. Ps 33:9,11, *leb*, heart). This does not redefine the ontology of God but clearly illuminates the strategic shift of God’s thematic relational action. Jesus is *the hermeneutical key* that opens this ontological door to the whole of God. Therefore, by the intrusion of Jesus’ whole ontology and function, the very heart of God’s being is the aspect of God’s glory made accessible to us, with whom we can intimately connect for relationship together by God’s relational nature.

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

The relational reality illuminated in the unmistakable face of Jesus is this ontological shift: The heart of God's being is the aspect of God's glory made accessible to us with which we can functionally connect for relationship together by God's relational nature. At the same time, this relational connection is possible (not improbable) also because of the ontology of the human person Jesus implied in "spirit," which God seeks. That is, the God of heart, who was vulnerably disclosed to us, made us in the image of the whole of God. Simply stated, the God of heart made us persons of heart (cf. Ps 33:15, *leb*).

This defines why the "God is spirit" (heart) seeks those "in spirit" (heart), who by nature must function in likeness of heart to be involved. The strategic shift of God's thematic action makes conclusive undeniably—though still avoidable by our heart—that the whole of God's desires are to be directly involved with the whole person for intimate relationship together as family. Since the function of the heart constitutes the relational involvement of the whole person, God cannot count on the whole person for this relational progression until it involves the heart with nothing less and no substitutes. Accordingly, this includes the "truth" or honesty of the heart presented to God for it to fulfill the intimate connection of 'hearts open to each other and coming together'.

Yet, the vulnerable honesty of our heart as the primary basis for function is rarely discussed, much less made necessary for our life and practice with God. This indicates subscribing to (perhaps unknowingly) a theological anthropology that composes persons and relationships in reduced ontology and function shaped by human contextualization. The implication of this discrepancy, both theologically and functionally, is that we don't really "Listen to him!" The irony in this could easily become the following for all of us:

That the transcendent God is now more accessible to us than we are accessible to God; and the heart of God is more vulnerable to us directly for relationship than we are vulnerable to God; thus the whole of God is ongoingly more intimately involved in relationship with us than we are ongoingly accessible and vulnerable in relationship with God.

A further irony may involve maintaining God in transcendence in order, rightly, not to reduce God to human shaping, and in turn struggling functionally to access God, who has been constrained to be accessible and vulnerable by this predisposition or bias, thus in effect reducing the whole of God to functional deism. Whatever the irony, the relational consequence is that the whole of God grieves (Lk 19:41-42; Eph 4:30) over this sad reality until we are transformed to wholeness, by necessity as persons and persons together in relationships. The deeper implication for us in all this, for which we have to account, is reinforcing counter-relational work—the genius of reductionism—despite a theology to the contrary. We need to return to the heart of the matter—not in referential terms but in the relational terms of turning around and back to (also known as repentance) the Subject of the Word.

"In spirit and truth" are the compatible qualitative relational terms that shift human persons to converge with the strategic shift of the gospel. As hearts open and come together, the gospel's relational dynamic in distinguished relational progression unfolds as follows: redefines their persons from outer in to inner out, transforms them from reductionism, and makes them whole in the primacy of relationship together in

God's family—all of which unfolds irreducibly and nonnegotiablely in the gospel of transformation to wholeness. Therefore, our theological reflections on the ontology and function of both God and the human person deepen as we understand the pivotal significance of the Samaritan woman's experience with the improbable. The need to account for the whole person, God's and ours, is critical to the relational dynamic of the gospel and its relational outcome in the primacy of intimate relationships together Face to face necessary to hold together God's family in the innermost.

The relational terms that only Subject Jesus made definitive are neither optional nor idealized terms, and certainly cannot be understood as referential terms. Jesus' relational terms embody the whole of God's thematic relational response in the gospel and constitute the only terms by *what* and *how* God does relationships for the gospel's reciprocal relational outcome. Understanding the qualitative significance and relational significance of the gospel, however, does not stop with the strategic relational shift. Further shifts unfold in the relational dynamic of the gospel distinguished by the relational progression to deepen our understanding and to fulfill our experience for its relational outcome. And in a further shift by the irreducible Subject of the Word, this gospel will be characterized as more of the improbable, thus neither a common nor popular gospel.

Tactical Shift

From the moment the Subject of the Word established the vulnerable presence and intimate involvement of God—"I am he, the *person* who is speaking to you"—the face of God was distinguished unmistakably for only new relationship together, never to be merely observed. The strategic shift opened direct access to Face-to-face relationship with the whole of God. The relational dynamic of the gospel also embodies the relational progression of relationship together to its complete (as in whole, not its conclusion) relational outcome. This relational progression unfolds in the gospel with the tactical shift, the further and deeper shift of the gospel integrated with the strategic relational shift.

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

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

A partial theological answer to the question perhaps could be that the human person is not only God's creation but created in God's image as the epitome of God in all creation; thus in support of *imago Dei*, God maintains this involvement and caring (cf. God's providence). Yet, this is really the wrong question to be asking because it does not focus on the primary. Attempting to explain God's action on the basis of *what* defines the human person is to conclude that human persons merit or warrant God's action—which is essentially the underlying dynamic for identity maintenance in Judaism with its identity markers. Such an explanation cannot be justified as the basis for moving the transcendent God to action. The primary question then to ask focuses on the innermost of God: Who and what are *you* that this is how you are—present and involved?

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

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

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

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

distinguished his relational involvement in progression with persons, and distinguished those persons in their relational response in relational progression.

We had our first exposure to Jesus' tactical shift when he called Levi to be redefined, transformed and made whole (Mt 9:9-13). Reviewing Levi's story, it was nothing less than the embodying of the gospel—that is, the gospel that is contingent on no substitutes for a complete Christology and a full soteriology. In calling Levi, Jesus demonstrated the new perceptual-interpretive framework distinguished from what prevailed in common function; and this new framework further needs to be distinguished from what prevails today.

Jesus' whole person crossed social, cultural and religious boundaries to extend his relational work of grace to Levi, who crossed those same barriers (for him) to respond to Jesus in order to connect in relationship together Face to face. In this highly unlikely relationship (given Levi's status), Jesus made evident his tactical shift for deeper involvement in the relational progression. This was initially demonstrated by the significance of their table fellowship together (including the presence of other tax collectors and sinners) after Levi's response (Mt 9:10). Levi was not only redeemed *from* the old but freed *to* relationship together in the *new*; dinner together was not a routine activity for pragmatic reasons (as is the Western tendency today, especially in families) but a social communion signifying a depth of relationship together involving friendship, intimacy and belonging²²—that is, specifically in the primacy of whole relationship together in the relational progression to God's family. This relationship would transform Levi and make him whole, which Levi would experience even further in relational progression.

Intrusively as Subject and vulnerably as person, Jesus' tactical shift enacts the relational dynamic in this relational progression for persons like Levi to go from a disciple (and servant) of Jesus to his intimate friend (Jn 15:15), and then to be whole together as family (Jn 14:23; 17:21). Our discipleship must by this nature account for this intimate relationship together; and our ecclesiology must by this tactical shift account in our church practice for this new relationship together as family—not just friends but sisters and brothers in the primacy of God's family. Anything less and any substitutes in our discipleship and ecclesiology deny the relational outcome of the intrusive Subject's tactical shift and disconnect us from the vulnerable presence and intimate involvement of the whole of God's strategic shift. Thus, the question of good news or bad news keeps emerging, which the Subject holds us accountable to answer.

This new relationship and gathering were not only improbable to observing Pharisees but unacceptable (Mt 9:11). Yet the holy Jesus in vulnerable presence and intimate involvement was not making evident a relational separation from the common's context but the distinction of his relational work of grace from common function, even in religious practice. The most probable candidates to follow Jesus would be those with messianic expectations; others likely would be the economically poor. As a low-level tax collector Levi wouldn't assume to be aligned to the former category, and he didn't appear to be economically poor, though certainly not rich. These candidates represent, however, what is the expected from common function—those who warrant a response. Levi

²² For further discussion of table fellowship by Jesus and the Mediterranean world, see S. Scott Bartchy, "The Historical Jesus and Honor Reversal at the Table" in Wolfgang Stegemann, Bruce J. Malina, Gerd Theissen, eds. *The Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 175-183.

represents the qualitative distinction of Jesus' relational work of grace from the common function of those who don't warrant a response. This reflected the perception from a different lens of this new perceptual-interpretive framework.

While celebrating Levi's commencement in the relational progression, Jesus disputed these religious reductionists by clarifying his vulnerable presence, purpose and function (vv.12-13). In the strategic shift of God's thematic action, the incarnation was only for direct relationship together as the whole of God's family. As God's ultimate response to the human relational condition "to be apart" from God's whole, Jesus vulnerably functioned to call such persons to be made whole in the likeness of the Trinity. He made this evident by definitively declaring that these persons are qualitatively distinct (but not intrinsically distinguished) from the "the healthy" (*ischyo*, to be whole) and from "the righteous" (*dikaios*, congruence in actions to one's constitutionally just, right character, which implies wholeness instead of disparity, vv.12-13). In other words, those who were not whole and who remained apart from the whole were the persons Jesus came to be vulnerably involved with in his relational work of grace in order to reconcile them back to the whole of God.

"The sick"- "sinners," whom Jesus called, were not those perceived by common function—that is, those commonly perceived by a surrounding context—as sick or sinners. While Jesus certainly never ignored those defined as sick and sinners, he was involved further and deeper than merely with physical disease and moral/ethical failure. Levi was not suffering physical disease, though he likely was perceived as a sinner of moral/ethical failure, assuming the stereotype for tax collectors applied to him. Yet Jesus notably pursued Levi also for the "social illness" (distinguished from physical disease) he was suffering that made him part of "the sick" (*kakos*, v.12).²³ The term *kakos* not only denotes to be physically ill but also to be lacking in value. This suggests social interpretation (not medical) that labeled persons to be lacking in value. The consequence of having this label was exclusion from participating in valued relationships of the "whole" (as in community), thus suffering the social illness of not belonging. This expands our understanding of Levi's condition as a tax collector, which was *kakos* (to be lacking in value), not *ischyo* (to be whole) and *dikaios* (to function in wholeness). Though Levi didn't belong to the prevailing whole of the common context, Jesus changed Levi's condition to belong (as a function of relationship, not merely membership) in God's whole.

This also deepens and broadens our understanding of sinners and the function of sin. In the trinitarian relational context and process vulnerably engaged by Jesus, sin is the functional opposite of being whole and sinners are in the ontological-relational condition "to be apart" from God's whole. When sin is understood beyond just moral and ethical failure displeasing to God, *sin becomes the functional reduction of the whole of God*, thus in conflict with God as well as with that which is and those who are whole. Sin as reductionism is pervasive; and such sinners, intentionally or unintentionally, reflect, promote or reinforce this counter-relational work, even in the practice of and service to church.

²³ For a discussion on disease and illness in the Mediterranean, see John J. Pilch, "Healing" in John J. Pilch and Bruce J. Malina, eds. *Handbook of Biblical Social Values* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 103-104.

At Levi's house Jesus responded to the sin of reductionism in religious practice, both to expose its participants and to redeem his disciples for the relational progression. This involved his tactical shift, which was not about sacrifice and serving, that is, in the common function of the religious community (or a reductionist reading of Mt 20:28). Only Matthew's Gospel has Jesus quoting "I desire mercy, not sacrifice" (9:13), which would not be unfamiliar to Jewish listeners and readers (quoted from Hos 6:6). The fact that Matthew has Jesus repeating this later, when his disciples were accused of unlawful practice on the Sabbath (Mt 12:7), is significant. The code of practice for Judaism was redefined by reductionism, thus these Pharisees did not understand the meaning of the quotation from Hosea. Jesus made it imperative to "Go and learn what this means."

Sacrifice (and related practice) was a defining term for Jews, and also has been defining for some Christians (e.g., by misunderstanding Lk 14:33, Mk 10:21). Yet God's strategic shift to the incarnation was not about Jesus becoming a mere sacrifice on the cross. Moreover, Jesus' tactical shift within the incarnation was not about a change from Messiah to servant. By referring back to Hosea, Jesus made two issues clear about the practice of sacrifice, not only for Jews but for all his followers: (1) sacrifice does not define the whole person, only a part of what a person may do, thus should never be used to define that person, just as what Jesus did on the cross should not define his whole person (or it becomes an incomplete Christology); and (2) the practice of sacrifice neither has priority over the primacy of relationship nor has significance to God apart from relationship, thus its engagement must not reduce the priority and function of relational involvement.

These two important issues apply equally to service, and the term sacrifice can be replaced by service in the above for the same application. This relational clarity and relational significance are crucial to understand for both of them—particularly for the gospel of Jesus the Christ and his followers' life and practice. Moreover, a reduction of this relational priority and function prevents us from composing a complete Christology, which embraces the whole ontology and function of the Subject Jesus. This whole Christology embraces the whole of Jesus' person functioning in whole life and practice as the intrinsic qualitative distinction from common function (as prevails in culture).

Forms of sacrifice (particularly in Judaism) and forms of service (particularly among Jesus' followers) without the relational involvement of the whole person both represent the common function of a religious community influenced by reductionism. Jesus' vulnerable presence and intimate relational involvement were the qualitative distinction from this prevailing function of the common, necessary by nature to disclose access to the whole of God for the experiential truth of relationship together.

In his relational work of grace, Jesus made clearly evident the importance of Levi's whole person and his need to be reconciled to the primary relationships necessary to be whole, thereby functionally signifying his tactical shift for further engagement in the relational progression. For his followers to go beyond sacrifice and service "and learn [*manthano*, understand as a disciple] what this means [*eimi*, to be, used as a verb of existence, 'what this/he is'],' they need to understand the heart of Jesus' person, not merely the meaning of these words in Hosea. That is, this is not the conventional process of learning as a common rabbinic student but the relational epistemic process characteristic of Jesus' disciples. This then must by nature be the understanding

experienced directly in relationship with Jesus the Subject, aside from any other titles and distinctions ascribed to him.

Such relational involvement is what the full quote from Hosea expands on: “I desire mercy [*hesed*, love], not sacrifice, and knowledge [*da’at*, understanding] of God rather than burnt offerings” (Hos 6:6). This is not about knowing information *about* God, which was why those Pharisees never understood the significance of Hosea’s quote. God wants (“desire,” *haphes*, denotes a strong positive attraction for) the relational involvement of love in the intimate relationship together necessary to understand the whole of God. In other words, this is God’s deepest desire and priority over anything else done *for* God. Sacrifice and service never supersede relationship (cf. Jn 12:26). For his followers to get reduced in life and practice to sacrifice or service is to stop following Jesus in the relational progression to the whole of God, and therefore to be on a different relational path than Subject Jesus. Such reductionism needs to be redeemed for the relationship to progress.

The relational progression is further distinguished with Zacchaeus. What unfolds from Levi to Zacchaeus is certainly more improbable in contextual terms (Lk 19:1-10). The significance of this was the design of Jesus’ tactical shift, which further illuminated his qualitative innermost distinguished from common function prevailing in human context. Yet, it is not the situation that is most significant but the relational messages, connection and outcome composed by the Subject of the Word—functions that cannot emerge from an Object.

To become rich in this ancient community required power to accumulate wealth at the expense of others.²⁴ Chief tax collectors (Levi’s boss) in particular became rich often by their greedy management of a system that depended on imposing unjust taxes and tolls for greater profit. Low-level tax collectors like Levi merely did their dirty work. As a chief tax collector, Zacchaeus not only bore this social stigma but clearly appeared to abuse his power to extort others by his own admission (19:8). He was a sinner in the eyes of all (not just the Pharisees, v.7), who apparently warranted no honor and respect despite his wealth—implied in not given front-row access to Jesus by the crowd, which he could have even paid for but had to climb a tree with dishonor instead (vv.3-4). The image of a short rich sinner in a tree and the Messiah coming together was a highly unlikely scenario.

In this common context, Jesus said: “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must [*dei*] stay [*meno*, dwell] at your house today” (v.5). Jesus further made evident in the common’s context the intrinsic qualitative distinction of his relational work of grace from common function. This was not about hospitality necessary on his way to Jerusalem to establish a messianic kingdom. This even went beyond the table fellowship of shared community or friendship. This relational shift of God’s thematic action was only for deeper involvement in the relational progression, which Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem to constitute in the new creation of God’s family.

Given Jesus’ practice of observing purity as prescribed by the law, he was not ignoring covenant practice in this interaction. Yet he functioned in clear distinction from the prevailing function of covenant practices, which had become a reduction to a code of

²⁴ For a discussion on rich and poor in the Mediterranean context of the NT, see Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 97-100.

behavior for self-definition (individual and corporate) rather than the relational function necessary by the nature of the covenant with God. A system defining human ontology and identity based on what persons do inevitably engages a comparative process that groups persons on a human totem pole or ladder. This explicit or implicit stratification reduces the importance of the whole person and fragments the primary relationships necessary to be whole. The consequence, even unintentionally among God's people, is reinforcing the human condition "to be apart" from God's whole.

Though Zacchaeus certainly was not lacking economically, he lacked by any other measurement. Most importantly, he lacked the wholeness of belonging to the whole of God. This was the only issue Jesus paid attention to—in demonstration of his perceptual-interpretive framework. By this qualitative lens, he didn't see a short rich sinner up in a tree but Zacchaeus' whole person needing to be redefined, transformed and made whole. Zacchaeus also becomes a metaphor for all such persons, whom Jesus must (*dei*) intrusively pursue in their innermost by the nature of God's thematic action; this is how Jesus also pursued the rich young ruler in his innermost, without the same relational outcome as Zacchaeus. This metaphor for such persons, whom Jesus must "dwell with" (*meno*) by intimate relational involvement together as family, also signifies the qualitative and relational significance necessary for the gospel—which his tactical shift composes. Yet these are persons who will not be paid attention to, and thus not understood, without this qualitative lens. This is a metaphor that will not be understood, and thus ignored, without the new perceptual-interpretive framework.

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

We need to understand the process of soteriology here in order not to have a truncated soteriology, which strains the gospel for lack of theological and functional clarity. The term "salvation" (*soteria*) comes from "a savior" (*soter*), which comes from the function "to save" (*sozo*). "Today salvation [from Jesus as savior] has come [*ginomai*, begins to be, comes into existence] to this house [*oikos*, a family living in a house], because [*kathoti*, to the degree that] this man, too, is a son of Abraham." Doctrinal predispositions and biases of a truncated soteriology (involving only what we are saved *from*) and an incomplete Christology (e.g., reducing Jesus' whole person to a role as savior) prevent us from perceiving the relational process involved here and understanding the relational progression inherent to salvation (and what we are saved *to*).

Jesus' whole person was vulnerably present and intimately involved with Zacchaeus for the relationship necessary to be saved. Jesus didn't come merely to bring salvation into existence but to engage Zacchaeus for the distinct relationship to be saved "to the degree that he is a son of Abraham." If this "degree" meant to the extent that Zacchaeus demonstrated adherence to the code of Judaism, then this was salvation coming into existence based on what Zacchaeus did in order to be identified with the lineage of Abraham. If "degree" involved the extent to which Zacchaeus engaged Jesus in the relational progression necessary to be saved, then this was salvation based on Jesus' relational work of grace, not Zacchaeus' lineage with Abraham. Jesus needed by nature (*dei*) to dwell at Zacchaeus' house only for the latter.

What does it mean to be saved and what is this salvation that is not truncated? Limiting our discussion to the term "to save," *sozo* denotes to deliver, to make whole. In Jesus' relational work "to save," *sozo* includes both and thus necessarily involves a twofold process: first, to deliver from sin and its consequence of death, and secondly to make whole in the relationship necessary together with the whole of God. Salvation (*soteria*) is a function of *sozo*. Soteriology is truncated when it is only a function of the process "to deliver"—that is, only what we are saved *from*. Sadly, this truncated understanding is our prevailing view of salvation. A full soteriology, however, necessarily is a function of *sozo*'s twofold process, which then must by its nature also involve "to make whole"—that is, including by necessity (without being optional) what we are saved *to*. This second function of the process is the significance of Jesus sharing directly with Zacchaeus "I must be [*dei*] relationally involved [*meno*]..." (v.5). This *dei* and *meno* "to make whole" constitutes the relational significance of the gospel of transformation to wholeness, and thus also redefines the evangelism necessary to fulfill Jesus' commission (to be discussed later).

What are we saved to and what is the relationship necessary together with the whole of God to make us whole? The answer directly involves Jesus' tactical shift for further and deeper involvement in the relational progression. Levi and Zacchaeus had similar experiences of Jesus vulnerably pursuing them in their condition "to be apart" from the whole; and both directly experienced his intimate relational involvement for the purpose to be made whole. Yet each of these narratives emphasizes a different aspect of the relational progression; combining their experiences with Jesus into one relational process provides us a full view of the relational progression.

The relational progression began with the call to "Follow me"—the call to be redefined, transformed and made whole. Relationship with Jesus as a disciple (*mathetes*) was a function of an adherent, the terms of which were only determined by Jesus.²⁵ This relationship went further than the common function of traditional rabbinic students as learners preparing for the role of teachers themselves eventually. Jesus' disciples served others (*diakoneo*) in various ways, yet with the paradigm making relational involvement with him the primary priority, not the work of serving (Jn 12:26, cf. 21:15-22). Disciples functioned as servants, ministers, deacons (*diakonos*), which tended to be perceived as the role of servant. Disciples became servants (cf. Mt 20:26-28), though with no fixed distinction between these identities.

²⁵ For an in-depth study of *mathetes*, see Michael J. Wilkens, *Discipleship in the Ancient World and Matthew's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995).

Servant (*diakonos* and the functional position of *doulos*, slave) did reflect movement in the relational progression, as Jesus implied (in Mt 20:26-27), but this does not define its relational completion. Unfortunately, our perceptions and practice of discipleship tend to be defined by a servant model, which may need redeeming (cf. Martha's practice, Lk 10:38-42). Yet, Levi in particular did not give up his servant role to a chief tax collector merely for another form of servanthood. Table fellowship for Levi and Zacchaeus necessarily functioned to take disciples further and deeper in relationship together than as mere servants. Table fellowship demonstrated the relational progression to friendship, intimacy and belonging. Jesus clearly constituted this movement in the relational progression when he told his disciples: "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you" (Jn 15:15, NIV).

Friendship in the ancient world was not loosely defined, as we experience it in the modern West and globally on the Internet. Though there were different kinds of friends, the four main characteristics of friendship involved: (1) loyalty (commitment), (2) equality, (3) mutual sharing of all possessions, and (4) an intimacy together in which a friend could share anything or everything in confidence.²⁶ A good servant (or slave) would experience (1). Good friends in the Western world today would certainly experience (2), hopefully (1), and less and less likely (4), but rarely (3). Modern perspectives tend to devalue (4) and magnify (1) and (2). Though his disciples never had (2) with Jesus, they experienced the others with him; Jesus demonstrated the first (Jn 15:13), the third (Jn 15:9,11; 16:14-15) and the fourth (Jn 15:15; 16:12-13), with (4) notably signifying the nature of their relationship as Jesus shared above. The disciples were inconsistent with (4) in their response, with Peter apparently the most open to share.

The movement from disciple and servant to friend in the relational progression, however, is only a function of relationship together in its primacy. It is not an outcome from sharing time and space, activity or work together, though it certainly involves these as secondary to the primacy of relationship. Table fellowship between Jesus and his disciples signified the function of intimate relationship together in which everything could be shared—notably demonstrated in their last table fellowship together. This was not about sharing merely personal information but sharing one's whole person. This relational involvement cannot be reduced to an activity, or shared time and space. Without the vulnerable presence of the whole person and the intimate relational involvement, there was no relational significance to whatever they did—including proclaiming the gospel. Jesus did not want mere loyal disciples and servants but friends to share intimate relationship together; he was vulnerably present and intimately involved "to seek and to save" persons for this relational progression to the whole of God. This relational process necessitates the intimate relational function of friends, nothing less and no substitutes.

Yet, friends together is not what we are saved *to*. Though the function of friends is necessary in the relational progression, it is insufficient for the relationship necessary together to make us whole—the only outcome of what Jesus saves us *to*. The relational progression does not conclude in friendship with Jesus, which has become another contemporary misperception of Jesus shaped by the prevailing influence of reductionism

²⁶ Craig S. Keener reports this information on friendship in *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 302.

to define our life and practice. In Jesus' tactical shift demonstrated with Zacchaeus for his involvement in the relational progression, Jesus alluded to both: what we are saved to, and thus the relationship necessary to be whole.

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

The whole of God is constituted in the life of the Trinity. Yet the wholeness of the Trinity's life is signified neither by the titles of the trinitarian persons nor by the roles they perform. While each trinitarian person has a unique function in the economy of the Trinity, that function neither defines their persons nor determines the basis for their relationship together—that is, how they relate to and are involved with each other. Their whole persons (not modes, nor tritheism) are neither ontologically apart from the others nor functionally independent, but always by the nature of God are relationally involved in intimate relationship together as One (perhaps in perichoresis) by the relational process of love, functional family love (Jn 10:38; 14:9-11,31; 15:26; 17:10-11, Mt 3:17; 17:5). This is the whole of God, the wholeness of the Trinity's life, that Jesus vulnerably shared for his followers to belong to and experience in likeness of the Trinity in order to be whole; and that he prayed as the central focus to form his family for the world to witness (Jn 17:20-26).

Both Zacchaeus and Levi received and responded to the three vital relational messages (about God, them and their relationship) that the ancient poet asked to experience as his salvation (Ps 35:3). While the poet's experience of what he was saved to was limited, he did receive these relational messages sufficiently to understand that God "delights in the *shalom* of his servant" (Ps 35:27). *Shalom* is the definitive relational outcome of *siym* (Num 6:26), the distinguished Face's relational work to bring change for new relationship together in wholeness that Jesus fulfilled with nothing less and no substitutes but the gospel of transformation to wholeness.

Belonging to God's family is both a position and a function. As a position, belonging cannot be experienced by a servant (or a slave, cf. rich young ruler's error)—nor even by a disciple without full involvement in the relational progression—but only by a son or daughter as God's very own. As a function, belonging cannot be fulfilled by a disciple (even as friend), no matter how dedicated to serving or devoted to Jesus. Disciple

and servant in effect become roles to occupy that are fulfilled by role players, that is, when involvement in the relational progression is not fully engaged. Belonging is only a relational function of those in reciprocal relationship together with the Trinity in the position as God's very own family. This is the relational outcome that intruded on the persons of Levi and Zacchaeus.

It is this relational function of family that the face of Jesus the Subject made unmistakable, irreducible and nonnegotiable by the trinitarian relational process of family love. This points to the functional shift of Jesus' relational work of grace to constitute his followers whole-ly in the consummation of this relational progression distinguishing the gospel—the irreducible Subject composing nothing less than its relational outcome transforming to wholeness.

Functional Shift

The strategic and tactical shifts illuminated the face of only Subject-God, clearly distinguished from an Object. These shifts make evident the ontology of the Subject—the whole of who, what and how God is—which is inseparable from the Subject's function. As accessed in these shifts, the Subject's ontology and function are most notably distinguished in relationships, both within the whole of God and with others. The Trinity is not distinguished by each person's title or role, which would create distinctions causing stratification and relational distance between them. Rather the whole of God is always distinguished by the ontology and function of the trinitarian persons inseparably being relationally involved in intimate relationship together as One, the Trinity as family (Jn 10:30; 17:21-23). Subject-God's vulnerable self-disclosure constitutes the ontology and function in likeness that distinguishes his followers as whole and his followers in whole relationship together as family (his church). This relational outcome will fulfill Subject Jesus' prayer above as his functional shift becomes an ontological and functional reality.

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

During their last table fellowship, Jesus intimately shared with his disciples-friends "I will not leave you orphaned" (Jn 14:18). While Jesus' physical presence was soon to conclude, his intimate relational involvement with them would continue—namely through his relational replacement, the Spirit (14:16-17). This ongoing intimate relational involvement is clearly the dynamic function of the trinitarian relational process of family love, which directly involves all the trinitarian persons (Jn 14:16-18,23). Yet, the full qualitative significance (in relational terms not referential) of this dynamic of family love

is not understood until we have whole understanding (*synesis*) of the relational significance of Jesus' use of the term "orphan" and his related concern.

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

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

In referential terms, adoption either becomes doctrinal information about a salvific transaction God made, which we can have more-or-less certainty about. Or adoption could be merely a metaphor that may have spiritual value but no relational significance. Both views continue to lack understanding of the qualitative and relational significance of the gospel and further *misre*-present the gospel's relational outcome in the innermost. The qualitative relational outcome from Jesus' intimate involvement of family love constitutes his followers in relationship together with the whole of God as family, so that Jesus' Father becomes their Father (Jn 14:23) and they become "siblings" (*adelphoi*, Jn 20:17, cf. Is 63:16; Rom 8:29). If the functional significance of adoption is diminished by or minimalized to referential terms—or simply by reductionism and its counter-relational work—the relational consequence for our life and practice is to function in effect as 'relational orphans'. In the absence of his physical presence, Jesus' only concern was for his followers to experience the ongoing intimate relational involvement of the whole of God in the primacy of whole relationship together as family—which the functional shift of his relational work of grace made permanent by adoption. This

relational action established them conclusively in the relational progression as family together, never to be “let go from the Trinity as orphans” (*aphiemi*, as Jesus said).

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

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

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

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

By the relational nature of the Trinity, the trinitarian relational process of family love is a function always for relationship, the relationship of God’s family. These are the relationships functionally necessary to be whole in the innermost that constitutes God’s family. That is, distinguished family love is always constituting and maturing God’s family; therefore, family love always pursues the whole person, acts to redeem persons from their outer-in condition and to transform them from inner out, and addresses the involvement necessary in the primacy of relationships to be whole as family together in

likeness of the Trinity. In only relational terms, family love functionally acts on and with the importance of the whole person to be vulnerably involved in the primacy of intimate relationships together of those belonging in God's family. When the trinitarian relational process of family love is applied to the church and becomes functional in church practice, any church functioning as an orphanage can be redeemed from counter-relational work to function whole as God's family together. Then its members will not only occupy a position within God's family but also engage from inner out and experience the relational function necessarily involved in belonging in the innermost of God's family that integrally holds them together—together not merely in unity but whole together as *one* in the very likeness of the Trinity, just as Jesus prayed for his church family (Jn 17:20-26).

In this functional shift enacted for the gospel, Jesus' relational function of family love vulnerably engaged his followers for the innermost involvement in the relational progression to the whole of God's family. This integrally, as well as intrusively, involved the following relational dynamic: being redefined (and redeemed) from outer in to inner out and being transformed (and reconciled) from reductionism and its counter-relational work, in order to be made whole together in the innermost as family in likeness of the Trinity. Theologically, redemption and reconciliation are inseparable; and the integral function of redemptive reconciliation is the relational outcome of being saved to the whole of God's family with the veil removed to eliminate any relational separation or distance (as Paul clarified, Eph 2:14-22). The irreducible and nonnegotiable nature of this integral relational dynamic of family love must (*dei*) then by its nature be an experiential truth having qualitative-relational significance for this wholeness to be a reality of consummated belonging to God's family. Family love also then necessarily involves clarifying what is not a function of God's family, and correcting misguided ecclesiology and church practices, and even contending with what misrepresents God's family. The integrity of God's whole is an ongoing concern of family love. This was further illuminated by Jesus when his family love exposed the ontological simulation and epistemological illusion of family, along with its counter-relational work—exposed by his relational action centered on a familiar theme composed with relational words in relational language, not referential: “you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (Jn 8:31-47).

Jesus made unmistakable that the human relational condition “to be apart” from God's whole is pandemic (and enslaves us all to sin as reductionism, 8:34), thus critically endemic to those who labor in ontological simulations and epistemological illusions of God's family (8:35,39,42). What Jesus distinguished with his relational words in relational language was both in contrast to and conflict with what prevailed in human contexts (8:43)—the influence of which permeates even gatherings of God's people. To be distinguished necessitates meeting the contingencies of Jesus' familiar words above. His familiar words are an integral relational message first contingent on his inseparable relational words connected to them: “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples.” In spite of this context, these familiar words are usually separated from their contingency on this integral structure of Jesus' relational message. The contingency of discipleship, however, is not met by merely following his disembodied words or teaching, which also are derelationalized. It can only be fulfilled by following Jesus' whole person, which Jesus made paradigmatic for discipleship (Jn 12:26) and the Father made relationally imperative (Mt 17:5). To “know the truth” is not a referential

fragmentary truth but the whole of the embodied Truth as Subject in the primacy of relationship. Therefore, “make you free” further involves a contextual contingency communicated in Jesus’ complete relational message. In other words, there is no relational progression to belong in God’s family without redemption, and there is no redemption to be reconciled together as family without receiving and relationally responding to Jesus’ family love in his functional shift (Jn 8:35-36).

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

Additionally in contrast, the immediate context of Jesus’ relational words further defines a reduced servant (*doulos*) as one who is not free to experience God as Father and participate (*meno*, dwell) in his family as his own child (as Paul clarified theologically and functionally, Rom 8:15-16; Gal 4:6-7). Any mere servant, or mere disciple stalled in the relational progression, must be redeemed first, then must be adopted to belong in its innermost relational significance. This integrated context makes clear the contextual contingency in Jesus’ relational message declaring adoption as irreplaceable. Anything less and any substitutes for God’s people are reduced in function to ontological simulations and epistemological illusions. Whatever forms these simulations and illusions from reductionism may have in church practice today (including as an orphanage), these persons have no position of significance nor belong in the innermost with relational

function in God's family as long as the adoption process is not complete. Without the relational reality of adoption, a church functions in a reductionist substitute, at most, and engages in counter-relational work, at least (the implications of Jn 8:43-44 among God's people). And without experiencing redemptive reconciliation in the primacy of intimate relationship with the embodied Truth who "will make you free" (v.32), there is no other relational means for the outcome of adoption. If we find ourselves (as person and church) in this critical condition, then what relational position does this put us with the whole of God, and what is the extent of the good news that we assume to claim?

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

As the Subject of the Word unfolds irreducibly, the Subject intrudes in our lives, persons and relationships to compose the heart of our theology and practice. That is, assuming both that we fulfill the challenge for our face ("in spirit and truth") that can only be presented by the unmistakable Face fulfilling the challenge of God's face. Without the Subject whole-ly establishing God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement, there is no relational connection, no ongoing relationship and no reciprocal involvement together. Therefore, this whole gospel and its whole outcome are contingent on the irreducible Subject's complete Christology, for which we must give account in our theology and practice—that is, for us (both as person and church) to be transformed in his relational progression to wholeness.

Embracing Complete Christology

When Jesus shared with his disciples that he must go to the cross, Peter strongly corrected him and said "No" (Mt 16:21-22). When Jesus wanted to be intimately involved with his disciples and wash their feet, Peter quickly replied "No" (Jn 13:8). Peter's reactions to Jesus appear to be the exception, but they are in reality quite common (if not the rule) among Christians. How so?

Peter had difficulty adjusting to Jesus the Subject, whose whole ontology and function made it uncomfortable for Peter to deal with. That involved Peter having to go beyond the limits of both a narrowed-down epistemic field and his personal comfort zone. So, Peter had the choice: either to reduce Jesus to an object shaped by Peter's terms, or to accept Jesus the Subject and thus change to the relational terms of Jesus' whole ontology and function. This ongoing choice is simply stated in relational terms, though certainly not simply enacted or readily made; and we all face this choice ongoingly. Theologically speaking, the choice is between either maintaining an incomplete Christology or embracing a complete Christology. While the former choice may hold in focus the Object of the Word, however fragmentary, the latter choice embraces the irreducible Subject of the Word.

This choice is more complicated than appears since the distinction between Christologies is commonly blurred, thereby easily allowing an incomplete Christology to mistakenly represent a complete Christology or to simply substitute for it. Our interpretive lens underlies this blurred perspective and forms the basis for an incomplete Christology, reducing Jesus' ontology and function, and transposing the Subject of the Word to an Object. All of this can be assumed by the ingenious alternative, method and means of the referentialization of the Word.

Along with our theology, the implication of this for all Christian practice is that the Jesus we think we are following could be on a different trajectory and path than the person distinguished irreducibly by the Subject of the Word. So, what choice have you been making about the Word?

The revelation of the Word emerged integrally from the improbability of God's theological trajectory as well as the intrusiveness of the Face's relational path. They are inseparable for God's self-revelation to be complete. Merely focusing on one without the other does not distinguish the transcendent whole and holy God or God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement in the human context.

When Paul asked "Has Christ been divided?" (1 Cor 1:13), he pointed directly to the fragmented state of the church that resulted from a narrowly focused theological task, further resulting in a divided theology. How we perceive the improbable theological trajectory of the embodied Word and approach the intrusive path of Jesus' whole person will determine how probable (as in certainty) or improbable (as in whole) our conclusions will be epistemologically, hermeneutically, ontologically and relationally. The critical issue of the distinction between probable and improbable, certainty and whole, involves how deeply our conclusions hold together and as a result how complete they are. The transcendent God beyond the universe is both holy and whole. Yet, we can only know this beyond our self-understanding by the improbable revelation of God's trajectory from outside the universe that interposed the human context to vulnerably intrude in our personal space—intrude on us from inner out as the whole Subject. We cannot have the transcendent God without this relationally personal God, or the converse, and expect our conclusions about God to be other than fragmentary.

Many, of course, would not affirm the dividing of Christ. Yet, subscribing to the mere idea of a fragmented Christ is often evident upon examining our assumptions about Jesus; and this fragmentation emerges even as it is practiced knowingly or unintentionally in the theological task. The consequence is still that dividing Christ irreversibly results in divided theology, the fragmentary condition of which is evidenced in the elusiveness of

whole theology, the absence of the whole gospel, and the lack of wholeness in persons and relationships together, noticeably practiced in both the church and academy. Peter's confessions of faith certainly did not subscribe to dividing Christ. His theological formation, however, was a prime example of this fragmentary condition in his divided (hybrid) theology.

Even though Peter had multiple interactions directly with Jesus, the influence of human contextualization on Peter shaped his lens of Jesus down to the limits of a narrowed epistemic field in referential terms. Thus, for example, his messiah could not incur the improbability of the cross (Mt 16:21-22), and his Lord could not bear the indignity of footwashing (Jn 13:6-8) that intruded on the vulnerability of both Jesus' person and Peter's. The referentialization of the Word accomplishes two critical functions in the process of dividing Christ:

1. It narrows down the perception of the embodied Word's theological trajectory from the improbable to the probable, so that it is more explainable in the certainty of referential terms based on what we know; such a theology is more neatly packaged without a lot of loose ends, yet it is a fragmentary—perhaps in multiple packages—construction of divided theology. As the goal of the modernist method, for example, certainty is based on an incomplete grasp of data that has an aversion to the improbable, and thus imposes that bias on any appearance of the improbable to dismiss it.
2. Referentialization not only narrows down the Word but it also generalizes the Word's relational language to referential language in order to impede (intentionally or unintentionally) the embodied Word's intrusive relational path in the human context—that is, making it less relationally vulnerable and demanding—so that it would be redefined as general teachings, values, ethics and practices; generalizing the Word in referential language not only disembodies these areas from Jesus' whole person but also de-relationalizes him from his primary function, thereby diminishing the whole person from inner out and minimalizing the primacy of relationships together in wholeness. Such a generalized theology (with its reduced theological anthropology) has no relational significance to God and to God's people, or to persons in the human condition—though it may gain distinction in the academy and even in churches.

The dynamic of these two functions in the referentialization of the Word unfolded in Peter's response to Jesus' person—initially in his improbable theological trajectory and intrusive relational path—and to their relationship together during their interaction walking on water (Mt 14:22-23). Seeing Jesus in this context challenged Peter to expand his epistemic field to test the improbable. Various dynamics converge in this experiential (and perhaps experimental) moment.

Peter initially engages Jesus' whole person (“if it is you...”) in Jesus' relational context (“...command me to come to you”). The situation is only the secondary matter to pay attention to here whereas the relational process of their involvement together is primary. Peter is making his whole person vulnerable to Jesus on Jesus' relational terms—though there is some element of “prove it” contingency to Peter's faith, yet not in

a passive sense without Peter's full relational involvement. Unfortunately, Peter only pays attention to Jesus' person and the relationship for a brief significant moment. His focus soon shifts to the situation, which then produces the fear causing a plea to Jesus only in the role to save him *from* his circumstances. The significance of this shift, in contrast to the beginning of this interaction, involves a critical dynamic: Jesus' person is reduced to what he can do and the primacy of relationship is replaced by the secondary matter of the situation and circumstances. That is, as Peter's focus shifted to the secondary, his epistemic field quickly narrowed back to the probable of his perceptual lens that defined the limits of his theology. Obviously, then, 'certainty' became an urgent matter for Peter, yet walking on water was not an issue until the secondary became primary. While the matter of Jesus' self-disclosure on the water becomes obscured here, Peter's theology—shaped by his function and not his earlier confession—can no longer account for the improbable. Based on a theology of the probable, Peter had no business walking on water; and his theology could only include being saved *from* trying to do so, in spite of the reality of Jesus' self-disclosure on the water to signify what Peter is saved *to*: "to come to you...Come" in the primacy of relationship together. This reduced their relationship together and attempted to renegotiate it to Peter's terms—evidence of an incomplete Christology. And the fragmenting process that Peter engages becomes the basis for his unfolding hybrid theology. Moreover, the above process also describes many who enter theological engagement relationally focused on God but then get distracted from the primary by the secondary in the theological task, with an equivalent result of formulating their own hybrid theology.

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

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

wholeness; and complete Christology is integral to the whole of Paul and the whole in his theology—integrating both his ontology and function and his theology and practice.

The relational dynamic of Jesus *into* Paul is illuminated in Paul's theology. How clearly this synthesis is illuminated for us depends on our perceptual-interpretive lens of various issues. While the synthesis of Paul and Jesus perhaps suggests a systematic theology—which I emphasize never concerned Paul—their synthesis involves a systemic framework that accounts for the relational dynamic of God's thematic action from creation (and prior to) in response to the human condition. This was Paul's integral concern and purpose to *pleroo* (make full, complete, whole, Col 1:25) the word of God for the further embodying of the theology and hermeneutic of the whole gospel. And he engaged this function to illuminate for us whole knowledge and understanding of God (*synesis*, Col 2:2-4), which includes more than some integration of parts of Jesus and Paul and more deeply involves the relational outcome of their synthesis.²⁷

In spite of the activity of the early apostles, Jesus curiously told Paul that he will “testify to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you” (Acts 26:16). Jesus and Paul converged on the Damascus road for the integration of the embodied Word with Paul's witness to *pleroo* the word from God and of God, in order for God's people together to be whole, God's whole family on God's qualitative relational terms. The apostles notwithstanding, Paul's “witness to all the world of what you have seen and heard” (Acts 22:15) would be integral to the experiential truth of the whole gospel distinguished by the Subject of the Word from outside the universe in the beginning. The Jesus of the so-called quest for the historical Jesus is not congruent with God's self-disclosure in the incarnation, indeed not even compatible. Accordingly, if Jesus cannot be incompatible with God's thematic relational response to the human condition, and thus must be congruent with God's revelation, then our view of Paul would be incongruent with all of God's communicative action (as in the canon) if Paul himself were not also completely compatible with the whole of Jesus, and thereby a complete witness of the Subject Jesus, God's revelation and thematic response (cf. Paul's implied position on the “canon,” i.e. “what is written,” *kanon*, 1 Cor 4:6; 2 Cor 10:13). The implication is, therefore, if we can't get Jesus right, then we can't get Paul right; and if we don't have Paul right, then we haven't gotten Jesus right.

Jesus and Paul can only be whole-ly integrated on the level of the whole of God's relational context and process, in which the Subject Word (relational not referential) and his *pleroo*-witness emerge in relationship together to be whole, live whole and make whole. “Witness” (*martys*) is a term for a person who possesses knowledge of someone (or something) and thus can confirm that one (or thing). The epistemic process engaged by the witness determines the level of knowledge the witness possesses, and thereby the extent of confirmation that witness can make about someone. That is, a full witness of Jesus the Subject of “what you have seen and heard” has to, as Jesus made requisite earlier, “pay attention to [*blepo*, carefully examine and be aware of] how you listen” (Lk 8:18), and accordingly “listen to the words you hear” with the necessity of relational involvement based on the paradigm “to the extent you are involved, to that extent you will receive, and more will be given” (Mk 4:24). Carefully examining and ongoingly being aware of how one listens to the Word from God characterizes the development of

²⁷ This discussion is fully developed in my study *Jesus into Paul: Embodying the Theology and Hermeneutic of the Whole Gospel* (Integration Study, 2012). Online: <http://4X12.org>.

Paul's witness in this reciprocal relational epistemic process; and Paul was a witness deeply involved with Christ in relationship together. It is curious, then, why Jesus did not simply count on his first disciples to be the integral witnesses of "what you have seen and heard." What, if anything, distinguished Paul's witness from theirs?

A witness with only quantitative knowledge about Jesus from a conventional epistemology can only confirm limited information about the historical Jesus as Object-for-observation—information which could be referentially compatible with Jesus but also would be relationally incompatible with his person and hereby lack congruence. To witness to the whole of Jesus' person also as Subject-for-relationship involves a deeper epistemology engaging the relational epistemic process with the relational outcome of whole knowledge, not merely quantitative knowledge about informational fragments. This requires a perceptual-interpretive lens that pays attention to the qualitative and relational significance of Jesus and engages him in relationship accordingly—with which the first disciples demonstrated having difficulty. A true and full witness of Jesus, therefore, must be vulnerably involved as a direct participant in whole relationship together with Jesus the Subject, not a mere observer, in order to confirm the whole of who, what and how Jesus is. Paul was this complete participant-witness of Jesus not by mere appointment but from his reciprocal relational involvement constituted by the whole of God's vulnerable relational response of grace to him—the whole of whom he continued to experience further and deeper in relationship together "to know Christ" intimately without the veil (Phil 3:10-11). The relational outcome was that Paul's whole knowledge of Jesus, the embodied Truth only for relationship, was the experiential truth of the whole gospel for whom he was a witness—the integral witness of the *pleroma* (fullness, complete, whole) of God and who *pleroo* (to fulfill, complete) the words of God.

Just for clarification, "the *pleroma* of God" was not a concept signifying some esoteric knowledge about or vague sphere of the mystery of God, as Valentinus misinterpreted from Paul to develop the Pleroma for Gnostics in the second century. Nor was "the *pleroma* of God" a conceptual-theological person. Rather this *pleroma* personally residing (*katoikeo*) in the embodied Jesus was the whole God person who functioned only to reconcile for relationship together in wholeness with God (Col 1:19-22). Nothing less and no substitutes than the relational ontology of the whole of God could constitute this *pleroma*, nor could anything less and any substitute constitute Jesus as "the image of God" (Col 1:15; 2 Cor 4:4) to disclose this relational function—which Marcion erred in doing by also misinterpreting Paul in the second century to support his docetic view that Jesus only appeared to be in bodily flesh. This was the One and Only who exegetes God (Jn 1:18) with his whole person in vulnerable face-to-face involvement in relationship: "God...who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6). This was in continuity with God's disclosure "face to face" with Moses (Num 12:6-8), yet now with complete self-disclosure of the whole of God vulnerably embodied in the face of Christ Jesus the Subject.

Both Jesus and Paul ongoingly challenge our theological and functional assumptions, just as the prophets did. Jesus challenges our assumptions of how we perceive and define his person, how we follow him, how we function in relationship with him, serve him and practice church—in other words, challenge our basic assumptions

about the gospel. Paul extends these challenges and clearly illuminates *pleroma* theology, from which emerges the ecclesiology of the whole nonnegotiable based on the experiential truth of the whole gospel irreducibly composed by whole relationship together with the whole of Subject Jesus, the *pleroma* of God, in order to integrally embody the *pleroma* of Christ (the church, Eph 1:22-23)—not a divided Christ shaped into an Object.

Paul's Christology initially emerges in his cosmology to establish Christ as the Creator (Col 1:16-17), defined as the immortal, invisible, *mono* God (1 Tim 1:17). From his transcendence, Christ enacted God's complex relational dynamic from top down in the mysterious and improbable relational process of embodiment—the outcome of which made Christ vulnerable for intimate relationship with reduced persons, and the consequence of which made Christ vulnerable for the effects of the sin of reductionism—that Paul highlighted in a hymn most likely from the Jesus tradition (Phil 2:5-8).

In Paul's Christology the incarnation set in motion the relational dynamic embodying the *pleroma* (fullness, complete, whole) of God (Col 1:19), the *pleroma* of the Godhead (Col 2:9), who is the image of God (Col 1:15) vulnerably revealing the whole of God's glory (qualitative being and relational nature) in the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:6) only for relationship together as God's family (Eph 1:5, 13-14; Col 1:20-22). God's relational action 'in Christ' involves these complex theological dynamics, which often need the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction of *tamiym* for their wholeness. Complex theological dynamics for Paul never involved the separation of theology from practice; by necessity Paul integrated his theology with practice in order for all our theology and practice to be whole.

For example, 'in Christ' is Paul's major use of shorthand relational language for the complex theological dynamics continuing to unfold in his theological framework-forest. This is neither a motif for theological discourse merely about Christ's death and its significance, nor a mere theological construct for the doctrine and events of Christ—both of which tend to perceive 'in Christ' with only a quantitative lens. For Paul, 'in Christ' is not a conceptual phrase without functional significance. Moreover, it is insufficient to shift to a qualitative perception of 'in Christ' as Paul's mysticism devoid of his whole knowledge and understanding (*synesis*) of the mystery of Christ embodying God's relational dynamic.²⁸ At the same time, this language should not be spiritualized for application only to the individual and hereby reduce it from its relational function for relationship together in God's family. In Paul's shorthand, 'in Christ' is the relational action and outcome from God's relational dynamic embodying the deepest desire of God's purpose planned with the relational context and process necessary for whole relationship together in God's qualitative image and relational likeness.

The image of God conjoined with the glory of God and integrated in the face of Christ has been interpreted, for example, in terms of epiphany in the OT and Jewish mysticism (*Merkabah*-vision in Eze 1).²⁹ This lens perceives something qualitative with a hermeneutic taken from within the quantitative limits of terms defined or shaped by human contextualization, albeit primarily religious. Paul's Christology, however, is

²⁸ For such a perspective of Paul's position on mysticism 'in Christ', see James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 390-412.

²⁹ For an example of this interpretation, see Seyoon Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective: Second Thoughts on the Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 165-213.

rooted beyond human contextualization and deeper than mysticism; and Paul's readers must keep in focus that his Christology was first his experiential truth of the incarnation relationally extended to him by the whole of Subject Jesus. In this relational contrast with both human contextualization and mysticism, the image, glory and face of God are deeply understood only in the relational context of God's relational response of the definitive blessing of his people (i.e. Num 6:24-26)—the face of God illuminated on his children for wholeness in relationship together (cf. Ps 67:1-2). This is the distinguished Face that the face of Christ, as the image of God, whole-ly embodied in the incarnation to relationally disclose unmistakably the glory of the whole of God only for vulnerable involvement in relationship. Paul's Christology signified the fulfillment of this definitive relational blessing in which the whole of God's face intimately turned, shined and restored wholeness to all life and function, notably Paul's own life and function.

In Paul's theology, the complex theological dynamics of God's relational response converge in the gospel of Christ; and in the reflexive dynamic of Paul's theology, the whole gospel converges in the incarnation, the whole Subject of Jesus embodying the whole of God. Without converging and being contextualized in the incarnation of the Subject, any other gospel can only have a human shape that essentially *misre-presents* the gospel. That is, any gospel contextualized apart from 'in Christ' has reduced the relational significance of the whole of God's thematic relational dynamic embodied by only Jesus the Subject in response to the human condition, and consequently has diminished, minimalized or precluded the wholeness of "the gospel of Christ" and substituted a gospel shaped or renegotiated by human terms (Gal 1:6-7; Col 2:4,8). Along with Jesus, Paul challenges the gospel we claim and holds us accountable for the gospel we proclaim.

Thus, a theology of Jesus has to be both compatible with the whole gospel and sufficient against any human shaping or construction from reductionism. These were accounted for in Paul's Christology of the whole of Subject Jesus, who was neither reduced by bottom-up shaping nor renegotiated by human terms to an Object. His Christology then went further than the limits of the Jesus tradition (the existing Christian beliefs of the early church) and even deeper than the early perceptions of the other apostles (cf. Gal 2:6-9; 2 Pet 3:15-16). The developing depth of experiential truth with Christ and the Spirit illuminated the whole knowledge and understanding (*synesis*) to compose Paul's Christology (cf. Eph 3:4; Col 1:25-27). This dynamic flow to his theology is signified in the following framework:

1. Experiencing Christ: the embodied presence and experiential truth of the whole of Jesus, who as irreducible Subject is the qualitative Word and relational Truth from the whole of God.
2. Following Christ in relationship together: discipleship of his whole person in the primacy of reciprocal relationship, not his disembodied-derelationalized teachings or example.
3. Witnessing 'in Christ' and thus for the whole of God: the experiential truth in function, not as an end in itself but in ongoing reciprocal relationship.

4. Theologizing ‘in Christ’ and thus with the Spirit to illuminate the whole of God.

This is not only a linear flow but a reflexive dynamic, which signifies the involvement in relationship together necessary for the relational epistemic process both to know God and to make God known (cf. Col 2:2; Eph 1:17-19; 3:16-19). The whole of Paul’s witness was complete only because of experiencing Christ in whole relationship together and following Christ in this primacy, without which the whole in his theology has no basis and significance. We need to learn both from Paul’s whole theology and his whole practice.

Paul’s *pleroma* Christology does not elaborate on the incarnation as event (cf. Gal 4:4-5), but assumes that knowledge with the Jesus tradition. His theological discourse on Christ did not follow the footsteps of Jesus’ deeds and example; nor did it follow the footprints about Jesus’ teachings for an overly christocentric doctrine. Paul concentrates instead on the complex theological dynamics of God’s relational dynamic embodied ‘in Christ’. His discourse on Christ was the experiential truth of following the whole of Jesus’ person embodying the relational context and process of God’s relational dynamic. This, I emphasize, explains why Paul made little reference to Jesus’ sayings/teachings in his letters. Paul neither reduced Jesus to nor disembodied-derelationalized Jesus’ person from his teachings or example. Moreover, even though Paul gives major attention to Christ’s death and resurrection, he was not focused on this as event (the Christ-event), a focus which ironically reduces and disembodies the whole of Jesus from the cross—not referentially but relationally. Paul’s focus was illuminating the qualitative function of Subject Jesus’ whole person embodying from inner out God’s relational dynamic in whole response to the human condition—just as Jesus called Paul to illuminate and confirm (*martyrs*) “the *qualitative* things in which you have seen me *from inner out* and to those *relational dynamics* in which I will appear to you” (Acts 26:16). By the clear nature of the incarnation constituted in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes, Paul’s discourse on Christ did not define Jesus by the reductionist terms of what he did (death), even in reality, and of what he had (teachings), even in truth. Therefore, the emergence of Paul’s theological discourse on Jesus Christ was nothing less and no substitutes indeed of *pleroma* (complete and whole) Christology.

What distinguishes *pleroma* Christology from an incomplete Christology of anything less or any substitutes? The short answer is wholeness: that is, the whole of God’s relational dynamic embodying the whole of God’s relational context and process in whole response to the human condition, in order to fulfill God’s whole desire and purpose to be made whole and thus live whole in relationship together as God’s whole family, nothing less and no substitutes. Incomplete Christologies may point to or address some aspect(s) of God’s relational dynamic, notably grace and love; yet they remain fragmentary and thus incomplete because God’s relational process or even relational context is not perceived with the qualitative lens necessary for the whole knowledge and understanding (*synesis*) to take in the irreducible and nonnegotiable experiential truth of this embodied wholeness of God’s whole. Paul’s *pleroma* Christology is inseparable from the experiential truth of the whole gospel, for which Paul relationally fought so lovingly in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes while conjointly fighting passionately against anything less and any substitutes from reductionism. It is within Paul’s functional purpose for the gospel that much of his theology in general and Christology in particular

converge; on this basis they are expressed in inseparable functional terms, not in what has since become conventional theological discourse. ‘In Christ’ is the summary functional expression of Paul’s relational language that signifies definitive discourse of the *pleroma* Christology unfolding in his theological framework-forest—which is always integrated with practice and never separated from each other, or theology and practice are fragmented and unable to be whole.

Read from a quantitative interpretive framework, Paul’s Christology appears to be both fragmentary in its lack of direct reference to Jesus’ sayings/teachings, and incomplete or skewed due to his dominant focus on Jesus’ death and resurrection. Yet, such a reduced framework using a quantitative lens (in contrast to *phronema* and *phroneo* by the Spirit, Rom 8:5-6) does not account for the whole of Paul’s witness to which Jesus called him; nor can it account for the whole in his theology for which he was given relational responsibility (*oikonomia*) to *pleroo* the word of God (Col 1:25). Paul’s focus was not on secondary areas defining Jesus but on the whole Subject of the Word composing the gospel of transformation to wholeness, and on the primacy of the relational outcome in new relationship together in wholeness. Not to understand this whole of and in Paul is not to understand the whole of God in the incarnation and thus ‘in Christ’, leaving in fact only an incomplete Christology that is fragmentary or distorted.

Paul’s theology of wholeness is the underlying dynamic of his *pleroma* Christology, which is necessary to distinguish it from an incomplete Christology. The irreducible and nonnegotiable dynamic of wholeness is what Jesus the Subject constituted *in* the incarnation of his own person and, likewise, constituted for human persons (both individually and collectively) *by* his incarnation in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes for all life and function (both for his person and human persons, Col 2:9-10). Therefore, Paul’s *pleroma* Christology further emerges to make definitive ‘in Christ’ the functions for epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction necessary for wholeness in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the *pleroma* of God. These functions ‘in Christ’ are the following:

1. Christ is *the epistemological-theological key* to whole knowledge and understanding of the whole of God’s ontology, the glory of God’s qualitative being and relational nature (2 Cor 4:6; Col 1:15,19; 2:9).
2. Christ is *the hermeneutical key* to whole knowledge and understanding of the whole of God’s function in relational context and process (Col 1:20-22; 2:2-3; Eph 1:4-11; 3:4-6, 18-19).
3. Christ is *the functional key* to the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God for human ontology and function, both individually and collectively as God’s family (Col 1:15; 3:10-11; 2 Cor 3:18; Eph 2:21-22).

These qualitative and relational functions ‘in Christ’, both for his person and human persons in relationship together, function always by the nature of wholeness in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes.

This is the *pleroma* Christology unfolding in Paul's theological framework-forest, and that unfolded whole because of two critical engagements by Paul: (1) Paul's Christology vulnerably followed Jesus on his intrusive relational path, not just his theological trajectory, and (2) Paul conjointly fought against any and all reductionism of the whole gospel and its whole relational outcome.

Beginning with his face-to-Face encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road, Paul experienced directly this relational dynamic of Christ's face illuminating the image and glory of God (2 Cor 4:4,6)—which is now extended also to him. In this relational process with Jesus, God's relational function of grace and its outcome of intimate relational connection together (not mysticism) provided Paul with his ongoing experiential truth of the glory of God 'in Christ', the image of God. All this was to definitively establish for the church at Corinth "by the open statement of truth" (*phanerosis* from *phaneroo*, 4:2) that the relational dynamic is from God and not from human shaping (4:1). For Paul, the image of God was unmistakable in the relational dynamic of Christ's illumination of God's glory, which Paul simply integrates in "the gospel of the glory of Christ" (4:4b). This relational dynamic of the image and glory of God is essential for Paul's *pleroma* Christology because it signifies the whole of Jesus' person vulnerably embodied, illuminated and involved for relationship together as Subject, fulfilling the three functions unique to the unmistakable face of Christ:

1. Whole knowledge and understanding of the whole of God's ontology and nothing less and no substitutes of God's qualitative being and relational nature (Christ the epistemological-theological key).
2. Whole knowledge and understanding of the whole of God's function in the relational context and process only on God's relational terms of grace (Christ the hermeneutical key).
3. The qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God necessary for human ontology and function, individually and collectively as God's family, in the same dynamic as Christ of nothing less and no substitutes (Christ the functional key).

Without Jesus' whole person and function throughout the incarnation, whole knowledge and understanding of the image and glory of God would neither be illuminated for vulnerable self-disclosure in experiential truth, nor be definitive for vulnerable human reciprocal response in the image and likeness necessary for whole relationship together (2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10).

In Paul's *pleroma* Christology, the above three qualitative-relational functions are vital for the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction necessary to be whole; without these functions Christology is rendered incomplete. Jesus constituted this dynamic of wholeness *in* the incarnation of his own person as Subject, and thereby constituted this dynamic for wholeness *by* his incarnation for all human life and function (Col 2:9-10). Therefore, this dynamic in the face of Christ was irreducible and nonnegotiable by the very nature of the *pleroma* of God. Anything less and any substitutes are reductionism of the *pleroma* of God, the image of God, the glory of God in

the face of Christ, consequently reductionism of the human person and function—shifting from the whole from top down to reductionism from bottom up, from the whole from inner out to reductionism from outer in. Paul’s church family responsibility to *pleroo* the word of God always fought jointly against this reductionism distorting, diluting it (*doloo*, 2 Cor 4:2) and for the whole gospel embodied by *pleroma* Christology.

The relational dynamic of the image and glory of God composes the heart of Paul’s *pleroma* Christology, which emerges only as the function of relationship and thus only in relational terms. Theological discourse in referential terms cannot compose this complete Christology without the irreducible Subject of the Word. From this integral function in the distinguished face of Christ unfold the remaining theological dynamics in Paul’s framework-forest, dynamics which always continue to be determined by God’s relational function of grace. For Paul, this relational dynamic in “the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God” (2 Cor 4:4) also composed what is at the heart of the gospel: Christ’s whole face and function as the irreducible Subject. This is the indispensable gospel for the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction necessary in order for the whole of God to fully emerge, for whole human persons and function to reciprocally emerge, and for wholeness to emerge in relationship together as God’s church family.

This “light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” is by its nature both irreducible and indispensable. Though clearly undimmed, it is not always seen by Paul’s readers (past and present), yet is at the heart of his *pleroma* Christology. It is not seen, understood, received or responded to because by its very nature these outcomes can take place only in God’s relational context and process. The relational context and process of God were the means by which God’s relational dynamic of grace was embodied by Subject Christ’s face and function. Paul himself was first contextualized beyond human contexts when God’s face from top down turned and shined on him, even beyond the context of Judaism’s definitive blessing (Num 6:24-26). On the Damascus road Paul was contextualized in the incarnation of Christ’s face and function, the whole person in relationship, to constitute Paul from inner out into the whole of God’s relational context and process. Only in God’s relational context and process did Paul see in Christ’s face and function the light of the gospel of the image and glory of Christ, and thereby relationally respond back (Acts 22:16) for the relationship together necessary to be whole.

This was the only gospel Paul knew and called his own. This was also his experiential truth of *pleroma* Christology, in which the whole of God’s (from Father to Son to Spirit) relational dynamic unfolds in fullness within only God’s relational context and process—the irreducible relational context and nonnegotiable relational process made vulnerable by the Subject Christ’s face and function for whole relationship together. Anything less and any substitutes are incomplete Christology, composed by the reduced ontology and function of an Object. Therefore, this gospel is contextualized by no fragmentary reductions of Christ’s relational context and process. It therefore cannot be shaped by any other context and process and still embody Christ’s whole face and function only as Subject, and still illuminate the whole of God’s qualitative being and relational nature, and still fulfill God’s thematic response to the human condition. Within the *pleroma* of God’s relational context and process, the relational dynamic of the integral face and function of Christ (as the image and glory of God) continues to deeply

engage vulnerably and to be intimately involved in fulfilling the other theological dynamics of Paul's framework-forest. Apart from God's relational context and process, Christ's embodiment does not have the abiding relational framework to complete these complex theological dynamics for the fulfillment of God's thematic relational response of grace. This is how Christology becomes fragmentary and thus incomplete, and when soteriology is truncated without the qualitative and functional significance of whole relationship together as God's new creation family—resulting in a gospel different from the image and glory of Christ. And whatever assumptions we make about God's grace are insufficient to make up the difference.

Unavoidable Implications

While the theological community needs to pay serious attention to an incomplete Christology and a truncated soteriology, churches cannot ignore these issues because God holds us all accountable for the whole of Jesus' self-disclosures—just as he did with the two on the road to Emmaus. What Christians follow and what churches practice are rooted in their Christology; and church mission is determined by their soteriology. Thus, churches need to examine their ecclesiology: what is it based on, what does it pay attention to and what does it ignore, and how compatible is its practice with the whole of God's thematic action distinguished by the intrusive Subject of the Word?

Jesus openly asserted, "Blessed are those who hear the word of *the Father* and *relationally respond*" (Lk 11:28), "*they are my family*" (Mt 12:50). The Father vulnerably shared, "This is my Son, whom I love...Listen to him!" (Mt 17:5, NIV). The Son communicated the Father's words (Jn 12:49-50) and functioned only for the Father (Jn 14:31) and his family (Jn 17:6-8); and the Father expressed his affection for his family and directed the attention to his Son for the purpose of their family. These vulnerable assertions by the trinitarian persons are conjoined in their mutual relational context and process for the same relational outcome. And their conjoint function was made evident by the relational significance of God's thematic action in the incarnation of Jesus' relational work of grace and his relational involvement in the relational progression (as complete Christology), which constitutes his followers in the relationships necessary to be the whole of God's family (as full soteriology).

Moreover, as their communication signified throughout the incarnation, their assertions interacted together to establish the new perceptual-interpretive framework, providing the lens to determine what to pay attention to and ignore. For example, we cannot ignore the implications of Jesus saying "they are my family" because the Father says "listen to him, *who communicates my words.*" And we cannot pay attention to the Son disclosing the Father's words (which is not just their content) and their functional implications while ignoring the Father and the relationships necessary to be whole together as his family, because Jesus functioned only for the Father and his family—which the Father said to pay attention to. This is the holy and transcendent whole of God vulnerably disclosed to us—as improbable as it appears. To pay attention to anything less and any substitute, or to ignore the relational significance of nothing less and no substitutes, demonstrates the lens from a reductionist perceptual-interpretive framework, which reduces the Subject's ontology and function of Jesus, the Father, and thus the whole of the Trinity.

The vital church as God's family is the ongoing function of the Son's and the Father's assertions integrated in its own practice, thus integrally determining what the church pays attention to and what it ignores. The tension between the improbable of Jesus' sanctified (both whole and holy) life and practice (cf. Jn 17:19) and the probable of common function—and its practical implications for church life and practice—is persistent and makes a church susceptible to reductionism. However, the ongoing involvement together in the relational progression “in spirit and truth” (with honesty of the heart) is the relational process necessary to redeem, to constitute whole and to mature a church as God's family. This only is *whom* the Father seeks, the *who*, *what* and *how* of God Jesus vulnerably disclosed to the Samaritan woman for a compatible relational response, and why the Father makes it a relational imperative to pay attention to him.

Churches are under pressure in effect to renegotiate its involvement in the relational progression by reducing the relational imperatives of discipleship and reprioritizing the primacy of intimate relationships, yet their alternatives have no relational significance to God. Despite how some alternatives may currently fill up a church, the result is only an ontological simulation and epistemological illusion of family—a collection of relational orphans who don't truly belong to God's family. Even the traditional servant model is inadequate to define Jesus' whole person and to compose his followers in the relational progression to God's family. These alternatives all stop at some point along the relational progression and disengage from its relational process. Yet, engaging the trinitarian relational process of family love can redeem, reconcile and mature a church as God's family. This is how Jesus vulnerably functioned by family love to constitute his followers as who they truly are and whose they truly are, and why the Father is emphatic about paying attention to him.

While a church may still struggle or strain to make connection with the transcendent God, its most important struggle or challenge is to maintain a compatible connection with the holy God. The holy God, who is qualitatively distinct from common function, is the whole of God Jesus made vulnerably accessible. And this whole and holy God is not only vulnerably present but also intimately involved. However, since Jesus' sanctified life and practice functioned in this qualitative distinction from common function, this made much of his life and practice distinct from what prevailed in the surrounding context—or improbable from what we're accustomed to. This distinction is a functional issue for the church: the tension between the improbable face of Jesus and our desire (or even need) for more probable practices, that is, which are really about being compatible with our prevailing function. To be distinguished with Jesus and thus distinct from prevailing function has personal implications, not the least of which involves being redefined and thus *different*. Being different usually has a negative connotation that means being *less*.

Though he was in the common's context, Jesus vulnerably disclosed the presence of the holy God only in the trinitarian context; and the whole of God is present and involved only by the trinitarian relational process. Relational connection with the whole and holy God must by nature be on terms distinct from common function and compatible with the holy God's terms. In other words, the functional implication is that Jesus' whole person reshaped the bell curve of probable practices. The experiential reality and truth is that to follow his person in the relational progression reshapes the curve of probable church practices. The functional issue (perhaps even theological) then becomes: do we

allow Subject Jesus to reshape the curve to change our practices to the more improbable range, or do we reduce Jesus' whole person by disembodied his presence and de-relationalizing his teachings to that of an Object, while selectively paying attention to them or even ignoring them, in order to maintain a probable range of practice?

Following Subject Jesus' whole person in the relational progression to the whole of God as family together can never be a common function and will always remain in the improbable range of the curve—notably in what prevails in our human context and culture. This news cannot be rendered to a common gospel or popular gospel that will be valued by the majority, even within our churches.

Thus, the unavoidable issue facing all of us by the irreducible Subject of the Word: what are we going to do with his relational progression, individually and together as church? Any type of disengagement (in the form of revision, substitutes, resistance, omission, avoidance or any relational distance) from this relational progression by Jesus' followers diminishes, makes elusive or loses the experiential reality and truth as revealed:

of God's thematic relational action for human wholeness; of the covenant relationship of God's people, composed only by God's relational terms for reciprocal relationship; of God's vulnerable relational work of grace in the incarnation and the emergence of the new creation of God's family as the church; and of the Spirit's ongoing relational presence and function to bring this relational progression of God's church family to completion at the eschatological conclusion of the whole of God's desires.

Whatever gospel is leftover, both to experience together and to share with others, strains for lack of theological and functional clarity and/or suffers from lack of relational significance, both of which cannot be resolved apart from the full relational progression with the Subject of the Word.

Any alternative to relational involvement with him in the relational progression becomes in effect counter-relational work reducing the relationships necessary to be whole. The functional opposite of being whole is sin as reductionism. For those unsettled by the improbable, it is a discomforting truth to both understand and embrace: sin is the functional reduction of the whole of God, therefore in conflict with God as well as with that which is whole and those who are whole. The church needs to pay attention to this sin, in particular in the practice of and service to church. The bad news shaping the gospel today is the function of sin as reductionism pervading our churches, including the academy where most of our church leaders are educated in referential terms.

These are unavoidable matters that either reflect change or require change from prevailing practice. This change can only be the outcome of redemptive change; that is, these matters (and their common function) need to be redeemed in order to be transformed to what we are saved *to*. Yet, even unavoidable matters must first be acknowledged for this redemptive process to happen. This is the importance of truth in relational terms and the honesty of our hearts—a necessary basis for vulnerable function beyond the probable in our life and practice with God, which the Father seeks. Whatever truth we claim and proclaim only has significance for this relationship, the relationship of the whole of God. Until we theologically and functionally understand (*syniemi* for *synesis*) the relational significance of the triune God vulnerably disclosed in the

incarnation, and thus account for the innermost involvement of the whole person in the primacy of intimate relationships together necessary to be whole as God's family, whatever truth we have will lack the experiential truth of *by what* and *how* the Trinity only does relationships as embodied by the Truth in the irreducible Subject of the Word.

"Listen to him" for the complete Christology. "Hear the word of the Father, and relationally respond" for the full soteriology. The gospel we claim and its relational outcome transformed to wholeness depend on nothing less and no substitutes. And any gospel we proclaim of anything less and any substitutes will have no significance of the Subject of the Word—unable to distinguish its subject from an object to believe—and thus its outcome will not be the relational outcome composed by Subject Jesus' prayer transforming his family (Jn 17:15-26).

"I am he, the *Subject* who *communicates with you.*"

Any subject-person does not merely submit to being shaped by the surrounding context, as an object would conform to; this is an ongoing issue challenging every one of us as a person. Accordingly, the irreducible Subject of the Word (composing complete Christology) cannot be reduced or fragmented as an Object has been (composing incomplete Christology). "I am he"—indeed, defined by nothing less and determined by no substitutes. Furthermore, the irreducible Subject always holds us accountable both to embrace the whole of his person and to be involved in relationship together with the subject of our whole person. This is the ongoing challenge *of* his Face that makes unavoidable the challenge *for* our face in innermost profile. Yet, contending with the challenge of and for face is the prevailing influence of reductionism and its counter-relational work.

Even though nothing less and no substitutes distinguish the discipleship following this Subject, for many this is not good news and makes an Object more appealing. Having an Object in referential terms for one's faith, as the basis for serving and even for the theological task, is always easier than having to deal with the Subject in relational terms—as Peter would testify. Moreover, an Object allows us to define the relationship on our terms, which is the basis for Subject Jesus not willing to "entrust himself to them" who "believed in his name" (Jn 2:23-24).

On this relational basis, the *irreduced* Subject in complete Christology—also called Jesus by name but not often known as Subject—this person magnified Mary's whole person and her relational involvement of discipleship to distinguish the whole gospel and its whole relational outcome—especially for all of us to distinguish today from fragmentary theology and practice, reduced in ontology and function (Mk 14:9).

"I am he, *the Subject* who *is involved with you...and who now holds you accountable for reciprocal relationship together.*"

Chapter 4 Discipleship Distinguished Only by Reciprocal Relationship

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

John 14:23

What is indeed both improbable and intrusive is that Subject God is vulnerably present and intimately involved. This news creates ambivalence, since the reality of God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement is not about observing in situations and circumstances but rather involves directly experiencing in the primacy of relationship. The unmistakable Face of the irreducible Subject is the whole of who, what and how God is, with whom we are faced ongoingly—if not confronted by “Where are you?” and “What are you doing here?”

When the challenge was raised in the primordial garden “Did God say that?” God's existence wasn't challenged but the extent of God's presence and involvement was questioned. Moreover, God's presence and involvement, along with God's words, were transposed from relational terms to referential terms, thereby keeping God's significance at a distance and thus unable to be distinguished. This continued influence may not be apparent explicitly in our theology (except our theological anthropology) but emerges implicitly, if not explicitly, in our practice—specifically in the function of relationships. This condition is the genius of reductionism, whose prevailing influence in human contextualization has consistently permeated Christian theology and practice. Likely then, the above questions by God are just as urgent today for those who call themselves or identify as followers of Christ.

Just as contemporary theological and biblical studies demonstrate difficulty clarifying the Subject—and even identifying the Subject—of their efforts, discipleship has had problems knowing *who* its Subject is and thereby distinguishing *what* its efforts involve, and *how*. Discussions about discipleship commonly focus on Jesus' teachings and examples, for example, as if Jesus' person were past history. This narrow focus not only detaches (disembodies) those teachings and examples from Jesus' person but it also critically disconnects (derelationalizes) the Subject from his ongoing vulnerable presence and intimate involvement—and thus also disconnects his followers from the Subject. This detachment and disconnection continues to beg the question from Jesus for each of his followers today: “But who do you say that I am?” (Mt 16:15).

A confession of faith is simply insufficient for discipleship, as Peter demonstrated. Contrary to common belief, discipleship is not what someone engages in after confession of faith. If it were, Jesus would not have had to make again emphatically the relational imperative to Peter, “You, follow me!” (Jn 21:20). Even after a clear confession of faith, the Subject of discipleship easily lacks clarity and becomes elusive when (1) that confession is made in referential terms over relational terms, and (2) that

faith does not compose a compatible relational response to Jesus and thereby does not compose a congruent reciprocal relational response that is ongoingly involved in following Jesus' whole person in relationship together.

When our faith responds compatibly in relational terms to Jesus, there is relational connection with the person Jesus (not his mere teachings and examples). With this relational connection the relational outcome unfolds in ongoing reciprocal relational involvement with the Subject Jesus that is congruent with his intrusive relational path. Both the relational response and its unfolding relational outcome, by necessity, compose discipleship and distinguish its Subject. Either insufficient confession or faith results in detaching from Jesus' person and disconnecting from Subject God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement, notably in the practice of discipleship. This detachment-disconnection is illustrated in the life of a most prominent contemporary example of discipleship, Mother Teresa. In Mother Teresa's personal letters, she revealed her struggles with Jesus' absence from her and also her lack of faith:

- "Such deep longing for God and...repulsed empty no faith no love no zeal."
- "What do I labor for? If there be no God—there can be no soul—if there is no Soul then Jesus—You also are not true."
- "I have no Faith—I dare not utter the words & thoughts that crowd in my heart."

As for her "ever-present smile" that distinctly identified her, she called it "a mask," or "a cloak that covers everything."¹

- "The whole time smiling—sisters and people pass such remarks—they think my faith, trust and love are filling my very being....Could they but know—and how my cheerfulness is the cloak by which I cover the emptiness and misery."²

She was deeply pained by the absence of personal connection with Jesus, even after a dedicated life serving him. Those with a spiritual disciplines lens may explain her thoughts and feelings as simply the experience of a classic case of what is called "the dark night of the soul." This limited focus, however, does not account for the nature of her discipleship and its ongoing relational consequence of detachment and disconnection.

Mother Teresa chastens our discipleship in a different way than expected. Not only her discipleship but also her confession and faith needed epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction in order for her, as well as any of our, theology and practice to be whole. Otherwise, we are all subject to epistemological illusion and ontological simulation in our theology and practice, composed by reduced ontology and function.

¹ Quotes from Associated Press, "New Book Reveals Mother Teresa's Struggle with Faith," Beliefnet.com/story/223/story_22353.html. Accessed 8/27/2007. The Beliefnet article came out on the occasion of the release of the book *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light—The Private Writings of the 'Saint of Calcutta'* (New York: Doubleday: 2007).

² Quoted by Father Raniero Cantalamessa, OFM CAP, in "The 'Atheism' of Mother Teresa," *National Catholic Register* September 9-15, 2007.

The Relationship of God

Since the primordial garden three basic views of God's presence and involvement have evolved: (1) deism, where God is distant or detached, and its variations where God becomes everything (pantheism) or everything essentially is part of God (panentheism); and two types of theism, either (2) theism with God as Object, whose presence is observed and then shaped primarily by human contextualization in referential terms, or, from the beginning, (3) theism with God as Subject, whose presence and involvement are enacted in the primacy of the relational context and process composed only by God's relational terms. Only theism with God as Subject is the view illuminated by the face of Jesus that connects us with God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement; and it is only this relationship of God that Jesus revealed intrusively for the vulnerable involvement of his followers in reciprocal relationship together. Theism with God as Object is not an option that the whole of Subject Jesus' person gives us if we are to follow him on his intrusive relational path. Nor is God as Object an alternative for those wanting connection with the whole of God—that is, relational connection with God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement, which an Object doesn't engage.

Our theistic view also shapes our gospel (whole or fragmentary) and determines its outcome of salvation (only saved from or also saved to). Thus, and this is indispensable, understanding the *what* of salvation's good news for whole relationship together is contingent on understanding the whole of the Who constituting the gospel. If salvation does indeed go further and deeper than just saved *from*, this necessitates an integral relational basis (not referential) for the new relationship together in wholeness of what salvation saves *to*—which includes by necessity an ongoing relational base to function in whole relationship together. The whole of God—the ontological One and relational Whole from outside the universe—composes the meaning, significance, purpose and means of whole relationship together, apart from whom relationship together lacks the meaning, significance, purpose and means to be whole, the human relational condition. Understanding the whole of God, the whole of the Who constituting the gospel, provides the integral relational basis and ongoing relational base for whole relationship together. That is, only the Trinity illuminated and distinguished the experiential truth of who came and what has come. Therefore, understanding *what* distinguished the Trinity and *how* the Trinity is distinguished are indispensable for those claiming the gospel and irreplaceable for proclaiming the good news of transformed and thus new relationship together in wholeness in likeness of the triune God as Subject.

The relationship of God distinguishes specifically both (1) how God as Subject engages in relationship, and (2) how God only does relationship on this relational basis. The distinction between God as Subject and God as Object is crucial to maintain in order to distinguish this relationship of God in our theology and practice. Consider the following. If you have a relationship with someone functioning essentially as an object, that relationship becomes a unilateral relationship because an object provides no basis for mutual involvement—thus leaving you with the responsibility (or perhaps freedom) to determine the relationship on your terms, which is a desirable relationship for many people. A bilateral relationship requires parties to be subjects to engage in mutual involvement, at the very least to negotiate or come to mutual terms for the relationship—at least in theory if not always in function. A reciprocal relationship, however, by its

nature (not theory) necessitates the ongoing involvement of subjects in the primacy of their relationship together in order to be whole, and not fragmented by secondary matters that reduce the persons as subjects and the relationship from its primacy. In other words, reciprocal relationship together is a function of subjects based only on whole relational terms—that which has been constituted from the beginning by the whole of God to distinguish the relationship of God for the human relational condition.

God may be present on the earth or in a situation but that does not mean that God dwells there. In the OT, David sought after a dwelling (*mishkan*) for God's presence and involvement, which shifted from the tabernacle to the temple (Ps 132:2-5). This dwelling was not limited to a place but was often confused with a place—likely as we often confuse God's dwelling today to a church. With God's strategic shift (Jn 4:20-23), God's dwelling signifies the pivotal point of reciprocal relational connection that the whole of God has in the human context, which is only compatible to his vulnerable presence and congruent with his intimate relational involvement. Until God has this reciprocal relationship, God has no dwelling in the human context even though the whole of God may be present. God as Subject dwells only in the relational context and process of reciprocal relationship together, and this reciprocal involvement is only on God's relational terms (Ex 29:45-46; Jn 14:23; 15:9-11, cf. Lk 13:35-36).

God as Subject participates in relationships only in whole relational terms. God's relational terms, on the one hand, are irreducible (e.g. to unilateral terms) and nonnegotiable (to bilateral terms); and yet, on the other hand, they are never imposed unilaterally as a template for conformity, thus making its adherents objects—as some view God's law and postmodernists view God's metanarrative. In spite of even the antecedent priority of God's relational response of grace—not to be confused with prevenient or irresistible grace—to compose the gospel and its outcome, the relationship of God is never unilateral. Nor is it bilateral for those who want to account for the human agency of free will, and for postmodernists who want to be inclusive of human contextualization.

The relationship of God in whole relational terms is unique. Unique in relational terms that required the who, what and how of Subject Jesus to distinguish unmistakably for his followers to receive in compatible relational connection and to respond to ongoingly in congruent reciprocal relationship together. The whole of God's self-disclosure communicated by Jesus the Subject illuminated how God does relationship. Not knowing how God as Subject is involved in relationship and how God only does relationship on this relational basis leaves us disconnected from the God of our faith and the Subject of our discipleship. Is this what happened to Mother Teresa? Not seeing the Subject Jesus for his discipleship happened to the rich young ruler seeking more in his life with God, which left him both detached and disconnected (Mk 10:20-22, to be discussed shortly). And this disconnection happened to two of Jesus' followers on the road to Emmaus that left them disappointed and confused (Lk 24:13-32).

The relationship of God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement was embodied by Jesus in its most distinguished relational context and process: within the whole of God, the Trinity. As noted previously, the most significant relational function in the incarnation of how God does relationship is Jesus vulnerably disclosing his relationship with his Father. Ontologically, they are one and their persons are equally the same (consubstantial in trinitarian theology, Jn 10:30,38; 14:11,20; 16:15; 17:21), and

thus inseparable (never “to be apart” except for one unfathomable experience on the cross, Mt 27:46). As trinitarian persons (not modes of being) in the qualitative significance of the whole of God (not tritheism), they are intimately bonded together in relationship (understood conceptually as perichoresis) and intimately involved with each other in love (Jn 5:20; 14:31; 15:9; 17:24). In particular, the relationship between the Son and the Father reveals the depth of God’s relational nature, along with the Spirit as the relational Whole, and their intimate reciprocal relationship as the ontological One reveals the innermost heart of God—both of which composed how we are created in this image and likeness and that the Trinity has acted to restore us to. Conjoined with Jesus’ baptism revealing the reciprocal interaction of the Trinity (Lk 3:21-22), the innermost reciprocal interaction revealing the glory of God’s vulnerable presence and intimate involvement unfolds at the Transformation: “This is my Son, whom I love” (Mt 17:5, NIV).

The relationship of God is constituted only by the innermost (“spirit” as heart) of the trinitarian persons (again, not as modes of being) in their reciprocal involvement together (hearts joined together inseparably), vulnerably revealed to us in the relational dynamic of *agape*—that term loosely translated as love and variably interpreted by human shaping. *Agape* love involves nothing less and no substitutes of the whole person, involved in the primacy of intimate relational connection for relationship together in wholeness, which is who, what and how Jesus embodied and disclosed of the whole of God (Jn 14:31; 17:24). Their innermost involvement together was disclosed further at Gethsemane (Mt 26:39,42), which is likely unexpected for us to imagine but not unexpected for the relationship of God. When Jesus said just hours before the cross, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me,” no special manifestations occurred as happened at his baptism and transfiguration. Given the significance of the situation and pending event, it would be reasonable to witness some demonstrative response to Jesus’ request. Yet, that would assume the primacy of situations and circumstances over the primacy of relationship—specifically over the primacy of reciprocal relational involvement in *agape*, which the relationship of God never subordinates, transposes or reduces regardless of the situation or circumstance (note the relational significance of Mt 27:46, cf. Lk 6:12).

The theological and functional implications of their intimate relationship are critical for our whole knowledge and understanding of God. What is vulnerably disclosed distinguishes the relationship of God without anything less and any substitutes of who, what and how God is. The particular interaction at Gethsemane demonstrates the relational process of family love involved in the Trinity’s relationship with each other. Consider again: what had been planned together even before creation and was now being fulfilled by the incarnation, the Son astonishingly did not want to continue; and imagine what the Father feels upon hearing the Son’s request. This is a strong contrast to an earlier interaction (see Jn 12:27-28). Despite the unique circumstances, what we need to understand about the Trinity, and thereby function in likeness in our relationships, is why this interaction even happened at all.

Jesus’ situation was certainly extreme and his intense circumstance would affect any person, and this obviously weighed on Jesus’ person. Yet, the effects on him is not the significance of this interaction. The incarnation was integrally based on the principle of nothing less and no substitutes, and accordingly always functioned in relationship on the basis of nothing less and no substitutes. Why this interaction even happened at all is

because by the nature of their relationship in the whole of God such an interaction could happen, was “designed” to happen, therefore was expected to happen—an outworking of God’s relational righteousness. That is, what this interaction signifies is the complete openness (implying honesty) and vulnerableness of their whole person (not reduced to roles and performance in the Godhead) with each other in the intimate relational involvement of love as family constituted by their whole relationship together as One, the ontological One. By being completely vulnerable here, Jesus clearly illuminates how they do relationship together to distinguish the relationship of the Trinity, the relational Whole. In other words, the trinitarian persons can and need to be their whole person before each other and intimately share with each other anything, so to speak—without the caution, restrictions or limits practiced in human relationships since the primordial garden (cf. before their reduction “*they* were both naked and were not ashamed,” Gen 2:25). Anything less than and any substitutes of their whole person and these relationships necessary to be the whole of God no longer would constitute the Trinity (as qualitatively distinguished in whole relationship) and therefore becomes a reduction of God.

Even under such conditions, what clearly unfolds is the primacy of *agape*’s involvement in reciprocal relationship together by whole relational terms. What also distinguishes the relationship of God is their language as they interact; and the language we need to pay attention to is relational language, not referential language. In the Father’s expression above, his words to the Son are simple, signifying the relational language of the heart, and therefore intimate. Jesus’ language with the Father in the garden called Gethsemane (Mt 26:39,42) and on the cross (Mt 27:46) is painfully simple and disarmingly direct language—words also straight from his heart. There are no platitudes, formal phrases or “sacred terminology” in their interaction—simply communication from the heart, and thereby ongoing communion together in intimacy. Their intimate communion forms the basis for communion at the Lord’s table to be in likeness, as the relational outcome of Jesus removing the veil for whole relationship together (discussed later in this chap.). Yet, their intimacy can easily be ignored by our relational distance or even be reduced to referential language by a non-relational quantitative perceptual-interpretive framework.

The relationship of God necessitates the function of the whole person, yet never centered on oneself and therefore always as a function of relationship in the trinitarian relational context of family and the trinitarian relational process of family love. What unfolds undeniably from the relational dynamics disclosed between the Father and the Son is that the most significant function of relationship is signified by God’s love. Their family love ongoingly constitutes the Trinity’s relational oneness (intimate communion) illuminating the ontological triunity of God and distinguishing God’s whole ontology and function from outside the universe. As the Father made evident at the Son’s baptism and transfiguration, the Trinity’s love engages only how they are involved with each other’s person. The synergistic (and perichoretic) mystery of this qualitative involvement is so intimate that though three disclosed persons yet they are one Being (the ontological One), though distinct in function yet they are indistinguishably and indivisibly one together—without relational horizontal distance or vertical stratification—the relational Whole.

And this relationship of God is disclosed not for our mere information but is made accessible by the whole of God as Subject for us to experience in whole relationship together in likeness. This reciprocal relational experience is the integral purpose of Jesus’

formative family prayer for all his followers (Jn 17:20-26). Therefore, only the relationship of God composes the integral relational basis for discipleship to be distinguished in reciprocal relationship and not be detached or disconnected.

“Follow the Whole of Me”

God’s self-disclosures lead persons to follow the unmistakable face of the Subject of the Word—not to direct persons like a GPS—so that they will be “where I am” (Jn 12:26). This relational condition involves not merely occupying the same space or participating in the same activities (cf. Lk 13:26-27) but to be involved relationally with him (*agape*, Jn 14:23, cf. 21:15) ongoingly in intimate reciprocal relationship (“dwell in me,” Jn 15:5, 9-10). John interrelates those texts to provide us the depth of understanding the significance of following Jesus in his improbable theological trajectory and intrusive relational path—as John focuses on throughout his Gospel for complete Christology—with the relational outcome of truly knowing the whole of God (Jn 14:9; 17:3,26) and, therefore, being transformed to wholeness (beyond expectations, Jn 14:27, to be “completely one,” 17:23) in relationship together as God’s family. Following Jesus’ whole person in this relational progression is the only involvement that distinguishes discipleship.

This raises vital issues for our theology and practice. It is insufficient for us to be impressed with Jesus’ actions (or teachings) as the basis for our discipleship and overlook his whole person. That would expose a theological anthropology of reduced ontology and function for a fragmented person (both ours and Jesus’) defined by parts of what that person does or has. This points to various persons who believed and followed Jesus but whom Jesus would not respond back to. As John noted significantly, “many believed in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing” (Jn 2:23). They believed not necessarily insincerely but on the basis of reduced referential terms overlooking Jesus’ whole person, thus not as a reciprocal relational response. Jesus did not reciprocate (“entrust himself to them,” v.24) to such referential terms, even though their response (and others like it) would mean more popularity and stature (v.25).

The relational implications here cannot be ignored. Whatever faith is used as the basis for our discipleship, for Jesus faith is not a ‘comfort zone’ masked by a mere confession but the vulnerable relational response that entrusts our whole person to Subject God, who, in turn, further responds in the primacy of reciprocal relationship together (cf. Jn 5:44; 12:42-43). John identified this reciprocal relational dynamic at the beginning of his Gospel: “But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God” (Jn 1:12). What’s the difference in this response? Those “who received him” (*paralambano*, to receive near) engaged an act of intimate relations. “Believed in [*eis*, into] his name” only involves the relational response of trust extended *into* his whole person (Subject) as a relational dynamic, which referential terms merely place *in* a reduced person (Object) and mainly placed indirectly through situations and circumstances. The relational response of trust certainly includes situations and circumstances but they are only secondary to the primacy of reciprocal relationship with Subject Jesus. Moreover, situations and circumstances don’t determine the focus of

involvement that trust extends with primacy *into* his whole person. Many may believe *in* his name but fewer extend the relational dynamic of trust *into* his Subject person.

Distinguished from Would-Be Disciples

As we continue to examine the person Jesus presented in human contexts, in human interaction and in public, one major issue he frequently addressed was others' positive perceptions of him. These perceptions, however, were not the process of *theaomai* (to contemplate carefully in order to perceive correctly) by those who "have seen his glory" (Jn 1:14), and thus responded to his whole person. His popularity was often based on an image of his person, which he had to revise or correct, chasten or confront, even with his own disciples. This was necessary in part for valid theology (i.e. complete Christology) but mainly for reliable function in relationship, that is, the reciprocal relationship of discipleship.

While it is true that each disciple has his/her own particular perception of this relationship and responds in one's uniqueness, this only allows for meaningful (not fragmentary) variation in the relationship but never makes the relationship relative to a disciple. The relationship is never negotiable because Jesus always functions in who, what and how he is, not reducible to human shaping; and because this nothing-less-and-no-substitutes person only does relationship on his whole relational terms—the relationship of God's nonnegotiable and irreducible terms. This relational condition and process of discipleship not only conflict with all our attempts or substitutes on our terms but are incompatible with such discipleshipism in much church practice. And this involves the issue of our positive perceptions of him versus the whole person Jesus presented.

When we formulate discipleship, the Jesus whom we have in our perceptions to follow often tends to be contextualized by a prevailing culture (e.g., Western) as well as Christian subculture (e.g., evangelical) in our surrounding context. The positive perceptions of that Jesus become "a popular Jesus," who, while becoming normative in our life and practice, often takes on a life of its own distinct from the embodied whole of Jesus—even inadvertently and with good intentions. The theological differences or nuances may not be apparent, that is, unless our Christology is challenged. In function, however, a popular Jesus becomes a Jesus we want to follow on our terms—one who may be more palatable or less threatening, whom we can determine or even control, and thus not have to deal with Jesus the Subject. Underlying a popular Jesus is an incomplete Christology, by which our practice perceives, for example, of an embodied Jesus going from the manger straight to the cross, though his disembodied teachings and examples are sustained. The consequence, however, derelationalizes Jesus' person from his intrusive relational path, which many would prefer.

The complete narratives of Jesus defining who, what and how his whole person is also reveal him counteracting a popular Jesus as well as clearly defining the terms of relationship with him. The skewed perceptions of a popular Jesus are directly addressed in both would-be disciples and his early disciples. Learning from their good intentions, relational errors and being held accountable will help us account for what needs to distinguish our discipleship.

Misguided Engagement:

Our first look is at the popularity Jesus generated by the feeding of five thousand, who were already following him for other miraculous signs performed on the sick (Jn 6:2). The perceptions of Jesus from a group in this crowd envisioned the fulfillment of their messianic hope for Jews under the political constraints and oppression of Roman rule (Jn 6:14-15). As Jesus distanced himself from them, they kept pursuing him rather intently (6:22-25). Finally, Jesus confronted their pursuit by exposing their focus on what he did rather than on his whole person (vv.26-28). Why was this an insufficient basis for Jesus to receive these followers at this stage? Couldn't they understand more and grow further with time?

Since they defined Jesus by what he did, they no doubt also defined themselves by what they did. This is indicated by their response to Jesus' critique: "What must we do to perform the works of God?" (v.28). While Judaism emphasized righteous works, Jesus answered with the singular "work of God" to address the deeper issue here (v.29). The significance of "work" over "works" is crucial to understand not only because it identifies how the person is defined but also for how that in turn determines how relationships are done. How we define ourselves strongly determines how we do relationships—both of which in turn greatly influence how we practice church. Underlying these three major issues (noted previously) is our theological anthropology, which Jesus consistently addressed, challenged or confronted in his intrusive relational path.

When Jesus defined "the work of God" as believing in him, he was not describing two things: (1) "believe" as merely confessing faith or a belief system, and (2) his person as a mere Object of belief. "To believe" is the ongoing relational act of trust vulnerably engaged in reciprocal relationship with the whole person God sent and Subject Jesus presented. God's self-revelation and Truth are disclosed (*phaneroo*), even as miraculous signs, only for relationship. The "work" of God then is totally relational work involving further and deeper relationship with Jesus' whole person in relational progression to the whole of God, which Jesus continued to disclose to them (vv.32-58).

In response to their quantitative focus on miracles and bread (vv.30-31), Jesus expands this limited human context—and their narrow epistemic field—to the qualitative relational context of his Father (thus the Trinity, v.32). At the same time, Jesus shifts the focus from quantitative bread (past and present) to the qualitative bread signifying his whole person (vv.33,35). Jesus unfolds the relationship of God and further distinguishes God's relational work. Yet the significant difference of the qualitative bread from the quantitative bread continues to be the source of tension and conflict for these would-be disciples throughout this interaction. Jesus both discloses his person and exposes their persons when he shares "eats of this bread...this bread...is my flesh" (v.51), "eat my flesh and drink my blood" (v.54). Every time Jesus said this about the bread as his flesh, they only thought in quantitative terms, suggesting possible thoughts of human sacrifice and cannibalism (vv.52,60). The person Jesus disclosed, however, was not merely what he did in the flesh but, more significantly, who, what and how he is embodied in his whole person.

The deeper profile of Subject Jesus' face is unmistakable in qualitative relational terms but lacks clarity or is elusive in quantitative referential terms. While we may not have tension and conflict with Jesus' flesh and blood as these would-be disciples did,

many still have difficulty with the relational work of God and directly engaging the vulnerable presence and intimate involvement of Jesus the Subject. The whole person Jesus presented and disclosed (i.e. *phaneroo* over *apokalypto*) is only for the purpose and relational outcome of transformed, new and thus redeemed relationship together in wholeness as God's family. This Jesus of complete Christology, then, involves his redemptive relational work of 'flesh and blood' that more completely involves his reconciling relational work of 'saved to' for salvation to be whole (not limited to 'saved from'), composing full soteriology. The conjoint relational work of redemptive reconciliation distinguishes Jesus' whole person, who must be received whole (including but not limited to flesh and blood) and responded to by our whole person in order to constitute the reciprocal relational work distinguishing the discipleship of Jesus' followers. This has pivotal implications for atonement in our relational work and for the Lord's Supper in church practice, to be discussed later.

For the above would-be disciples following Jesus, their ongoing responses (or reactions) reflected how they defined the person only by what one did or had (vv.30-31). It was on this basis from a quantitative framework that they perceived Jesus and were following him. Yet as intently as they followed Jesus, their involvement reflected reductionism (in their perceptual framework and practice, vv.41-42,52,60) and thus seeking relationship with Jesus only on their terms—which also kept them confined to the probable and thus unable or unwilling to go deeper face to face. This tension became increasingly problematic (vv.41,42b,52,60), resulting in the predictable relational consequence that many of his would-be disciples “turned back and no longer followed him” (v.66).

After their departure, Jesus asked the Twelve if they wanted to leave also (v.67). Simon Peter's answer could be interpreted as either a traditional confession of faith or a discipleship response to the embodied words of Jesus' whole person for relationship together (v.68). Confession alone is insufficient to “Follow me,” though it was likely part of Peter's answer attached to his response to follow the whole of Jesus (cf. Mt 16:15-16). As we have been seeing, Peter still struggled with Jesus' whole person and negotiating the relationship on his terms. The substantive difference between Peter and the would-be disciples was his openness to pursue the whole person Jesus presented for relationship only on Jesus' terms. To believe from the innermost (the relational dynamic of trust “in spirit and truth”) and to follow whole-ly (the discipleship of subjects) are always relationally specific to Jesus' whole person (nothing less), and thus they only have relational significance in the direct intimate involvement of reciprocal relationship with his Subject person (no substitutes). Nevertheless, as Peter demonstrated, the responsibility of engaging Jesus in reciprocal relationship is often circumvented by two relational errors revising the composition of discipleship.

Two Relational Errors Revising Discipleship:

A would-be disciple seeking a popular Jesus always has tension or conflict with the person Jesus presents. The dynamics of such encounters are seen even more notably when a rich ruler anxiously sought Jesus (Mk 10:17-22, discussed partly in the last chap.). No account is given of his previous exposure to Jesus' popularity, yet it is unlikely he was unaware of Jesus at this later point in his public ministry. It is also likely

he witnessed Jesus' intimate reception of children preceding his own encounter with Jesus, which may have heightened his interest in Jesus.

The encounter begins as he imposes himself on Jesus with the greeting "Good Teacher." Given the Jewish conception of God's goodness and who, what and how Jesus is, this seems to be appropriate address to the person Jesus presented to this man. Yet, Jesus' response—"Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone" (v.18)—appears to indicate the rich ruler is not addressing his whole person as God, possibly suggesting at least his faux pas. His address as "teacher," however, seems appropriate regardless of his perceptions of Jesus, that is, appropriate if he only implies a title not a function. Back then, the meaning of "teacher" (*didaskolos*) involved a much more significant relationship with those who called someone teacher than it does today in Western culture. To have someone as your teacher meant that you were more than a student or learner. It meant you were their disciple (*mathetes*), an adherent, which involved a deeper attachment to the teacher. And the specific terms for adherence were determined solely by the teacher.³ The rich ruler does not pursue Jesus to function in this kind of relationship, despite his humble posture ("knelt before him") and seemingly significant address. Their interaction will confirm this person's level of interest and engagement.

By asking "what must I do to inherit eternal life" (v.17), he indicates his perceptual framework and the limits of his focus—just as the earlier would-be disciples did by asking "what must we do" (Jn 6:28). Since he defined himself by what he did (keeping the commandments, v.20) as well as by what he had (great wealth, v.22), he reduced his person to these quantitative aspects. Moreover, with the lens of this reductionist framework, this is how he perceives Jesus: as a teacher only for information, as useful or profitable to advance his life. In other words, he only sees Jesus for what he does and has—nothing further or deeper. He does not engage Jesus' person further or involve himself deeper with the Teacher as Subject for relationship together (cf. Peter at Jesus' footwashing). This was a critical error he made, the first of two critical errors of relationship, which revises what composes following Jesus.

Jesus responds to the man's innermost. In the content of those familiar words that come out of Jesus' mouth (v.21), he lovingly tries to help the man to redefine his person and to free him from what reduced his whole person and prevented the relationship necessary to be whole. The discipleship of "Follow me" cannot emerge from a theological anthropology of reduced ontology and function. This would require a shift in his perceptual-interpretive framework from quantitative to qualitative (cf. Lk 12:32-34)—which is what he really sought in *zōē* ("eternal life"). Sadly, the rich ruler separated himself from the whole person Jesus vulnerably presented to him, whom the man had already detached from his teachings. This disconnection thus clearly demonstrated his continued condition of enslavement to reductionism, that is, defining himself by what he did and had (v.22). This enslavement exposes his second critical error of relationship.

The rich ruler pursued the Teacher only to learn what to do (his first critical error) "to inherit eternal life." "To inherit" (*kleronomeo*, to be an heir) something was not an end result any individual can make happen by one's effort, which the rich ruler appeared to assume—likely given his resources and self-determination. "To be an heir" required a

³ For an in-depth study of *mathetes*, see Michael J. Wilkens, *Discipleship in the Ancient World and Matthew's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995).

specific relational context involving a process that can have the relational conclusion of an inheritance. In those days, the specific relational context of an heir was the family of which one was a full member (either biologically or by adoption); a family slave, for example, would not qualify for an inheritance, only a son would. Since the rich ruler was not free from his reductionist framework and practice of defining his person and doing relationships, he clearly pursued this inheritance of God's life functionally while in enslavement, that is, in effect from a position of a slave. This was his second critical error of relationship. Regardless of his best efforts, a slave could not qualify for an inheritance, only a son would qualify as an heir to partake and participate in the Father's life, thus belong permanently in his family (cf. Jn 8:31-36). This was the relational shift that Zacchaeus experienced in following Jesus to belong to God's family. Sadly also, functional enslavement (primarily due to a reduced theological anthropology) has prevented even Christians from experiencing this intimate belonging of relationship together, regardless of one's confession of faith and referential beliefs..

In Subject Jesus' whole ontology and function, he distinctly makes evident that the whole person—not disembodied from his teachings and derelationalized from his examples—he vulnerably presents and discloses is only for relationship in the trinitarian relational context of family and the trinitarian relational process of family love. Discipleship of “Follow me” by this nature can only be ongoing intimate involvement in reciprocal relationship together with Jesus in relational progression to the whole of God. As the rich ruler's two critical errors of relationship demonstrate unequivocally, anything less and any substitutes are not sufficient, acceptable or relationally significant to Jesus—no matter the sincerity or good intentions.

Limited by the Surrounding Context:

What also emerges from Jesus' self-disclosures in these interactions is the simple fact that he holds persons fully accountable for his whole person presented to them. If Jesus presented something less or some substitute, he could not have this expectation—nor would we be able to expect much from him, thereby justifying disembodiment from his teachings and derelationalizing him from examples. The incarnation principle of nothing less and no substitutes, however, presents the Subject person for whom we are fully accountable. This accountability for all of God's self-revelation is neither excused nor adjusted, whatever the situation or circumstances, the context or culture. The following would-be disciples learn the extent of this accountability when Jesus chastens their sincere intentions to follow him.

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 his “wherever you go” is in the Greek middle voice, subjunctive mood—Jesus responds in a curious way: “...the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (8:20, par. Lk 9:58). This is commonly interpreted as Jesus identifying the rigorous sacrificial life of discipleship; an alternative reading I propose is about sojourning. Thus I assert that Jesus is making a

deeper response to this teacher of the law—not about what his disciples *do* 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, sojourners have “nowhere to lay.” Yet, the reality of sojourning *in* this world can only emerge from the further and deeper process of discipleship inherent in “Follow me”—the nonnegotiable relational process of ongoing intimate reciprocal relationship together. While a sojourner in this world is subject to the pressures and influences *of* the world, that person cannot be defined and determined by the surrounding and prevailing human contexts. 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. Thus, he is bringing this particular perceptual-interpretive framework with him in his assertion to Jesus, which influences how he sees Jesus as well as himself. Without specifying what his framework is, Jesus implies 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 whole person he vulnerably presents is compatible in function only with the trinitarian relational process of family love. What Jesus also implies in all this for this person to understand about his own self is pivotal: that his framework needs to shift from a reductionist quantitative framework (in narrow referential terms) to a qualitative relational framework (in whole relational terms); that he needs to change how he is defined and what defines him; 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—nothing less and no substitutes. And that no matter how good this man’s intentions, the *de facto* state (functional reality) of who and what he is will always implicitly shape how he functions as his disciple. Therefore, Jesus holds the man accountable both for Jesus’ whole person and the man’s own person. That is the nature of discipleship following Subject Jesus in reciprocal relationship together.

Jesus clarified that discipleship is this call to be redefined, transformed and made whole. Whatever this teacher of the law heard in Jesus’ response and however he perceived Jesus after this, we are given no further indication in the narrative about his response back to Jesus. I suspect that following Jesus was more to be accountable for than he expected, even with his previous experience as a disciple—radically more deep than he likely imagined. This interaction, however, provides the broader context for the following two would-be disciples, which suggests looking at these three interactions as a narrative whole integral for discipleship 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, 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 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. Yet, Jesus appears to deny the request, counter the religious values and change the man's role (9:60). If we look only at the man's circumstance, Jesus' response would definitely imply all of this. If, however, we look at his 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 puts into juxtaposition two different realities here: (1) the prevailing social 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 social 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 whole of God's family of those who truly are *alive*, a new creation in Christ, who are redeemed from reductionist definition, determination and control that dominate the social reality of the world; and those belonging to this new reality by redemptive reconciliation also need to share it directly with others in family love, just as Jesus discloses it, in order to experience relationship in God's family, because every person needs the experiential reality of this family of the living.

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 in this relational imperative, however, the ontology of his person as a disciple. Who, what and how this person is by its nature 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 reduced to something less and some substitute. 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 but to declare fully, completely. By this, Jesus means "go and proclaim" not in a quantitative sense (as many view the Great Commission and evangelism) but in its qualitative significance. The former does indeed make it about a role and what he should do. This emphasis reduces the whole person and functionally deemphasizes the relationships necessary to be whole constituting the family of God, and thereby truncates soteriology with a gospel suffering from a lack of relational significance. Such a proclamation would not be full, complete, that is, whole in what we are saved to.

And Jesus clarifies for this would-be disciple that discipleship is the call to be whole, not to serve. Thus what is imperative is not to fulfill his role to bury his father. That may be necessary along with other matters in the social reality of the world but only as a function of his wholeness as Jesus' disciple. This is the imperative Jesus presents to him—the relational imperative of the whole of God.

Following Jesus is also about more than interest, however strong. The adherence of a disciple to Jesus involves deep *attachment* and distinct *priority* for the experience of

belonging as one of his true disciples. The third would-be disciple in this grouping declared his plans to follow Jesus but first wanted to “go back and say good-by 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 and thus would always exert greater influence than interests (which only reflect the focus of the mind), no matter how strong the interest. As a consequence of his attachment, his primary priority was still with his biological family over Jesus—a prevailing priority in the church today in need of clarification and correction.

The differences of interest, attachments and priorities disclose where the person is in the innermost. Jesus ongoingly clarifies this for persons, particularly his disciples, both would-be and real. When he talked later about the need to “give up all” (*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 is about how the person is defined, who/what determines their lives, and thus how relationships are practiced. For this purpose, Jesus is emphatic with this third would-be disciple that anything less or any substitutes in discipleship are a reductionist compromise, which is not “fit for the kingdom of God” (*euthetos*, usable, suitable, 9:62); that is, it’s not relationally meaningful, thus neither significant relationally to God nor acceptable for relational function in God’s family.

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. Therefore, his call continues to be clarified as the call to be redefined, transformed and made whole—to “follow the whole of me” in reciprocal relationship together as subjects in relational progression to the whole of God, the Trinity in function as family. Anything less than and any substitutes for this integral relational dynamic are reductionism of the embodied whole of Jesus (e.g. to “flesh and blood”) and the whole of God’s self-disclosure (e.g. to narrowed-down referential terms). This reductionism renders 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.

Embracing the Whole Person

The Subject-person of Jesus cannot be perceived, received and responded to in relationship apart from his intrusive relational path, even though his theological trajectory may be in focus. As we witnessed Jesus’ intrusive interactions, his whole person has emerged and unfolded—clearly distinguished in deeper profile even before the cross. This necessarily composed the complete Christology that is integral for our theology and practice to be whole. We also now need to go into the cross with Jesus in order to

perceive, receive and respond further and deeper to his whole person. The person seen on the cross both summarizes Subject Jesus' whole person and gives us a summary account of the gospel of transformation to wholeness—seen not to observe or just to affirm but rather to receive and respond to the most vulnerably, and thus the most intimately, in reciprocal relationship together.

When we reflect further on Nicodemus asking “How can these things be?” and other would-be followers raising in monologue “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” (Jn 6:52), there are issues for us to address. In the skewed theological task of these would-be disciples (6:28,30,34), we see the evidence of a narrowed-down epistemic field and the hermeneutical impasse of its limits (6:41-42,52,60). What appeared improbable to them raises underlying issues beyond Jesus' improbable theological trajectory to his intrusive relational path that converged on the cross to constitute it—issues raised for all of us. Our view of the Lord's Supper aside, we likely would not ask “How can Jesus give us his flesh to eat?” Yet we need to engage this question in relational terms and challenge our assumptions of the cross in this context of the prevailing influence from reductionism. If not reduced to a symbol, it can be said that Jesus' death on the cross has been grossly exaggerated. That is to say, we need whole understanding of *what* converged on the cross and *how* it was composed, in order to know the whole *who* of the cross and *why* he engaged it. Our assumptions of the cross are likely insufficient for this understanding—perhaps even on a different relational path than Jesus—and need to be clarified, challenged, if not corrected.

Whatever position we have on the atonement sacrifice, that position becomes the lens that tends to skew our view of the cross. With this lens *what* we associate with the cross is sacrifice and *who* we see is the one who made the ultimate sacrifice. Yet, the atonement sacrifice is just one part of *what* converged on the cross. This sacrifice is insufficient to explain the full relational dynamic involved in *how* the cross was composed, and thus is inadequate to understand the *who* of the cross and *why* his relational path vulnerably involved it. Moreover, idealizing the cross creates a hermeneutical impasse that keeps us at a relational distance to go deeper into the cross *with* Jesus' whole person, not simply affirming this cross of Jesus.

Refocused View of the Cross

Who, what, how and why are integral to God's relational dynamic that unfolds on the cross. This relational dynamic cannot be narrowed down to one of its parts (namely atonement) without fragmenting God's whole relational action that constitutes that part. The consequence would reduce atonement to referential terms with the loss of its relational significance (i.e. its *how* and *why*) and thus having no relational outcome to experience in the transformed relationships together with the veil removed (discussed below). Jesus clearly defines the whole of God's relational dynamic: “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you” (Jn 15:9, cf. 17:23,26). What he said next may confuse the dynamic of love if heard in referential language: “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends” (15:13). Jesus was certainly pointing to the cross, yet his relational language for “lay down” (*tithemi*) signifies “to put or place one's person” in vulnerable relational involvement with others. At times, this vulnerable involvement of love may include sacrifice but not be defined by sacrifice, which Paul's

language may confuse if seen in referential language: “But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). Yet, God’s relational dynamic of love does not revolve around sacrifice. How the Father loves the Son is not about sacrifice but the depth of the Father’s involvement with the Son; and this is the relational dynamic of love Jesus extends to us, notably on the cross and throughout the incarnation and even prior to the embodied Word. And God’s love also cannot be idealized or this keeps both God’s involvement at a less intrusive relational distance and our response to “amazing love” at a less vulnerable relational distance.

When we think of *agape* love, the primary thought to emerge is about sacrifice. Then, of course, the ultimate *agape*-sacrifice is seen in Jesus’ death on the cross. The functional significance of *agape* (and *hesed* in OT), however, is focused on involvement in the primacy of relationship—without letting any other matter take away from this primacy (cf. Dt 7:7-9). Sacrifice tends to have the focus on that individual and what one does in the sacrifice, though intended ostensibly for the sake of others—an important distinction Jesus challenged all to learn (Mt 9:13; Hos 6:6). In contrast, *agape* functions in the relational significance of *how* to be involved with others in relationship—“as the Father has loved me, so I have loved you”—not about *what* “I” do, notably with sacrifice; the latter is how Jesus’ death gets grossly exaggerated. Therefore, the focus in *agape* must by its nature (*dei* in contrast to the obligation of *opheilo*, as Jesus acted, Mt 16:21) be involvement with others in the primacy of relationship together—neither on me nor what I do, even intended for the sake of others (as Jesus illuminated, Jn 13:34-35). Yet, this is not the prevailing understanding of love in theological discourse, nor is it our prevailing practice—both contrary to Jesus’ intrusive relational path.

Rather in prevailing referential terms, love is narrowed down to positive works that God *does* and an attribute that God *has*, thereby defining God by what he does and has. Such love essentially constrains God’s ontology and function and has relational consequences, the repercussions of which continue to have dominant influence in theological discourse today—not to mention in our practice. The results of this kind of works is certainly good but this limited outcome does not go to the depths of who, what and how God is in ontology and function; nor does it get to the relational significance of the whole and holy God’s vulnerable presence and intimate involvement with the reduced ontology and function of human persons. Israel often labored in their focus on the limited outcome of deliverance from their situations and circumstances rather than on the primacy of their covenant of love with God (*hesed* with *ahab*, Dt 7:6-9). Love (both *hesed* and *agape*) defines God’s relational work that determines the depth of relational involvement God has with us (including but not only on the cross) entirely for the relational outcome of the gospel of transformation to wholeness—new reciprocal relationship together as God’s whole family (Jn 17:21-23).

Relational work is clearly distinguished from referential works (as would-be disciples learned, Jn 6:28-29), which mainly focus on situations and circumstances for positive results and not the primacy of relationships in relational work. Any relational involvement that may take place in referential terms is regarded as only secondary to what happens—not the primacy of “put or place one’s person” in vulnerable relational involvement (*tithemi*, Jn 15:13)—and often is not paid attention to by the lover or the recipient over the positive results. Consequently, with love in referential terms, persons and relationships are defined from outer in and are thereby determined by what they do

and have in their situations and circumstances. This is a critical distinction that Paul learned from his personal experience with God (2 Cor 12:7-9; Phil 4:11-13). Yet, even the positive results of such love can merely reflect, reinforce or sustain the human condition, results which our theology and practice must account for. This is not the love enacted on the cross. We need a deeper experience of *agape* than sacrifice, and a new view of the cross takes us deeper than sacrifice—perhaps even deeper than we want, particularly if we embrace a popular Jesus.

The nature of *agape* as constituted by God's ontology and function is relationship. As disclosed by Jesus and the Father along with the Spirit, *agape* relationships are signified by the extent of involvement directly in the relationship—and not indirectly through a situation or circumstance (Jn 17:21,23,26)—and by this relational nature its depth necessitates increasing vulnerability by the person enacting *agape* (cf. Jn 12:27-28; 13:1-5; 14:9-10). The ultimate enactment of *agape* disclosed to us is signified in John 3:16, in which the relational significance of the incarnation was Jesus relationally embodying the whole and holy God to be vulnerably present and intimately involved with us for relationship together in wholeness. 'God with us' (Immanuel) is neither a mere name nor event but the relational context and process of God's whole relational action. *Agape* is the integral function of both God's grace and wholeness, nothing less and no substitutes. Therefore, this *agape* relationship initiated by the holy God's relational grace is the gospel of wholeness. The experiential truth of this 'good news' relationship (not mere positive results) was composed by Jesus in his *agape* involvement with us on the cross—the vulnerably embodied extension of the Father's love for him (Jn 15:9). What the cross signifies entirely in relational terms, hence, is the depth of relational involvement Jesus engaged conjointly with us and the Father (along with the Spirit), and not about what Jesus did even though by necessity it involved the sacrifice of atonement to remove the veil.

What the cross composes theologically in terms of atonement must by its nature be understood in the relational dynamic of love to distinguish Jesus' involvement in his intrusive relational path. That is, Jesus' whole person vulnerably involved himself with the whole human person, thus he involved his person with persons' sin (namely as reductionism) as well as human creation in the image of God. His involvement with persons' sin was fully vulnerable and intimate (*tithemi* of love, Jn 15:13) such that he took on and incurred the consequence of that sin—which also involved the relational consequence of separation from God the Father (Mt 27:46)—and integrally prevailed over the human condition by removing the veil to make whole human ontology and function (as Paul clarified for theology and practice, 2 Cor 3:16-18; Eph 2:14-18). The wholeness of persons and relationships together is the relational outcome that unfolds from atonement, which is integrally determined by Jesus' relational involvement of love. If this is not the outcome from atonement, then atonement has been fragmented from God's whole relational action for a reduced outcome in a truncated soteriology of what persons are saved *from*: sin, yet without sin as reductionism, which, if it were included, would require the above relational outcome of saved *to* wholeness. Simply stated, if what we get from the cross is just salvation from sin, we are being shortchanged; and either God needs to be held accountable or our theology and practice are incomplete. In the theological task, as Jesus declared unmistakably in his defining statement for his

followers (Mk 4:24), “the atonement you use is the salvation you get.” And “the cross you see is the outcome you get in theology and practice.”

Therefore, what the cross represents is no mere event (even idealized), as many refer to it, albeit a salvific event; and it cannot be *represented* in these terms without *representing* God in salvific action. *What* converged on the cross is entirely Subject God’s relational dynamic of love extending throughout the incarnation, and *how* the cross was composed unfolded from the relational outcome of the whole of God’s involvement with us. This was Paul’s direct relational experience and therefore his major emphasis on the cross, yet only on God’s relational terms and not as mere event in referential terms. While the cross as event likely presents the body of Jesus such that the cross is not disembodied from Jesus—for example, as his teachings get disembodied—the Jesus presented on this cross is disengaged, that is, not relationally involved in *agape* relationship, but only love as sacrifice at best. This becomes the ultimate de-relationalizing of Jesus’ person, with the consequence to maintain the veil that limits both knowing the whole *who* of the cross and experiencing the relational outcome of *why* he engaged the cross.

This provides us the refocused and new view of the cross and the Jesus on it for the what and who, how and why that converge congruently with Jesus’ intrusive relational path to fulfill the whole of God’s improbable theological trajectory. The lens from the relational significance of *agape* enacted by Jesus on the cross necessarily shifts our focus from Jesus to his relational involvement with others. To only see Jesus on the cross (e.g. a crucifix) also reduces Jesus’ whole person, consequently to truncate the salvific function of the cross without what Jesus saved *to*, and to render John 3:16 and the gospel without its relational significance. With this consequential lens, such a narrow view of the cross and of *agape* fragments God’s relational dynamic to mere sacrifice, not relationship together in wholeness. If the cross is not whole and the who on the cross is not whole-ly embodied by the whole ontology and function of God (*pleroma* of God as Paul made definitive, Col 1:19; 2:9), then the salvific outcome cannot be the whole relational outcome but at best a truncated soteriology in referential terms limited to only saved *from*—and still without being saved from reductionism. Such a cross is detached from the embodied whole of Jesus and disconnected from the Subject on the cross, leaving us with no person to embrace in relationship.

Embracing the View *from* the Cross

Jesus does not in fact give us such a reductionist view of him on the cross that fragments his relational action and diminishes his *agape* involvement. There is no legitimate option to *represent* him in other than the terms Jesus presented in his whole person. God’s thematic relational action of grace and dynamic of love are intimately communicated and vulnerably consummated by Jesus’ ultimate discourse on the cross. Again, this certainly included atonement but is not limited to it, so that the relational outcome of complete soteriology unfolds with Jesus’ ultimate salvific discourse.

This discourse is understood as his seven statements integrated with his actions on the cross, though each of the Gospel narratives provides a different part of the discourse, with Mark and Matthew including only the most important fourth statement to formulate a structure somewhat analogous to an OT chiasm (two halves framing the key point

placed between them). Taken together they evidence the thematic relational message of God, and this composite message's theological interpretation constitutes it as the ultimate salvific discourse consummating the whole of God's thematic action for the new covenant relationship together as family. Thus, no aspect of this discourse can be fully understood separated from the context of the whole; nor can any aspect be reduced and still constitute its relational significance in the whole of God's thematic action.

This was Jesus' discourse on the cross, in which the language of his words and actions communicated with the ultimate relational clarity and significance—nothing less than relational language.

First Statement: “*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing*” (Lk 23:34).⁴

In his initial words, Jesus clearly established his full relational context with the Father, thereby pointing to the source of salvation. His initial action also disclosed the full relational process of grace necessary for salvation: forgiveness (*aphiemi*, to remit sin, dismiss indebtedness toward God, cf. Mt 26:28; also its function in Lk's emphasis on salvation, Lk 5:20-26; 7:47-50; 24:46-47). How Jesus engaged *aphiemi* was less about the situation and full of relational significance, which was constituted only by God's relational grace.

As they killed Jesus, this destruction was the paradoxical relational process necessary for new relationship with the whole of God (cf. Lk 22:20). That is, it is ironic that *aphiemi* denotes, on the one hand, the forgiveness for their sin and broken relationship with the triune God, which in this moment led to the necessary cost for redemption fulfilled by his death on the cross (cf. Mk 10:45). On the other hand, *aphiemi* signifies the transformation to the new covenant relationship together constituted by the Spirit, who is Jesus' relational replacement so he would “not leave [*aphiemi*] you as orphans” (Jn 14:18, NIV). In other words, Jesus enacted *aphiemi* entirely for relationship together and completely fulfilled the whole of its relational significance by his relational work of grace.

Jesus' discourse was interjected with challenges to his salvific claim (Mt 27:40; Mk 15:29-30), as well as with mocking of his salvific authority and power as the Messiah King (Mt 27:42; Mk 15:31-32; Lk 23:35). Another detractor was one of the criminals executed with Jesus, who demonstrated a prevailing messianic expectation of salvation in existing quantitative situations and circumstances (Lk 23:39). His derision was about deliverance from his circumstances, not about relationship together; thus, he represented a majority position of those with a reductionist reaction to Jesus.

The other criminal looked beyond their own circumstances and made a qualitative shift to see Jesus' person (though also as King) and to pursue him in his relational context, despite Jesus' situation (Lk 23:40-42). Thus, he represented those with the qualitative relational response necessary to receive the vulnerable self-disclosure of God in Jesus for salvation. He received the following relational response from Jesus.

⁴ While some early manuscripts do not include this statement, it is important to include this to establish the relational flow of the discourse.

Second Statement: “*Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise*” (Lk 23:43).

In the relational clarity of his family love, Jesus clearly made definitive the relational outcome and conclusion for anyone and all who relationally respond to his vulnerable relational work of grace for new covenant relationship together. This relational response necessitates reciprocal vulnerability in engaging Jesus in his relational context and by intimate involvement with him in his relational process, as signified by the second criminal’s relational response of trust in Jesus.

The relational conclusion of being “with me in paradise” should not be reduced. Paradise, despite images and notions, is not about a place, that is, about aspects of *bios*; Jesus’ statement here should be compared to his statements with the churches in Ephesus and Laodicea (Rev 2:7; 3:21). Rather, paradise is about sharing together intimately in the ultimate relational context of God, and thus complete involvement in the ultimate relational process of participating in the *zoe* of the Trinity. “With me” is only about relationship together at its ultimate (“Paradise”)—to which Jesus could have added “nothing less and no substitutes,” yet was absolutely definitive in prefacing his statement with “Truly I tell you.”

In the next part of his discourse, Jesus points to what he saves us *to*, which the first criminal was predisposed to ignore by reducing salvation merely to being saved from bad situations and circumstances.

Third Statement: To his mother, “*Woman, here is your son,*” and to the disciple, “*Here is your mother*” (Jn 19:26-27).

With the relational significance of his family love communicated in this statement, Jesus gives us a partial entrance into what he saved us to by opening the functional door to salvific life and practice.

There are many aspects for us to reflect on here: circumstances, culture, family, Jesus’ promise to his disciples (*viz.* Mk 10:29-30). All of these factor into this extraordinary interaction, the outcome of which forms the experiential roots of what he saved us to and the functional roots for the development of his church as family. Building with the persons who truly constituted his family (see Mt 12:47-50), Jesus demonstrated the functional significance of being his family in what should be understood as a defining interaction, yet is often underemphasized or overlooked.

Apparently, Mary had been a widow for a while. In the Mediterranean world of biblical times, a widow was in a precarious position (like orphans, cf. Lk 7:12-15), and so it was for Mary, particularly when her eldest and thus primary son (culturally speaking) was about to die. Their culture called for the eldest son to make provision for parents when they could no longer provide for themselves. The kinship family (by blood and law) had this responsibility. Though a widow, in Mary’s case she still had other sons and daughters to care for her (Mk 6:3). Why, then, did Jesus delegate this responsibility to someone outside their immediate family?

Though circumstances, culture and family converge on this scene, they do not each exert the same amount of influence. We cannot let contextual considerations limit our understanding of this defining point in the relational progression of his followers. In relational terms, Jesus was neither fulfilling his duty as the eldest son nor bound by the

circumstances. As he had consistently demonstrated throughout the incarnation, Jesus was taking his followers beyond culture and circumstances, even beyond family as we commonly view it. As the embodied whole of God, his intrusive relational path (including on the cross) was composed by his ontology and function beyond reductionism, which he expected also of his followers in order to participate in his new covenant family (Mt 5:20).

Jesus' whole relational context of family and relational process of family love was made evident in his painful condition yet sensitive relational involvement with Mary and John, which should not be reduced by the drama of the moment or the obligation of the situation. Though Jesus was in anguish and those closest to him were deeply distressed, this unimaginable interaction took place because Jesus functionally embodied the family love of the whole of God. This dramatically demonstrates the inseparable relation between theology (of the cross) and function (in the relational involvement of love). In the most touching moment on the cross, Jesus teaches us what being his family means: how to see each other, how to be involved with each other, and how the individual is affirmed in submitting to him for it.

For Jesus, family involvement was based on *agape* relational involvement, so being his family cannot be understood from our conventional perceptions of family involvement or by our conditioned feelings of obligation. Despite his circumstances, Jesus focused on Mary and John with the deepest *agape* involvement and affection (*phileo*, cf. Jn 5:20, *ahab*, Dt 7:7): “*Here is your son,*” “*Here is your mother.*” How was he telling them to see each other? How was he saying to be involved with each other? How was the individual affirmed in submitting to him?

Jesus gave his followers *new* eyes to see each other from inner out—beyond circumstances, culture, blood and legal ties, social status. He redefined his family to be relationship-specific to his Father (Mt 12:47-50). This is how he wants us to see each other, and how he saw Mary. It seems certain that Mary was not merely Jesus' earthly mother but increasingly his follower. She was not at odds with Jesus (though she certainly must have had mixed feelings) during his earthly ministry, as were his brothers. She was always there *for* him in her role as mother but more importantly she was now there *with* him as one who did the Father's will—thus, as follower, daughter, sister. This was the person Mary at the crucifixion.

Just as Jesus didn't merely see Mary as his earthly mother, a widow, a female, he didn't merely see John as a disciple, a special friend. They were his Father's daughter and son, his sister and brother (cf. Mt 28:10; Heb 2:11), his family together in the relational progression. This is the nature of *agape* family love that extended from the Father to the Son to his followers, and how he wants his family to be involved with each other in likeness (Jn 15:9; 17:23). This deeply touching interaction clearly distinguished Jesus' relational involvement with and response to *his family*. It was the beautiful outworking of family love in the reciprocal relational process together of *being* family and growing it from these relational roots. Nothing less and no substitutes, just as Jesus lived and went to the cross, whom we need to embrace in whole. This is the function of salvific life and practice in the present, what Jesus saved us to.

On this relational basis and unequivocal relational purpose, Jesus' action was just as much for John's benefit as it was for Mary—both in provision and opportunity. In response to Jesus, John acted beyond being merely a disciple, even a friend, and took

Mary into “his own” (*idios*, one’s own, denotes special relationship, v.27). He didn’t just take her into his house; he embraced Mary as his own mother (or kinship sister). She must have embraced him also as her son (or kinship brother). Earlier in response to what each of his disciples let go of in order to “Follow me,” Jesus promised them an even greater family (Mk 10:29-30). True to his words as ever, he partially fulfilled his promise to them. This is the relational outcome ‘already’ for each person who submits to him to participate in his family. No greater satisfaction of being accepted, no fulfillment of the person’s self-worth, no certainty of one’s place and belonging can be experienced by the person from inner out without the relational significance of his new creation family in reciprocal relational involvement without the veil (cf. Jn 15:11).

As the functional key, Jesus’ action here demonstrated the relationships of love necessary to be the whole of God’s new covenant family with family love (both *agape* and *phileo*)—extended from God’s covenant of love (both *hesed* and *ahab*, Dt 7:7-9)—and this initial experience composed the roots of his church as family. Moreover, this experiential reality signified the ongoing fulfillment of his covenant promise to his followers (i.e. Mk 10:29-30, which becomes functional in the present as his church family), and thereby established the experiential truth of the whole gospel for all to experience (cf. Jn 17:21-23).

And as the hermeneutical key, Jesus used not only relational language but also his family language to compose his words as the whole of the Word from God embodied vulnerably for just this new covenant relationship together. This scenario statement, therefore, must be understood in the whole of his salvific discourse and made definitive for the function of his church in its ongoing life and practice.

Keep in mind that his first three statements happened while he was dying a physically painful death. Thus, having clearly and vulnerably communicated God’s thematic relational action of grace in the first half of his discourse, Jesus continued in the second half to intimately consummate his salvific work for the new covenant relationship together of God’s family. The cost for redemption to complete this salvation to the new creation was immeasurable. In unsettling contrast to his previous statement as the most touching moment on the cross, his next statement is the most heartbreaking—while also the most important statement disclosing the relational significance on which the whole of God’s salvific action hinged.

Fourth Statement: “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” (Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34).

Familiarity with these words must not predispose us to minimize Jesus’ relational language, and thus to diminish the depth of relational significance involved here. Such reductionism can only have a relational consequence of promoting relational distance (however unintentional) from God or of reinforcing the relational condition “to be apart” (however inadvertent) from the whole of God. This commonly results when we disembodied and/or derelationalize Jesus from his Subject person (the Subject of the Word) and thereby have no person as Subject to embrace for relational connection with the whole of God. Moreover, I affirm, nothing will help us understand the distinction

between the qualitative (e.g. element of *zoe*) and the quantitative (e.g. aspects of *bios*) more than this pivotal relational statement by Jesus.

Beyond the prolonged physical pain (nearly in its sixth hour), Jesus' words vulnerably exposed his relational pain—which was initially experienced in the garden of Gethsemane (Mt 26:37-38) in anticipation of this ultimate relational pain. The Son's relationally painful scream not only further expressed his honesty and vulnerableness with his Father, but now even more significantly demonstrated the relational wholeness by which their life together is constituted (Jn 10:38; 14:10,11,20; 17:21). Therefore, we are exposed intimately to what is innermost to the *zoe* of God: the whole of the relationship of God.

Since God is the Trinity, the whole of the triune God is constitutive of the Trinity's relationships, while the Trinity's relationships together constitute the whole of God—apart from which the *zoe* of God does not function. It was the *zoe* of the Trinity, the whole of the relationship of God, which was the issue in Jesus' statement (relational scream).

While Jesus' physical death was necessary for salvation, that quantitative death of *bios* was not his ultimate sacrifice. The ultimate was his apparent loss of the qualitative relationship of the whole of God. As a consequence of absorbing our sin, in that inexplicable moment the Son was no longer in the Father nor the Father in him. In this nothing-less-and-no-substitutes action of grace by the whole and holy God, the mystery of the “brokenness” of the relational ontology of the Trinity in effect happened. We can have only some sense of understanding this condition by focusing on the relational reality in distress, not the ontological. With this qualitative focus on Jesus' pain, we become vulnerable participants both (1) in the painful relational consequence involving any degree of the relational condition “to be apart” from the whole of God, and (2) in the fullness of God's ultimate response to redeem us from this condition as well as to reconcile us to the whole of the relationship of God, the *zoe* of the Trinity.

For this wholeness with God to be experienced, however, the relational barriers “to be apart” have to be removed. When the Son screamed out in relational pain, all those barriers had converged on him to evoke the Father's separation. I assert that it was also the moment the Father cried, and the Spirit grieved. This was their relational work of grace; and nothing less and no substitutes could have consummated this relational consequence, which was necessary by its nature to overcome the relational consequence of sin, most notably as reductionism. Furthermore, nothing less and no substitutes can constitute the family love involved in the relational process and relational conclusion of salvation. Therefore, though in a figurative sense the whole of God was broken, nevertheless the relational significance of this paradoxical moment was functionally specific to wholeness, that is, in order that we (necessarily both individually and corporately) will be made whole in new relationship together with the veil no longer between us—which Paul later clarified for persons and the church, 2 Cor 3:16-18; Eph 2:14-18).

This is how the whole of God indeed “so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.” Nicodemus apparently would understand this more deeply from this ultimate salvific discourse than he understood from Jesus' first discourse with him about salvation (see him after Jesus' death, Jn 19:38-39).

If we understand whole-ly the relational significance of the Son's relational pain from being forsaken by the Father, this goes beyond relational rejection to the deeper relational condition of being apart from the whole of God. In this sense, what is taken away from the wholeness of the Trinity affects the wholeness of each trinitarian person. Not only are they no longer *in* each other but they are not one—whole. To be forsaken or to forsake is to be separated from this dynamic whole. Certainly the mystery of this pivotal moment has no ontological understanding; God never stopped being God. And there is also the paradoxical aspect of the Son declaring he will not forsake us as orphans apart from the whole of God's family (Jn 14:18), who is now himself separated from this whole. Yet, the relational significance of this both signifies the dynamic whole of the Trinity as well as establishes the means for relationship necessary to be whole in likeness of the Trinity. This is *the whole of the relationship of God* that Jesus not only prayed for his followers to have (Jn 17:20-23), but also paid the cost for the redemptive change necessary to be adopted into his family, and further provided his Spirit to help us grow in this experiential reality and ongoingly function to mature in his new creation family in wholeness together.

As the whole of God's salvific action nears fulfillment, Jesus' qualitative relational involvement remained fully embodied in the historical context of the cross. What transpired necessarily involved his whole person, just as indicated in Hebrew Scripture (Jn 19:24,28,36,37). After the heartbreaking interaction, Jesus made this evident in his next statement.

Fifth Statement: "*I am thirsty*" (Jn 19:28).

John's Gospel began with the eternal state of Jesus the Christ as the Word who was always God (Jn 1:1-2, contrary to Arianism). When the whole of the Word became flesh also, Jesus the Christ became fully human while still fully divine to constitute his whole person (Jn 1:14, contrary to Apollinarianism). In this expanded Christology (beyond the Synoptic Gospels) the evangelist's narrative included this part of Jesus' salvific discourse. With the words in this statement, we are reminded that Jesus' person was also human. This brings us face to face with his full humanity and the human toll involved in his action necessary for salvation. This "I am" is the counterpart to the other "I am" statements the evangelist developed in this Gospel for a more complete Christology (see Jn 4:26; 6:35,51; 8:12,58; 9:5; 10:7,11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1). In conjoint function, these "I am" statements are his relational work of grace fulfilling God's thematic action and the Face's definitive blessing for new relationship together in wholeness.

Jesus' thirst was not merely the dehydration from physical exertion and trauma, but more importantly points to the depletion of his full humanity completely extended in intense vulnerable involvement in his relational path. This thirst signified that his relational work of grace was both the divine action of his deity disclosing the whole of God and also the relational involvement of his full humanity; and this conjoint function cannot be diminished in either function without reducing Jesus' whole person for an incomplete Christology. Any reduction of Jesus' whole person has theological and functional implications for soteriology, resulting in fragmenting what Jesus saved us from or saved us to, or both, thus a truncated soteriology. Such reductionism is always

consequential for relationships, whether it is relationship together with God or within Christ's church as family, or both.

In these fourth and fifth statements of his discourse, we are openly exposed to (even confronted by) this functional picture of Subject Jesus' whole divine-human person: He who was vulnerably present, intimately involved and completely fulfilling the whole of God's thematic relational action of grace only for new covenant relationship together.

Thus, "when he had received the drink, Jesus said...."

Sixth Statement: "*It is finished*" (Jn 19:30).

"Finished" (*teleo*, complete, not merely ending it but fulfilling it to its intended conclusion), that is, his relational work both for redemption to free us from the old and its relational significance "to be apart" from the whole of God (ultimate death), and for reconciliation to God's family—completing redemptive reconciliation. With these words, his ultimate salvation discourse was being brought to a close. Essentially all had been said and done, except for the concluding chapter in the history of salvation by the whole of God's thematic relational action responding to the human relation condition.

As Jesus completed his redemptive work for the original covenant (cf. Ex 24:8 and Mk 14:24), the transition to *the new* conjointly begins. In Luke's Gospel, the evangelist is concerned about a gospel accessible to all, thus he narrated the temple being reconstituted for the new covenant (Lk 23:44-45). Mark and Matthew's Gospels also included the temple curtain event (Mk 15:38, Mt 27:51), yet they appeared to include this only as part of the narrative detail of events during the crucifixion without pointing to its relational significance (cf. Ex 26:31-33, Heb 10:19-20). Luke apparently changed the order of this event to precede and thus directly connect with this closing statement in Jesus' salvific discourse—no doubt in further emphasis of Luke's concern for an accessible gospel for all, which the relational significance of the torn temple curtain constitutes and Jesus' next and last words both point to and will consummate.

Seventh Statement: "*Father, into your hands I commend my spirit*" (Lk 23:46).

With his final words in this ultimate salvific discourse, Jesus engaged the furthest and deepest in the trinitarian relational context and process. This relational cry to his Father contrasted with his earlier scream from relational pain (fourth statement), yet these cries for relationship were also conjoined in the mystery of the relational dynamic enacting the Trinity's salvific work of grace.

Jesus said, "I commend" (*paratithemi*, to entrust, i.e. to relationally entrust) "my spirit" (*pneuma*, signifying the very innermost of his person), yet his relational language did not compose a dualism here implying he did not entrust his body; rather, he entrusted his whole person. His last words evidenced the submission of his whole person for relationship together in the transitional journey to complete the redemptive reconciliation work of the old and to raise up the new. By his intimate involvement in this vulnerably present and ongoingly involved relational context and process of the Trinity, Jesus was fully constituted in the final salvific action necessary for this ultimate relational conclusion: the resurrection and the birth of the new creation in the new covenant relationship together as family constituted in and by the Trinity, which the Spirit

ongoingly transforms from the old to the new and brings to maturity for the eschatological completion.

Immediately after Jesus' discourse, various responses from those who witnessed his death were recorded (Mk 15:39-40, Mt 27:54-55, Lk 23:47-49). By the nature of his ultimate salvific discourse, however, compatible relational response back to the whole of Jesus is necessary (*dei*) for the experiential truth and relational reality of this new covenant relationship together. This nothing-less-and-no-substitutes relational response is thus irreducible and nonnegotiable, just as Jesus vulnerably embodied and intimately involved his whole person only for this reciprocal relationship together to be whole with the veil removed—the new wine relationship of God's whole family. His ultimate salvific discourse is a summary of the relational words that the Father makes imperative not only to “listen to my Son” but also to relationally respond to the whole of the Word embodied for nothing less and no substitutes. In other words, or further relational words, our response must embrace the whole of Jesus' person in reciprocal relationship, both vulnerably and intimately.

The whole of what we hear and see from this cross is more inclusive and extensive than being only about Jesus and sacrifice. This view of the cross cannot be distinguished through a narrow lens that reduces the complete context and process of Subject Jesus' involvement. Such a narrow lens was used by the first criminal to see Jesus in a reduced way and consequently to seek salvation (deliverance) merely from his negative circumstances. As Jesus further involved his whole person in the third statement, he defined what he saves us *to*, which the first criminal ignored and could not understand because he was predisposed by his reductionist lens. Yet many Christians are also predisposed with a similar narrow lens and thereby can only view the cross essentially as the first criminal did without whole-ly understanding what they are saved *to*. There is no forgiveness in relational terms (statement 1), however, unless it emerges from the relational consequence of the depth of Jesus' *agape* involvement (statement 4) to constitute the relational outcome for statements two and three to be the experiential truth of this relational reconciliation in God's whole family.

The Lord's Supper cannot partake of this view of the cross without participating in this view from the cross. The Lord's Supper, on the one hand, celebrates Jesus' *agape* involvement, which cannot be narrowed down to partaking of quantitative symbols of the quantitative aspects of Jesus' sacrifice as Object. More deeply significant then, on the other hand, the Lord's Supper participates in the qualitative relational involvement of Subject Jesus' *agape* action, and therefore in having communion (intimate relational connection) together person to person, heart to heart as God's family—the relational outcome 'already' of statement three. Anything less and any substitutes for engaging Jesus' whole person in his deep relational involvement is to engage merely in ritual flashback of Object Jesus' sacrifice, and therefore not to be involved *with* Jesus the Subject in his vulnerable relational path on the cross. When Paul instructed the church on its communion practice, his relational language focused on the relational distance in their gatherings; the relational consequence simultaneously fragmented the new wine communion instituted by Jesus, and countered the relational involvement embodied by Jesus to compose the new covenant relationships together necessary to be his church family (1 Cor 11). For Paul, to have relational distance in the Lord's Supper is to

participate “in an unworthy manner” that nullified “the new covenant in my blood” (11:25-27).

The set of words and actions communicated in relational language by Jesus on the cross define the whole *who* and determine the *what* of the cross, and *how* it was composed and *why*—all of which challenge our assumptions of the cross. Only the irreducible Subject of the Word fulfills the challenge of the Face’s vulnerable presence and intimate involvement on the cross. The depth of God’s whole relational action and dynamic of love constitute the integral relational context and process for sacrifice and make conclusive the relational outcome of atonement for persons and relationships together to be the whole and holy God’s family. This new view of the cross, however, makes relationally imperative Jesus’ intrusive relational path in the new wine relationships without the relational barriers-distance signified by the veil, and therefore holds us accountable—the *who* and *what* God seeks—for this ongoing vulnerable involvement in our theology and practice in order to be congruent with this view *from* the cross. Our relational distance is no longer acceptable and cannot distinguish the ontology and function unfolded on and from the cross. Who and what did not end with the cross but rises to be followed in compatible reciprocal relationship in nothing less and no substitute of whole ontology and function.

Since the whole of Jesus fulfilled the challenge of the unmistakable Face, those who follow him must address and fulfill the challenge for our face in the same intrusive relational path.

The Irreplaceable Veil of the Cross

Embracing the whole person Jesus vulnerably presented makes inseparable the challenge for our face from the challenge of his face, notably evident on the cross. To meet this challenge, Jesus’ relational work of atonement requires further understanding for the gospel’s relational outcome to be whole in new relationship together. From the beginning, the whole of God’s relational response of grace has been to the human condition—to restore the whole that emerged in the primordial garden (Gen 2:18,25) and to transform to wholeness what unfolded from that pivotal context (Gen 3:7). This distinction between whole ontology and function and reduced ontology and function is immeasurable in its significance and is indispensable to expose the contending and contrary dynamics between them. These dynamics converge in the inescapable issue symbolized by ‘the veil’.

The veil represents a twofold condition:

1. The human condition in reduced ontology and function that fragmented the person and relationships to the outer in; and this condition emerged in the primordial garden when those persons put on ‘the veil’ not merely to cover their bodies but to construct a barrier for their person and relationship, signifying the fragmentation of the whole person and relationship together in wholeness (Gen 2:25; 3:7,10). Their coverings need to be given the importance of having set in motion the contending dynamic of the human condition composing the presence of the veil to represent reduced ontology and function. To minimize this process

directly diminishes the contending dynamic that God initiated in response to this condition represented in the veil.

2. The condition that God initially established for the terms of covenant relationship together in order to distinguish the whole and holy God from the reduced human ontology and function—that is, “the curtain,” (Ex 26:31-34; 40:33-34). The dynamic of God’s thematic relational response to the human condition contended with the dynamic represented by the veil in order to reconstitute the terms of covenant relationship (tore open the curtain, Lk 23:45; Heb 10:19-20) and conclusively removed the veil for human ontology and function to be whole in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God (as summarized by Paul, 2 Cor 3:12-18).

Until the incarnation, the heart of God’s presence and involvement revolved around the tabernacle/temple (Ex 40:34; 1 Kg 9:3), namely vulnerably present and directly involved behind the curtain in the most holy sanctuary (Ex 26:33; Lev 16:2). Thereafter, with God’s strategic shift (Jn 4:20-23), the new temple of qualitative and relational significance would be the heart of God’s presence and involvement (1 Cor 3:16; Eph 2:19-22). This outcome, however, emerges only when the embodied Face’s theological trajectory vulnerably completes his intrusive relational path to transform the old temple. This relational dynamic unfolded while Jesus was on the cross and during the outcome witnessed in the temple (Mt 27:50-51, cf. Ex 26:31-33; Heb 9:3,6-8). If we interpret God’s action in the temple to a narrowed-down event in referential terms, then it has lost the qualitative and relational significance of the gospel. The embodied Face’s atonement sacrifice behind the curtain transformed the ‘old’ and brought forth the outcome of the ‘new’ without the curtain whereby to constitute its qualitative and relational significance (Heb 10:19-20; cf. 6:19). This provides the essential view of the cross with the curtain torn open and veil removed, whose Subject can now be directly responded to and fully embraced. This relational outcome composes the ultimate intrusion enacted by Subject Jesus both of the Face and for our face.

In his theology, Paul made the significance of this outcome functional for the church in the experiential truth of the new covenant relationship (2 Cor 3:16-18). No doubt, this outcome emerged from the complex theological dynamics converging on the cross. These dynamics, however, cannot be narrowed down to traditional doctrines of atonement—namely the classic view of *Christus Victor* (i.e. Christ’s victory over sin, death and the powers of evil) or the Latin (or Western) view of penal substitution (i.e. Christ’s sacrifice to satisfy God for the consequences of sin)—and expect to have the same relational outcome. In one way or another, these doctrines have taken a more probable theological trajectory or a less vulnerable relational path than Jesus’; and the consequence for those maintaining and giving primacy to these beliefs is to be detached from the whole of Jesus in an incomplete Christology and thereby to be disconnected from the whole of God in a truncated soteriology.

The outcome of new covenant relationship with the veil removed integrally unfolded from the distinguished Face’s theological trajectory extended from the Face’s definitive blessing to bring change for a new relationship (*siym*) together in wholeness (*shalom*). This new relationship together in wholeness is constituted only vulnerably

behind the curtain, that is, to be congruent with the embodied Face's theological trajectory and compatible with his intrusive relational path in order to remove the veil for vulnerable face-to-Face relationship together in wholeness. If the 'old' condition is not understood with the sin of reductionism, that sin remains in front of the curtain in a truncated response of atonement insufficiently enacted behind the curtain—essentially then keeping the curtain in place in the condition of the 'old' for an incomplete atonement that maintains the relational distance/separation to prevent being new and whole (Heb 10:1). Historically, this relational condition has been kept in place or maintained by the doctrines of *Christus Victor* and penal substitutionary atonement, thereby indicating the influence of the veil on their interpretive lenses that constrains the whole embodied by Subject Jesus to an incomplete Christology. These theological reforms always truncate soteriology, thus unavoidably leaving us detached from the whole of Jesus' person and disconnected relationally from the whole of God and God's whole.

The 'new' cannot take place in front of the curtain and does not emerge in theology and the church until the relational barrier (or distance) signified by the curtain is destroyed—as Paul made functionally conclusive for the wholeness of the church (Eph 2:14-22). These dynamics may appear to be only technical, yet they are essential for the theological anthropology intrinsic to God's creation, the human condition, the gospel and its outcome. The persons God created whole and who were then fragmented by reductionism are not defined sufficiently by a reduced theological anthropology skewed by a weak view of sin ignoring reductionism (and the veil); nor are they restored (saved *to*) adequately by a gospel whose lens of the person is less than whole (e.g. as practiced by Peter, Gal 2:14).

Theology and practice without the qualitative and relational significance of the whole gospel are then formulated only in front of the curtain in the limits of referential terms, with a constrained view of persons and relationships. The curtain obscures the theological lens epistemologically, hermeneutically, ontologically and relationally from what is distinguished entirely behind the curtain with the Face in relational terms—resulting in theological fog. Theological discourse in front of the curtain speaks only in referential language, which constrains what we see and how we think, for fragmentary discourse (cf. Jn 8:43). The relational language behind the curtain opens up the whole and the new (cf. 2 Cor 3:16-18). If our theology does not clearly distinguish the whole, then we have not connected with the Face behind the curtain for our theology and practice to be whole-ly significant. The distinction between in front of or behind the curtain may not be apparent in our theology, but a distinction evident in our practice emerges with a lack of clarity (even elusiveness) in our discipleship.

Whole theology and practice is the outcome of vulnerably receiving and responding to the Face behind the curtain to have the veil removed for the intimate heart-to-heart communion of face-to-Face relationship together (Heb 10:19-22); this relational outcome is distinguished in qualitatively understanding and relationally knowing the whole of God, thereby being transformed to the new creation in the image and likeness of the Face (2 Cor 3:18; 4:4,6; 5:17; Col 2:9-10; 3:10). Whole theology and function are constituted entirely in face-to-Face-to-face relationship solely in relational terms only without the veil. Therefore, wholeness in theology and function demands both our vulnerable engagement *into* the Face's theological trajectory behind the curtain—and then to have the curtain torn away—and our vulnerable involvement *within* the Face's

relational path with the veil removed. And our theological anthropology can no longer legitimately define anything less of the person or acceptably determine any substitute for relationship together.

From the beginning, the reality of God's dwelling is the relational location and connecting point with the whole of God. This has radically shifted with Subject God's intrusive relational path. The only relational connection with Subject God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement takes place with the curtain torn away and the veil removed. Therefore, by the necessity of Jesus' relational work of atonement, we emphatically "must follow my whole person" in reciprocal relationship without the veil (which Peter often kept), in order for our discipleship to be distinguished with the relational connection of intimate involvement and thereby have relational significance both to God and to us.

The curtain is no longer available for us to be in front of, though this can be simulated by living with the veil. When, or if, we embrace the whole of Jesus' person, we must by the nature of his whole ontology and function fulfill the challenge for our face "in spirit and truth," that is, vulnerably and intimately in reciprocal relationship with Jesus the Subject without the irreplaceable veil.

"Follow Me Whole-ly"

The reciprocal relational nature of discipleship ongoingly presents us with both the challenge of the intrusive face of Jesus and the challenge for our face to be vulnerably involved in face-to-face relationship together. Anything less and any substitutes for either face decompose the reciprocal relationship distinguishing discipleship. Would-be disciples learned the hard way from Jesus that the composition of discipleship is nonnegotiable and irreducible.

The fact of God's dwelling without the curtain is no mere theological notion that can be reduced to referential information. Indeed, complex theological dynamics converged behind the curtain to make God's improbable theological trajectory more improbable and the Face's intrusive relational path more intrusive. This cannot be reduced or fragmented to referential information without incurring major relational consequences. The whole gospel depends on the integral dynamic unfolded in the temple that illuminated the qualitative and relational significance of God's thematic relational response to the human condition and its outcome to be made whole. The gospel and its theology and function cannot be whole in front of the curtain, that is, without the constraints of the veil removed—as Peter learned the hard way (Gal 2:11-14). As the theological and functional keys to the whole of God, Jesus opened the door (curtain) to the vulnerable presence and intimate involvement of God to be whole-ly Face to face in relationship together. No more relational separation in the sanctuary, no more cloud to distinguish the whole of God within the limits of God's earlier relational response to Moses and the tabernacle. And being vulnerable in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes is the essential nature of God's complete relational response constituting the qualitative and relational significance of the gospel; and this inseparably includes the same vulnerable nature of its outcome of wholeness for persons and relationships and their function and theology. There is no way to avoid being vulnerable in these areas; the

only alternative is to replace the veil and remain as if “in front” of the curtain to signify relational distance or separation. In other words, the lack or absence of being vulnerable is to stay in the ‘old’—the relational condition ‘to be apart’ that has become normative and collective—which accordingly includes the lack or absence of wholeness for persons, relationships, their function and theology. In relational words, the veil is irreplaceable.

The alternative for our face is always easier than the relational work of being subject persons. When Jesus qualified “whoever serves me” by making antecedent the priority “follow me” (Jn 12:26), he established a problematic condition for all of us. This paradigm for serving and imperative for discipleship make our life and practice more difficult. 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. Following Jesus is now made more difficult because the terms of discipleship are not only relationship specific with his whole person but also relationally specific only to God’s terms.

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.

“Follow me” is about both relationship and relationship with him on God’s 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. The challenge of his face inescapably involves the challenge for our face. This further composes the discipleship of “follow the whole of me” with the conjoint challenge to “follow me whole-ly.”

This is the problem Peter had in coming face to face with Jesus. As we revisit some of his interactions with Jesus, we can understand the difficulty he had with the “me” of Jesus’ whole person as well as presenting the significance of his own person in face-to-face relationship. Moreover, Peter illustrates what is problematic to the theological task and a common tendency to formulate a hybrid theology. Like many engaged in the theological task, Peter operated within the limits of the human context (notably his tradition, culture and human roots) and thus remained within the limits of what he knew (the probable), which engaged a process of reductionism either intentionally or by default. Epistemologically, hermeneutically, theologically, ontologically and/or relationally, this necessitated dividing the improbable theological trajectory of the Christ embodied in whole ontology into fragments that can be shaped and aggregated down to the limited understanding of his knowledge (cf. Job). In other words, if those of us engaged in the theological task do not receive “face to face” the improbable Subject vulnerably present and relationally involved, we have to turn to a default alternative: an interpretive framework from outer in that is the basis for human shaping and construction in referential terms, which are limited to self-referencing

theories and conclusions. This default alternative also provides us with a basis for not being relationally vulnerable to the improbable whole of Jesus and his intrusive relational path defined and determined on his relational terms. The lack of vulnerableness signifies a self-consciousness that includes a decrease in qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness. This is evident in our practice of faith, our discipleship integral to faith, and in our theological task that should be integrated with our discipleship.

The theological task may not always start out with a focus on discipleship—which is unfortunate since this puts ‘the cart before the horse’—yet discipleship is how this task needs to be engaged if its outcome is distinguished with theological significance. In this age prevailing with the influence of reductionism, for the theological task to be in relational terms it must by the nature of its relational epistemic process be engaged in the relational context and process of discipleship. That is, to be distinguished the theological task follows the whole *who* of the cross in his intrinsic relational path of vulnerable involvement; this is inseparable from the theological trajectory distinguished fully in its process. If not on this basis, the theological task is engaged by default down to referential terms, the limits of which render theology and practice fragmentary, in reduced ontology and function of both God and us.

This default position and epistemic limits were evident in the struggles of Peter’s theological task, despite having started out with discipleship—at least based on his narrow understanding of *who* to follow. Hence, Jesus made conclusive in his last words to Peter implied in his relational language: “your discipleship will be determined by the depth of your *agape* relational involvement with me and my family—in the primacy of relationship together and not the secondary of serving and sacrifice” (Jn 21:15-22). The primacy of discipleship could be confused with the secondary since earlier Jesus identified himself as “the good shepherd *who* lays down [*tithemi*] his life for the sheep” (Jn 10:11). Yet, as in John 15:13, *tithemi* defines putting one’s person in the vulnerable dynamic of *agape* involvement; in the shepherd metaphor this explains why the sheep know *him* (Jn 10:2-16). To follow Jesus is to be *agape*-relationally involved with him on his vulnerable relational path (“where I am,” Jn 12:26). Nothing less and no substitutes unfold in the relational outcome of whole theology and practice, which Peter eventually learned, not without difficulty, in the early formation of the church.

In their time together even leading up to the cross, Jesus clearly defined for his followers *who* to follow, *what* to follow and *how*. When he disclosed the imminence of his death, his relational language was not focused on sacrifice but distinguished between what was primary and secondary (Jn 12:23-27). It was in the primacy of relationship with his Father that Jesus made definitive his discipleship in the primacy of reciprocal relationship together—contrary to discipleship in the rabbinic tradition—and thereby conclusively distinguished this relational involvement from the secondary of serving (v.26). Though serving is not unimportant, the servant model illuminates neither Jesus with the Father nor his followers with him (Jn 15:15). What determines this involvement in the primacy of these relationships is entirely by the depth of *agape* in relational involvement, not in sacrifice and serving. The immeasurable depth of *agape* involvement intimately manifests between the Father and the Son, “As the Father has loved me,” and then proportionately overflows between Jesus and his followers, “so I have loved you” (Jn 15:9). Only *agape* involvement flowing from the whole of God in the primacy of relationship together constitutes his followers (“that they may be one, as we are one...and

have loved them even as you have loved me,” Jn 17:22-23), and on this relational basis alone distinguishes his followers (“Just as I have loved you...by this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have *agape relational involvement with* one another,” Jn 13:34-35). Note also that even as Jesus makes definitive the vulnerable relational process of the relational path to follow him, Peter asked for information to process in his theological task (v.36, cf. 21:20-22).

It is also crucial to understand that love is not some substance Jesus gives us and thus we possess it and can dispense it; love is also not something Jesus does as an example and thus we can do. *Agape* is relational involvement, the relational context and process of which is engaged by those who have this relational experience. *Agape* is what his followers ongoingly share together in intimate relationship; and through obedience they submit their whole person to him for this reciprocal (not unilateral or bilateral) relationship. Just as for Jesus with the Father, obedience for his followers is their ongoing functional posture with him submitted to the Father, and *agape* is their ongoing relational function and experience in reciprocal relationship together composing the whole of God’s family—thus distinguishing his disciples.

Jesus used the metaphor of the vine and the branches to describe this relational process (Jn 15:1-17, the context for his relational statement earlier). We tend to perceive this metaphor as a static structural arrangement that is necessary for quantitative results (“fruit”). This one-way framework shifts the focus from the dynamic process of intimate relationship together that Jesus is describing. Three times he mentioned the need “to abide” in each other (vv.4,5,7). “Abide” (*meno*) means to dwell, remain, and when applied to another person it denotes relational involvement. With *meno*, Jesus defined the reciprocal effort involved in the relationship necessitating relational work by each participant as subjects, not objects. Jesus *dwells* in his followers with his ongoing *agape* relational involvement, as he defined about the relational work of the vine’s extension (v.9). But conjoined to his relational work is “abide in my love.” In other words, in the reciprocal function of relationship together, neither “the vine” (the whole of God) does all the relational work nor do “the branches,” but his followers have their necessary reciprocal part in the relationship—which is not really about “fruit” as commonly perceived. Our relational work includes obedience, that is, the relational act of submission by our whole person to be *agape* involved with “the vine”—thus having ongoing congruence with the intrusive relational path of his whole person and thereby experiencing ongoing relational connection with the whole of God.

When there is this reciprocal relational involvement, there are distinct relational outcomes experienced in this process. One outcome is to know the whole of God intimately, which Jesus noted is not a servant’s experience but from the relational involvement of a friend (15:14-15, cf. 17:3,26). A further relational outcome is the experience of *agape* involvement not only from Jesus but also from the Father as family together (15:9; 14:21,23; 17:26). These experiences are the joy of wholeness (made complete, *pleroo*) directly from the experiential truth of sharing his joy in the relational whole of God (15:11; 17:13). And these relational outcomes underlie the fruit his followers bear. This fruit does not reflect the quantitative results of what we do—in spite of alignment to “the vine.” This fruit is congruent with and witnesses to these relational outcomes of being intimately involved with Jesus in this reciprocal relational nature and

functional significance of discipleship, thus distinguishing his disciples (15:8; 13:34-35)—even for the world to witness, receive and respond to (17:21-23).

In contrast and even conflict with the limits of serving and sacrifice, therefore, Jesus definitively distinguished his followers by two relational imperatives of discipleship that can only be whole-ly understood in relational terms: (1) “follow my whole person in the primacy of reciprocal relationship” (Jn 12:26) based entirely on (2) “remain, dwell, abide (*meno*) vulnerably in the intimacy of my *agape* relational involvement with you that flows from the Father” (Jn 15:9). These relational imperatives make unavoidable the primary engagement of the theological task in the vulnerable relational path of Jesus, and not just with his theological trajectory. The relational outcome in intimate reciprocal relationship that distinguishes discipleship is the emergence ‘already’ and the ongoing unfolding of whole ontology and function in relational likeness to the whole and holy God—which is based not on mere knowledge about God but on experiencing his *agape* relational involvement (Jn 17:23,25-26). Likewise, the relational outcome of whole theology and practice is based on just this *agape* relationship composed face to face without the veil.

The experiential truth of relational involvement with the whole and holy God is distinguished only when discipleship is unambiguously distinct from the influence and shaping from human contextualization (the common or ordinary usage distinct from the uncommon, holy). When his followers receive the Subject of the Word from God in relational language, they are distinguished from the world and its prevailing referential language, “just as I am not of the world” (17:14). This discipleship is crucial for the theological task to have the relational outcome of whole theology and practice. The whole and holy God’s communicative word in relational language is the experiential truth that makes Jesus’ followers distinct from the common and ordinary of human contextualization, and thus distinguishes them in the world as they follow him with their whole ontology and function “just as you *Father* sent me into the world, so I have sent *our family* into the world” (17:17-18). And with the relational outcome ‘already’ of the whole theology and practice of his family in relational likeness of the Trinity, also “the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (v.23).

Without discipleship in the primacy of *agape* relational involvement together in the whole and holy God’s family, the relational outcome of whole theology and practice does not emerge and ongoingly unfold. Anything less and any substitutes in the age of reductionism are insufficient to distinguish theology and practice from the common shaping of human contextualization, and are unable to prevent their fragmentation by reductionism and its counter-relational work. This default position in referential terms yields only a referential outcome in reduced ontology and function of both God and us. Theological discourse in referential language can be rigorous, eloquent and profound, but by contrast in relational language there is a qualitative distinction of the relational messages it communicates (without the quantity of words) in significance to the whole and holy God and for the whole ontology and function of God’s family—the critical difference between the quantitative outer in and the qualitative inner out. Theological discourse in referential language speaks to “the wise and learned” whom Jesus critiqued consistently for their narrow epistemic field and limited engagement (Lk 10:21; 17:20-21; Jn 5:37-40). Theological discourse in relational language speaks to the vulnerable

heart of a “child”; this is not just about the relational nature of faith but integrally also involves what is human ontology in the qualitative image of God and human function in God’s relational likeness. This is the only basis that composes qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness in the practice of our faith, our discipleship integral to faith, and in our theological task that always needs to be integrated with our discipleship.

“The discipleship you use will be the ontology and function you get, both as a person and persons together as church,” to paraphrase Jesus’ defining statement for his followers, “the measure you use will be the measure you get” (Mk 4:24)—which is directly connected to his relational imperative “listen to *the relational words* you hear *from me*.” Therefore, “Follow me whole-ly!”

‘Follow the whole of me whole-ly’ composes the discipleship distinguished by reciprocal relationship of subjects involved face to face without the veil (or using a face-mask). This meets the challenge *of* the face in the deepest profile of Jesus’ person and fulfills the challenge *for* our face both compatible to Jesus’ and congruent with his intrusive relational path. It was on this relational basis that Jesus magnified Mary’s discipleship to help all of us distinguish the gospel’s whole relational outcome. Therefore, we are accountable ongoingly to the unmistakable Face for intimate involvement with the irreducible Subject of the Word, and responsible for the subject of our face in reciprocal relationship without the veil. The veil is simply irreplaceable for the relationship to be whole that Jesus saves us to.

Anything less and any substitutes detach us functionally from the whole of Jesus’ person and disconnect us relationally from the whole of God’s vulnerable presence and intimate involvement—as experienced by Mother Teresa. This fragmentary condition cannot be made whole by confession of faith or would-be discipleship. On this relational basis and for this relational outcome, both on his whole relational terms, Jesus emphatically makes the relational imperative: “Follow the whole of me whole-ly!”

Discipleship is neither optional nor what someone negotiates after confession of faith—contrary to popular belief and practice. From the beginning, we are accountable for “Where are you *as whole person*?” and responsible for “What are you *as subject* doing here?” That’s why the Father persists in his relational imperative to Jesus’ followers: “Listen to him!”—integrally composing the relationship of God “in spirit and truth.” And for those who respond vulnerably with intimate involvement in reciprocal relationship without the veil, “my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them” (Jn14:23), and “so that they may all be *whole*, as we are *whole*...may become completely one *family*, so that the world may know that you *vulnerably responded with me* and have loved them *as family together* even as you have loved me” (Jn 17:22-23).

Chapter 5 Called to Be, Live and Make Whole

Come, follow me and I will transform you to be fishers of anthropos.

Mark 1:17, NIV

When I became a Christian at age twenty, I had little idea what it meant to follow Jesus beyond merely believing him. I had even less understanding that to be a Christian involved a specific call from Jesus that is inherent to the gospel. By the time I graduated from seminary, I had gained neither a deeper understanding of his call nor a further concern for discipleship. These were not the main priorities of theological education. Even as I advanced in the Christian life with assumed clarity on these matters, I, along with Peter and other disciples, still needed epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction in my theology and practice.

Both a reduced and convergence model of the gospel do not understand the depth of Jesus and thus cannot know the extent of his call to his followers—a call not just to church leaders, gifted servants or special Christians but to all of us. The assumptions we make about Jesus shape our theology and practice, and also determine how we will be (our ontology, *ginomai* in Mk 1:17) and live (our function) both with him in relationship and in everyday life in the world.

In Jesus' intrusive relational path, his interactions with potential disciples frequently redefined them from inner out (their innermost as a person), and also how they determined their persons and relationships. That is to say, without making assumptions about them in his intrusiveness, Jesus addressed their theological anthropology that was commonly composed by the prevailing influence of human contextualization and thereby embedded in a pervasive reduced ontology and function. Certainly, Jesus not only addressed their theology but also challenged and confronted their practice as persons and in relationships. The breadth of Jesus' interactions are critical to pay attention to in order to understand the depth of his purpose and desires for his followers—the call to be whole persons, who then also pursue other persons to be whole. His interactions were not the exception but the rule of his intrusiveness because Jesus always called them to be whole—no longer reduced or fragmented—the rule of faith, as it were, integral to the relational outcome of the gospel of transformation to wholeness.

Of course, anything less and any substitutes maintain the status quo in our theology and practice, which Jesus' intrusive relational path also jolts with epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction as he did with Nicodemus. What is this reduced ontology and function in our theology and practice that Jesus finds contrary to distinguish his followers beyond what is common to human contextualization?

Default Human Condition

If we continue to see Jesus' followers in their primary identity as servants or in their primary function of serving, there are various ways this identity and function can be fulfilled. Theological education typically trains people for these various ways, with the more variety in its curriculum the better. This perception of and approach to discipleship, however, consistently overlooks or ignores what is primary to Jesus for his followers, and thus what is both intrinsic to and underlying who, what and how they are: the human person and the accompanying human condition.

This critical gap is apparent when the significance of current theological discourse is assessed. Along with the lack of clarity or elusiveness of theological-biblical studies' Subject, 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 in human context without factoring in the human condition? The consequence for theological anthropology and its ongoing implications reverberate throughout human life, notably converging on the development and survival of the whole person. This is why in Jesus' interactions he frequently addressed, challenged and confronted his followers' theological anthropology. He calls them (us) to pursue ("be fishers of") personness.

If selfish genes have dominated human development from the beginning—for example, as biologist Richard Dawkins contends¹—there can be 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. 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", has reduced the quality of human communication and relationships, along with the persons so engaged.² This modern reduction pervades further by hookup relationships dominating youth-young adult culture in the U.S.

What evolves here emerges from redefining the human person in quantitative terms from outer in (mainly preoccupied with the secondary over the primary). This 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 should not be confused with human development, although 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.

¹ See Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

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).

From such a basis as natural selection emerges a quite simple object (not a complex subject) that quantifies human beings, or at least *Homo sapiens*, and shapes them as objects by human contextualization. This urgently prompts the question for anthropology, and specifically for theological anthropology: is it adequate to identify human beings as objects and sufficient to describe them only in quantitative terms? Is human life that simple, as Dawkins assumes? The same question urgently applies to the identity and function of Jesus' followers. Yet, before we answer on the basis of our own assumptions and bias, we need further and deeper understanding of the existing condition of human beings to explain the full significance of the human person—most notably defining the identity and determining the function of Jesus' followers. 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—that person whose whole ontology and function are needed to emerge, develop and survive to expose, confront and make whole the human condition.

The fragmentation of the whole person from inner out to outer in emerged from the beginning—not in an evolutionary process of simple objects but in a qualitative relational process of complex subjects. In the creation narrative, a critical dynamic took place in the primordial garden that has been oversimplified (e.g. by spiritualizing it) or lacking in understanding (e.g. not understanding its repercussions on the whole person). Composed prior to what emerged, wholeness of persons is the irreducible and nonnegotiable created ontology and function constituted integrally by the qualitative and relational. Anything less and any substitutes for the human person and persons in relationship together are simply reductions of creation; this condition is what unfolds in the primordial garden (Gen 3:1-13). And we need to account for this condition in our own person and relationships.

This critical dynamic unfolding in the primordial garden underlies and ongoingly contends for the reduction of persons to compose the human condition. What we need to understand fully is less about what Satan does and involves more what the persons do. In the female person's perceptual field (with her brain fully engaged), the fruit she saw evoked feelings of delight, feelings that cannot be reduced to mere sensory matter (as neuroscience does³). She desired it as a means for gaining knowledge and wisdom in referential terms (a prevailing practice to this day, Gen 3:6), even though she already had whole knowledge and understanding in relational terms (an overlooked practice to this day, Gen 1:27-28; 2:25). Whether she thought about the fruit as an alternative means prior to this pivotal moment is unknown, but she appeared clearly satisfied with her created condition in whole ontology and function integrated in whole relationship together (implied in *bosh*, "without disappointment or dismay" about both persons being "embodied whole from inner out," 2:25); and thus she also appeared satisfied with the Creator in relational terms. Additionally, along with the Creator's creative action from inner out being satisfying, the Creator's communicative action directly (not indirectly or implicitly) in relationship with them was not displeasing ("but God said," 3:3). This all changed when a sweeping assumption was framed as a fact: "You will not surely *be reduced*" (3:4, NIV). We also have ongoingly made this assumption by not accounting for the human condition in our ontology and function.

³ See Antonio Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010).

In the reality of relational terms, the feelings evoked by the fruit should also have evoked—as neuroscience identifies in the social brain⁴—feelings of insecurity, perhaps even pain, about losing whole relationship together with the Creator and with the other person. Why the feelings about the fruit had more influence than the feelings about whole relationship involved the above assumption; therefore this person’s perceptual-interpretive framework and lens made the following pivotal shift in function:

The shift from inner out to outer in (focused on bodily nakedness), from the qualitative to the quantitative (focused on fruit), from the relational to the referential (of knowledge and wisdom), therefore from what is primary to secondary things (“good for food...a delight to the eyes...desired to make one wise”) that has preoccupied human function accordingly ever since.

This pivotal shift involved a higher level human function, which reveals the absence of supervenience assumed by nonreductive physicalism. Rather, what is unfolding is the encompassing reality of the reductionist dynamic of the human condition. What emerged is ongoingly evidenced in the pervading human effort for self-determination—which in a limited way could also describe selfish genes—and the prominent human shaping of relationships on self-conscious terms (“clothed” and “hiding”). This shift makes evident when self-consciousness (“naked and fragmented”) emerged to displace person-consciousness (“naked and whole”). What fully accounts for this pivotal shift from wholeness and its resulting fragmentary actions is reductionism (insufficiently defined as disobedience) and its ongoing counter-relational presence and influence: that which counters the whole in creation and conflicts with the whole of the Creator, thereby elevating the quantitative as primary over the qualitative and substituting referential terms for relational terms to renegotiate the primacy of relationship together.

The shift from wholeness, simply stated, is the shift to anything less and any substitutes, all of which composes human condition. The importance of the knowledge and understanding of this pivotal shift cannot be overstated. Nor can it be understated that anything less and any substitutes will be reductions, since they render us by default to the human condition. We make sweeping assumptions that our knowledge and understanding are not reductions when they are framed as facts or sound theories. Anything less and any substitutes have prevailed in the human narrative and have even been presented as whole for human life—all counter to the reality that nothing less and no substitutes constitute the whole. The sum consequence, even by default, on human being and being human—and who and what can emerge or develop—is the human condition, emerging from the beginning by the seemingly reasonable assumption “we will not be reduced,” especially if our knowledge and understanding have some basis in the probability framework of fact.

⁴ See John T. Cacioppo and William Patrick, *loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), 15.

Default Due to Fact

It is truly ingenious how the influence of reductionism permeates the most reasonable areas of human life to compose the human condition. 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—not only are there limits imposed but also constraints. 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 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 thereby 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, 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 a discourse is subject to them depends directly on having epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction from a larger epistemic field.

This prompts questions about our knowledge and understanding, their level and their basis in fact or reality. There is no doubt that fact and reality certainly overlap at various points. A fact may reliably observe and represent what exists, but whether it observes the extent of reality and represents its depth involve the further issue of validity. Validity statements on the extent and depth of reality cannot be based on a limited epistemic field that is also narrowed down by the constraints of a biased interpretive framework. A reliable fact does not necessarily mean it has validity for reality, but is reliable only on the basis of its limits and constraints. Therefore, fact and reality should not be considered synonymous or confused as the other.

There is a critical distinction between fact and reality that needs to be maintained:

Facts are from the limited epistemic field of the human context, which are observed and interpreted from a framework and lens influenced by the constraints of the human context—and thereby raising issues of how validly the facts represent what truly exists (what *is*). Reality is subjected to these limits and constraints, and to some extent is shaped by them but not defined and determined by them as facts are; and reality also can go beyond these limits and constraints, and does so when constituted in an epistemic field beyond the human context. However, facts are unable to go

beyond these limits and constraints by the nature of their probability framework that inescapably limits and constrains them to the human context and the reductionist bias of the human condition.

Unless we account for this distinction, we easily can reflect, reinforce or sustain by default the human condition in our theology and practice.

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 uncommon reality renders the person by default to the human condition.

Our knowledge and understanding of reductionism need to advance to the depth level of its counter-relational work. The primary means for this heuristic epistemic process is contingent on ‘the presence of the whole’ for the integral function to expose reductionism and illuminate the whole. Indeed, the common reality of reductionism also needs the definitive presence of the whole, since reductionism’s sole purpose for existence is to counter the whole—the whole of creation, the whole person and the whole of God. The reality interacting here that we need to rigorously account for is the presence of the whole with its subsequent reduction. This involves the conjoint fight of Paul both for the whole gospel and against its reduction.

The qualitative relational presence of the whole emerged in the human context from the beginning prior to reductionism’s unfolding, which is why those persons knew what was “good and not good (apart from the whole)” before experiencing reductionism. Ever since, however, there has been an ongoing difficulty, struggle and even confusion distinguishing the uncommon reality of the whole and its distinction from reductionism. This reflects in part the genius of reductionism to confuse fact (and related assumptions) and reality and blur their distinction, hereby obscuring the primary focus on what is whole from inner out with a secondary focus on fragmentary parts from outer in.

This contrary and pivotal dynamic emerged from the beginning and continues its predominant influence today to confound our knowledge and understanding of human persons, including our own. Does this signify being embedded in the human context and the need still to be redeemed from the human condition? A default mode makes this a reality for us, whether we recognize it or not.

And as far as theological anthropology goes (or doesn’t go), has reductionism in fact composed its human narrative and its assumed “reality” of human being and being human? If in practice such theology reflects or reinforces reduced ontology and function, then this has become a common reality that continues to influence our persons and relationships—even to determine by default.

Continuing by Default

Anything less and any substitutes of the whole, particularly the whole ontology and function of the person, can be found along a wide spectrum of expression. We tend to look at human fragmentation and reduction at 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 human condition by default.

To emphasize again, what the persons in the primordial garden paid attention to and ignored due to their shift to a perceptual-interpretive framework focused on the outer in are critical to understand. This reduced lens supposedly would have given them greater perception (“your eyes will be opened”) but in reality did the opposite instead—unmistakably fragmenting what was integral for the whole:

1. What the Creator created, by obscuring the qualitative with the quantitative.
2. What the Creator communicated in the primacy of relationship, by narrowing the epistemic field with a biased lens to redefine the terms of relationship (in reality, God did say that).

Countering God’s creative and communicative actions was the result of these persons transposing their perception from inner out to outer in and inverting their priorities from the primary to the secondary—common and prevailing practices engaged along a wide spectrum to this day, even by the theological academy and church. The loss of both the qualitative and the primacy of relationship together are distinctly evident throughout contemporary human context, not only prominently amplified by modern social media and hookup culture. This continuing condition is clearly witnessed increasingly in our lack of both qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness.

What we pay attention to and ignore about sin as reductionism are what we pay attention to and ignore about defining the person and engaging in relationships. They overlap inseparably and interact both unmistakably in the human context and undeniably in our theology and practice. Therefore, a weak or insufficient view of sin is consequential for reductionism of the person and relationships. Conversely, any reduction of the person and relationships results in not paying attention to, ignoring or simply not understanding reductionism operating in the entire spectrum of human life and in its dynamic process fragmenting God’s whole. And the consequence continuing for us even in our practice of following Christ is engagement in the human condition by default.

Thus, at the risk of understating it, it is indispensable to recognize and understand in our theology and practice:

For reductionism, the part(s) is primary over the whole, with any sense of the whole (if considered at all) determined only by parts (even their sum); therefore, reductionism always counters the whole by fragmenting it, operating under the false assumption “you will not be reduced” that legitimates preoccupation with the

secondary—which then promotes epistemological illusions and ontological simulations of the whole.

It is imperative to address reductionism in our theology and practice—most urgently our theological anthropology—to receive the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction needed to be whole in reality, even notwithstanding the facts.

Reductionism's contrary dynamic is ongoingly consequential most significantly for the person and relationships, and this immeasurable influence has shaped our theology and practice. The accumulation of knowledge (“desired to make one wise”), for example, emerged from the beginning to define many human identities and status today, which are clearly enhanced and embellished by reductionism's referential knowledge (as demonstrated in the academy). How much has this shaped the identity and function of Jesus' followers today? The redefinition of the person based on the parts of what they possess and can do in referential terms becomes the defining basis by which relationships with other persons so defined are engaged according to these reduced terms—evidencing the inescapable issues for ontology and function. Consequently, it is further indispensable to recognize and understand:

Basic to reductionism counteracting God's whole is its ongoing counter-relational work, inverting the primacy of reciprocal relationships together—with the shaping of relationships with others (including God) on one's own limited terms as its most subtle practice located on the full spectrum of anything less and any substitutes. The relational consequence is converting complex (vulnerable) relationships into simple associations with a minimum of involvement measured according to one's own self-definition from outer in. One's own terms are composed at the loss of both the qualitative of the whole person from inner out and the relational of persons together in wholeness in their innermost.

If we do not acknowledge and understand the loss of the qualitative and the primacy of relationship together that emerged from the beginning, we certainly have no significant basis to recognize their loss in our midst, including in our own person and relationships.

The emergence of reductionism is not a human construction, for example, by selfish genes in natural selection, though such thinking does emerge from reductionism. The initial appearance of reductionism is often insufficient to understand the scope of this contrary dynamic in both its breadth and depth, and thus its ongoing implications. We, therefore, also need to recognize unmistakably and to understand entirely:

Reductionism by its nature routinely imposes a narrowed perceptual-interpretive framework that reduces our lens with the following consequences:

1. limits the epistemic field to fragment our epistemology,
2. diminishes the ontology of all persons,
3. minimalizes any and all relationships.

Referentialization of our epistemic source—which includes the creation narrative and the Word—is the most significant, and least understood, consequence emerging from the dynamic of reductionism: “Did God really say that?...you will not surely be reduced.”

Moreover, this dynamic has unfolded, been long established and continues to extend itself in human contexts, even as the norm for the common notion of ‘the common good’. Many of our notions of the common good may in fact seek for wholeness but in reality reflect, reinforce or even sustain reductionism by default. This addresses us both to the globalization of reductionism and the matter of globalization as a social phenomenon of growing fact today that is a mere illusion and simulation of the whole and what wholeness is in reality.

If it is not apparent in your daily life, the influence of modernism as a worldview and its primacy of rationalizing in search of knowledge and truth have prevailed in determining the quality of life in most human contexts. We are all ongoingly influenced and shaped by the outcome of the modern enterprise of progress—whether from the physical and natural sciences or from related applied technologies, and even from theology. A most far-reaching result of this human project impacting humanity in its innermost is the globalization of the economy; and, as noted earlier, we are only beginning to grasp the impact of media technology on persons and relationships. Positive or negative, further development of globalization can be expected—and needs to be anticipated by those in the theological context—since, as sociologist Anthony Giddens states, “Modernity is inherently globalizing.”⁵ Both how globalization is unfolding and why it has emerged are equally important to recognize and understand. And understanding this age we live in necessarily requires understanding the scope of reductionism.

Along with the economic impact globalization has on peoples of the world, there is a dual phenomenon somewhat paradoxically characterizing globalization. On the one hand, the process is distinctly reductionist, for example, reducing the whole of persons and people to cheap labor, disposable goods or market pawns. On the other hand, globalization is breaking down national boundaries and provincialism to give us a glimpse of the interrelated whole of humanity, albeit in a convoluted sense.

Systems theory (for example, in ecology and family process) has provided further understanding of a whole as a working system of interrelated parts. There is a general tendency to perceive the sum of these parts as determining the whole, without the need for further understanding; yet in a process of synergism the whole functioning together is greater than the sum effects from the function of its individual parts. Inherent to the whole, however, is not merely a quantitative effect greater than the sum of its parts but more importantly a qualitative effect. Systems theory is a quantitative framework the use of which tends not to account for qualitative aspects. Thus its value is limited though nonetheless useful to help us understand the whole.

While philosophical postmodernism insightfully has exposed the reductionism in modernity and perhaps points to a holistic direction, postmodernity is neither instrumental in fully grasping reductionism nor significant in understanding the whole. Since the main voices of postmodernism do not speak of a definitive whole—only the need for it—a part (e.g. a person) cannot truly know the importance of *who* one is and is a part of, nor understand the primacy of *what* one is apart from, therefore never really understanding the full significance of *how* being apart from the whole reduces that part(s) to something qualitatively less, or, as God said, “not good.” In other words, we need a definitive whole in order to fully understand reductionism—acknowledging the presence

⁵ Anthony Giddens, *The Consequence of Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 63.

of the whole emerging from the beginning and affirming the whole's trajectory in the human context. Without the ongoing presence and trajectory of the whole, we have no epistemological, hermeneutical, ontological and relational means to recognize, expose, confront and make whole the fragmentation of persons and relationships together to reduced ontology and function in our midst. Moreover, we need the presence and involvement of the Whole to provide the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction needed for our own theology and practice according to this human condition by default.

It is evident today that there is a critical gap in our understanding of the human condition, and perhaps a failure to take the human condition seriously. Directly interrelated, and most likely its determinant, a reduced theological anthropology not only fails to address the depth of the human condition but in reality obscures its depth, reinforces its breadth, or even conforms to this inescapable and unavoidable condition. The repercussions for us, of course, are that we do not account for our own practice of reductionism, and, interrelated, that we do not address our own function in the human condition. Our reduced function manifests in three notable areas, which are three interrelated issues of ongoing major importance for ontology and function (discussed earlier and addressed throughout this study):

1. How we define the person from outer in based more on the quantitative parts of what we do and have, and thereby function in our own person.
2. On this basis, this is how our person engages in relationships with other persons, whom we define in the same outer-in terms, to reduce the depth level of involvement in relationship together.
3. These reduced persons in reduced relationships together then become the defining and determining basis for how we practice our beliefs and consequently how relationships together function as the church and in the related academy.

These ongoing issues are the three inescapable issues for our ontology and function needing accountability. The pivotal shift from “embodied whole from inner out and not confused, disappointed in relationship together” to “embodied parts from outer in and reduced to relational distance” has ongoing consequences; and their implications directly challenge our theological anthropology and hold us accountable for its assumptions of ontology and function.

This shift to reductionism expressed in these inescapable issues for our ontology and function further expresses itself in interaction with three unavoidable issues (ongoingly discussed) for all practice that are necessary to account for in all moments:

1. The presentation of the person: the outer-in parts of our person presented to others that define and determine our primary identity, thereby conveying to others who and what we are based on these facts, not reality—that is, an ongoing presentation of self (e.g. “naked from outer in...”) that is limited by covering up and masks.
2. The integrity and quality of our communication: our communication becomes shallow, ambiguous or misleading in the presentation process with others and how this communication compromises the integrity of relationship together (e.g. “the

woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate,” Gen 3:12).

3. The depth level of involvement in relationship: the involvement level engaged in this relationship is shaped by our identity presented and its related communication, and thus determined by levels of relational distance, not depth (e.g. “...they covered up,” “I was afraid because I was naked, and I hid myself,” Gen 3:10).

Regardless of who we are and what our place is in the human context, we all must account ongoingly for the type of person presented, the nature of our communication and the level of involvement engaged in our relationships. These are unavoidable issues that interact with the three inescapable issues, which together influence and shape our lives and need accountability even in the commonest expressions along the full width of the spectrum locating anything less and any substitutes of the whole.

The qualitative and relational aspects in human life necessary for whole ontology and function are neither sufficiently addressed nor deeply accounted for in theological anthropology discourse—including with the prominence of dualism, the emergence of supervenience and the focus on relationality. In spite of recent focus on the latter, there appears to be a status quo in theology and function above which we rarely rise—perhaps evident of a lack of qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness—and from which likely indicates our need for a critical and pivotal shift from reductionism back to the whole. This prompts a related question for theological anthropology: On what basis is the human condition defined and its resolution determined? The answer is either good news in relational terms or so-so news in referential terms, or perhaps disappointing news because it lacks qualitative and relational significance.

The persons in the primordial garden redefined their theological anthropology and reduced their whole persons (from inner out with the qualitative heart in the primacy of relationship) in order to substitute an identity from outer in based on the secondary of what they had and did and thereby reshaped relationships. The consequence was the loss of wholeness in both the qualitative and the relational. In further understanding these critical dynamics, since their action to give priority to the secondary was made apart from the primacy of relationship, by implication the person (self) acted autonomously in the relationship based on one’s own terms. Of further significance then, having assumed an identity apart from the primacy of relationship necessitated being involved in the effort of self-determination. If they had functioned inner out focused on the primary, they would have engaged the above situation by the primacy of relationship. This would have avoided the fragmentation of wholeness in relationship created by their self-autonomy and made unnecessary their attempt to construct an identity in the human context by self-determination, efforts which necessarily involve their shaping of relationships. Their loss of whole relationship together was demonstrated in the relational consequence: “the eyes of both were *refocused to outer in* and they knew that they were naked and they *covered their person*.... ‘I was afraid because I was naked and I hid myself’” (Gen 3:7,10). These dynamics were extended further with the overlap of self-determination into the need for self-justification: “The woman whom you gave to be with me *in the primacy of relationship*, she gave me fruit...I ate” (3:12). For the person to be defined from outer in

and determined by what they have and do, always necessitates a comparative process with human distinctions of ‘better’ or ‘less’, which then inevitably will involve efforts of self-determination. This self-definition forms the basis for self-conscious engagement in relationships, which make evident the inescapable issues for ontology and function discussed above.

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

Furthermore, the whole person from inner out signified by the qualitative function of the heart needs renewed focus for understanding the human condition and needs to be restored in our theology and function—yet, merely discussing spirituality is inadequate. We cannot avoid addressing the human heart (our own to start) and the feelings associated with it because the whole of human identity is rooted in it—along with the consciousness of self, noted by neuroscientist Damasio—and the depths of the human condition is tied to it. If neuroscience can talk about feelings as integral to the human function, why doesn’t the theological academy discuss feelings as at the core of the human person? A major part of the answer relates to our theological anthropology having redefined the person without the primacy of the qualitative and relational; but interrelated, the main reason involves the human condition, that is, our intentional, unintentional or inadvertent engagement in the reductionism composing the human condition—notably in the self-determination preoccupied in the secondary (“good for...a delight to...desired to”) and in the shaping of relationships (“unexposed and distant,” cf. Gen 2:25). Consciousness as a person necessarily involves feelings—even for the whole of God (e.g. Gen 6:6; Jn 11:33,35; Eph 4:30)—which Damasio defines as essential for the self but locates feelings only in brain function to integrate mind and body. Theological anthropology, however, can and needs to go deeper to inner out to get to the qualitative function of heart to distinguish the whole person. Yet, as found in contemporary discourse, this is not about dualism, which goes ‘inner’ for an elusive soul but not ‘out’ adequately to embody the whole person without fragmenting into parts (soul and body); and nonreductive physicality has ‘outer’ but not sufficiently ‘in’ to constitute

the depth of the whole person in ontology and function. The whole person is pointed to but is either fragmentary or not distinguished beyond these limits.

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

The qualitative function of the heart is irreplaceable and inseparable from the primacy of whole relationship together. They are the irreducible and nonnegotiable outworking of the creation, for whose wholeness they are integral; therefore, their conjoint function are the keys for being whole that cannot be ignored or diminished. Anything less and any substitutes of the qualitative and the relational are reductions, which only signify the presence, influence and operation of the human condition. Any reductions or loss of the qualitative and relational render the person and persons together in relationship to fragmentary terms of human shaping; and this condition cannot be whole and consequently simply functions in the “not good to be apart” from God’s whole—in spite of any aggregate determination made in referential terms, for example, the members filling a church.

The reduction to human terms and shaping from outer in—signifying the human person assuming autonomy apart from the primacy of relationship—prevail in human life and pervade even in the church and the academy, notably in legitimated efforts of self-determination and self-justification (functionally, not theologically). The interrelated issues of self-autonomy, self-determination and self-justification are critical to understand

in terms of the sin of reductionism—which Jesus integrally addressed in his major discourse for his followers (Mt 5-7)—indispensable to account for in our theology and practice if we are to pay attention to the human condition in our midst. Without being accountable based on this integral understanding, the only alternative available for us is to continue by default along the spectrum of reductionist function.

The Inner and Outer Scope of Reductionism

As discussed previously, reductionism tends not to be the blatant activity often associated with Satan but rather is usually an obscure process having the appearance of being reasonable, normative and even righteous (cf. 2 Cor 11:14-15). Any shift to reductionist substitutes for the whole may not be apparent because the overt forms may remain while the underlying or deeper significance is absent. For example, a shift may not involve a shift in basic doctrine and theology but what they are based on (e.g. a scientific paradigm and foundationalism), or it may not be a shift in basic types of Christian practice but how they function (e.g. without the significance of heart, as exposed in worship by Jesus, Mt 15:8), not a change in outward behavior but without the relational significance of intimacy (signified by “heart and vulnerableness,” Jn 4:23).

The process of reductionism therefore effectively formulates two influentially competing substitutes that are critical to recognize: one, an *ontological simulation* of the whole of God but without the qualitative significance of the heart, and, two, an *epistemological illusion* of the truth of God but without really knowing the triune God in intimate relationship. These substitutes counter God’s strategic shift and who and what the Father seeks in whole relationship together (as Jesus vulnerably disclosed, Jn 4:23-24). Without the qualitative significance of the heart and the intimacy of relationships together, there is no certainty (in spite of doctrinal certainty) of the whole of God constituted in the Trinity, only simulation and illusion. No created entity understands this more than Satan. Consequently, Satan initiated reductionism as an ontological simulation and epistemological illusion for life based on lies (false assumptions, inadequate methodologies, incomplete practices, cf. Rev 2:4; 3:2) he generates (as the author of lies, Jn 8:44) for his twofold purpose: (1) to distance or detach the whole of our person from our hearts and (2) to interfere with our relationship with God by reducing the primacy of intimacy necessary to be whole. His twofold purpose serves his ongoing goal for Christians to reduce our relational function—since he is unable to destroy our relationship with God—so as “to be apart” from the whole. Moreover, his counteracting influence and counter-relational work are evident in theological engagement today when our hearts are distant and our involvement is less than vulnerable in the theological task.

Consequently, and urgently, the scope of reductionism and its influence to perpetuate the human condition by default make it crucial for understanding our working theological anthropology, which underlies our theology and practice, notably in our discipleship. Any diminishing of the ontology of all persons and the minimalizing of any and all relationships, which directly emerges from reductionism, are inseparable from our theological anthropology unless they are specifically accounted for and contested. The theological anthropology issue will remain insurmountable in our theological engagement unless it conjointly includes the strong view of sin necessary to fight against the scope of

reductionism as sin. Therefore, the interaction of these two issues necessitates neither assuming nor neglecting either one because it will be at the expense of the other.

There is a certain degree of validity in thinking that in our age it is much harder to deal with sin today than in the age, for example, of the early church. To the extent that this is true, two factors heavily contribute to this condition. One factor is contextual and the other is structural. They operate separately and in combination. The church today and those in theological engagement need to understand these operations if they expect to be distinguished in their practice from these increasingly prevailing factors.

The contextual factor is distinct in the increasing normative character of sin. As discussed earlier, it bears repeating that the growing frequency and extent of any questionable behavior or practice create conditions for redefining those more favorably. Our perceptions of what is unacceptable are indeed being challenged continuously and likely redefined. As the relativism of a postmodern context or a climate of indiscriminant tolerance continue, distinguishing sin becomes even more difficult. This process can also be seen as a reaction to forms of Christian legalism with its rigidity and dependence on constraints (e.g. templates for conformity)—particularly reactions from less conservative Christians. In this process Christian liberty is exercised, and somewhat abused, in a manner influenced more by its social context than its redeemed nature and purpose (cf. Paul's polemic in 1 Cor 10:23-33).

The other factor that heavily contributes to a weak position on sin is less overt because it is a structural factor. Being a structural factor, its effects on our understanding of and subsequent dealing with sin is much less obvious than the typical moral and spiritual issues. In understanding that life is not merely operating under the total control or influence of the individual, there are broader operations that must be taken into account. These are found on the more systemic level of everyday life.

It is in this no-less-real area of human life that our understanding of sin must be further developed both in our theology and our practice. This is critical in the conjoint fight for the gospel to be good news indeed for the human condition to be made whole and the fight against the scope of reductionism. Sin or evil can no longer be seen merely as the outworking only of the individual(s). It can also be found in the operations of institutions, systems and structures of a society, or the global community. In its more developed stages evil is not only manifested at this structural level but rooted in those very institutions, systems or structures such that they can operate quite apart from the control of the individual, or even the latter's moral character. This is especially true, for example, when the very infrastructure of a society obscures moral issues and legitimates such systemic operations.

Evidence of this process in U.S. society has been found historically, for example, in the development of racism from the level of individuals' prejudice to the systemic level known as institutional racism or discrimination. Contrary to common understanding, at this systemic level you don't need prejudice or racist intentions to have institutional discrimination. Such an operation, in fact, could be run by well-intentioned persons but still produce the outcome of racism. Complicity with discrimination could also be unintentional on the part of any person directly or indirectly involved. The unavoidable consequence is participating in the sin of reductionism.

Jacques Ellul commented back in the mid-20th century about such a systemic process: "A major fact of our present civilization is that more and more sin becomes

collective, and the individual is forced to participate in collective sin.”⁶ This process continues today in increasing global conditions that broaden and compound our participation in sin and evil. Child labor and slave-like factory practices, for example, which would not be tolerated in the U.S. become tolerable overseas to serve U.S. consumer interests.

The net effect of this structural factor on Christians is the responsibility for directly or indirectly propagating sin by either knowingly or unknowingly being in complicity with the operation of such an institution, system or structure. Of course, it should be clearly understood also that this collective nature of sin does not take away the individual’s accountability for sin. But it does reveal the extensive reality of sin and the church’s need to address the full scope of sin as reductionism, both for the church’s own transformation and for its redemptive purpose in the world—and this applies to the academy as well.

The development of the church’s purpose in actual practice is directly related to the strength of its position against sin; and it is the function of theology to provide this basis for the church’s practice, which is the academy’s responsibility. In prevailing conditions, the normative character of sin and its collective nature interact to confuse us of the presence of sin as reductionism, to distort its operation in everyday life and to create illusions about the benefits of its results. All the harm that has been incurred for the sake of “progress” is a prime example of this consequence. Yet, despite these conditions it is really immaterial whether it is more difficult to deal with sin today than before. We are accountable to recognize, address and work for the redemption of the scope of reductionism as sin and its relational outcome of transformation to wholeness. And our theology must be whole to underlie this whole practice.

The breadth and depth of reductionism by its nature is anything less and any substitutes of the whole. This irrefutably composes a wide spectrum of shapes and expressions, even among Jesus’ disciples and within gatherings of church. All of these shapes and expressions of human ontology and function constitute the human condition—notably continuing by default, even due to fact—which prevail in the human context with the following consequence:

To define human being and determine being human, to construct human identity and shape human relationships, under the limits and constraints of the quantitative over the qualitative, the referential over the relational—all preoccupied with the secondary over the primary, even embedded in secondary information/details about the primary, under the long-standing assumption: “You will not surely be reduced.”

In the reality of life—distinct from what we may consider fact—from the beginning to the present, our theology and practice must be engaged whole-ly, or be subjected to the limits and constraints of the human context without being distinguished from it, and thereby subject to the human condition by default. Anything less and any substitutes in both our theological anthropology and its human ontology and function

1. Jacques Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom* (New York: Seabury Press, 1967), 13.

either ignore or reinforce the human condition in its depth, and therefore either sustains or even conforms to its breadth. This state of our theological anthropology and its ontology and function of the person in the human context counters the whole person constituted in God's context, both in the beginning and continuing today in following Jesus—countering the person central to and composing Jesus' call.

Reduced ontology and function is the condition prevailing in human context; and this common condition is what human contextualization composes unavoidably for those not distinguished from it. In other words, reduced ontology and function is our default mode—that is to say emphatically, our default mode for all of us without exception. Accordingly, the condition of reduced ontology and function is what Jesus finds, addresses, challenges and confronts in our theology and practice in order to be distinguished as those who “follow the whole of me whole-ly.”

Therefore, we must never assume that “you have not been or are not being reduced.” Nor can we claim to be whole and not fragmented until we understand Jesus' call to his followers and respond reciprocally according to his whole relational terms for discipleship. “Come...!”

Identity Formation

As Jesus started proclaiming the good news that the kingdom of God had come (Mk 1:14-15), he extended his call to follow him: “Come” (*deute*, 1:17, cf. Jn 1:39). His exclamation to come “follow after” (*opiso*) him was the opposite of what he told Satan earlier: “Away with you” (Mt 4:10, *opiso*, get behind). Later, Peter also received this contrary message from Jesus to “get behind me” (*opiso*, Mt 16:23). Yet, before that Peter clearly received Jesus' call to follow after him (*opiso* in positive response). The opposing messages Peter received help distinguish the nature of Jesus' call.

When Jesus called “Come,” he initiated a relational dynamic that composed his calling in three interrelated processes:

1. The process of redemptive change—the innermost change (*metamorphoō*, not the outer change of *metaschematizō*, cf. Rom 12:1-2) of being redeemed from reductionism in which the old dies so that the new can rise (Jn 8:31-32; Eph 4:21-24, cf. Rom 8:5-6).
2. The process of transformation—the relational outcome of redemptive change from reduced ontology and function to whole ontology and function (Jn 1:12-13; 3:3; 2 Cor 3:18; 5:17).
3. The reciprocal process of living and making whole—the ongoing vulnerable involvement, first, in reciprocal relationship together both with God and God's family, and, second, in reciprocating contextualization with the world both to be distinguished from human contextualization and to make whole the human context; the process composed by whole relational terms in Jesus' formative family prayer for his followers (Jn 17:13-26).

Peter indeed received Jesus' call but had difficulty responding to Jesus in these three interrelated processes—with the first process certainly the main impasse for him.

Jesus exposed that impasse for Peter with the contrary message to “get behind me.” But, unlike with Satan, Jesus used this pivotal interaction to give the clarification and correction Peter needed for the nature of his call. In only this relational dynamic initiated by Jesus, Peter’s (and any of our) identity formation unfolds in Jesus’ calling.

Jesus always contended with reduced ontology and function because he called his followers to be whole, first and foremost. His call to his followers necessitates conjointly being redeemed from reductionism and transformed to wholeness. We can’t be saved *to* wholeness without being saved *from* reductionism, which is our default condition and mode as long as we live in reduced ontology and function. We can’t be forgiven for our sin in order to be redeemed without being forgiven also for our sin of reductionism. A truncated soteriology and an incomplete process of change create unresolvable identity problems for those related to God. That is what we witness in God’s people from the OT, in would-be disciples, and in even his closest followers, including in the early church (discussed in Section II). This should not be surprising or unexpected as long as reductionism in human contextualization is not dealt with.

The surrounding human context (namely culture) commonly establishes the priorities of importance for life and practice, hereby making relative what those primary priorities will be from culture to culture, subculture to subculture, community to community, even family to family. Reflecting again on our contemporary expanding surroundings, the global context is having a profound effect in reducing the priorities of local contexts by increasingly shifting, embedding and enslaving persons in secondary priorities and away from the primacy of qualitative and relational priorities. This is becoming, if it has not already become, another fact that misrepresents reality that composes the quality of life. And this so-called progress is taking its toll on the minds and bodies of those affected—which has been confirmed by nongovernmental organizations and human rights groups, and that neuroscience would also confirm. Being occupied, even preoccupied, with secondary matter is a pervasive condition also found in theological education—notably preoccupied with referential information—which shapes the academy by the prevailing influence from its surrounding context.

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

Identity formation in particular for Jesus’ followers is problematic when it is composed either apart from his call or not understanding his call—problematic most noticeably when not composed by the process of redemptive change (process 1 above). Peter’s identity (in the above interaction) was contrary to Jesus’ call because it was still determined primarily by human contextualization: “you are setting your mind not on

God's things but on human things" (Mt 16:23). The influence of human contextualization, of course, is a pivotal issue for all of us, which must be dealt with ongoingly for our primary identity composed by Jesus' call to emerge and unfold.

Jesus taught a critical lesson (e.g. Rev 2-3, to be discussed in Section II) that delineates a simple reality of life about the human person and the surrounding social context—matters we either pay attention to or ignore depending on our assumptions of theological anthropology and the human condition. His lesson is integrated with his formative family prayer (Jn 17:9-19) and addresses the issue of contextualization defining us. Since we do not live in a vacuum, our ontology and function (both individual and collective) are either shaped by the surrounding context we are *en* (v.11, thus "of the world," v.14) or constituted by what we enter *eis* (dynamic movement "into") that context with. In the latter constituting process, for the dynamic of *eis* to define and determine our ontology and function in congruence with Jesus (v.18) necessitates the *ek* ("of" indicating source) relational involvement to negate any defining influence on us from a surrounding context ("not of the world") in order to determine us by our primary source in the whole of God's relational context and process, therefore constituting the whole ontology and function in the primacy of relationship together for the *eis* relational movement back to the world (vv.16-18). Human contextualization, though neither disregarded nor necessarily unimportant, is clearly secondary to God's in this process that integrally distinguishes our primary identity of who we are and whose we are (v.9). This reciprocating relational process (*ek-eis* relational dynamic, cf. reciprocating contextualization noted previously) signifies the relational demands of grace for reciprocal relationship conjointly compatible with the theological trajectory of Jesus' coming *eis* the world and congruent with his relational path of wholeness for all of life with which he engaged the world. Nothing less and no substitutes can distinguish the whole ontology and function of Jesus and of those in likeness who indeed follow him in the primacy of whole relationship together without the veil.

The wholeness of his followers' identity is the relational outcome of embracing Jesus in his full identity—the outcome emerging from the process of transformation (process 2 above) composing his call. In this relational dynamic initiated by Jesus, the clarity and depth of his identity are vital and become a *christological contingency*. The key, and thus the contingency, is who Jesus is. If who Jesus is defines the basis for our identity as his followers, then Jesus by necessity is both the hermeneutical key and the functional key for identity formation. This, of course, makes our life and practice in discipleship contingent on our working Christology—specifically, whether or not it involves the embodied whole of Jesus to compose the discipleship of complete Christology.

When Jesus said in his formative family prayer "I sanctify myself" (Jn 17:19), this was not about sanctifying his ontology but about sanctifying his identity to function clearly in the human context to distinguish the whole of his ontology. Since Jesus' ontology was always holy (*hagios*), this sanctifying process was mainly in order that his followers' ontology and identity may be sanctified (*hagiazo*) in the experiential truth of his full identity (as Jesus prayed). Moreover, since Jesus' embodied identity did not function in a social vacuum with relational separation, it is vital to understand his sanctified identity for the experiential truth of our identity to be in his likeness and our ontology to be in the image of the whole of God (as Jesus further prayed).

What is Jesus' sanctified identity? As the embodiment of the holy God, Jesus' identity functioned in congruence with the origin or source of his ontology. Earlier in his formative family prayer, he indicated the source of his ontology as "I myself am not of the world" (vv.14,16, NIV). "Of" (*ek*) means (here in the negative) out of which his identity is derived and to which he belongs. Yet, this only points to Jesus' full identity. In his prayer he also defined his function as "in the world" (v.13, cf. Jn 13:1). "In" (*en*) means to remain in place, or in the surrounding context, while "out of" the context to which he belongs, thereby pointing to his minority identity in that surrounding context. It is the dynamic interaction of Jesus' full identity with his minority identity that is necessary for the significance of his sanctified identity. They are conjoined, and if separated our understanding of who, what and how Jesus is as the whole person is diminished. This fragmentation signifies an incomplete Christology that is consequential for the clarity and depth of identity to emerge.

In relational terms and not referential, Christian identity must by its nature be qualitatively rooted in and ongoingly relationally based on Jesus' identity. On this irreducible and nonnegotiable basis, Christology is basic to our identity; and any reduction of our Christology renders our identity to a lack of clarity (as "light") and depth (as "salt"), consequently precipitating an identity crisis ("no longer good for anything," Mt 5:13). Therefore, questions like those by the disciples ("Who is this?" Mk 4:41) and Paul on the Damascus road ("Who are you?" Acts 9:5: cf. Jn 8:25) need to be answered in complete (*pleroo*) theological determination for the answer to be definitive of the qualitative and relational significance of both the incarnation and the whole gospel. The disciples struggled with this relational epistemic process, while Paul received the epistemic clarification and hermeneutic correction to engage the whole of Jesus for relationship together without the veil—the relational outcome of whole ontology and function redefining who Paul was and transforming what he was and how he lived, signifying the new wine/creation.

Directly related to the above questions are questions such as "Where are you?" (Gen 3:9) and "What are you doing here?" (1 Kg 19:9,13). These, of course, are the urgent questions from God involving our theological anthropology, and related theological assumptions of Christology, that are critical for identity formation. Both sets of questions need to be answered to define the depth of our theology (as signified in "Do you also wish to go away?" Jn 6:67), and to determine the depth of our reciprocal relational response (as signified in "do you love me?" Jn 21:16). Our response emerges from the primary identity of who we are, and the identity we form emerges from our theology, that is, the interaction between our theological anthropology and Christology. The ontology and function that result are contingent on this theological process. And this ontology and function identify the persons at the heart of Jesus' call—both his person and our persons, apart from whom creates an identity crisis.

Identity Crisis

Our identity serves to inform us about who and what we are, and thus how to be. While identity is certainly not routinely singular, from this primary identity we can present that person to others. No moment in time, not one situation or association adequately defines an identity; identity formation is an ongoing process of trial and error,

change, development and maturation. Just as the early disciples struggled with their identity—vacillating between what they were in the broader collective context and who they were as Jesus’ followers—the formation of our identity is critical for following Jesus in order both to establish qualitative distinction from common function and to distinguish who, what and how we are with others in a broader context.

Despite the identity crises that seem to be a routine part of identity formation in general, Jesus focused on two major issues making our identity as his followers problematic (Mt 5:13-16). These major issues directly interrelate to what has been discussed in this chapter, and are as follows:

1. The first issue is *ambiguity* in not presenting ourselves in our true identity as “light” (5:14-15). Identity becomes ambiguous when what we present of ourselves is different from what and who we truly are. Or this ambiguity occurs when what we present is a variable mixture of two or more competing identities. Light may vary in its intensity but there is no ambiguity about its presence. Identity is problematic when it does not have this functional distinction or clarity in relational involvement with others in the surrounding context (v.16).
2. The second issue is *shallowness* in our identity. This identity, for example, may have the correct appearance in our presentation but not the substance, the qualitative significance—just like the salt without its substantive quality (v.13). This lack of depth is both an ontological issue and a functional issue. Salt is always salt; unlike dimming a light, salt cannot be reduced in its saline property and still be salt. Merely the correct appearance of an identity neither signifies the qualitative function nor constitutes the ontological substance of the person presented. Shallowness is guaranteed when we define ourselves by an outer-in approach as opposed to an inner-out process; subtle examples of this approach include defining ourselves merely by the roles we perform, the titles we have, even by the spiritual gifts we have and/or exercise.

Christian identity, namely as Jesus’ followers, must have both *clarity* and *depth* to establish qualitative distinction from common function (notably from reductionism) and to distinguish the qualitative significance of our whole person (what, who and how we are) in relationship with others. These two identity issues of ambiguity and shallowness, therefore, need our honest attention and have to be addressed in our ongoing practice, if our righteousness is going to function beyond reductionism (as in Mt 5:20).

Going beyond reductionism necessitates the shift in righteousness from merely displaying character traits (an issue of integrity) and practicing an ethic of right and wrong (an issue of being upright) distinctly deeper to the qualitative involvement of what, who and how to be in relationship—relationship both with God and with others. This is the significance of righteousness that is in qualitative distinction from common function, and thus is contrary to and goes beyond those who reduce righteousness, the law, the covenant, God and his communicative action to disembodied quantitative terms. Jesus clearly makes this distinction of righteousness the relational imperative for his followers to be distinguished beyond practice that reduces God’s whole (Mt 5:20).

In these metaphors of the light and the salt, Jesus was unequivocal about the identity of his followers: that “you are...” (*eimi*, the verb of existence), and thus all his

followers are accountable *to be* (not merely to do) “the light of the world” and “the salt of the earth.” Other than as a preservative in the ancient world, it is not clear what specific function the salt metaphor serves—perhaps as peace (cf. Mk 9:50). But as a seasoning (“becomes tasteless,” *moraine*, v.13, cf. Col 4:6), this metaphor better suggests simply the distinct identity of Jesus’ followers that cannot be reduced and still be “salt,” and, in further distinction, that cannot be uninvolved with others and still qualitatively reflect the vulnerable Jesus (the Truth and Life) and illuminate the relational Way as “light.” This is not an optional identity, and perhaps not an identity of choice, but it is unmistakably the identity that comes with the relationship with Jesus and the function as his followers.

Yet, in function identity formation can either become ambiguous or have clarity, can remain shallow or have depth. The identity formation from following a popular Jesus, for example, becomes ambiguous because the Christology lacks the qualitative significance of the whole of God and also lacks the qualitative distinction from common function. Consequently, the Christian subculture this generates becomes shallow, without the depth of the whole person in the image of the whole of God nor the primacy of intimate relationships together in likeness of the Trinity; this is not only a functional issue but affects human ontology.

While the embodied Jesus was distinctly Jewish, and his predominant surrounding context was Jewish Galilee and Judea, the person Jesus presented (who and what) and how he interacted at the various levels of social discourse were a function of a *minority identity*, not the dominant Jewish identity. One advantage of his minority identity was to clearly distinguish his significance from the prevailing majority—including from the broader context pervaded with Greco-Roman influence. A major disadvantage, however, was to be marginalized (*viz.* considered less, or even ignored if not intrusive) by the majority or dominant sector. This disadvantage is problematic at best for his followers and can precipitate an identity crisis, that is, if his followers are not experiencing the truth of who, what and how they are.

The consequence of Jesus’ minority identity is one issue all his followers must address (cf. the consequential characteristic of the last beatitude, Mt 5:10). At the same time, Jesus’ full identity is an interrelated issue inseparable from the minority issue, not only conjoined to it but antecedent to it. Thus, both issues must be addressed for the functional clarity of his followers’ identity as well as for the experiential depth of this identity necessary to mitigate an identity crisis.

In a complete Christology, the person presented by Jesus is a function of his whole person—nothing less and no substitutes, thus irreducible in the nature of his incarnation involvement with the human context; and Jesus’ whole person is a function of relationship in the trinitarian relational context and process—also nothing less and no substitutes, thus nonnegotiable to the terms of any other context and process. In this complete Christology the whole gospel of God’s thematic relational action of grace emerges for the experiential truth of Jesus’ full soteriology (saved both from and to), the significance of which is only for relationship together.

An identity crisis begins to emerge when the truth (or identity) of Jesus we follow is incomplete of his whole person—for example, focused on his disembodied teachings or example. This crisis develops when the Jesus as Truth we embrace is not his whole person in relationship together; whatever we then experience is some substitute for his person in a context and process simulating the context and process of intimate

relationship as family together. The consequential lack of depth leads to a lack of clarity, that is, not necessarily a lack of clarity of what the object of faith is but a lack of clarity of the significance of Jesus' whole person. Any lack of clarity of who Jesus is also reflects a lack of understanding of what faith involves as our reciprocal relational response to Jesus' whole person (cf. would-be disciples who believed). These lacks are a relational consequence of functioning in relationship with Jesus without relational significance. Therefore, identity crisis for his followers is a direct function of reductionist relationship, first with Jesus then together with each other—the relationship of persons in reduced ontology and function.

Any aspect of identity crisis as followers of Jesus is correlated to their function in relationship with Jesus and its relational significance. In his full identity Jesus is the hermeneutical and functional keys to the whole of God (notably the Father) and for constituting the relationships necessary to be whole together as family. In this relational process, on the one hand, the full identity of who Jesus is constitutes the experiential truth of his followers' identity as belonging to God's family, which is the basis to mitigate an identity crisis. On the other, embracing Jesus in his full identity will always involve not only being associated with a minority identity but also being composed in it, which will unavoidably involve being different from the surrounding context. The incarnation principle of nothing less and no substitutes does not give his followers latitude to be selective of who, what and how they will be, even with good intentions (as various followers learned the hard way).

Wholeness of identity as Jesus' followers is a relationship-specific process engaged in the practice of the contrary culture clearly distinguished from prevailing cultures (including popular Christian subcultures), which Jesus made definitive in his sanctified life and practice and outlined in the Sermon on the Mount. Clarity and depth of his followers' identity is rooted in the following: *what* we are in the relational progression of reciprocal relationship with Jesus, and thus *who* we become intimately with the Father in his family together, as we also reciprocally work with the Spirit in *how* we ongoingly function.

The clarity of the light and the depth of the salt are the relational outcome of this ongoing intimate relationship with the Trinity. Any identity formed while distant from this relationship (which happens even in church) or in competition with this relationship (which happens even in Christian subcultures) diminishes the basic identity of being the whole of God's very own ("the light") as well as deteriorates its qualitative substance ("the salt"). Certainly, then, the whole presentation of self to others is crucial to the identity of Jesus' followers. This is the importance of Jesus interrelating identity with righteousness in conjoint function. While identity informs us of who, what and how we are, righteousness is the functional process that practices the whole of what, who and how we are. Identity and righteousness are conjoined to present a whole person in congruence (ontologically and functionally) to what, who and how that person is—not only in Christ but in the whole of God, the Trinity. Righteousness is necessary so that his followers can be counted on to be those whole persons—nothing less and no substitutes, and thereby distinguished from reductionist practice (Mt 5:20).

Christian identity without righteousness is problematic, rendered by Jesus as insignificant and useless (5:13). Yet, righteousness without wholeness of identity is equally problematic, which Jesus made a necessity in order to go beyond reductionism

(6:1). The latter often is an issue unknowingly or inadvertently by how “the light” and “the salt” are interpreted. “You are the salt...the light” tend to be perceived merely as missional statements from Jesus of what to do. While this has certainly challenged many Christians historically to serve in missions, it has promoted practices and an identity that do not go beyond reductionism. By taking Jesus’ words out of the context of the vital whole of his major discourse, they fail to grasp the significance of Jesus’ call to his followers—the extent and depth of which Jesus summarized in this major discourse and increasingly made evident in his sanctified life and practice.

The seriousness of the issues of clarity and depth in our life and practice cannot be overstated. The alternative common in Christian practices of essentially obscuring our identity as “the light” is a crucial issue directly related to Jesus’ warning to be acutely aware of functioning with the perceptual-interpretive framework of the reductionists (Lk 12:1, cf. Mt 16:6). This approach (alternative *didache*, Mt 16:12) involved presenting a performance of a role (*viz. hypokrisis*), that is, essentially the process of taking on an identity lacking clarity of who, what and how one truly is—which in his discourse Jesus addressed, for example, in the practice of the law and relationships with others (5:21-48; 7:1-5). Yet, as noted earlier of *hypokrisis*, this practice does not preclude the subtlety of a process that could be engaged with good intentions, even inadvertently. Dual identities (e.g. one each for different contexts at church and work) and composite identities (subordinating “the light”) are commonly accepted Christian practices that demonstrate the mindset of reductionism—a framework (*phronema*) and lens (*phroneo*) incompatible for those in Christ (as Paul clarified theologically, Rom 8:5-6).

Moreover, any identity rooted only in the practice of propositional truth and the content of the law, without being relationally connected with the Truth (cf. “the vine and the branches”) and without ongoing intimate involvement with his whole person (“remain in me,” Jn 15), also is not the whole identity of Jesus’ followers. Such disembodied identity lacks depth, despite correct appearances. Any identity of “the salt” without its substantive quality is directly interrelated to another critical issue of persons basically undergoing only limited change in the practice of their faith (*viz. metaschematizo*, outward change), which was addressed by Jesus (e.g. in 6:1-18) and continues to be a current problem for conversion-sanctification issues. No amount of effort in this outer-in approach to what and who we are will compose the qualitative change of the innermost (i.e. *metamorphoo*, transformation from inner out) of the whole person because that is the nature of *metaschematizo* and a shallow identity. This distinction of *metamorphoo* from *metaschematizo* is vital for identity formation (cf. Rom 12:2), which involves the integral processes of redemptive change and transformation composing Jesus’ call. Where reductionism prevails, there is no depth of identity and relationship with God, despite even considerable identification and involvement with his truth, law and gospel, all of which have been disembodied, detached and disconnected for the relational outcome of wholeness.

This reductionism further involves functionally substituting for the whole person, which has crucial consequences for the ontology of the person. Whenever the perceived ontology of the human person (created in the image of God) is qualitatively different in function from the whole of God (whose image the person supposedly bears), there is reductionism of the human ontology. This reduced ontology is demonstrated when the person functions relationally apart (or at some distance) from others (even when serving

them), without the primacy of intimate relationships necessary to be whole, thus reflecting a person detached or disconnected from the relational nature of God and from God's whole as distinguished in the Trinity. In other words, who, what and how this person is never goes beyond reductionism, even if by default—remaining within the limits of its ontological simulation and epistemological illusion.

Bifocal Identity

When Jesus demonstrated to his disciples the depth of his *agape* involvement by washing their feet, he made this the experiential-relational truth for his followers in order to be congruent with his full identity without constructing a different identity (Jn 13:16). Conjointly, this is not private or separatist congruence with Jesus but further and deeper congruence with Jesus' minority identity in the surrounding context (both local and global). That is, this is the definitive congruence for a called follower who is experiencing in his/her identity being redefined (redeemed), transformed and made whole by Jesus in the three processes composing his call. This experience with Jesus is the process of discipleship he defined by the term *katartizo* (Lk 6:40). *Katartizo* denotes to prepare to completion or to repair for completion, both of which are involved in the process of following Jesus: to repair (redeem) any brokenness or fragmentation (e.g. from sin of reductionism), to restore and transform (reconcile) the person to wholeness and to the relationships necessary to be whole in congruence with the whole of Jesus and his sanctified life and practice in the world (cf. *katartizo* in Eph 4:12-13).

The functional truth for us is simply stated: to be just as (*kathos* and *hos*) Jesus was necessitates discipleship in the process of *katartizo*. The functional reality for our accountability is typically that the prevailing practice of discipleship does not involve *katartizo*—and this pervades churches, seminaries and the Christian academy. Without *katartizo* Christians cannot grow together in the depth of Jesus' full identity to be clearly distinguished in his minority identity as his whole disciples, both in the church and the world. Without *katartizo*, our identity gets shallow or ambiguous, particularly with the influence of the surrounding context. The alternative identity we tend to practice in place of his sanctified identity (intentionally or unintentionally, often by default) is what I call *bifocal identity*.

Bifocal identity is a process of identity construction in a context in which one is considered (real or perceived) as a minority or part of a subordinate group (even if not a numerical minority). For example, in the United States persons of color have always been minorities; even though they are collectively now the numerical majority, they are still the subordinate group. Minorities are always marginalized. For minority persons to be acceptable in the dominant surrounding context (not accepted into the dominant group) invariably requires assimilation: the practice of dominant values, usually at the cost of relinquishing minority practices. Unless persons of color have essentially denied their minority associations, or become separatists, they negotiate identity construction in a dominant surrounding context with a bifocal process.

Similar to the function of bifocal eyeglasses, a minority person perceives the more provincial, private and intimate aspects of one's life through the "lower reading lens" of one's racial-ethnic identity. All other aspects are seen through the "upper general lens" of the dominant identity. While this appears to be a rather simple either-or operation, the

actual perceptions often vacillate between lenses, frequently overlap, and at times even seem confused. Using the “correct” lens for the “right” purpose requires ongoing adjustment since neither remains constant for a fixed prescription, similar to being fitted for the proper bifocal eyeglasses. This dynamic process of identity construction and presentation is a familiar phenomenon for minority persons, yet not without its identity conflicts and frustrations—not only specifically about being fragmented and thus not whole, but also embedded in an identity not only of being different but considered as *less*. What is not apparent, however, to most Christians is how the bifocal process is a common phenomenon for Christian identity in the surrounding context.

When Jesus sanctified himself in life and practice, he established the identity necessary for his followers to be constituted fully submitted to the Father and set apart for the whole and holy God in the world. As his followers function in this sanctified identity, they declare their minority identity in the surrounding context. Whatever prevails in that surrounding context is neither who they are (and what defines them) nor whose they are (and what they belong to); and whatever the pressures and influence of that context, Jesus prayed for his followers not to be separated from it (Jn 17:15). The only context of their calling to make whole is in the surrounding context (local and global). Yet Jesus understood in his formative prayer that the integrity of their minority identity necessitates congruence with his sanctified identity (17:17-19). Just as the Father sent him into the world is how Jesus sends his followers into the surrounding context. This congruence involves both context and function. And Jesus’ function was always demonstrated distinctly by his relational involvement, thus necessitating interrelated congruence of his minority identity (involved in human context) conjoined with his full identity (in the primacy of God’s context)—the relational dynamic constituting his sanctified identity.

Identity formation and maintenance as his followers can only be functionally realized as a minority. Nevertheless, the function of this minority identity is incomplete as a bifocal identity. His followers cannot negotiate their identity in a dominant context by a bifocal process and still have the distinction as his called followers. Unless Christians in effect have functionally ceased following Jesus, they have no negotiable option to construct a composite, hybrid or parallel identity with some partial aspect of Jesus’ identity. Just as Jesus addressed his disciples earlier, while a disciple is certainly not “above” Jesus to construct his/her own identity, called followers who are growing in discipleship wholeness (*katartizo*) also are not apart from any aspect of Jesus’ identity to function on their own terms (which would effectively construct their own identity, Lk 6:40).

It is the temptation or tendency of every minority person in a dominant context to fall into the following: (1) defer to the dominant group and be rendered passive; (2) compromise with the dominant values and be reduced in one’s own significance; (3) be co-opted by the dominant context and lose one’s sense of purpose, and thus value to that context. A bifocal process of identity construction involves any or all of these practices. This is the function of bifocal identity. For the Christian minority in the world, this is what’s at stake.

For Christians to relegate their identity with Jesus to the “lower reading lens” for function in the provincial, private and intimate aspects of their life and practice is to defer to, compromise with and/or be co-opted by the surrounding context. To render the influence of the surrounding context to the “upper general lens” for their function in all

other aspects of life and practice is to lose the qualitative distinction unique to Jesus' followers—and thus, contrary to how Jesus prayed, to preclude both their joy shared intimately with the whole of God (Jn 17:13) and their value to the surrounding context (17:21,23). On the other hand, bifocal Christian identity exposes the ontological simulations and epistemological illusions of our identity constructions incongruent with Jesus' sanctified identity; any such identity is what emerges from reductionism.

If the whole of Jesus' person is our hermeneutical and functional keys, this perceptual-interpretive framework will “listen to my Son” and result in congruence with the relational nature and functional significance of his sanctified identity. If we listen to the Son, this will change our perceptual-interpretive framework to understand that the Father meant “listening” not only to the words the Son told us but also to his whole person, and thus to how he functioned. His whole followers walk together conjointly in the relational posture of his full identity and in the functional posture of his minority identity. The only alternative to this qualitative interaction necessary for congruence is some form of reductionism.

Jesus' sanctified life and practice discloses two vital issues about this identity interaction necessary for his followers, as he prayed: (1) without the relational function of his full identity, there is no truth and function of his minority identity (cf. some ministers with an incomplete Christology, missionaries with a truncated soteriology, or activist Christians with disembodied ethics or morality; also those who experience primarily outward change [*metaschematizo*] and function merely in role behaviors [*hypokrisis*]); and (2) without the function of the truth of his minority identity, there is no experiential truth of his full identity (e.g. as those with bifocal identity). This qualitative interaction between identities is an ongoing relational dynamic: the relational outcome of which constitutes the sanctified identity of his followers fully submitted to the Father and set apart for the whole and holy God in the world; and the function of which signifies the ontology of his followers together in the relationships necessary to be whole as his family in likeness of the Trinity—the wholeness that will make whole the human context, as Jesus prayed (Jn 17:21-23).

There is a variation of Christian bifocal identity that needs to be discussed. This involves Christians who present a distinct Christian identity in general public or the dominant surrounding context, while functioning with a different identity in private. Basically, this reverses the bifocal process with a reductionist form of Jesus' minority identity or full identity used as the “upper general lens,” while an alternative identity is used for the “lower reading lens” in private. This is characteristic notably of these followers: of ministers serving in the name of Jesus who construct their own identity in effect as if “above” or even apart from Jesus, thus lacking depth of their identity; of missionaries and evangelists who seek to save the lost in the world, while practicing a personal identity incongruent with what Jesus saved us *to*, thus lacking depth in their function; of Christian activists who promote the so-called ethics and morality of Jesus in the surrounding context while having no sense of relational involvement with the person of Jesus in their own life and practice, thus lacking clarity of their identity; and also included are Christian scholars whose theology have little, if any, connection to their practice. This reverse bifocal identity is also characteristic generally of those who present a serious Christian identity in public (albeit sincerely or with good intentions) but have no depth to their identity to signify the ontology of their whole person.

All these persons characterize Christians who lack the clarity and depth of identity to go beyond reductionism, and who are not being redefined (redeemed), transformed from inner out (*metamorphoo*) and made whole in congruence with Jesus' sanctified identity. Thus, these bifocal identities are of persons who function in the ontological simulations and epistemological illusions of the wide spectrum of reductionism, and thus who must account for *hypokrisis*—the leaven of reductionism, which Jesus made imperative for all his followers “to pay attention to” (*prosecho*, Lk 12:1).

Jesus' declarative statements about the clarity of the light and the depth of the salt are definitive for our identity. Yet, they are not a challenge about what to do; such a challenge would not help us go beyond reductionism but further embed us in it. His definitive statements of our identity are an ontological call about *what* and *who* to be; that is, the call to be redefined, transformed and made whole in the ontology of the person created in the image of the whole of God, thus also as *whose* we are. Conjointly, his definitive statements are a functional call about *how* to be, that is, called as whole persons to function together in the relationships necessary to be whole in likeness of the Trinity.

How we receive Jesus' statements depends on what we pay attention to and what we ignore—that is, the direct function of our perceptual-interpretive framework (cf. the various disciples discussed previously). Our framework functions as the lens (our “eyes”) through which we perceive Jesus, read the biblical text, see ourselves and others, and view the world. In this perceptual-interpretive process reductionism presents a formidable challenge to the relational context and process of Jesus' followers, primarily because we don't pay focused attention to it, or we ignore its presence and influence. What we perceive of God's self-revelation and what we interpret about the whole of God are skewed by the influence of reductionism in human contextualization. The validity of our perceptions and interpretations emerge only from the framework that Jesus definitively disclosed upon thanking the Father for his revelations to “little children” (Lk 10:21), which is not apparent that we pay attention to or even take him seriously.

This clearly makes evident the need for our perceptual-interpretive framework to be changed—the redemptive change constituted by listening to the Son, submitting to the Father and reciprocally working relationally with the Spirit. This includes the necessary redemptive change of our whole person and the relationships necessary to be whole signifying the ongoing relational involvement of our whole identity distinguished in who, what and how we are with the whole of God. Without this change our identity is rendered fragmentary by the prevailing influence of reductionism in our surrounding contexts. The person distinguished in Jesus' call can only be composed by a new identity, which by its nature cannot be shaped by human contextualization.

The Process Integrally Composing the New Identity in His Call

For the wholeness of his followers, Jesus made definitive the process of identity composition necessary for the clarity and depth of our identity to emerge, grow and mature. The identity of the new creation or new wine (signifying whole ontology and function)—of persons redefined in who they are and transformed in what they are and how they function—involves a process of identity formation that distinguishes this

identity from common incomplete and fragmentary identities in human context, even shaped by the human brain. The outline of this process was clearly distinguished in the beginning of Jesus' major discourse for his followers: the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7). It is vital to keep in mind that the context for his major discourse always remains in his call and thus must be maintained within his call for whole understanding (*synesis*).

We need to see this outline, therefore, distinguished further and deeper than how we commonly interpret the Beatitudes (Mt 5:3-12). Paul helps us go beyond our knowledge and understanding in order for God's whole to unfold.

When our identity adequately informs us of who, what and how we are, there is opportunity to experience wholeness and the satisfaction to be whole—which Jesus points to in the beatitudes with “blessed” (*makarios*, fully satisfied). The problem, however, with most identities in general and Christian identities in particular is that these identities only inform us of who and what we *should* be, and thus how we should act. This merely defines what we need to do in order to be associated with that identity without defining our integral ontology. The process then becomes trying to measure up to that identity so that we can achieve definition for our self—an ongoing effort to erase any identity deficit (i.e. from a comparative process). The theological and functional implications of such a process for Christian identity are twofold: First, it counters and hereby nullifies God's relational work of grace, and then in its place, it substitutes constructing human ontology from self-determination, even with good intentions of serving Christ.

As we discuss identity formation, it seems necessary to distinguish identity formation of the new creation/wine (signifying whole ontology and function) from identity *construction*. Identity construction describes the human process of quantifying an identity for a measure of uniformity or conformity to some standard or template in the surrounding context (cf. Gen 11:1-4). New wine identity formation involves a qualitative growth and maturation in a reciprocal relational process with God for wholeness (cf. Gen 17:1-2), which Jesus made vulnerably distinct from the surrounding context (Lk 5:33-39). It is problematic if any identity constructions substitute for or are imposed on this identity formation. Therefore, since the ontology of the whole person is a vital necessity for the identity of Jesus' followers as the new wine, it may require identity deconstruction of many Christian identities to get to this ontology—a necessary process of redemptive change composing Jesus' call. While any identity deconstruction would not be on the basis of postmodernist assumptions, it has a similar purpose to discredit ontological simulation and epistemological illusion. Yet, this would not be merely to expose reductionism but to go beyond it for the relational whole of God distinguishing new ontology and function—the necessary process of transformation composing Jesus' call. The interrelated process describes Jesus' major relational discourse with his disciples and the whole context of the Sermon on the Mount.

New and whole identity formation involves the necessary functional convergence of identity with righteousness and human ontology in a dynamic process based on God's grace in order to go beyond the reductionism exposed (deconstructed) by Jesus to be whole. This integral process, summarized in the Sermon on the Mount, is composed by the following:

To go beyond reductionism (Mt 5:20), our righteousness necessitates an identity of clarity and depth (5:13-16), which requires the ontology of the whole person; and, in reflexive action, the significance of this process necessitates righteousness to make it functional, which further needs wholeness of identity for our righteousness ongoingly to go beyond reductionism; therefore, this must by nature involve the human ontology created in the image and likeness of the whole of God—all of which are constituted by the whole of God’s relational work of grace, functionally signifying the relational basis of whose we are.

This process of integrally interrelated function is crucial for our understanding and practice, which Jesus illuminated in the beatitudes to establish his followers in his call to be redefined, transformed and made whole.

The beatitudes taken together establish the whole identity of his followers. I affirm, that rather than each beatitude understood independently they constitute interdependent functional characteristics of the basic new identity for what, who and how his followers are. Joined together in dynamic function, the beatitudes form the outline of the integral process composing the whole identity formation distinguishing those he called out (*ek*) of human contextualization. Not surprisingly, Jesus began the process by focusing immediately on the ontology of the person and giving us no basis to define our self by what we do or have.

Though Jesus was not explicit in the beginning of his discourse about the irreducible importance of the heart, the function of the heart underlies everything he said and all that we do (e.g. Mt 5:28; 6:21). The innermost person, signified by the heart, constitutes the qualitative distinguishing the person, such that we cannot assess what and who a person is based merely on aspects from the outer-in person—notably what we do and have (cf. Mt 15:10-20). Yet, since the latter perception is a prevailing perceptual-interpretive framework for human ontology, whole Christian identity is composed essentially by beginning with the process of redefinition of the person from the inner out. When we functionally address redefining our own person from the inner out, however, we encounter a major difficulty. Once we get past any resistance to a vulnerable look at ourselves from inner out, what is it that we honestly see of our person as we look inside? This can become an issue we may rather dance around.

In the first three beatitudes (Mt 5:3-5) Jesus provides us with the irreplaceable steps in the process composing our identity as the new wine, that is, to functionally establish his followers in his call to be redefined, transformed and made whole, and therefore be clearly distinguished from reductionism. Anything less and any substitutes for these steps will result in a contrary identity (e.g. bifocal) and likely lead to an identity crisis.

First Beatitude: When we honestly look inside at our person, Jesus said the natural effect would be realization of the condition signified by “poor in spirit” (v.3). This condition is deeper than an identity deficit from a comparative process—for example, feeling bad or less about our self. “Poor” (*ptochos*) denotes abject poverty and utter helplessness; therefore this person’s only recourse is to beg. Just to be poor (*penes*) is a different condition from *ptochos* because this person can still, for example, go out to work for food. *Penes* may have little but *ptochos* has nothing at all. *Ptochos*, Jesus

immediately identifies, is the true condition of our humanity, which precludes self-determination and justification generated from a false optimism about our self (Gen 3:4-6). This is human ontology after the primal garden, yet not the full ontology of the whole person that still includes the viable image of God. Without the latter, *ptochos* would be a worthless person, and this is not Jesus' focus on the ontology of the person. Nevertheless, *ptochos* does prevail in human ontology, which is inescapable with false optimism and clearly makes evident the need for God's relational work of grace. This juxtaposition is what we need to accept both about our person and from God—not only theologically but functionally because anything less than *ptochos* counters God's grace, for example, by efforts to measure up, succeed or advance on the basis of self-determination shaped by what we do and/or have. By necessity, however, the *ptochos* person ongoingly appropriates God's relational work of grace to relationally belong to the whole of God's family, as Jesus said, "theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Yet, *ptochos* only begins the process of forming this new identity.

This irreplaceable beatitude forms the basis for answering God's question "Where are you as a person?"—a response from our innermost, without deflection to or enhancement by secondary identity markers. Those markers keep our innermost unexposed in relational distance, just as the persons in the primordial garden—"I hid *and kept relational distance from you; the situation and she made me do it*" (Gen 3:10,12). Most of us are resistant to operate with the self-definition of *ptochos*, especially if we define ourselves by what we do or have and depend on these secondary markers for our primary identity. We may be able to accept this "spiritually" in an isolated identity but for practical everyday function in the real world, to live with this self-definition is problematic. While any alternatives and substitutes masking our true condition may make us feel less vulnerable, we will never be able to dance completely around the truth of our condition and this reality of human ontology—despite any facts we can present to reinforce these illusions and simulations.

In this first critical step in the formation of the new identity distinguishing his followers, Jesus provided no place or option for self-determination. Who and what we are as his followers is determined only by the function of reciprocal relationship with him as whose we are; and how we are in relationship together is only on his whole relational terms, which constitutes the relationship and thus our identity in God's grace. By this, Jesus discloses unmistakably that God's grace demands the vulnerability of *ptochos* existing in our person (the honesty of heart) for ongoing relationship together to be whole—the same honesty of heart he strategically disclosed to the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:23-24). Without this innermost vulnerability our person does not open and extend our heart to make intimate relational connection with the heart of God to belong to God's family ("kingdom of God is theirs"), which reflects the self-definition and relational error by the rich young ruler (Mk 10:17-22).

Second Beatitude: Since the ontology of the person (from inner out) is never static, Jesus extends its dynamic function in this next irreplaceable step. When we are indeed *ptochos*, our honest response to our true condition is to "mourn" (*pentheo*, lament, grieve, deep sadness, v.4). If we accept our condition as *ptochos*—and not merely perceive it as *penes*, that is, a deficit needing to be overcome—then mourning would be the natural response of our heart. Yet, too often we insulate ourselves from such experience, though

unknowingly we may get depressed. The tension involves issues of self-worth, which revolve around *ptochos* in terms of how we see and feel about ourselves. We tend not to recognize this matter because our heart is unaware of experiencing *pentheo*, likely only feeling insecure of how others perceive us. Of course, we can ignore or reject others' perceptions by our overestimated self-assessment, which renders these beatitudes inapplicable to our identity.

In this second critical step in the process of identity formation, the person is taken further and deeper toward being redefined, transformed and made whole. This necessitates the functional ontology of the whole person, contrary to a reductionist practice that insulates the heart or keeps it at a distance of diminished involvement. The dynamic necessary is to open our heart and expose the *pentheo* by fully acknowledging, admitting and confessing our *ptochos*—which may not only be about one's own condition but also the condition of humanity in general. The extent of this vulnerability can not only depress but also create despair, that is, if left in this condition.

The ironic influence of reductionism on human ontology is the simulation and illusion to be strong, self-determined, self-sufficient, and accordingly not in need of redefinition and transformation. In contrast and conflict, persons who *pentheo* address reality without reducing the person, yet not in self-pity but by vulnerably opening their whole person to God and not just a fragmented spirit. In this vulnerable relational process, their whole person is presented to God for comfort, healing, cleansing, forgiveness, and deeper involvement, so they can experience God's intimate response—as Jesus assured “they will be comforted” (*parakaleo*, term used for every kind of call to a person that is intended to produce a particular effect). As Jesus further relationally disclosed ongoingly in his sanctified identity, the whole of God is relationally vulnerable to our humanity, and we must (*dei*) relationally reciprocate in likeness with what and who we are in our innermost. Functional intimacy in relationship involves hearts open to each other and coming together. Intimacy with God, therefore, necessitates by nature that our heart functions in its true humanity (as “in spirit and truth”)—nothing less and no substitutes. The process from the first beatitude to the second engages this qualitative relational involvement that Jesus calls us to experience *parakaleo* in intimate relationship together. And these two irreplaceable steps involve the relational moments we extend our person to God the most openly and hereby give him the best opportunity to be with us—*parakaleo* not from outer in but for our ontology inner out.

Since identity is rooted in whose we are (e.g. culturally or socially), its formation is contingent on the ongoing function of this relationship. Belonging to God involves an irreducible and nonnegotiable relationship for our identity's further and deeper growth. While *pentheo* defines only a degree of experience relative to each person—no set quantity of sackcloth and ashes—God does not let us remain in a state of gloom and perhaps fall into depression or despair. God's thematic relational action never unilaterally allows for human ontology to remain in reductionism but only functions to make us whole. As Jesus did with tax collectors, a prostitute and others lacking wholeness, he extends God's relational work of grace to us in our helplessness, pursues us vulnerably in the poverty of our humanity, redeems us (the *parakaleo* mainly from the common's enslavement of reductionism) back to his family (on the relational terms of the Uncommon), therefore transforms our whole person for intimate relationship with the Father, and formally by covenant (through adoption) constitutes us as his very own

children permanently belonging to the whole of God's family ("theirs is the kingdom of heaven"). This relational process defines God's thematic relational response only as family love—the vulnerable process involvement based on the whole of God's relational work of grace, which continues as the basis for God's new creation family to experience now even further and deeper in whole relationship together as the church until eschatological completion of God's whole. This operationalizes the relational progression constituted by Jesus in his tactical shift, the ongoing function of which he summarized in this major discourse to compose the new identity of the persons in his call.

Third Beatitude: The experiential truth of this relational reality is not usually functional in a linear process as it is reflexive (back and forth). God's thematic relational response and ongoing vulnerable involvement with our humanity, most vulnerably disclosed in the incarnation, demonstrate the faithfulness and righteousness of the whole of God whom we can count on to trust intimately in reciprocal relational process. As we go up and down, in and out in our *ptochos* and *pentheo*, the initial relational experiences of God's family love rightfully conclude with only one understanding of our person. This understanding forms the core function of the redefined self, the new identity of those transformed in Christ.

In the interrelated critical steps involved in this process of self-understanding, Jesus defined the core function forming the identity of his followers: "the meek" (*praus*, v.5). While the sense of meekness should not be separated from *ptochos*, *praus* (*prautes*, noun) denotes to be gentle—that is, not hard or resistant to live as one truly is. *Praus* involves heart function conjoined with overt behavior to demonstrate what and who one is from inner out. Contrary to most perceptions of "meek," this function is not timid weakness but humble strength and truth of character based on one's true condition. How this specifically would be demonstrated or expressed can be defined best by the various behaviors of Jesus with others. Whatever its form in a particular situation, the most significant issue is that there is no lie or illusion about one's person in being meek (including being humble).

Yet, meekness is not a characteristic of the Christian person by which to be defined and thus to behave, for example, as an identity marker. Though commonly seen and practiced in this way, this only simulates humility from outer in. Rather, most importantly for the whole person, it is a function of relationship both with God and with others. Being meek is a core function in relationship with God for two reasons: (1) with no illusions about self-determination and justification (*ptochos*) and with response to one's *pentheo*, the only basis and ongoing functional base for the person's life and practice is the whole of God's relational work of grace; and (2) on this basis, relationship together is only on God's terms, hence irreducible and nonnegotiable by human persons. God does not work by any human agenda, notably for self-determination and justification. Being meek is this core function involving the relational process of turning away from the falsehood in self-autonomy and entrusting one's whole person to the grace of God; this is basic not only for conversion but for ongoing sanctification, yet not on the basis of unilateral relationship controlled by God but only for reciprocal relationship.

Furthermore, who and what this meek-humble person is and how this person functions also must by nature be involved in relationship with others in two qualitatively distinguished ways: (1) with God's grace as the basis for the person, there is no basis for

comparison with others, for climbing any human ladder or one-upmanship, and accordingly no basis for stratified relationships that reduce the whole person to fragmentary distinctions, but rather a qualitative loving involvement with others (without employing reductionist distinctions) in the relationships necessary for wholeness; and (2) therefore this relational involvement allows no basis for the function of individualism, which gives priority to the individual agenda and reduces the primacy of the intimate relationships necessary to be God's whole. *Praus* then is a clear function only of ontological humility, relational humility as well as epistemic humility (cf. Paul's critique of the church, 1 Cor 4:7; 8:1-2).

Meekness is a direct relational outcome of the first two irreplaceable steps (beatitudes) signifying the above functions of relationships. There is no theological or functional basis for any other self-assessment, regardless of how much one does, has or accomplishes. Yet, we encounter difficulty when lies or illusions keep us from facing our *ptochos* or experiencing our *pentheo*. In strong contrast, being meek also signifies a functional admission of one's enslavement—that is, not being free from some form of self-sufficiency (even in a collective context), self-determination (even with a theology of grace), or self-centeredness (even in acts of service)—and one's need for redemption.

Jesus said the meek “will inherit the earth.” This is not a result of what they do but only a relational outcome constituted in relationship with Jesus and by his relational work of grace with the relational outcome of belonging to God's family. These beatitudes have roots in the promise from the OT covenant, yet Jesus was not taking us back into that context but extending and fulfilling God's thematic relational action. The meek's inheritance is not the earth per se (or land, cf. Ps 37:11), with a sense of redistribution for the poor and dispossessed. This inheritance is not about a place, situations or circumstances. This is about the distinguished context of God's whole and dwelling, the relational context in which their inheritance is the whole of God for relationship—just as it was for the OT priests and Levites (Nu 18:20, Dt 10:9). The meek (as the poor in spirit, and so forth) are “blessed” (*makarioi*), that is, fully satisfied, because God is vulnerably present and intimately involved in their life—the relational outcome of God's definitive blessing (Num 6:24-26). Therefore, this is about well-being and wholeness experienced as the relational outcome of God's covenant love and faithfulness, of Jesus' vulnerable grace and truth (Jn 1:14), that is, as with the Trinity who is intimately involved together in their “spirit and truth”—nothing less and no substitutes. This blessed relational condition cannot be reduced merely to happiness about one's situation and circumstances; everyday life is not reduced to our situations and circumstances. In this redefinition of self, the irreducible importance of our whole person (from inner out) and the nonnegotiable priority of intimate relationship together become the perceptual-interpretive framework for what we pay attention to. And the full relational significance of being *makarioi* is the ongoing relational outcome of these and the rest of the beatitudes in the integral process of new wine identity formation.

Reductionism is an ongoing challenge to this process, from which we cannot underestimate our need for redemption (process 1 composing Jesus' call). The issue of inheritance makes this evident, raising the question of inheriting eternal life. Inheritance was not possible in the ancient world from a position of enslavement. Redemption (payment made for one's release) was necessary to change this relational condition, which was the critical error of relationship made by the rich ruler who pursued Jesus (Mk

10:17). Merely being freed, however, was insufficient to establish a relational position necessary for inheritance, which was the critical error of relationship likely made by the lawyer who queried Jesus (Lk 10:25). The redemptive history of the whole of God's thematic action has had a singular trajectory, which Jesus' vulnerable redemptive work constitutes and the Spirit brings to completion. This purpose is the trinitarian relational process of family love composing the new covenant by fulfilling both the charter of the original covenant and its relational significance: relationship together as the whole of God's family, in which we permanently belong as God's very own children through adoption (Jn 1:12-13; 8:31-36, Gal 4:4-5, Eph 1:3-5). This new creation family is the relational outcome of the relational progression fulfilling Jesus' formative family prayer (Jn 17:20-26), and the complete soteriology of what he saved us *to*. Without the process of adoption constituted in Jesus' functional shift—however this process is interpreted that composes the relational reality of becoming the sons and daughters of God (cf. 2 Cor 6:18)—we would be in a relational position of enslavement, or merely redeemed for no relational purpose and outcome, consequently leaving unresolved the human relational condition “to be apart” from God's whole, and moreover, leaving unanswered what we are saved to.

While reductionism may not discount the theology of adoption, it either separates the purpose of redemption from it, consequently using the concept of redemption merely to promote the freedom and autonomy of individualism, which becomes functionally enslaving, or reductionism creates an illusion of being free, masking any enslavement. Meekness (in process with *ptochos* and *pentheo*), then, by signifying a vulnerable admission of one's enslavement and need for redemption, becomes the functional clarity of the relational posture necessary for submission to the God who can redeem us from our enslavement and make us whole. The alternative is a false sense of strength or freedom, or the lack of humility, exhibited by those who avoid acknowledging their enslavement, and thus think they are free (e.g. Jn 8:33). Without meekness there is no relational involvement with God's relational work of grace on God's terms, only renegotiated terms; without God's relational work of grace there is no adoption; without adoption there is no relational position of belonging in the whole of God's family, much less an inheritance. In relational terms, the seeds of the new wine have not sprouted for the emergence of the new wine identity, whole ontology and function.

For Paul, the relational dynamic of adoption involves the integrated outcome of belonging as possession, relationship and ontology. Those adopted ‘in Christ’ now belong to God, who “put his seal on us” (2 Cor 1:22) as the identification of ownership as God's possession (*peripoiesis*, Eph 1:14). More importantly for Paul, in distinguishing God's relational whole from the human shaping of reductionism, those adopted into God's family also relationally “belong to Christ,” the *pleroma* of God, thus relationally belonging to the whole of God (“belong” rendered in the genitive case, 1 Cor 3:23; Gal 3:29; 4:4-7). Equally important in this relational dynamic, since “Christ belongs to God” both relationally and ontologically, by relationally belonging (not ontologically) to Christ those adopted also relationally belong to each other as well as belong ontologically to each other in wholeness together (1 Cor 3:22; 12:15-16; Rom 7:4; 12:5, belong also rendered by *ginomai*, verb of becoming, and *eimi*, verb to be).

What unfolds in this theological dynamic ‘in Christ’ is the integrated outcome of belonging. The emphasis of the theology of belonging for Paul in his theological forest is

on relational belonging and ontological belonging to signify the new covenant relationship and the new creation. Relational belonging dynamically interacts with ontological belonging in the new creation, and their interaction is the relational outcome of the full soteriology in being saved to wholeness in God's family together (2 Cor 3:18; 5:16-17; Col 3:10-11). Furthermore, conjoined with the integrated outcome of belonging, the relational outcome of adoption in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes (the theological dynamic of wholeness) is the relational ontology and identity of the new creation of God's family as the church (Eph 1:22-23).

Adoption is not a mere doctrinal truth in which to secure our faith. The whole of God's theological trajectory was made vulnerable in Jesus' relational path for the functional shift to adopt us into his family. Therefore, adoption must by its nature be an experiential truth, which is an ongoing function of reciprocal relationship together with relational responsibilities that the Spirit cooperatively brings to wholeness (cf. Rom 8:6,15-16). And any functional enslavement practiced by Jesus' followers (notably Peter) counters this experience of intimate relationship together as family. Therefore, the function of adoption is the very heart of the relational significance for our ontology, and accordingly our identity—who and what we are, and whose we are—which makes definitive the relational posture of meekness as *the core function*. Together with *ptochos* and *pentheo*, *praus* is irreplaceable for composing the new identity distinguishing Jesus' followers in his call.

Fourth Beatitude: Identity formation is an ongoing process of growth and maturation, which is implied in this beatitude. The relational progression for Jesus' followers implicit in the beatitudes leads us to the next identity function for growing the new wine: “hunger and thirst for righteousness” (v.6). The experience of the first three beatitudes, establishing vulnerable involvement with Jesus who takes us to the Father to become a part of his very own family, provides the relational process and the context of family to understand the fourth beatitude.

In contrast and conflict with reductionism, righteousness is not a mere conformity of actions to a given set of legal and ethical standards (or a template) but about the relational responsibility that is in keeping with reciprocal relationship between God and his people (his family). Going beyond reductionism necessitates the shift in righteousness from merely exhibiting character traits and practicing an ethic of right and wrong—our common notions about integrity and being upright—to the distinctly deeper qualitative involvement of what, who and how to be in relationships—both with God and with others. New identity formation of Jesus' followers necessitates this same shift and becomes inexorably integrated with the process to righteousness for the clarity and depth of their identity. Therefore, this fourth identity function is not a pursuit about ourselves, though it certainly further and more deeply constitutes our ontology and identity as his family in an essential process of transformation (the 2nd process composing his call).

Our definitive and functional understanding of righteousness comes from the righteous God's action in the context and process of relationship. Righteousness is no static attribute or quality of God but always a dynamic relational function. Righteousness is the immanent relational function of God that all other persons can invariably count on from and with God. By the nature of being righteous, this distinguished involvement is the only way God acts in relationship; moreover, by the nature of being righteous, this

ongoing relational involvement is the only way God functions. That is, righteousness is intrinsic to the ontology of what, who and how God is.

“Hunger and thirst” represent the primary acts to sustain life and to help it grow, which is a metaphor for this basic pursuit. To pursue righteousness is to pursue how God is, and accordingly to pursue what and who God is—that is, the ontology of God. In other words, this ongoing pursuit of righteousness is the basic relational process of pursuing God and of becoming like God in relational function, not in ontology (e.g. by some deification). This involves the process of transformation (cf. Eph 4:24) of our whole person (from inner out) to the image of the Son (*metamorphoo*, 2 Cor 3:18, cf. Rom 8:29; 12:2), who is the image of the whole of God (cf. 2 Co 4:4); the relational outcome of this process further constitutes our ontology in God’s qualitative image in relational likeness of the Trinity, the function of which in relationship together with no veil makes us whole. The functional purpose of this process of ongoing transformation is only relational: first, for deeper reciprocal relationship together with the whole of God as family, and further, for more deeply representing the Father to extend and to build his family with family love (the immediate relational responsibilities of those adopted). This defines the relational significance of the new wine identity and clearly distinguishes that identity formation must include this process of transformation in order to be whole.

As these beatitudes interrelate, therefore, pursuing the righteousness that goes beyond reductionism involves not seeking character traits or ethical behavior but vulnerably pursuing the very qualitative and relational innermost of God and compatibly reciprocating to participate further and deeper in the whole of God’s life (cf. Mt 6:33). Without this qualitative relational significance of righteousness, our identity will merely exhibit shallowness or ambiguity in who, what and how we are in relationships. For those who “hunger and thirst” for the relational righteousness of God, Jesus asserted “they will be filled” (*chortazo*, to be filled to satisfaction) because their whole persons will experience deeper intimate relationship with the whole of God as family together with no veil. This is *the growth function* of identity formation denoted by the fourth beatitude. The other beatitudes will converge in this process shortly.

Paul’s Composition of Our New Identity

It is important for us to see this new identity as it unfolds in the church and the surrounding context. We further turn to Paul at this point to help us gain this understanding. As the formation of the new wine identity develops in clarity and depth, God’s new creation family increasingly is challenged both in its life together and in the surrounding context of the human condition. Therefore, in congruence with the relational dynamic resulting in adoption, the ontology and function of the new church family must always be in the dynamic of ‘nothing less and no substitutes’ for whole relationship together, which Paul integrally made unequivocal (Eph 4:1-6, 13-16, 22-24). Both the person and persons together are accountable without exception. As these theological dynamics of wholeness, belonging, and ontological identity converge in Paul’s theological forest, at the same time the dynamic of reductionism and its counter-relational work are always seeking to redefine the qualitative-relational process constituting their theological interaction and to reshape, reconstruct or otherwise fragment the relational outcome emerging from their theological integration. In other words, we are all unavoidably subjected to reductionism; whether we become subject to its influence is an

ongoing issue. In relational terms, the consequence of this contrary influence is that the new creation family is rendered to an ambiguous ontology and shallow function; and its new wine identity is reduced of its clarity and depth that by necessity distinguished it in human contexts.

This conflict for Paul necessitates distinguishing the truth of the whole gospel clearly from “a different gospel” (Gal 1:6-12). In his polemic for this conflict, Paul made definitive two critical and necessary conditions to constitute the only gospel, both of which he implies in Gal 3:28:

1. While the incarnation embodied the *pleroma* (complete, full, whole) of God in human contextualization, the whole of Jesus and his gospel are incongruent and incompatible with any human shaping. Culture in some particular ways can give secondary human characteristics of outer-in form to the gospel but is unable to determine the substantive composition of the gospel itself. Human culture in general is always subject to the sin of reductionism, and thus can never be assumed to be neutral. In Paul’s examples, reductionist distinctions, stratified contexts and systems of inequality are the primary functions of human constructs that impose human shaping on the gospel (cf. 1 Cor 4:6-7).
2. The only composition of the gospel is *whole*, which by its nature must be determined solely by the whole of Jesus, the *pleroma* of God, who by God’s initiative (grace) alone relationally involved (*agape*) the whole of God for the irreducible and nonnegotiable whole relationship together of God’s new creation family.

The reciprocal relational means for experiencing this definitive whole relationship together as God’s family was also at the center of this conflict for Paul. He understood that this issue is unavoidable and ongoing unless understood in its proper context. In Galatians, the conflict of relational means appears to be between “the law” and “faith” (Gal 3:1-26). Yet, this would not only be an oversimplification of Paul’s polemic but also a reduction of the law as God’s desires and terms for covenant relationship, as well as a reduction of faith as the necessary reciprocal relational response to God’s promise of covenant relationship together. Paul put the issue into its full perspective.

Galatians represents Paul sharing the functional clarity for the whole gospel to address their current issue, situation and related matters in order to take them beyond the human contextualization of reductionism (not only of Judaism) to the further and deeper contextualization of God—the whole of God’s relational context of family and relational process of family love embodied in the whole of Jesus. Within God’s relational context and process, the law (as God’s whole relational terms) neither reduces nor renegotiates the covenant relationship. In reality, as God’s terms for relationship together, the law is whole-ly compatible with the covenant and even is a vital key for the emergence of whole relationship together. That is, not as a functional key to fulfill the promise (3:21), the law serves rather as a heuristic framework (*paidegogos*) for both learning our human condition and discovering the source of its whole solution (3:10, 22-24; Rom 3:19-20). This heuristic process returns us to the identity formation of the first beatitudes.

Paul's focus on the law addressed the condition of human ontology in two vital ways, both of which perceived the law as God's desires and terms for covenant relationship:

1. The law unequivocally exposes reduced human ontology and function and the insufficiency and relational consequence of all human effort, notably for self-determination and self-justification, which are pivotal to accept in any response to God for relationship (as Paul noted above and Jesus outlined in the first three beatitudes above).
2. Moreover, the law also clearly identifies the whole human ontology and function necessary for the relational involvement in reciprocal response to the whole of God, which is congruent with God's desires and compatible with God's terms for relationship together (Gal 5:14; 6:2; cf. Jesus on the law, Mt 5:43-48, and James on faith, Jas 2:8).

When Paul refers to "the law of Christ," this is God's law/desires constituted by Jesus' whole ontology and function in the incarnation (cf. 1 Cor 9:21b), who takes the law of Moses further and deeper into the whole of God's relational context and process. By vulnerably embodying God's relational ontology and function, the whole Subject of the Word is the hermeneutical key to interpreting God's law/desires and the functional key for its practice in relationship together (as Jesus defined in the Sermon on the Mount, Mt 5:21ff), which by necessity requires whole ontology and function (as Jesus implied about practice of the law in likeness of the Father, Mt 5:48).

This became the critical issue for Paul because—as implied in the first three beatitudes—human ontology is inexorably embedded in the sin of reductionism; and this enslavement needs to be redeemed for human ontology and function to be freed to become whole. Yet, whole human ontology is constituted only by the redemptive relational dynamic of adoption for relationship together in God's family. Reduced human ontology is incapable of a response that would be compatible to Jesus for this relationship together. In Paul's whole perspective, the issue underlying the law is nothing less than the issue of human ontology. Therefore, his discourse on the law challenges existing assumptions on human ontology to expose reduced human ontology (those subject to reductionism), while his discourse on faith assumes the definitive ontology that illuminates the whole human ontology and function needed for relationship together in God's family—and which also fulfills the law of Christ (Gal 5:6; 6:2).

The reciprocal relational means both necessary to receive and compatible to respond to Jesus for whole relationship together is the issue for Paul, which then necessarily involves human ontology. When human effort is relinquished—namely, ceases in self-determination and desists in shaping relationship together, as the first beatitude composes—and replaced by the relational response of faith (as unfolds from the 3rd beatitude), Paul adds for functional clarity that we are no longer under the *paidagogos* of the law (Gal 3:25). Paul is only referring to the law's *paidagogos* function. This does not mean that the law (as God's desires and terms for covenant relationship) is finished and no longer functional for the practice of faith (5:14; 6:2; cf. Rom 3:31; 1 Cor 9:21). Paul in truth wants the law to be fulfilled by human persons, and he may confuse us by

stating that the law cannot be fulfilled by human effort (Gal 3:10; 5:3). By focusing on the relational involvement of *agape* (5:14), however, he makes definitive how the law is or is not fulfilled. By necessity, this engages the two conditions of human ontology (whole or reduced), and Paul differentiates their respective involvement with the law (5:6; 6:15). Whole human ontology functions from inner out in the relational response of trust to be vulnerably involved with God and others in family love—just as Christ functioned (cf. Jn 15:9-12)—thereby reciprocally responding to God’s desires and terms for relationship together. Reduced human ontology, in contrast and conflict, functions from outer in to try to fulfill the quantitative aspects of the law, consequently renegotiating God’s terms for relationship by human terms shaped from human contextualization. This reductionism essentially redefined relationship with God to mere relationship with the law (e.g. conforming to a template), which then disembodies the law from the whole of God and God’s desires for relationship together.

For Paul, the underlying issue between function by law and function by faith is clearly between reduced ontology and function and whole ontology and function. The relational consequence of the former is not only the inability to fulfill the law but enslavement to the reductionist futility of human effort (Gal 5:3-4). The relational outcome of the latter is to receive and respond to Christ for whole relationship together with nothing less and no substitutes. The first two beatitudes admit the limits and constraints of the former, and the third beatitude affirms the connection of the latter.

The new wine identity emerging from these dynamics is irreducible in ontology and nonnegotiable in function. This integral process of identity formation necessitates the ongoing integration of identity and righteousness. For Paul, righteousness is the relational function of the heart that lives not according to reduced notions of ‘by faith’ but in whole ontology and function in the image and likeness of the whole of God (Col 3:10; Eph 4:24). This inner-out function of the heart signifies ontological identity, the primary identity necessary to have wholeness despite the presence of reductionism (Col 3:15). Therefore, ontological identity is definitive of who the person is and the determinant of what and how the person is, regardless of the surrounding context. And the integrity of identity is rooted in a person’s ontology, which needs to be whole or its integrity will be fragmented (cf. Paul’s discourse about the church at Corinth). As Paul summarized in Galatians 6:15, any function of reductionism is without any ontological significance of existence (*eimi*); only the new creation exists in ontological wholeness. Also, the credibility of identity is rooted in a person’s righteousness, which must not be fragmentary (cf. Peter’s *hypokrisis*, Gal 2:14) or it will lose both its credibility and the integrity of wholeness in identity (cf. Jesus’ expectation of righteousness as whole ontology and function, Mt 5:20). The whole of Jesus’ identity in the incarnation was based on the integrity of his ontology and the credibility of his righteousness, which persons could count on and trust in relationship together. The image and likeness of his whole ontology and function is *what* we are transformed to (2 Cor 3:18) and *who* we become (Col 2:10; 3:10), and only on this basis *how* we function (Eph 4:24; Col 3:15; cf. Ps 71:15). Therefore, anything less and any substitutes defining our ontology and determining our function are a reduction of our wholeness together, a fragmentation of the ontological and relational whole of who we are and whose we are in Christ. Vulnerably and humbly submitting to this wholeness of persons and relationships

together are what ongoingly emerge and unfold from the beatitudes to compose the ontology and function of the church as God's family.

Moreover, as our identity reveals the underlying roots or heart of how we define our ontology and determine our function, our primary identity also signifies the composition of our gospel—if it is whole or reduced. Paul's gospel and thus his own identity were not defined and determined by what he had and/or did (both past and present, cf. Phil 3:7-9) or even by his current weaknesses (2 Cor 12:7-9). In his polemic for the gospel and against reductionism, Paul made definitive both the ontological and relational changes that must by nature (*dei*) compose the truth of the whole gospel and its whole relational outcome, that is, by the nature of who and what Jesus embodied as "the image of God" and relationally involved of the whole of God's ontology and function "in the face of Christ" (2 Cor 4:4,6). Paul clearly made distinct that anything less or any substitute is not the gospel of the glory of Christ, the gospel of wholeness, but a different gospel of reductionism.

The new wine constituted by Jesus flowed *into* Paul, who further composed its relational outcome as the new creation (Eph 4:23-24; 2 Cor 5:17; Col 3:10). The new wine identity emerges, develops and matures entirely from whole ontology and function. As the new wine grows from redefined and transformed persons, its relational outcome is distinguished unmistakably in the primacy of family relationships together with no veil—signified in the table fellowship of the new creation (2 Cor 3:16-18; Eph 2:14-22; Gal 6:15-16). As Paul theologically and functionally clarifies the new creation, there is a realistic sense interjected in his message: "As for those who will follow this...*wholeness* be upon them, and mercy" (Gal 6:16). The term for follow (*stoicheo*) involves progressing within a certain framework. This engages the perceptual-interpretive framework by which Paul defined ontology and determined function. For Paul, he follows Jesus' whole ontology and function in the relational progression of Jesus' theological trajectory and relational path for the relational outcome of the new creation family. *Stoicheo* requires the qualitative and relational framework of the whole of Jesus to progress to this relational outcome.

At the first new wine table fellowship, the disciples present did not taste the new wine yet but could only be associated with it. Their perceptual-interpretive framework still reflected the old in their transition to be redefined and transformed. The practices of the early disciples and early church raise further questions about the relational outcome of the new wine, questions that still need to be raised today. What is this relational outcome? Where do we see it? Why don't we see more evidence of it? What are the issues involved here?

When Paul interjected that "mercy" (compassion, *eleos*) be upon those who follow in this framework, he is building on Jesus' framework of discipleship that involves Jesus' distinguished relational process and progression disclosed at the new wine table fellowship (Mt 9:10-13; cf. Mt 12:7)). This relational dynamic also interacts with the integral process of identity formation in the remaining beatitudes for the further development of his followers—"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy..." (Mt 5:6-12, discussed below). God's relational response of grace underlying this relational dynamic constitutes Jesus' theological trajectory and relational path, which involves the relational outcome of mercy, compassion. Yet mercy must be experienced

first before it can be extended to others. This necessitates whole understanding and experience of God's relational response of grace in Face-to-face relationship.

Once Jesus' sacrifice for atonement was completed, the torn curtain was no minor detail in the events of the cross; nor is it merely symbolic but in rather improbable relational terms it opened up the Holy Place of God's intimate presence to be vulnerably involved in direct relationship together Face to face. Jesus' sacrifice unmistakably constituted "the new covenant in my blood," as he disclosed in communion together (Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25). This composed the improbable of Jesus' theological trajectory and the intrusion of his relational path that composed this gospel of transformation and its relational outcome of relationship together without the veil. The removal of the veil, a necessary condition for the new covenant relationship Face to face, was contingent on the nature of the sacrifice. Prior sacrifices behind the curtain were insufficient to open direct access to the whole and holy God. Nothing less and no substitutes of God in whole can constitute this sacrifice to bring about this relational outcome. Likewise, nothing less and no substitutes of our whole person, with all our sin (notably as reductionism) signifying "poor in spirit," can receive and respond back to the whole of God in the depth of Jesus' relational process and progression for the wholeness of reciprocal relationship together *in* the innermost of God's holy presence, *with* God's holy involvement and *by* God's holy relational work of grace. Without our vulnerable function "poor in spirit" there is a relational impasse. Anything less and any substitute of God or of our persons will be insufficient to enact or engage the depth of Jesus' relational work of grace, consequently cannot reconcile life together in the innermost of relationship without the veil with God (Eph 3:12) and in relationship together with no veil in God's family (Eph 2:13-16; 2 Cor 3:16-18). Paul claims to be sufficient (*hilkanos*) only in the new covenant (2 Cor 3:5-6).

The primary focus of the new wine is not on being redeemed from the old, as Paul clarified for the gospel (Gal 4:4-6; Rom 6:4). Though being saved from sin is a necessary condition for the new wine, it is insufficient for the relational outcome of the new wine flowing as the new creation. The relational outcome of God's relational response of grace cannot be experienced in just the atonement for sin but necessarily also what Jesus' sacrifice saves *to* that emerges solely without the veil: the primacy of whole relationship together as God's family that is reciprocal both Face to face and face to face. It is a critical reduction of God's grace, therefore, to make the primary focus merely being saved from sin because there is no relational outcome beyond this truncated soteriology; moreover, there is no accounting of the sin of reductionism because such an accounting necessitates being saved to wholeness—the integral relational outcome of God's relational response of grace.

It is immeasurable for our whole understanding and experience of the relational outcome of the new wine as the new creation family, that God's grace is not reduced to our terms. The irreducible experiential truth and nonnegotiable relational reality are that *grace* is not a gift given, a resource shared and an action enacted by God in the context and for the purpose of *unilateral* relationship. Grace only creates the opportunity for reciprocal relationship together, for which the recipients of God's relational response of grace are responsible and therefore accountable. As Jesus made clear to various churches (Rev 2-3), God is not unaffected by the sin in reciprocal relationship; and as Israel's relational history evidenced, God has reciprocated with his own relational distance ("hide my face from them," Dt 31:17; 32:20; Isa 1:15; 45:15; 54:8). In other words, God's grace

comes with relational demands. Compatible with God's relational response, the demands of grace are irreducible and nonnegotiable that God wants the whole person from inner out for the relationships together necessary to be whole as the new creation family in likeness of the whole of God. Congruent with God's relational response, grace ongoingly does not allow for anything less and any substitutes.

Whole understanding and experience of God's grace emerge in Face-to-face-to Face relationship, with the relational outcome constituted *by* mercy (compassion) from God and on this relational basis constituted *with* mercy for others. This ongoing reciprocal relational process, distinguishing the relational outcome of the new wine, further engages the integral process of the new wine identity formation in the remaining beatitudes.

Fifth Beatitude: Jesus' call to his followers to be redefined, transformed and made whole is increasingly realized by ongoing vulnerable involvement in the whole of God's relational context of family and the experience of his distinguished relational process of family love. This vulnerable involvement and experience reconstitute how his followers function, not just reform them. The whole outcome of being the relational recipient of the Trinity's loving involvement and of experiencing further intimate relationship together cannot remain a private (even within a group) or solely individual matter. If this relational outcome is confined to a private context (personal or collective), it will become ingrown, self-serving, and ambiguous or even shallow, and thus fragmentary. If this outcome is reduced to an individual focus, it will become enslaving, not redeeming and transforming, and consequently incomplete. Therefore, as the relational outcome of life together in wholeness, Jesus necessarily extends the process of identity formation to relationships with others.

With the relational outcome emerging from the previous beatitudes, this next function of identity formation (Mt 5:7) is more than a restatement regarding Levi and Hosea 6:6 (Mt 9:9-13), and of the lawyer and the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37). This function is not merely about mission or fulfilling what is rightfully expected of us. It is integrally focused on the ontology of what persons (his followers) have become (in the relational progression) and on the emerging identity of who they are and whose they are, and thus how they function in relationship—not only with God, not only among themselves, but now also with others.

Mercy (*eleos*, compassion) denotes action out of compassion for others that responds to their distress, suffering or misery. Yet, such acts can be performed merely out of missional service or Christian duty (*opheilo*)—perhaps with paternalism, intentional or inadvertent—without the relational involvement of a person who essentially has been in their position (the reflexive reality of the first three beatitudes). With the mercy experienced from God's relational response of grace, Jesus' whole followers from inner out become more than good servants but first and foremost become intimate personal recipients (as adopted children) of compassion (Gal 4:4-5; Eph 2:4-5). Accordingly, in reciprocity from this redeemed and transformed ontology, this person functions to extend that compassion in likeness of relational involvement with others—notably with those lacking wholeness (or value) and suffering the relational condition “to be apart” from the whole.

Reductionism would define this beatitude to subtly promote the act and benefits of mercy, not the relational involvement of persons with other persons; consequently, its practice of mercy would signify either paternalism, even with sacrifice, or a quid pro quo in human relations. Jesus, however, leads the process of identity formation deeper in contrast and conflict to go beyond such reductionism. The relational outcome of vulnerably following Jesus in the relational progression constitutes the ontology of the whole person and the relationships necessary to be whole. It naturally follows then: being compassionate (*eleemon*) is a given function in identity formation, not an option; and those persons are blessed (*makarios*, fully satisfied) because they are relationally functioning with others in qualitative involvement for wholeness and fulfilling God's relational desires in the innermost for his creation. In the process these persons ongoingly experience deeper compassion themselves, not suggesting their own future problems but the further relational outcome indicated in the next beatitude.

Sixth Beatitude: The deeper compassion the compassionate also experience always involves the relational work of God's grace. These persons, who are being further redeemed and transformed, are engaged in the process of becoming whole by vulnerable involvement necessarily both from their whole person and in the relationships together constituting the whole. These next two beatitudes outline what is involved in this process to wholeness, and therefore the maturation of our identity (Mt 5:8-9).

The tendency in a context pervaded by reductionism, even though not enslaved by it, is to pay more attention inadvertently to the behavioral/activity aspects of our life and practice. We readily make assumptions about the qualitative presence and involvement of our person in that behavior or activity. A relational context and process make deeper demands on our person; the whole of God's relational context and process hold us accountable for nothing less and no substitutes than our whole person—the demands of grace. Accordingly, we should never assume the ongoing condition of our heart nor the state of our relationship with the whole of God. Wholeness is contingent on their qualitative function in vulnerable relational terms, which referential terms cannot account for with relational distance.

A shallow identity lacks depth. A shallow person lacks the presence and involvement of heart (cf. Mt 15:8). Persons lacking heart in function (even inadvertently) lack wholeness. Intimate involvement with the whole of God (i.e. who is unreduced) necessitates an ongoing process of our hearts open and coming together—God's nonnegotiable terms. As discussed previously about the significance of holy, the Uncommon and the common are incompatible for relationship, further necessitating our ongoing transformation to “the pure in heart” (*katharos*, clean, clear, Mt 5:8) to be compatible. This *katharos* is not a static condition we can merely assume from God's redemption and forgiveness. God's relational acts of grace are always for reciprocal relationship, thus “pure in heart” is a dynamic function for deeper relationship to be whole together. This involves a heart functioning *clear* of any relational barriers or distance, functioning *clean* of Satan's reductionist lies, substitutes and illusions—signifying *the catharsis of the old* to be constituted in the whole of the new. Yet, any subsequent turn from the heart interjects gray matter, making our function ambiguous.

An ambiguous identity lacks clarity. An ambiguous person lacks clarity of one's ontology. Christians lacking ontological clarity lack the qualitative distinguishing them

from the common's function in the surrounding context, notably from reductionism. Being distinguished includes from the mindset, cultural practices and other established ways prevailing in our contexts, which we assume are compatible with God but effectively shift relationship with the holy God to our common terms (cf. Rom 8:5-6). When the identity and ontology of the Uncommon cannot be clearly distinguished from this common function (even in a Christian subculture), this generates ambiguity in our identity and counteracts wholeness for our ontology—which increasingly becomes life and practice without the whole person and without the primacy of intimate relationships necessary to be whole (cf. Col 3:15). The theological implication is that the Uncommon and common can neither coexist in functional harmony nor can their functions be combined in a hybrid. The functional implication is that the tension between them must by nature always be of conflict, the nature of which is ongoing and, contrary to some thinking, irremediable. Therefore, “pure in heart” also signifies *catharsis of the common* to be constituted in the whole of the Uncommon.

The function of the depth of this person's heart will have the relational outcome to more deeply “see God.” The significance of “see” (*horao*) implies more than the mere act of seeing but involves more intensively to experience, partake of, or share in something, be in the presence of something and be affected by it. This depth of significance in “seeing” God in the substance of relationship is the intimate process of hearts functionally vulnerable to each other and further coming together in deeper involvement to be whole—the purpose of Jesus' sanctified life and practice and formative family prayer (Jn 17:19-26). When our ongoing experience (not necessarily continuous) with God is not *horao*, we need to examine honestly where our heart is and address any assumptions. If, for example, we don't dance around our *ptochos* and *pentheo*, our heart will respond with greater functional trust and vulnerable intimacy—the relational posture of submission to God's whole relational terms signified by meekness. It is only when we assume or ignore this inner-out aspect of our person that we essentially keep relational distance from God, hereby impeding the process to be whole and the relational outcome of the new wine signifying the whole ontology and function of the new creation.

The early disciples' struggles were essentially with heart issues, and consequently they had difficulty seeing (*horao*) God even in Jesus' vulnerable presence (Jn 14:7-9). Without a clean and clear heart there will be shallowness in our identity formation and ambiguity in the ontology and function of our person (both individually and together) in ongoing relationship with the whole of God. The catharsis of both the old and common make the sixth beatitude pivotal as *the contingency function* in the process to be whole and for the maturation of our identity as the new persons composed in Jesus' call.

Yet, wholeness is never about only the individual person, nor about just the person with God. The next beatitude extends the process.

Seventh Beatitude: While this beatitude (Mt 5:9) integrated with the sixth outlines the process to wholeness, it is also conjoined with the fifth beatitude for the person made whole to function in the relationships necessary to be whole. As the process of the new wine identity formation engages others in relationship, there emerges a distinguished presence and involvement that is neither ambiguous nor shallow. Yet this beatitude is often not fully understood or integrally enacted.

Peace is generally perceived without its qualitative significance and with a limited understanding of the relational involvement constituting it. As discussed previously about Jesus approaching Jerusalem in his triumphant entry, he agonized over its condition: “If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace” (Lk 19:41-42). “The things that make for peace” is a critical issue focused on *what belongs to peace*, and thus by necessity involves the persons who bring this peace, not just the work of peace.

Reviewing previous notes on peace, in the classical Greek sense peace is perceived as the opposite of war. The NT, however, does not take its meaning of peace from this source; its concept of peace is an extension from the OT and of the Hebrew *shalom*. The opposite of *shalom* is any disturbance to the well-being of the community. That is, biblical peace is not defined in negative referential terms by the *absence* of any conflict but in positive relational terms by the *presence* of a specific condition of ontology and function. Throughout the Bible the primary concept of peace is well-being and wholeness. Peace is a general well-being that has both an individual dimension and a corporate/collective dimension. This wholeness extends to all aspects of human life and by necessity included salvation and the end times but it certainly is insufficient to limit it to the latter. Going beyond the mere absence of negative activity, all of this involves what must be present for peace; this is what belongs to peace—and is more than commonly understood or even wanted.

The gospel is clearly affirmed by this peace (cf. Acts 10:36; Eph 6:15). This is the peace in which Jesus constituted his followers, and distinguished from conventional peace (Jn 14:27). It is thus insufficient to signify the gospel of peace with a truncated soteriology (only what Jesus saved us from) without the relational outcome of what he saved us to. The whole gospel’s salvation necessitates the relationships together of the whole of God’s family in which Jesus constituted his followers to be whole as the new creation. Wholeness is intrinsic to this peace, and to be whole is a necessary relational condition for those who bring this peace. Who then are the peacemakers?

Their identity is clearly defined by Jesus as the sons and daughters of God (v.9), not God’s servants but the Father’s very own children (cf. v.44-45). This tells us not only who and what they are but whose they are and how they are as peacemakers.

The adopted children of God have been made whole in God’s family and partake of the new wine communion together with the whole of God without the veil. As whole persons receiving the whole of God’s relational work of grace, it is insufficient for God’s children merely to share mercy (compassion) with others. It is also insufficient for them merely to engage in the mission (however dedicated) to reduce violence, stop war or create the absence of conflict. On the basis of the ontology of who they are and whose they are, how they function to clearly reflect the depth of their wholeness—thus the relational responsibility to represent the Father and to continue to extend his family— involves a deeper level of relational involvement. “Peacemakers” (*eirenopoios*) denotes reconcilers, those who seek the well-being and wholeness of others, just as they experience (cf. 2 Cor 5:17-18). The reciprocal nature of the process of peacemaking is both a necessary and sufficient condition for peacemakers. This means not only to address conflict but to restore relationships in the human condition to wholeness, just as God’s thematic relational action and the relational work of the Trinity engage. Such involvement can only be vulnerable by the whole person from inner out, and thereby

renders any participation in peacemaking with relational distance insufficient, inadequate and even contrary to peace.

In these seven beatitudes Jesus defined the natural relational flow from repentance to redemption to reconciliation to wholeness. Jesus functioned vulnerably in this relational flow and ongoingly engaged the relational work necessary to be whole. While peace describes interpersonal relationships only in a corollary sense, the condition of wholeness and well-being is the new relational order of the new creation as the whole of God's family (as Paul made definitive, Eph 2:14-22; Col 3:15). Peace, therefore, is a necessary condition for the relational outcome of the new wine. Moreover, each emerging act of reconciliation and peacemaking must function in the same natural relational flow to become whole. This will further the relational process to wholeness for others and will deepen the wholeness of those so engaged, and therefore the maturation of the distinguished clarity and depth of their identity.

Yet, the experiential truth and reality of this wholeness is intrusive to others, which is unavoidable for those following Jesus' relational path. And though it may seem counterintuitive, this peacemaking will evoke negative reactions, thus the eighth beatitude.

Eighth Beatitude: The reality for human life and practice is that reductionism prevails; and not everyone is seeking resolution to the human relational condition "to be apart" from the whole. Consequently, in this last function of their whole identity Jesus made clear to his followers the repercussions of being composed in his call to be redefined, transformed and made whole: the function of this new ontology in relational involvement with others will encounter strong negative reaction "for righteousness' sake...on my account" (vv.10,11). Identity formation of his followers remains incomplete until they experience this consequence of their ontology and function in the world, which may include some Christian subcultures. That is to say, the relational outcome of the new wine includes this repercussion in human contexts because by its nature it is intrusive to the human shaping of persons and relationships together.

Along with the benefits and responsibilities of belonging to his family as one of the Father's very own, this consequence is another given unavoidable function in their identity. These repercussions are not the result of being doctrinaire, condescending or otherwise relationally uninvolved, though Christians certainly have experienced reactions for these reasons, justifiably or not. Nor are these reactions against only certain servants of God—for example, a frequent reduced perception of prophets (v.12). These are the relational reactions from others to God's children who are functioning whole in their reciprocal relational responsibility ("for righteousness' sake") as the Father's very own to extend the whole of God's family ("theirs is the kingdom") to others in the relational righteousness of family love vulnerably constituted by Jesus ("on my account"). This reaction comes with the intrusive significance of being the new wine, which will emerge in his call to be whole, live whole, and to make whole.

This last beatitude is the consequence of both the qualitative distinguishing the ontology of God's people and the relational involvement of their function, both of which intrude in the human context. Just as the prophets and Jesus experienced, this is the relational outworking of the identity of being in God's family and intimately involved with the whole and holy God (the Uncommon). This may be a difficult identity function

to embrace, and so in our thinking we may tend to limit it to unique situations for only a minority of Christians. Yet, the relational reality is inescapable that not only is the qualitative distinguishing the Uncommon incompatible with the common function but in conflict with it also; anything less reduces the ontology of the Uncommon and those who have become uncommon. And relational reactions from the common function will come in all forms and varying degrees (even from within Christian contexts) as long as the uncommon relationally extend themselves to the common with a critique of hope for change.

To avoid those reactions is to reduce our ontology and function to a level more ambiguous and shallow. To function as a peacemaker, for example, merely by being irenic, consensus building and unity forming is insufficient, and tends to become the ontological simulations and epistemological illusions of reductionism shaped in a hybrid theology. This beatitude's last function integral in identity formation completes the process of being whole, both individually and together as family, in the human context suffering the relational condition "to be apart" from the whole. The repercussions are an integral part of the new wine fellowship, which Paul was blessed to participate in with Jesus and desired to grow in further and deeper (Col 1:24; Rom 8:17; 2 Cor 1:5; 4:10; Phil 3:10). Nothing less and no substitutes for this whole define the new wine identity and determine its relational outcome as the whole of God's family. Anything less and any substitutes for wholeness of our identity lack the clarity and depth for our righteousness to go beyond the reductionism that Jesus made imperative for his followers in this major discourse (Mt 5:20). The resulting ambiguity and shallowness will neither be fully satisfying (*makarios*, "blessed"), nor be taken seriously in the world.

As *the consequential function* of the new wine identity, this beatitude must not be taken lightly or be lost in our identity formation; to do so is consequential for the relational outcome of the new wine.

The above eight beatitudes are the interdependent functions that together formulate our whole identity in who, what and how we are as Jesus' followers and whose we become in the relational progression as his family—therefore distinguishing the ontology of the person and the whole. The beatitudes taken separately are problematic for *makarios* (fully satisfied, beyond being merely happy), since some beatitudes seen individually strain to be defined as blessedness; moreover, any beatitude by itself does not yield the relational outcome connected to it. Blessedness is synonymous with wholeness, and to be fully satisfied emerges only from vulnerable involvement in the whole of God's life who has removed the veil for intimate relationship together.

The beatitudes together, however, are only the outline of the integral process of identity formation. Functionally, this process immediately addresses the whole person by opening our heart to be redefined. In the relational process, Jesus (in conjoint function with the Spirit) redeems us from the old (and the common) and transforms us to the new (and the uncommon) to be made whole in relationship together with the whole of God, whereby to function whole in likeness of the Trinity, including making whole in human contexts. The beatitudes' integral process, therefore, is ongoing and its outline is not just linear but reflexive in our identity's growth and maturation. As identity issues of ambiguity and shallowness become resolved, our identity as Jesus' followers takes on a

distinguished qualitative presence with others in the world. This is the basis for Jesus' definitive declaration immediately following the beatitudes that *we are the light and the salt*, in which the ontology of *we* is the whole understanding of the light and the salt that integrally distinguishes the relational outcome of the new wine flowing integrally in the new creation church family.

The Integral Process Clarified

Implicit in this identity formation and integral to the relational outcome of Jesus' new wine fellowship is the relational process of discipleship. Along with identity, however, discipleship easily becomes ambiguous or shallow, lacking the clarity and depth of this relational process. For this reason Paul interjected "As for those who will follow" to his message of the new creation (Gal 6:16), therewith challenging those to follow in progression within Jesus' qualitative and relational framework for discipleship. Otherwise, the whole process becomes fragmentary and subject to our shaping from the variable influence of surrounding contexts—contexts that also have been shaped by the fragmenting influence of reductionism.

The early disciples demonstrated an ambiguous, if not shallow, discipleship that focused mainly on what they did in serving with minimal relational involvement with Jesus. This reflected the prevailing focus on the secondary that emerges from reduced ontology and function. While discussing what is primary in life, Jesus disclosed the defining paradigm for serving him: "Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also" (Jn 12:26). Jesus' relational imperative has some parallel to Copernicus' presentation of a new model of the world. That is, embracing Jesus' new model for discipleship (in contrast to a prevailing rabbinic model) required a paradigm shift: a radical reordering of one's beliefs, way of living and perceptual-interpretive framework—a shift from the quantitative work to be done (the focus of *diakoneo*, serving) to the qualitative function and primacy of relationship (the focus of *akoloutheo*, following), and accordingly a shift from a view and function of the person from outer in to a view and function of the person from inner out. In Jesus' framework for discipleship, his paradigm for serving implies both the primacy of relationship (making the work secondary) and defining the person and determining their discipleship in qualitative terms from inner out. That is to say, to distinguish his followers, Jesus assumes a change to whole ontology and function in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God ("where I *am*, there will my servant *be*," *eimi*, verb of existence). Anything less or any substitutes of this whole ontology and function—no matter how well-intentioned and dedicated to serve Jesus—is a reduced ontology and function based on shaping and constructing discipleship by human terms, which may be the prevailing model even in churches (cf. Rev 2:2-4; 3:1-2); such terms no longer follow Jesus only on his whole relational terms.

This is a common reduction of discipleship that prevailed in Peter's life and signified the gap in relationship the early disciples had with Jesus (Jn 14:9). His followers' primary identity cannot be reduced to serving, which is the prevailing identity practiced or, at least, perceived by Christians and churches today. Therefore, in Jesus' discipleship framework distinguished in his call, his paradigm for serving requires both redemptive change and transformation (process 1 and 2 composing his call), the

redemptive reconciliation that restores persons and relationship together to the wholeness of the gospel of transformation distinguishing the new creation/wine. This was Paul's experiential truth of relationship together intimately following the whole of Jesus from the Damascus road (2 Cor 3:16-18), and Jesus' relational framework that composed the whole of Paul and his witness as well as the whole in Paul and his theology. What we need to learn from their theology and practice is that the integral relational flow of this new wine signifying the whole identity of Jesus' followers is irreducible and nonnegotiable to our terms shaped by human contextualization—regardless of how sincere and committed our practice, and doctrinally correct our theology.

Understanding the various parts of Paul's *synesis* (whole understanding, Eph 3:4, cf. Col 1:9; 2:2) makes clear that the whole of his witness and the whole in his theology were deeply rooted in *pleroma* (complete) Christology. Following Jesus' whole ontology and function in the relational progression of Jesus' theological trajectory and relational path is how the relational Paul emerged from the historical Paul to compose the theological Paul. The experiential truth of the fullness of Christ's whole ontology and function by necessity involved *pleroma* soteriology making functional 'already' the relational outcome of being saved to God's new creation family. The whole of this family was developed as the church's ontology and function by Paul, signifying the *pleroma* of Christ (Eph 1:22-23). In the complex theological dynamics of Paul's theological forest, God's whole family in transformed relationships together without the veil is the gospel of the glory of Christ (2 Cor 3:16-18; 4:3-6), the gospel of wholeness in the face of Christ's whole ontology and function (Eph 2:14-16; 3:6; 6:15), the *pleroma* of God (Col 1:19-20; 2:9-10; 3:10-11)—all emerging for Paul in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes. Therefore, in his theological forest the theology of ontological identity emerges only from the theological dynamic of belonging, both of which are inseparably integrated and rooted in the theology of wholeness—all of which are integrally composed in Jesus' call.

This wholeness is the primary identity that defined Paul's ontology and determined his function (the historical Paul notwithstanding), and the identity by which all who relationally belong to Christ need to be contextualized to be whole, both as persons individually and collectively. The relational outcome of God's whole family together is the ontological identity of conjointly who we are and whose we are. Whose we are is always the determinant of who we are, never the converse or there is reductionism by human shaping. And the *what* that whose we are determines for who we are is always about family, not about the individual. Western Christians in particular need to embrace this theology and practice. Whole persons have been set free by Christ not for self-autonomy but are freed to be whole in whose we are, that is, in likeness of the whole of God (2 Cor 3:17-18; Gal 5:1, 13-14; Eph 4:24-25; Col 3:15; cf. 1 Cor 8:1). Wholeness for the person is contingent on wholeness in relationship together, therefore the whole person is inseparable from and indispensable for God's new creation family—which in Paul's theological forest is the church, "the *pleroma* of Christ who makes all whole in the whole" (Eph 1:23; cf. Rom 12:4-5). For the whole of Paul and the whole in his theology, there is no other relational outcome from the gospel of wholeness—the "new creation is everything" for those who follow the whole of Jesus in the new wine fellowship with the veil removed. Any other identity is neither new nor composed in Jesus' call.

Jesus' call composes nothing less and no substitutes for the new and whole identity of his followers. And the intrusive relational process distinguishing his followers involves living whole in reciprocal relationship together both with God and God's family, and making whole in reciprocating contextualization within the world both to be distinguished from human contextualization and to make whole the human context (process 3 composing his call).

To Be and Live in God's Image and Likeness

Central to Jesus' call is *anthropos* (human being and person, *anthropon*, pl. Mk 1:17), around whom his call revolves. This human person must not be reduced either to the object of discipleship or to an *object* as a disciple in referential terms ("fishers of *anthropos*"), but rather completely the person as *subject* whose ontology and function are whole or need to be made whole. The ontology and function of those persons are contingent on the ontology and function of Jesus' person, whose person-to-person call composes persons to be and live in congruence with his whole person. Thus, his call revolves around the human person involved intimately with his person; and without the centrality of both human persons and his person, his call has no significance.

As Jesus intruded on his followers and their theological anthropology, he clarified and corrected the significance of the person and relationships distinguished in God's context. In the innermost of his call, Jesus distinguishes the whole person in the theological anthropology that includes whole understanding of the image and likeness of God—which is congruent with Christ as the image of God (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15) and thereby in likeness with the whole of God (Jn 17:21-22, cf. Col 3:10; Eph 4:24). How the person is perceived and how that person functions, particularly in relationships, are directly composed in this image and likeness intrinsic to Jesus' call.

There have been three basic theological formulations or approaches to what constitutes the image of God (*imago Dei*) for all persons: (1) it is substantial or structural, that is, consisting of certain attributes or capabilities (notably reason) built into the person; (2) it is relational, indicating a fundamental relationship between human creature and Creator; and (3) it is a goal or destiny for humanity that lies in the eschatological conclusion toward which humans are directed.⁷ Each approach is insufficient understanding of God's image that merely composes a fragmented or incomplete person, not the whole person; and by itself each lacks the significance distinguishing the whole of God—namely as vulnerably embodied by the Subject of the Word, whose unmistakable Face as the image of God calls us to "'Come, follow after me in ongoing reciprocal relationship together.'

Jesus' call to "Come, follow after my whole person" includes the relational message "and I will make you fish for people." The call was not for those fishermen to make a vocational change in refocusing their efforts—a common misconception of "called" frequently found among seminarians. The three relational messages (discussed previously) implicit in Jesus' call include: (1) the primary importance of his whole

⁷ The third view focuses only on the fulfillment of the new humanity/creation at the eschaton. For a discussion of this project see Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 141-264.

person, and (2) the related importance of his followers as persons also, plus (3) the primacy of their reciprocal relationship together only as persons, without secondary distinctions (such as title, role, race-ethnicity, class, gender or age). These three relational messages converge in the relational dynamic of Jesus' call in which the following unfolds:

“My whole person will transform your person to be whole in my image and likeness”—that is, not as clones conforming to a template imposed by Jesus (perhaps as a postmodernist's lens may perceive) but rather “transform your person and relationships to be whole in the qualitative image and to live whole in the relational likeness of the whole of God, whose vulnerable presence and intimate involvement I embody for you to come follow after in reciprocal relationship together, face to face without a template or a mask for a veil” (as Paul made conclusive, 2 Cor 3:18).

The Full Context from the Beginning

It is necessary to put Jesus' call into its full context, the relational context of the whole of God from the beginning. The person in God's context is distinguished (*pala*) only in the epistemic field of the whole of God's relational context, 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, that is to say, to distinguish beyond what exists in the human context and thus which 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 was beyond, for example, Job's knowledge and understanding (Job 42:3). 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).

Evolutionary biology highlights the development of the physical body, including the brain, for *Homo sapiens*—that is, the bodily development of human antecedents in physical form. While I affirm this physical development, science cannot assume that this physical body developed into the human person. Even with the development of the brain for higher level function unique to humans, the evolution process can only account at best for humans from the outer in. There is a limited quality within the quantitative structure of outer in that neuroscientist Damasio identified in the evolutionary development of the organism's interior (noted previously). This does not distinguish the whole person but only defines a fragmentary person without the significance of being whole from inner out. So, then, what is the 'inner' of the person and how do we account for it with the human body to integrally constitute the whole person from inner out?

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 from inner out (the inseparably integrated qualitative and quantitative) distinguished 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* is reduced when primacy is given to the quantitative and thus the outer in; this appears to be the *nephesh* signified by supervenience in nonreductive physicality that is linked to large brain development and function. All animals have *nephesh* (Gen 1:30) but without the qualitative inner that distinguishes only the person. 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 at times in Scripture 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 (beyond a comparative process) or merely referenced in some uniqueness (within a comparative process).

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).

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:

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), as giving life to “the body” (*basar*, referring to the outer aspect of the person, Prov 14:30, NIV), which describes the heart’s integrating function for the whole person (inner and outer together).

Without the function of the heart, the whole person from inner out created by God is reduced to function from outer in, distant or separated from the heart. This functional condition was ongoingly critiqued by God and responded to for the inner-out change necessary to be whole (e.g. Gen 6:5-6; Dt 10:16; 30:6; 1 Sam 16:7; Isa 29:13; Jer 12:2; Eze 11:19; 18:31; 33:31; Joel 2:12-13). Later in God’s strategic shift, Jesus made unmistakable that the openness of the heart (“in spirit and truth”) is what the Father requires and seeks in reciprocal relationship together (Jn 4:23-24).

In Judaism, Paul had already been introduced to the importance of the heart (*leb*, e.g. Deut 6:4; 10:16; 11:13). Yet, Paul had not understood this importance for the ontology either of Israel as God’s people or of his own person. He had not grasped the integrating function of the heart for the person (cf. Prov 4:23; 14:30; 27:19) until his own heart was exposed on the Damascus road, now vulnerable in relationship with the whole of God. I have assumed that this involved the retrospective journey of his person back to the human roots beyond his Jewish roots in Abraham. The original human roots, both for the individual-person and for the collective-persons together, define the heart as the center of human ontology, not the brain of neuroscience or the sub-atomic dynamics of physics. What is the difference of the heart and how is it significant?

The integrating function of the heart is irreplaceable. The mind may be able to provide quantitative unity (e.g. by identifying the association of parts) for the human person, as quantified in the brain by neuroscience. However, while this may be necessary and useful at times, it is never sufficient by itself to distinguish the whole person, nor adequate to experience the relationships necessary to be whole. Not even the higher level function of supervenience, as used by nonreductive physicalism, is sufficient to account for the qualitative whole needed to constitute persons in God’s context.

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. *Nephesh* may be rendered “soul” but its functional significance is the heart (Dt 30:6; Rom 2:28-29). 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).

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 of God (namely God's relational ontology and function, discussed below). One without the other identifies an incomplete, fragmentary person. 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 with not a detailed (much less scientific) account of humans but the integrated perspective (framework and lens) necessary to define and determine the whole person, as well as the underlying reductionism of 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.

The original human roots with Adam and Eve constituted each of them in their individual self, both with themselves in relationship together and with their Creator. Yet, Adam and Eve made two critical assumptions in the primordial garden: (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 is a pivotal qualitative and relational consequence for persons. 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 (*bosh*, Gen 2:25, cf. Eph 4:18). Only the conjoint function of the qualitative inner (signified by the heart) and the relational from innermost (signified by hearts coming together in intimacy) distinguish whole persons beyond comparison. Nothing less and no substitutes can claim to *pala* 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 "it is not good to be apart" (Gen 2:18).

God acts only in relational terms and communicates only in relational language. Any person focused outer in does not make relational connection with God (as Job struggled, Job 23:3,8-9), and thus is unable to know and understand God merely by referential language, no matter the quantity of referential information about God (as the theological academy labors today). In reality, any such knowledge and understanding

about God is simply self-referencing, whereby theological discourse becomes speaking for God from the cognitive level of the mind rather than receiving God's relational communication and expressing this relational knowledge and understanding of God from the depth level of the heart.

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. 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.

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. For example, when discussing the social nature and character of human persons, it is insufficient for theological anthropology to talk about merely social relatedness and community to define and distinguish the human person. For nonnegotiated theological anthropology, the person is created in the qualitative image of God to function in relational likeness to the whole of God (discussed shortly). Without renegotiation, therefore, human persons are created in whole ontology and function for the primacy of relationship together solely in 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 ontology and function. This qualitative and relational consequence no longer distinguishes persons in God's context, only shapes them in the limits of the human context by the constraints of the human condition (“to be apart...naked and relationally distant”).

From the beginning, these two competing, contrary and conflicting dynamics have either constituted the person in the primary of God's relational context and process, or shaped (even embedded) the person in the secondary of the limits and prevailing constraints in the human context. In Jesus' call, however, the image and likeness of God are the indelible relational outcome constituting persons by his relational response for the gospel of transformation to wholeness.

In the Qualitative Image of God

Spirituality has consistently pointed our focus to the qualitative, though its disciplines have often been less qualitative and less than relational. Moreover, common notions of spirituality tend to be dualistic (e.g. the soul as primary) and are insufficient to get to the heart of the person from inner out. Such a limited focus of spirituality fragments the person into parts, however spiritual, and is inadequate to integrate and transform the whole person. As discussed above, the heart is the innermost of the whole person, integrating the person who by nature is also deeply involved in relationships.

At the same time, anything qualitative today is under constant pressure to be revised by the quantitative, and even under continuous assault to be narrowed down and quantified. Aside from the obvious, the subtle consequence is a preoccupation with the secondary—evident by a focus on fragmentary parts (e.g. of a person) from outer in over the whole from inner out—and a significant lack of qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness. This has been amplified by the Enlightenment with its modernist perceptual-interpretive framework in quantitative referential terms. As much as this paradigm shift has been engaged since the Enlightenment, the shift to the quantitative emerged from the beginning in the primordial garden, with its immeasurable impact on how the human person is defined and relationships are determined. The consequence has thrust anthropology on a narrowed-down trajectory charted on a fragmentary path. Its influence continues to today, either not paid attention to or not understood.

As the image and likeness of God are further illuminated, there likely will occur an uncovering of theological anthropology—or making “naked” if you wish—that reveals a person in a reshaped image or unlikeness of God. This will challenge our assumptions and be critical for the person (including our own) who emerges and develops.

There are two main and vital issues any theological anthropology must answer:

1. What does it mean to be the human person God created?
2. What does God expect from this person?

To expand on our discussion above, understanding the first issue is interrelated to the second. This mutual understanding thus unfolds in relationship together by the inseparable function of righteousness: defined as being the whole of who, what and how the person is that can be counted on by others to be that person in relationship together. Accordingly, any theological anthropology that adequately answers these two issues must by nature be integrated with righteousness, both God’s and ours. Anything less and any substitutes in theological anthropology or for righteousness fragments the person into certain parts over other parts, with the relational consequence of being and living less than whole.

Ecclesiastes illuminates a simple reality of God’s creative action that is easy to ignore not only to distinguish the human person but also God: “God has also *implanted* eternity in the hearts of persons” (Ecc 3:11, NIV). What is illuminated is the reality of being connected in ontology and function to something beyond our persons, which can be defined in whole knowledge and be satisfied in whole understanding solely by the whole of God, because that something is transcendent. Eternity (*’olam*) should not be seen as a referential term and thus here understood in cognitive terms (e.g. “a sense of past and

future into their minds,” NRSV), as part of human rationality and reasoning that traditionally is considered to compose the image of God. In this sense, *‘olam* and any other connections thought to be made beyond the human person can also be considered mere epiphenomenon (appearing to be related but not really), without clearly accounting for a distinction between them.⁸ The reality of eternity consists in relational language and helps constitute the qualitative innermost of the person in the image of God only in relational terms (cf. Jn 17:3). In other words, having eternity in their hearts connects persons to the transcendent God—not just to some cognitive part of God but to the whole of God. Yet, there is a critical distinction that must be made between referential terms and relational terms in order to further know and understand the God behind the image distinguishing the human person. To know and understand God is the relational process to know and understand the person in the image of God.

What necessarily separates theism from deism is the clarity of God’s qualitative presence and relational involvement. Theism assumes God’s vulnerability, yet more likely has been described traditionally in referential terms not compatible to make connection with God’s presence and involvement. Such a theism is certainly problematic to know and understand God other than with referential information merely about God, which in function is not significantly different from deism. This has obvious implications for the image of God and for persons dependent on that image to be distinguished. The vulnerable presence and relational involvement of God, however, is a relational reality that integrally distinguishes the whole ontology and function of God, who, on the basis of this qualitative relational reality, created the human person and relationships together in that image and likeness of God’s incomparable ontology and function. To use Ecclesiastes’ relational language: “God transplanted into the innermost of human persons not the breadth of linear time in chronological terms composed by a traditional lens of eternity but the depth of the image of the whole of God’s ontology and function.” What God transplanted did not deify the person ontologically (also not to be confused with panentheism) but constituted the person relationally to be whole together, whereby to relationally know and understand the God who is vulnerably present and relationally involved is to have whole knowledge and understanding of God’s image and, on this qualitative relational basis, to know and understand the whole person distinguished by that image in God’s relational context and process.

This irreversible connection of the person with the whole of God is the simple reality *‘olam* signifies that theological anthropology is ongoingly accountable to compose the person in the image of God: to constitute from inner out as a complex subject of person-consciousness involved in complex relationship both vulnerable and reciprocal, not to compose the person from outer in as a simple object of self-consciousness engaged in simple association. Yet, the reality of this connection is continuously subjected to reductionism and its counter-relational work that must also be addressed definitively with the whole, or fall into being subject to its obscuring influence. ‘The presence of the whole’ constitutes the image of God and makes functional this image for persons to live distinguished in its significance. How is ‘the presence of the whole’ vulnerable to be relationally involved for this vital relational outcome?

⁸ Consider further neurosurgeon Eben Alexander’s recent experience while his brain was not functioning, in *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon’s Journey into the Afterlife* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 2012).

The qualitative image of God is known and understood conclusively only in the involved God in the beginning, the vulnerable God of the beginning, and indeed the transcendent God beyond—composed only in relational language according to relational terms by just the relational Word. On this basis, the presence and involvement of the relational Word from the beginning is the key for the ongoing presence of the whole to make functional the image of God.

Our understanding of the message unfolding with the Word from the beginning does not emerge from the textual words in referential language. This is not merely having referential knowledge and information about God but critically involves the distinguished process of whole-ly knowing God, which is only the relational outcome of deep involvement in relationship together as Jesus' family prayer makes definitive (notably of eternal life, Jn 17:3, cf. the disciples, Jn 14:9). Therefore, communication from the Word is composed by the primacy of relational language and only in relational terms that get quite intrusive because the relational Word speaks to our innermost. The significance of relational language defines, on the one hand, the qualitative ontology, relational nature and vulnerable function of the Word (signifying his glory, Jn 1:14) and, on the other, defines *what* was created and *why*. To define these secondarily by only referential language immediately diminishes what was created and minimalizes why, along with fragmenting the Word who created in the image and likeness of the whole of God.

Definitively *what* was created and *why* are contingent on the whole ontology and function of God, and therefore contingent on the Word in the beginning, in whose image human being is created to be whole and in whose likeness all human ontology and function are created to live whole—to be and live whole together in relationship with the whole of God and God's creation (Gen 2:18,25, cf. Rom 8:17,19). The whole was not a product of some dialectic or abstract process; it was the relational outcome in the beginning of the whole of God's communicative-creative action. The *whole* emerged only with the Whole from outside the universe to constitute the whole of the universe and all in it in the innermost (Col 1:17). Moreover, the Whole does not become the universe (pantheism), nor is the universe all there is of the Whole (as in panentheism). The whole of God (the triune God) remains distinguished outside the universe and this Whole's likeness distinguishes the universe in the innermost to be whole. Though this wholeness was the reality in the beginning, reductionism fragmented the whole of human ontology and function, and also creation (Gen 3:7,10,17; cf. Rom 8:19-21). The good news, however, is the deeper unfolding of the Word to give the light to the innermost necessary to be whole, "who has shone in our hearts..." (2 Cor 4:6).

For Paul, to emphasize our earlier discussion, there is definitive epistemological clarification in "the knowledge of the glory of the whole of God *vulnerably revealed* by the face of Christ *as the image of God*" (2 Cor 4:6). 'Glory' illuminates the being, nature and presence of God (as Moses requested, Ex 33:18), which reveals the qualitative heart of God's being, God's intimate relational nature and vulnerable presence (cf. Jn 17:22,24). The whole of Jesus magnified the heart of God's being, relational nature and vulnerable presence in the human context by embodying an improbable theological trajectory and intrusive relational path (Jn 1:14,18). The whole gospel illuminates this glory magnified in Christ as the image of God (2 Cor 4:4). The relational significance of this theology cannot be overemphasized.

In the incarnation of God's relational dynamic determined only by the relational function of grace, Jesus fulfills the whole of God's thematic relational response to the inherent human relational need and problem (which neuroscience rightly identifies). By fulfilling God's relational response only in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes, Jesus embodied the wholeness of the image of God (*eikon*, Col 1:15). *Eikon* implies not merely a resemblance to but the total correspondence to and likeness of its archetype, here the invisible God—just as Jesus claimed to his first disciples (Jn 14:9). The *eikon* of God is made definitive by the illumination (*photismos*) of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, whose vulnerable embodiment made God's qualitative being and relational nature functionally involved with persons for experiential truth in relationship together (2 Cor 4:4b,6).

To revisit Paul's face-to-Face encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road, he experienced directly this relational dynamic of Christ's illumination now extended also to him. On this relational basis (not mysticism), God's relational function of grace and its outcome of intimate relational connection together provided Paul with his ongoing experiential truth of the glory of God 'in Christ', the image of God. For Paul, then, the image of God was unmistakable in the relational dynamic of Christ's magnification of God's glory, integrally composing "the gospel of the glory of Christ" (4:4b). This relational dynamic of the image and glory of God is essential for Paul's *pleroma* Christology (completeness, fullness, whole, Col 1:19; 2:9) because it signifies the whole of Jesus' person vulnerably embodied, magnified and involved for relationship together, fulfilling the following three functions unique to the face of Christ, as discussed in Chapter three:

1. Whole knowledge and understanding of the whole of God's ontology as nothing less and no substitutes of God's qualitative being and relational nature (Christ the epistemological-theological key).
2. Whole knowledge and understanding of the whole of God's function in the relational context and process constituted only by God's relational terms of grace (Christ the hermeneutical key).

In Paul's *pleroma* Christology, the face of Christ is the exact *eikon* of God that magnifies the glory of God's qualitative being and relational nature in Christ's whole person and function, with the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes. This dynamic of wholeness is indispensable for how the face of Christ is perceived and his function interpreted. In his whole-reductionism discourse, Paul pointed to the relational outcome or consequence of this issue of perceptual-interpretive framework as fundamental to the relational epistemic process necessary to "see [*augazo*, be illuminated by] the light" from top down ("God who...has shone") and from inner out ("in our hearts") "in the face of Christ" (2 Cor 4:4,6). The term "face" (*prosopon*) can be understood in two contrary dynamics: (1) like a mask worn in early Greek theatre to take on a different identity in a role or as in a masquerade (*metaschematizo*, cf. 2 Cor 11:13-15); or (2) "face" can signify the whole person, whose identity of who, what and how the person is is not hidden but made fully vulnerable to be whole-ly perceived and involved with (cf. what the Father seeks, Jn 4:23-24; note Num 12:6-8). The first dynamic functions from outer in (e.g. "that

one hides,” 2 Cor 4:2) while the second dynamic only functions from inner out (e.g. “by the open statement of the truth”). The interpretive framework of the first dynamic perceives only the outer face of Christ and thereby interprets Christ’s function in mere referential terms or reductionist human terms. This outward approach is an incompatible interface with Christ’s face of inner out, and creates distance and maintains barriers in relationship. The relational consequence is not seeing the light and consequently unable to make relational connection with the qualitative being and relational nature of God.

Contrary to the first dynamic, in the second dynamic the face of Christ is without reductionism of the whole of who, what and how God is—just as Jesus conclusively revealed to his disciples (Jn 14:9) and fulfilled for the Father (Jn 17:4,6,26). This is the face vulnerably embodying, magnifying and involving the whole of God’s glory—nothing less and no substitutes of God’s qualitative being and relational nature—for relationship together. It is the only face and function that constitute *pleroma* Christology—“the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor 4:4). Moreover, then, this relational dynamic of the image and glory of God in Christ functions also to illuminate the whole knowledge and understanding of the face of Christ’s function from inner out in God’s relational context and process, whereby to function congruent to only God’s relational terms of grace from top down. Christ’s face and function together are irreducible and therefore indispensable for Christology to be complete. In the complete Christology of Paul, Christ’s face and function constitute the whole person vulnerably involved in relationship. The relational outcome, in contrast to the relational consequence above, is that the whole of God is now accessible for intimate relationship Face to face. The relational implication is that the function of this distinguished Face is compatible only with the human face in qualitative image and relational likeness of his for the qualitative-relational connection and involvement necessary to be whole-ly Face to face to Face. Accordingly, this qualitative-relational connection can only be without the relational barrier of the veil, as Paul made conclusive (2 Cor 3:18).

This relational outcome is the purpose and function of the unequivocal image and glory of God vulnerably embodied by the whole of Jesus only for relationship together. Indispensably throughout the incarnation, Christ’s function illuminated the whole knowledge and understanding of the qualitative image and relational likeness of God in which the human person and function were created; and by his qualitative-relational function between the manger and the cross, Christ also vulnerably demonstrates the ontological image and functional likeness to which human persons need to be restored for whole relationship together face to Face. Therefore, the relational dynamic of the image and glory of God is essential in Paul’s *pleroma* Christology for a third function fulfilled in the distinguished face of Christ necessary for relationship together:

3. The qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God necessary for human ontology and function, as individual-person and collective-persons together in God’s family, in the same dynamic as Christ of nothing less and no substitutes (Christ the functional key).

Without Jesus’ whole person and function throughout the incarnation, whole knowledge and understanding of the image and glory of God would neither be illuminated for

vulnerable self-disclosure in experiential truth, nor be definitive for vulnerable human reciprocal response in the image and likeness necessary for whole relationship together (2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10). Theological anthropology becomes definitive only in the face of Christ and distinguishes the human person only in Face-to-face-to-Face relationship together.

As Paul composed to complete Christology, the above three qualitative-relational functions are vital for the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction necessary to be whole. Paul was unequivocal that Jesus constituted this dynamic of wholeness *in* the incarnation of his own person, and thereby constituted this dynamic for wholeness *by* his incarnation for all human life and function (Col 2:9-10). In Paul's theology and practice, therefore, this dynamic in the face of Christ was irreducible and nonnegotiable by the very nature of the *pleroma* of God. And anything less and any substitutes are reductionism of the *pleroma* of God, the image of God, the glory of God in the face of Christ, consequently reductionism of the human person and function—shifting from the whole from top down to reductionism from bottom up, from the whole from inner out to reductionism from outer in.

It is conclusive for theological anthropology that the person essential to God and distinguished in the Trinity is embodied by Jesus. Jesus' whole person, as Paul made definitive theologically, is the exact and whole "image of God...in the vulnerably present and relationally involved face of Christ." Jesus as *person* is not a referential concept or anthropomorphism imposed on him but his vulnerable function as "the image of the *transcendent* God...in *his person* all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (Col 1:15,19). His person as the image of God—along with the person of the Spirit, Jesus' relational replacement (Jn 14:16-18; 16:13-15; 2 Cor 3:17-18)—is essential for the human person both to know the qualitative significance and to have whole understanding of what it means to be and function as the person created in the image of God. There are certainly irreducible differences between God as Creator and creatures. As Jesus vulnerably disclosed (e.g. in his formative family prayer, Jn 17:21-23), however, there is also an irreducible likeness between the persons of the Trinity and the human person created in the image of the whole of God (cf. Col 3:10; Eph 4:24).

"Following after the whole of my person" is irreplaceable for his followers' "person to be transformed to the whole person," whose ontology and function are congruent with Jesus' and therefore distinguished only in the qualitative image of God. This whole ontology and function composes the only person(s) whom Jesus called both to follow after and to transform to be and live. The person defined by anything less or any substitutes—mainly from outer in, even with distinctions widely prevailing that obscure the whole person and keep relational distance (cf. Col 3:9-11)—is not congruent with Jesus' call and composes persons (both his and ours) with reduced ontology and function on a different relational path. Such a person cannot be and live whole, much less make whole in human contexts. The primacy of his person in wholeness is the only determinant to constitute our persons in wholeness, and thereby function in the primacy of reciprocal relationship together as whole persons (as Paul declared, Col 3:15).

Our theological anthropology is responsible to compose these persons and to distinguish their ontology and function in Jesus' whole relational terms:

Theological anthropology is the most accountable of the theological tasks for the whole knowledge and understanding of God and thereby of the human person, an interrelated qualitative condition and relational function that is irreducible and nonnegotiable. The glory of God beyond the universe has been vulnerably disclosed in relationship as whole person-Subject to be known (Jn 17:3,6,26, cf. Jn 14:9), in order to distinguish—beyond comparison indeed (*pala*)—human persons and relationships in the image and likeness of the whole of God (Jn 17:22-23).

Until our theological anthropology fulfills this responsibility, Jesus continues in his intrusive relational path to address, challenge and confront our person reflecting our theological anthropology.

So, from the beginning to the present, when God asks the person in theological anthropology, and our person in practice, “Where are you?” (Gen 3:9), God is not asking a referential question for information locating the person. The whole of God asks a relational question to distinguish the whole ontology and function of persons created in God’s very own image and likeness, or perhaps to expose a reshaped image or unlikeness.

In the Relational Likeness of God

Any uncovering of theological anthropology that reveals a person in the unlikeness of God may not be surprising, since it will no doubt involve issues about relationship that are not accounted for in relational terms. For example, what is the significance of John 4:23-24 and how is this interrelated to the person in Matthew 15:8? The answers should be at the core of theological anthropology to distinguish the person. Here again, the nature and extent of our Christology is the key, which is why we need to pay close attention to the whole of Jesus as the Father said (Mt 17:5, cf. Mk 4:24).

Integral to the relational likeness of God is the qualitative image of God, and conversely. Since God implanted the heart of his being to the innermost of the human person to connect with the whole of God (Ecc 3:11), the whole person can only be distinguished from inner out and only in relational terms (as in Jn 4:23-24). However, any shift of focus to outer in also shifts to referential terms, as in “these people draw near with their mouths...while their hearts are far from me” (Isa 29:13, cf. Mt 15:8); and this is when relationship becomes a critical issue reflecting the unlikeness of God. The person (both Jesus’ and ours) in his call must be accounted for in whole relational terms or else reflect the unlikeness of God.

The embodied Word relationally communicated the whole knowledge and understanding of God to make definitive the functional reality of God’s image and likeness (as Paul illuminated, 2 Cor 4:4,6), while also conclusively providing the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction of God’s unlikeness (as Paul reflected, 2 Cor 3:14-18). Jesus distinguished the relational likeness of God in two relational contexts: (1) within the whole of God, the Trinity, together with the persons of the Father and the Spirit, and (2) with other persons in human context, whether together or not.

1. Within the Whole of God

One of the main distinctions of whole Christology is that it is not overly christocentric, which may be problematic depending on how Jesus is defined. The traditional lens defining Jesus focuses on only parts of his person—namely on what he did, on his teachings and example—and not on the whole of Jesus. The whole of Jesus vulnerably embodied his whole person throughout the incarnation in the human context; and this involvement is indispensable to understand in his relationships with others that composed his intrusive relational path (to be discussed in the second relational context). Conjointly, the whole of Jesus' whole person uniquely embodied the vulnerable presence and intimate involvement of the whole of God, the Trinity. Christology remains incomplete when it does not encompass both Jesus' whole person throughout the incarnation and the whole of God whom his whole person embodied.

Moreover, by involving us directly in the trinitarian relational context and process, the whole of Jesus involves us in God's story, that is, the whole of God's thematic relational action in response to the human condition. We cannot perceive the whole of Jesus apart from God's story or we reduce the whole of *who* and *what* Jesus embodied as well as the whole of *how* he functioned. This reduction signifies a recontextualization of Jesus that relegates him to our situations and circumstances in history—just as many Jews (including some of his disciples) did with their messianic hopes. Accordingly, when the person Jesus distinguished (both divine and human) is fragmented to various parts of him (however notable), this puts Jesus on a different theological trajectory and relational path. For theological anthropology based on such a fragmentary Christology, Jesus' person is obscured from the relational ontology of the Trinity and their relational function together as the Whole, and consequently our persons struggle in the relational unlikeness of God.

What is this relational likeness of the Trinity that Jesus vulnerably embodied to distinguish human persons? Some have attempted to define a relational idea of personhood in more recent development of trinitarian theology. Niels Gregersen offers cautionary balance to emphasize that the interrelations between the divine persons are still thought to be unique to God and not related to human beings: "The question remains, however, whether it is possible to deduce a comprehensive ontology for the Trinity, and whether theologians of today should argue for such a direct derivation of the human concept of personhood from the trinitarian concept of the personhood of God." Noting differences between the trinitarian and the anthropological concepts of personhood, he points to Orthodox theologians' rejection of recent attempts to use the trinitarian concept as a general ontological model, and he continues: "Positive resemblances and suggestive proposals should not make us blind to remaining differences."⁹

As discussed previously, the doctrine of the Trinity emerged in the fourth century as a response to theological conflict and reductionism. Arius specifically taught that Jesus was subordinate to God in substance (*ousia*) and was created (begotten by the Father). The Council of Nicea (the Nicene Creed in 325) countered that Jesus was begotten (i.e. generated, not created) from the substance of the Father, of the same substance (*homoousios*) with God. In further response to another form of Arianism (from

⁹ Niels Henrik Gregersen, "Varieties of Personhood: Mapping the Issues" in Niels Gregersen, William B. Drees and Ulf Gorman, eds., *The Human Person in Science and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 11-12.

Eunomius: divine substance is unbegotten and only belongs to the Father), the Cappadocian fathers (Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus, between 358-380) formulated the distinction between the same substance of God and the different persons (*hypostasis*) of God, thus establishing the doctrine of the Trinity: one God existing in three persons.¹⁰

Essentially, from the fourth century into the twenty-first, we observe one aspect of God emphasized over another (e.g. the oneness of God or the divine threeness), and some aspect of God reduced (e.g. God's substance [*ousia*] or the persons/personhood [*hypostasis*] of God), as well as redefined or ignored (e.g. "begotten" or the relationality of the Trinity). If not in theology most certainly in function, these perceptions and interpretations profoundly affect how we define God—namely in the ontological and relational nature of the whole of God. I suggest that much of this theological difficulty can be resolved or prevented if trinitarian theology emerged first and foremost from complete Christology. This is the compelling antecedent Jesus' vulnerable disclosures made evident about him and the Father, which involved the Spirit together—and the only antecedent Paul made imperative for persons and relationships together in the church (Col 3:15).

John the Baptist testified that "I saw the Spirit...remain [*meno*, dwell] on him" at Jesus' baptism (Jn 1:32, cf. 3:34). From there, Luke's Gospel records that Jesus was full of the Spirit and led by the Spirit (Lk 4:1,14). These early accounts made evident the presence and function of the Spirit in Jesus' embodied life and practice, which Jesus himself confirmed (Lk 4:18, cf. Isa 11:2; 42:1); and their function dynamically continued in Jesus' post-resurrection interactions (Acts 1:2) and continues in his post-ascension involvement (Acts 9:17; 13:2; 16:7) and discourse (Rev 2-3). In essence, the Spirit *meno* with Jesus together to constitute the trinitarian relational context and process. When Jesus told his disciples that he will send the Spirit to them as his relational replacement not leaving them as orphans (Jn 14:18), he pointed to the relational ontology between him, the Spirit and the Father (Jn 15:26; 16:13-15). This ontology that the trinitarian persons have in common as *One* is what Jesus vulnerably disclosed about his Father and himself.

Our attention then necessarily focuses again on the primacy of 'the relationship of God' discussed in Chapter four, in order for both the theology of our person and the practice of our relationships to be in likeness. Consider further what was noted earlier: the most significant relational function in the incarnation of how God participates in relationship is Jesus vulnerably disclosing his relationship with his Father. In ontological terms, they are one and their persons are equally the same (Jn 10:30,38; 14:11,20; 16:15; 17:21), and thus inseparable (never "to be apart" except for one unfathomable experience on the cross, Mt 27:46). As distinct trinitarian persons (not modes of being) in the qualitative significance of the whole of God (not tritheism), they are intimately conjoined together in relationship (understood conceptually as *perichoresis*) and intimately involved with each other in love (Jn 5:20; 14:31; 15:9; 17:24). This is the relationship of God that Jesus functionally distinguishes of the whole of God, the Trinity.

¹⁰ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 2004), 252-69. Catherine Mowry LaCugna, ed. *Freeing Theology: the Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), 85-87. Stanley J Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 7-8.

To reexamine Jesus' baptism and transfiguration (transformation), the Father openly said: "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased" (Mt 3:17; 17:5). The term for "to be well pleased" (*eudokeo*) can also be rendered "to delight." To be pleased with a son expresses a common bias about parental approval of what a child has done; on the other hand, to delight in a son deepens the focus on the whole person from inner out, with a deeper expression of what a parent feels in the primacy of relationship together—which compose the three relational messages qualifying the content of the Father's communication above. "Delight" better expresses the qualitative heart of the Father in intimate relationship with the Son focused on his qualitative whole person, and consequently should not be interpreted as the Father's approval of the Son's performance. This distinguishes that the Father delights in the Son and loves him for his whole person, not for what he does even in obedience to the Father. If we are predisposed to parental approval, we will ignore the deeper significance of their relational involvement, and also be predisposed in seeking God's approval of our practice.

Furthermore, it is important to pay attention to their language as they interact. In the Father's expression above, his words to the Son are simple—signifying the relational language of the heart—and therefore intimate. Jesus' language with the Father in the garden called Gethsemane (Mt 26:39,42) and on the cross (Mt 27:46) is painfully simple and disarmingly direct language—words also straight from his heart. There are no platitudes, formal phrases or "sacred terminology" in their interaction—simply communication from the heart in ongoing communion together in intimacy. Their intimate communion forms the basis for communion at the Lord's table to be in likeness, as the relational outcome of Jesus removing the veil for whole relationship together (2 Cor 3:16-18, cf. Heb 10:19-22). Yet, their intimacy can easily be ignored by our relational distance or even be reduced to referential language by a non-relational quantitative perceptual-interpretive framework.

The theological and functional implications of their intimate relationship, as discussed in the previous chapter, are indispensable for our whole knowledge and understanding of God. Thus, what is vulnerably disclosed distinguishes the relationship of God without anything less and any substitutes of who, what and how God is. Their interaction at Gethsemane demonstrates the relational process of family love constituting the Trinity's relationship with each other. This interaction happened because by the nature of their relationship in the whole of God such an interaction was "designed" to happen, therefore was expected to happen—an outworking of God's relational righteousness. Again, what this interaction signifies is the complete openness (implying honesty) and vulnerableness of their whole person (not reduced to roles and performance in the Godhead) with each other in the intimate relational involvement of love as family constituted by their whole relationship together as One—which the Father also seeks from us (Jn 4:23-24). In his complete vulnerability, Jesus clearly discloses how they are involved in relationship together to distinguish the relationship of the Trinity, which Jesus also prays for us to experience (Jn 17:21-26). In whole relational terms, the trinitarian persons can and need to be their whole person before each other and intimately share with each other anything. Their involvement functions without the caution, restrictions or limits practiced in human relationships since the primordial garden to contrast "naked from inner out and without need for embellishment," with "naked from outer in and keeping relational distance". In other words, anything less than and any

substitutes for their whole person and these relationships necessary to be the whole of God no longer would constitute the Trinity (as qualitatively distinguished in whole relationship) and therefore become a reduction of God's ontology and function.

The relationship of God necessitates the function of the whole person, which is never centered on one person (as in many families) and therefore always as a function of relationship in the trinitarian relational context of family and the trinitarian relational process of family love. The most significant function of relationship between the Father and the Son is distinguished by God's love. Their family love ongoingly constitutes the Trinity's relational oneness (intimate communion) illuminating the incomparable uniqueness of God and distinguishing God's whole ontology and function from outside the universe. As the Father vulnerably disclosed at the Son's baptism and transfiguration, the Trinity's love is the function only of how they are involved with each other's person. The immeasurable depth of their qualitative involvement together is so intimate that though three disclosed persons yet they are one Being (the ontological One), though distinct in function yet they are indistinguishably and indivisibly one together (the relational Whole)—without relational horizontal distance or vertical stratification that characterize human relationships. Most important, this relationship of God is disclosed not for our mere information but made accessible for us to experience in whole relationship together in likeness. The integral purpose of Jesus' formative family prayer (Jn 17:20-26) is composed only for this reciprocal relational experience.

For relationship together in likeness, it is essential to understand the implied nature of *who* the Son and Father are and *what* they are in relationship together. This necessitates whole understanding of two clear overlapping statements Jesus disclosed to define his relationship with the Father: (1) "The Father and I are one" (Jn 10:30; 17:11,22), and (2) "the Father is in me and I am in the Father" (Jn 10:38; 14:10-11,20; 17:21). We need to understand Jesus' definitive declarations both ontologically and relationally, thus expanding on the Greek concept of *perichoresis* in trinitarian theology.¹¹

Jesus' first declaration of "The Father and I are one" (*heis eimi*) essentially revealed the dynamic existence (*eimi*, verb of existence) of their persons dwelling in each other together as one (*heis*). *Heis eimi* signifies the ontological oneness of the trinitarian persons in qualitative substance (consubstantial, *homoousios*), the nature of which cannot be differentiated in any of their persons from the whole of the triune God and differentiated in this sense from each other. Each trinitarian person is whole-ly God and an integral part of the whole of God, implying that each is incomplete without the others (pointing to the depth of pain Jesus shouted on the cross, Mt 27:46). Yet, on the one hand, what Jesus disclosed is not the totality of God but only the whole of who and what God is and how God does relationship. On the other hand, what Jesus vulnerably disclosed is irreducible for distinguishing God's whole ontology and function. Reducing the whole of each trinitarian person or the whole of God's being are consequential not only for our understanding of the triune God but also for understanding what is important about our persons and our relationships together in order to be whole in likeness of who, what and how God is.

¹¹ For an overview of *perichoresis* in trinitarian theology, see Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity: Global Perspectives* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007).

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

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

If human persons are not or cannot be distinguished by the relational likeness of the Trinity, then human persons in relationships have no distinction from the social relatedness of all animals. Certainly, human history has strained for this clear distinction in human relations between persons, yet this reflects the human condition and not the nonexistence of the relational ontology of God constituting human likeness. The person in theological anthropology must have clear distinction by its created nature of “not good to be apart from the whole”; otherwise persons are not and cannot be distinguished (*pala*) in the human context and will merely reflect, reinforce or sustain the human condition.

2. With Other Persons in the Human Context

We also need to keep in clear distinction that the triune God does relationship in two distinct relational contexts, which certainly overlap yet must remain distinct in determining the terms for relationship. The improbable theological trajectory and intrusive relational path of the embodied whole of Jesus vulnerably addressed human persons in his relational language and not the prevailing referential language of the human context. The basis on which the terms for relationship are defined will determine what human ontology and function emerge, and thereby what persons emerge and how relationships unfold. This determining process is irreversible for both the human person and the human condition. Whole human ontology and function emerge from the relational terms in likeness of the Trinity, while reduced human ontology and function emerge from referential terms in unlikeness of the Trinity. For the relational outcome that distinguishes the person in God’s relational likeness, it is vital to understand the relational language of the Word.

Previously we discussed what is basic to this relational language, implied in all communication, that directly expresses three relational messages implicit to what is communicated by the sound of the voice, gestures on the face or choice of words. These relational messages are vital to help us understand the significance of the content in the

message communicated—most importantly what Jesus communicated to his followers in the short narratives available to us, particularly in his call “Come, follow after me....” To review, these messages communicate:

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

The content alone of the words “follow me” easily become redefined by our terms, as demonstrated by prevailing inadequate interpretations for discipleship. Yet, even though the first disciples initially did not understand Jesus’ relational language sufficiently, they had to have experienced some level of his relational messages to make such a radical change (not necessarily redemptive change) in their lives to simply leave everything and follow Jesus. The Gospels’ narratives did not detail this but it is implicit in Jesus’ relational language and messages. If we do not directly receive his relational messages, we become detached from the person distinguishing his call, and consequently relationally disconnect from the qualitative innermost of persons (his, ours, others) in relational likeness.

Besides within the surrounding context, the deeper significance of the Word’s words emerges within the relational context constituted by what the Word says of himself, or about other(s) or the relationship together, implied in his communication. The relational nature of the language and the messages from the whole Subject of the Word are irreducible and nonnegotiable for the relational outcome constituted by the Word, in and from the beginning, of the relationships together necessary to be whole, God’s relational whole only on God’s relational terms. This relational dynamic from outside the universe is vulnerably present and relationally involved with the unfolding of the Word to define and determine the whole nature of his message conjointly in the gospel and in his call.

The Trinity’s relational involvement in the two relational contexts (within God and with others) still involve the trinitarian relational context of family, and how God does relationship is consistent for both contexts. Moreover, in both contexts God still functions by the trinitarian relational process of family love. The enactment of family love, however, in the latter context requires a different relational process. Understanding the different relational processes is critical for our whole knowledge and understanding of the Trinity and trinitarian uniqueness, and inseparable for whole understanding of how we need to do relationship with the whole of God and with each other together to be whole.

For the whole and holy God to engage in relationship with us involves a very distinct relational process appearing both paradoxical and incompatible, which illuminates what matters most to God and therefore how God does relationships. In ultimate relational response to the human condition “to be apart,” the Father extended his family love to us in the embodied trinitarian person of the Son (Jn 3:16-17). Yet, unlike how the trinitarian persons love each other in the Whole by a “horizontal” relational process between equals, the inherent inequality between Creator and creature necessitates a vertical relational process. This vertical process would appear to preclude the Trinity’s intimate involvement in relational oneness (*en eimi*) as family together to be whole; that is a logical conclusion from interpreting this process separated from the whole relational context and process of God. Additionally critical to this vertical equation, the incompatibility between the holy God and sinful humanity compounds the difference of inequality between us. The perception of God’s ultimate response from a quantitative lens might be that God reached down from the highest stratum of life to the lowest stratum of life to bridge the inequality, which certainly has some descriptive truth to it yet is notably insufficient both for understanding the Trinity and for an outcome beyond this intervention—for what Jesus saves us *to*.

More significantly, God pursues us from a qualitatively different context (holy, uncommon) in a qualitatively different process (eternal and relational) to engage us for relationship together only on God’s terms in the trinitarian relational context of family and process of family love. That is to say, unlike the Trinity’s “horizontal” involvement of family love, God had to initiate family-love action vertically downward to us in response to our condition “to be apart” in order to reconcile us to come together in compatible relationships *en eimi* the whole of God, relational wholeness together. The mystery of this response of God’s relational grace can only be understood in a vertical process, which must be distinguished not only from the “horizontal” relational process of how the Trinity loves among themselves, but also from any horizontal process implied (and imposed on God) in the reductions of this vertical process. These reductions are signified by renegotiating relationship with God on our terms, for example, as human shaped friendship with Jesus (contrary to Jesus’ intimately involved friends, Jn 15:15), or by illusions and simulations of closeness. This subtle renegotiation of terms—functionally, not necessarily theologically—pervades Christian and church practice (cf. the early disciples and the churches in Jesus’ post-ascension discourse, Rev 2-3). Yet, without God’s family-love initiative downward, there would be no compatible relational basis for God to connect with us or for us to connect with God, both initially and ongoingly.

In this qualitative relational process, the whole and holy God can only love us by a vertical relational process because of the inherent inequality between us. God can only do relationships as God, which Jesus embodied, and never on any other terms, specifically ours, which points to our not having ontological oneness (*heis eimi*) with God. Nevertheless, in spite of God’s obvious distinguished ontology and superior position and authority, in loving us downward the Son came neither to perpetuate nor to expand the quantitative and qualitative differences between us, though his working assumptions never denied the extent of those differences. Nor did he come to condemn us to or bury us in those differences (Jn 3:17), which Paul clarified theologically (Rom 8:1). In the qualitative difference of God’s family love, the whole of Jesus vulnerably

disclosed how God does relationship for relationship together to be whole, which the Spirit's relational work extends for us to experience this primacy of reciprocal relationship further and deeper to completion. It is vital for us to understand the implications of this qualitative relational process engaged by the whole of God (cf. Jesus' footwashing)—both in our relationship with the Trinity and in our relationships together as church, then in our relations with others to embody the good news of whole relationship together.

For the eternal and holy God to be extended to us in family-love action downward required the mystery of some paradoxical sense of “reduction” of God (cf. Jn 17:4-5), suggesting a quantitative-like reduction (not qualitative) of God that appears incompatible to the whole of God. The action of God's family love downward underlies the basis for the functional differences in the Trinity revealed to us in the Scriptures—functional differences present in the Trinity even prior to creation yet differences only about God in relation to us (Jn 3:16, cf. Rom 8:29, Eph 1:4-5, 1 Pet 1:2, 1 Jn 4:9-10). These differences among the trinitarian persons appear to suggest a stratified order of their relationships together. Jesus indicated that “the Father is greater than I” (*meizon*, greater, larger, more, Jn 14:28) only in terms of quantitative distinctions for role and function but not for qualitative distinction of their ontology. There is indeed a stratification of function in the Trinity, yet any differences in their functions have significance only in the relational process of enacting family love downward to us. Their functional differences correspond to the economic Trinity, and Scripture provides no basis for a stratified order of relationships in the immanent Trinity in eternity. In other words, their functional differences are provisional and cannot be used to define the relational ontology of the totality of God. To make that application to the transcendent triune God can only be an assumption, the theory of which reflects the limits of our biased lens. What the embodied whole of the Word of God vulnerably disclosed helps us understand the Trinity sufficiently to preclude such an assumption.

As the Word of God who created all things, the Son embodied the most significant function of subordinating himself to extend family love downward (as Paul highlighted, Phil 2:6-8). God's initiative downward in the Son, however, must be distinguished from a view that the transcendent God needed an intermediary (i.e. Jesus) to do this for God—a form of Arianism that claims Jesus is less than God in deity, being or substance (*ousia*). Despite any apparent sense of quantitative reduction of God to enact family love downward, the incarnation was the nothing-less-and-no-substitute God revealing how the whole of God does relationship. This subordinate action of family love is further extended downward by the Spirit as the Son's relational replacement to complete what the Son established (Jn 14:16,18,26).

The relational context and process of God's focus on human persons (even before creation) and involvement with us (during and after creation) compose the functional differences in the Trinity necessary for God to love us downward. Each of the trinitarian persons has a distinct role in function together as the whole of God to extend family love in response to the human relational condition. Thus it is in this relational context and process that the Trinity's functional differences need to be examined to understand the significance of trinitarian uniqueness. There are two approaches to the Trinity's differences that we can take. One approach is a static and more quantitative descriptive account of their different functions and roles in somewhat fixed relationships, all

composed in referential terms. For example, gender complementarians use this approach to establish the primacy of an authority structure within the Trinity that extends to marriage and usually to church. Meanwhile, many gender egalitarians use the same approach but come to different conclusions about the meaning of the Trinity's functional differences—sometimes even to deny them; the primary focus remains on human leadership and roles also, though who occupies them is open to both genders.

The other approach to the Trinity's differences is more dynamic and qualitative, focusing on the relational process in which their differences occur. While this approach fully accounts for the different functions and roles in the Trinity, the relational significance of those functions involves how each of the trinitarian persons fulfilled a part of the total vertical relational process to love us downward as the whole of God, not as different parts of God. This is a pivotal distinction distinguishing God's relational work of love being vulnerably involved with us, from merely God's referential work of redemption to save us from sin. In this qualitative approach, the primary significance shifts from authority (or leadership) and roles to love and relationships. When churches assess their practice in terms of likeness of the Trinity, they need to understand which approach to the Trinity they use. For example, the successful and highly regarded churches in Ephesus and Sardis certainly must have had an abundance of leadership and role performance to generate the quantitative extent of their church practices, yet Jesus' post-ascension discourse exposed their major deficiency in the whole of God's primary function of love and primacy of whole relationship together (Rev 2-3). And, as Jesus clarified and corrected in this discourse, central to a church's assessment is the awareness of the influence of reductionism—the influence that narrows down qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness, notably to the limits of the quantitative and the secondary.

Understanding the relational significance of trinitarian differences requires more than the descriptive accounts of authority and roles; this is an observation made in referential terms. The more dynamic and qualitative approach by necessity goes beyond this to the qualitative whole of persons and relationships and the dynamic process in which they are involved to be whole and not fragmentary. This requires the theological framework that redefines persons not based on what they do (notably in roles) or have (namely authority) but on who and what they are in qualitative significance together, thus understanding relationships as a vulnerable process of the relational involvement in family love (as at Gethsemane) between such whole persons (unreduced by what they do or have) and not as relationships based merely on authority and roles (essentially reductionist distinctions, erased by Jesus' claims with the Father). Jesus' call composes only these persons and relationships. These qualitative relationships help us understand what is necessary to be whole as constituted in the Trinity, and whereby persons and the church are to live whole in likeness of the Trinity—which requires a compatible theological anthropology congruent with this theological trajectory and relational path, and the persons and relationships together composing them.

When our relationships are defined and examined merely on the basis of roles, the focus is reduced to the quantitative definition of the person (at the very least by what one does in a role) and a quantitative description of relationships (e.g. a set of roles in a family) according to the performance of those roles. This is usually in a set order for different roles (as in a traditional family) or even mutually coexisting for undifferentiated roles (as in some non-traditional families). Yet this limited focus does not account for the

variations that naturally occur in how a person sees a role, performs that role and engages it differently from one situation to another; for example, compare Jesus' initial prayer at Gethsemane of not wanting to go to the cross (Mt 26:39) with what he had clearly asserted in various situations earlier. Nor does this narrowed focus account for the dynamic relational process in which all of this is taking place—the process necessary for roles to have relational significance; for example, examine Jesus' intimacy with the Father at Gethsemane and assess its significance for his role to die on the cross.

Moreover, when primacy is given to the Father's authority and role to define his person and also to constitute the relationships within the Trinity, this tends to imply two conclusions about the Trinity—if not as theological assumptions, certainly in how we functionally perceive God. The first implication for the Trinity is that everything is about and for primarily the Father (an assumption congruent with patriarchy); the Son and the Spirit are necessary but secondary in function to serve only the Father's desires. While there is some truth to this in terms of role description to extend love downward, the assumed or perceived functional imbalance reduces the ontological oneness (*heis eimi*) of the triune God, the ontological One. Interrelated, this imbalance created a further assumption or inadvertent perception of the Son's and Spirit's roles being “different thus less” (as in identity deficit) than the Father's, thereby operating in stratified relationships preventing the relational oneness (*en eimi*) necessary for the whole of God, the relational Whole. This points to the second implication for the Trinity, that such primacy of the Father also tends to imply a person who exists in relationships together without interdependence and essentially self-sufficient from the other trinitarian persons—similar to the function of individualism in Western families. This unintentional assumption or perception counters the ontological One and relational Whole by reducing the relational ontology of God as constituted in the Trinity, the innermost relational nature that is at the heart of who, what and how the whole of God is.

These two implied conclusions (or variations of them) about the Trinity are problematic for trinitarian theology, notably when integrated with the whole of Christology. They also have deeper implications for our practice of how we define persons, how we engage in relationships together, and how these become primary for determining the practice of church, and in whose specific likeness our persons function and our church practice is—the three inescapable issues for ontology and function. While the priority of the Father's authority and role must be accounted for in the revelation available to us, our understanding of trinitarian functional differences deepens when examined in the relational context and process of the whole of God and God's thematic response to the human condition in the vertical process of love. God's self-revelation is about how the whole of God does relationship as the persons of the Trinity in response to us for relationship together in God's whole—the ultimate disclosure and response of which were embodied by the whole of Jesus. The keys for whole theology and practice emerge within this complete Christology.

In his vulnerable involvement of family love, Jesus confronted the relational human condition and restored persons (e.g. from reductionist human distinctions) to qualitative wholeness from inner out in relational terms in the relational likeness of the Trinity as God's own family. This was demonstrated in his relational interactions, for example, with the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:7-26), Levi (Mk 2:13-17), Zacchaeus (Lk 19:1-10), the prostitute (Lk 7:36-50), Martha's sister Mary (Lk 10:38-42), including his

mother Mary and beloved disciple John while on the cross (Jn 19:26-27)—vulnerably evidencing the qualitative innermost of the whole person in the qualitative image of God.

The ontological One and the relational Whole, which is the Trinity, is what the whole of Jesus embodied in his life and practice throughout the incarnation. Though unique in function by their different roles in the whole of God's thematic relational response to the human condition, what primarily defines their trinitarian persons are not these role distinctions. To define them by their roles is to define the trinitarian persons by what they do, which would be a qualitative reduction of God to quantitative parts or aspects. This reduction makes role distinctions primary over the only purpose for their functional differences to love us downward, consequently reducing not only the qualitative substance of the Trinity but also the qualitative relational nature distinguishing God and its significance of what matters most to God, both as Creator and Savior.

For whole knowledge and understanding of God, role distinctions neither define the trinitarian persons nor determine their relationships together and how they do relationships with each other. God's self-disclosure is about God's relational nature and function only for relationship together. As disclosed of the persons of the Trinity, namely in the narratives of Jesus, the following relational summary can be made:

The Father is how God does relationship as family—not about authority and influence; the Son is how God does relationship vulnerably—not about being the obedient subordinate; the Spirit is how God does relationship in the *whole*—not about the helper or mediator.

In their functional differences, God is always loving us downward for relationship together—to be whole, God's relational Whole.

The primacy of whole relationship together distinguishes the ontology and function of the Trinity. Anything less and any substitutes of the Trinity give primacy to secondary aspects, however important that aspect may be to the gospel. Therefore, we cannot utilize how each trinitarian person discloses an aspect of how God does relationship in loving downward in order to make reductionist distinctions between them, by which to eternally define their persons and determine their relationships, and by which we determine God's likeness in our persons and relationships. The consequence of such a reductionism of God alters the embodied whole of God's theological trajectory and relational path, with repercussions reverberating to the innermost. This reduces the primacy of the whole of God's desires, purpose and actions for redemptive reconciliation from our relational condition as well as ongoing tendency "to be apart." Furthermore, this reduction removes trinitarian uniqueness from the relational context of the eschatological big picture and from its relational process constituted by the primacy of how God does relationship within the Trinity and thereby in relationship to us. The shift from this primacy of the relationship of the Trinity reduces who, what and how God is and thereby can be counted on to be in relationship, that is, reduces the righteousness of God. The gospel then shifts away from this primacy and the experiential truth of whole relationship together to a referential truth of a truncated soteriology (only saved from sin without saved to God's whole). What irreducibly constitutes this nonnegotiable primacy in the Trinity's ontological One and relational Whole is how they function in their relationships *in* the whole of God *as* the whole of God and *for* the whole of God. This functional-

relational oneness of the whole of God is not signified and cannot be constituted by their authority and roles. Primary function in the distinctions of authority and roles would not be sufficient to enable Jesus to say seeing him was seeing the Father, therefore would be inadequate for God's whole ontology and function and our ontology and function in likeness.

This primacy of whole relationship together in the Trinity is irreducible to human contextualization and nonnegotiable to human shaping of relationships. The integral relationship of the Trinity is the righteousness of God that Jesus clearly defined as primary for his whole followers to seek first in God's kingdom-family to distinguish them from reductionism (Mt 6:33, cf. 5:20). The emphasis on authority and roles, however well-meaning, does not give us this primacy for relationships together to be whole as family in our innermost, nor is it sufficient to reconcile us from being apart—even if our relational condition “to be apart” only involves relational distance minimizing intimacy in our relationships. The further relational consequence of this emphasis strongly suggests relational and emotional orphans functioning in church as orphanage—no matter how successful and well-respected church practice is, as clearly exposed in the churches in Ephesus and Sardis by Jesus' post-ascension discourse for ecclesiology to be whole (discussed in Section II). Jesus disclosed definitively that this is not the likeness of the Trinity by which his church functions to be whole—at best only an ontological simulation and an epistemological illusion.

As the embodying of the whole of God and God's thematic relational action, Jesus is the relational and functional keys to the likeness of the Trinity necessary for the experiential truth of his gospel and its relational outcome in the relational significance of his church family. His declaration to be in the Father and the Father in him (*en eimi*) was not simply to inform us of the whole of God (*heis eimi*) but to provide the primary means to relationally know and experience the whole of God and relationally belong in God's family. As we understand this complete Christology, we more fully understand the deeper significance of his designation as “the only One.” This primacy of whole relationship within the Trinity is distinguished only by their intimate communion and family love (Jn 3:35; Mk 1:11, Jn 5:20, Mt 17:5, Jn 14:31). Relationships of intimate communion and family love are both sufficient and necessary to constitute the whole of the triune God (*homoousios*) as well as to define the significance of the trinitarian persons (*hypostasis*) and to determine their integral relationships together (*perichoresis*). This intimate communion of family love is what matters most *to* God because it illuminates what's innermost *in* God and distinguishes what's most significant *of* God—not authority, different roles, unique functions—and what the whole of God saves *to*. This is the depth of what “the only One” foremost calls us to experience in relationship together *en eimi* with the Trinity, the relational Whole, and on this irreducible and nonnegotiable basis expects his distinguished followers to live *heis eimi* with each other for the ontological oneness of his church family in likeness of the Trinity, the ontological One—in fulfillment of his formative family prayer (Jn 17).

Therefore, our intimate relational involvement of family love signifies both the relational oneness with the Trinity in ongoing communion in the life of the triune God, and the relational and ontological oneness of God's family as church living to be whole in likeness of the relational ontology of the Trinity. This relational oneness is not about a structure of authority and roles, or a context determined by such distinctions, but oneness

only from the function of relationships in the intimate relational process of family love. These ongoing dynamic relationships of family love, however, necessitate by its nature the qualitative innermost of God (Mt 5:8) and thus relationships only on God's terms (Jn 14:21; 15:9-10; 17:17-19). Intimate communion with the whole of the triune God cannot be based only on love, because God is holy. This relationship requires compatibility of qualitative innermost, and therefore the need for our transformation in order to have intimate relationship with the holy God. God's love downward does not supersede this necessity, only provides for it. Further interrelated, the whole of God's relational work of grace constitutes the redemptive reconciliation for our relationships in his family to be transformed to equalized and intimate relationships together necessary to be God's whole on God's whole relational terms, that is, in relational likeness of the whole of God

In creation, God constituted the human person in the image of the qualitative innermost of the whole of God signified by the function of the heart, not in dualism but in wholeness (Gen 2:7). The trinitarian persons and human persons in likeness cannot be separated or reduced from this qualitative innermost and still be defined as whole persons. This wholeness signified by the heart is what the Father seeks in worshippers (Jn 4:23-24) to be in his presence to experience him (*horao*, Mt 5:8), and what the Son searches in church practice to be whole (Rev 2:23). This primacy of the heart challenges the level of our qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness and our assumptions of theological anthropology. The qualitative significance of the heart is an integral necessity for the primary definition of the person from inner out, both trinitarian and human, not the secondary definition of what they do (roles) or what they have (authority) from outer in, and therefore is vital for both human ontology and the ontology of the Trinity.

Complete Christology provides the keys necessary for trinitarian theology and thereby for theological anthropology to be whole. The Cappadocian fathers (between 358-380) formulated the initial doctrine of the Trinity by distinguishing the trinitarian persons (*hypostasis*) from substance (*ousia*) to clarify relationality; but they advanced the person as ontologically more important than substance in order to give priority to the relationality of the triune God—establishing a social trinitarianism—though for the Cappadocians their persons were based on begottenness and spiration. While this significantly countered the prevailing idea of God's essence as unrelated (or nonrelational), complete Christology does not allow reducing the importance of the qualitative substance of God—that is, the innermost of God who functions from inner out in the primacy of the heart. Jesus vulnerably disclosed his person and the innermost of his heart interacting together in relationship with the Father to make definitive both as necessary to define the whole of God (the ontological One) and the relationships (threeness) necessary to be whole (the relational Whole). In other words, God's whole relational terms compose only the primacy of both intimate and equalized reciprocal relationship together.

This lack of understanding the ontological One and relational Whole in trinitarian theology creates a gap in understanding the Trinity and as a result a gap in human function and church practice based on likeness of the Trinity. Complete Christology provides whole understanding of the qualitative significance of God to more deeply

understand the relationality of the Trinity.¹² In trinitarian theology, the predominant explanatory basis for relationality has been the Greek idea of *perichoresis*: the interpenetration of the trinitarian persons in dynamic interrelations with each other. The importance of *perichoresis* is certainly critical for our perceptual-interpretive framework (notably of Western influence) and it may be a conceptually more complete term to define the ontology of the Trinity. But this idea of relationality needs further and deeper understanding because it lacks the functional clarity to be of relational significance both to more deeply know the whole of God and to intimately experience who, what and how God is in relationship together. The Eastern church, rooted in trinitarian theology from the Cappadocians, appears to lack this functional clarity in their ecclesial practice based on the Trinity.¹³ If this is accurate, I would explain this as primarily due to the functional absence of the whole person in their relationships together as church—given the reduction of *ousia* inadvertently diminishing the function of the heart and as a result unintentionally minimizing intimacy together. This shape of relationship together would not be the likeness of the Trinity. The whole of Jesus provides this clarity in how he vulnerably functions with his person in relationships throughout the incarnation—signifying his intrusive relational path—for which he holds his church accountable by family love as demonstrated in his post-ascension discourse on ecclesiology to be whole (summarized in Rev 3:19).

Without this clarity to establish relational significance, our Christian life and practice function less relationally specific in involvement with the whole of God—though the intention may be there—and as a result we function as persons and practice church apart from (lacking involvement in) the relationships necessary to be whole as God’s family constituted in the Trinity, even though the idea may be understood. The lack of functional clarity has immeasurable ramifications for how the human person is perceived in the image of God and how our persons together were created in likeness of the Trinity, both of which are necessary for *imago Dei*. And the absence of clarity diminishes how those persons in God’s image function in relationship together necessary to reflect the Trinity’s likeness, as well as to represent God’s whole and build God’s family—all counter to Jesus’ prayer distinguishing persons (both ours and God’s) in the human context (Jn 17:20-23). This lack of the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God opens the door to and tends to result in ontological simulations and epistemological illusions of the whole with reductionist substitutes from the human shaping of relationships together—the prevailing condition even in our churches and academy today. This is not the door that Jesus’ relational and functional keys open, as he told the church in Philadelphia (Rev 3:7), which is why Jesus still knocks on many church doors for relationships together to be made whole—just as he did with the church in Laodicea (Rev 3:19-20).

The need for our fuller and deeper understanding of the Trinity goes beyond to be merely informed about God, which *perichoresis* tends to do. We need this whole

¹² For a broader development of this trinitarian theology, see my overlapping studies *The Person, the Trinity, the Church: the Call to be Whole and the Lure of Reductionism* (2006), and *Sanctified Christology: A Theological and Functional Study of the Whole of Jesus* (2008), online at <http://www.4X12.org>.

¹³ For a modern Eastern view conceptualizing personal being as a communal ontology of the Trinity and the church, see Eastern theologian John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985).

understanding (*synesis*) to experience the whole of God for relationship, as the early disciples' lack with Jesus demonstrated (Jn 14:9). This is the only purpose of God's self-disclosure vulnerably embodied in the whole of Jesus, making complete Christology the necessary antecedent for trinitarian theology. In the incarnation, the whole of God ultimately emerges and converges for this relationship together, which Jesus intimately disclosed in functional clarity and experiential truth: to be relationally involved with God as whole persons together in the whole of God's family constituted in and by the Trinity. Jesus' call is composed by this relational language and terms. The whole experience of this relational reality of God's whole without reduction of its relational truth (e.g. to referential truth) has been the integrating theme of the Trinity's relational response to our human condition "to be apart" from the whole from the beginning in the primordial garden. Indeed, the whole of God's desires were formulated even before creation to restore us to the whole in the new creation, to be completed by the Spirit in God's eschatological plan concluding with the Son partaking of the last Passover cup at the ultimate table fellowship (cf. Mk 14:25).

As the Son fulfilled his earthly function to vulnerably embody God's family love downward to constitute his whole followers in the whole of God's family, his relational replacement, the Spirit, extends this family love by his reciprocal relational work to bring their new creation family to its ultimate relational conclusion. Trinitarian uniqueness emerges and integrally unfolds in complete Christology, which establishes the relational significance of the Spirit and his reciprocal relational work: as 'the presence of the ontological One and relational Whole' who continues to be vulnerably involved in relationship to distinguish and raise up to completion whole persons in whole relationships together in the qualitative image and relational likeness of God (2 Cor 3:17-18). Our theological anthropology cannot ignore the third person of the Trinity (to be fully discussed in the next chapter) but must also engage this person ongoingly in the relational epistemic process for the knowledge and understanding necessary integrally for the whole of God and for the whole human person (Jn 15:26; 16:13-15; 1 Cor 2:9-16) and for persons together in wholeness (Eph 2:19-22).

Distinguishing Our Person in Jesus' Call

Jesus calls persons to be distinguished from human contextualization, which means that without exception, option or negotiation his followers "do not belong to the world" even as they both live and intrude in the world (Jn 17:14-19). His deep desire for our persons is to experience the innermost of his joy as the relational outcome of deeper and deeper intimate relationship together belonging as his family—congruent with his prayer (Jn 17:13) and as he shared about intimacy together (Jn 15:11, cf. 3:29). Yet, this intimacy together cannot be experienced if the innermost of our person (signified by our heart function) is fragmented by human contextualization, and therefore is divided between him and the world. The *ek-eis* relational dynamic—our primary identity composed "out of" any human contextualization and lived "into" human contexts—which distinguishes the persons in Jesus' call, requires a strong view of sin that must include sin as reductionism. Without being forgiven for our sin of reductionism and redeemed from its effects, our person and relationships are rendered by default to reduced ontology and

function; and even with our good intentions and efforts as Jesus' followers, this condition becomes our default mode in our practice. The relational consequence for these persons called to be whole is not to be distinguished in our innermost from our surrounding human contexts—the human contexts in which we are called to live in whole ontology and function and thereby to make whole.

Being undistinguished from human contextualization today has become an unspoken identity crisis for our person and relationships. If this commonly unnoticed or ignored crisis remains unaddressed, it renders us unavoidably to reflecting, reinforcing or even sustaining the human condition by default. We cannot continue to depend on our assumptions in our theology and practice but must have them clarified and corrected in order to distinguish our person and relationships central to Jesus' call.

The person in whole ontology and function cannot be distinguished without knowing, understanding and experiencing the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God. As Job learned and theological anthropology needs to learn in relational terms, this knowledge and understanding are only accessed and received in the relational context and process of God's communicative action (the relational language of God's revelation, Job 42:3-6). God's self-disclosure is whole-ly distinguished solely in whole relational terms by the embodied Word as Subject person, who engaged the improbable theological trajectory and intrusive relational path (Jn 1:14,18) that constituted the vulnerable presence and relational involvement of the whole of God for our experience in relationship. That is to say, the relationship of God is distinguished and thus experienced only by relationship together from inner out signified by heart level involvement, therefore by intimate reciprocal relationship equalized in wholeness (as Jesus prayed, Jn 17:3, 6-8, 20-26). It is solely within the relational context and process of God's communicative action disclosed by the whole of Jesus that the image and likeness of God is understood and experienced in whole relational terms, not as mere knowledge in fragmentary referential terms. Anything less and any substitute of this person in our theological anthropology will be insufficient, and even distorted, to define and determine our person created in God's image and likeness—unable to distinguish the whole person in God's context ("not of the world") who is distinct from the human context while in it. Moreover, to understand and experience this whole ontology and function in relational terms requires—without reduction or negotiation—reciprocal relational involvement with Jesus' person in "Follow after the whole of me," therefore also with the Father's person in family together, and with the Spirit's person for the relational conclusion.

In other words, theological anthropology cannot be discussed in whole terms unless the person is first experiencing the relational outcome of whole ontology and function with the Trinity. This is neither optional nor reducible to an overly christocentric theology and practice. Accordingly, this relational outcome does not emerge from a theory, nor is there integral significance in our theological anthropology apart from this vulnerable involvement of our whole person (signified by primary function of the heart not mind) in the primacy of relationship with the whole of God's vulnerable presence and relational involvement—that is, not mere association with God (e.g. engaged on the referential level of the mind) but the compatible response to God's that is congruent with God's relational context and process for reciprocal relationship together. This is the only person distinguishing theological anthropology in whole ontology and function, and

whom our theological anthropology can distinguish in God's context composing Jesus' call.

Job's discourse on the person in God's context was composed with speculation, educated guesses if you wish. There were limits to his knowledge to understand what was indeed distinguished (*pala*) beyond the human context (Job 42:3), which required his epistemic humility to engage the relational epistemic process with God for necessary epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction. This is the responsibility of theological anthropology that, by its theological nature, it must fully assume in order to *pala* the person in God's context.

Distinguishing the person in our theological anthropology depends on 'the presence of the Whole' in relational terms to jointly constitute theological anthropology's whole ontology and function as well as to expose any of its reduced ontology and function in our theology and practice. From the beginning, therefore, theological anthropology is the relational outcome of the integral dynamic of God's creative action and relational response of grace constituting the whole of God's presence and involvement to define and determine human ontology and function in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the Trinity. Based on the ongoing presence of the ontological One and relational Whole, it should be unmistakable also from the beginning to the present that anything less and any substitute of this whole is not theological anthropology but a distinctly different 'humanistic anthropology': namely, anthropology shaped and constructed by the epistemic limits of the human context and by the hermeneutical, relational and ontological constraints of the human condition. These limits and constraints are interrelated but the influence of the latter is notably the relational consequence of human self-determination explicitly or implicitly apart from God's context (cf. "to be desired to make one wise"), which results in anthropomorphic and anthropocentric human ontology and function lacking wholeness.

Theoretical models of the human person (e.g. generated by physical and social sciences) are at best constructed by incomplete knowledge—without even accounting for a biased hermeneutic lens—and thereby are insufficient to understand the human person and cannot be the basis for our theological anthropology (as Job learned). According to its nature, theological anthropology clarifies and integrates the knowledge of the human person illuminated by the Creator and magnified by the embodied Word for the integral significance necessary to understand the whole of human ontology and function. The heuristic epistemic process of theological anthropology, therefore, inevitably involves deconstruction of other models of the human person in order for the epistemic clarification and hermeneutic correction needed to distinguish the whole person—which includes our models of the person and relationships that reflect more the influence from human contextualization. Also, within theological anthropology discourse past and present, I include dualism (body and soul), nonreductive physicalism (with the primacy of supervenience), and their emergent variations, in the category of models of reduced ontology and function needing deconstruction, epistemological clarification and/or hermeneutic correction.

Whether humanistic anthropology (e.g. from science) has validity in any aspect of human ontology and function is contingent on its compatibility and/or congruence with theological anthropology. Moreover, regardless of some aspect of humanistic anthropology having validity, it can only serve to support theological anthropology and

by itself cannot be definitive of human ontology and function. Due to the nature of humanistic anthropology's limits in its epistemic process, its results are merely based on fragmentary knowledge and thus understanding that can never be complete and therefore whole (as physicist Hawking learned about the universe, noted previously). Humanistic anthropology, however, can be useful in the heuristic process—for example, to help integrate the physical outer with the qualitative inner yet without determinism—which God uses in the relational epistemic process to help us understand the theological anthropology of whole ontology and function.

This epistemic and methodological distinction is critical for the unmistakable nature of the person in our theological anthropology to be distinguished from humanistic anthropology. The latter at best can only be secondary to the primary emerging from and constituted by God's relational context and process. On this relational basis alone can our theological anthropology be distinguished and, thereby, whole-ly distinguish our person's ontology and function in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God—nothing less and no substitutes.

If we are to integrally understand Jesus' call and respond reciprocally to him, we cannot accept anything less and any substitutes of the persons (his, ours, others) distinguished in his call. Nor, with such reductions, can we expect to be whole persons, live as whole persons in intimate and equalized reciprocal relationships together, and to make whole persons and relationships in the human context. Persons in reduced ontology and function are witnessed in would-be disciples, who reduced Jesus' person, theirs or others even with good intentions. Thus, the assumptions of their theological anthropology were always clarified and corrected by Jesus in order for the redemptive change necessary that transforms persons and relationships from inner out. Such redemptive change, with its interrelated processes of transformation and reciprocity composing Jesus' call, necessarily involve a complete Christology with a full soteriology and a functional pneumatology, in coherence with an ecclesiology of the whole and a congruent missiology, all of which together cohere in an eschatology progressing to the relational conclusion (not mere event) of the whole of God's thematic action since creation. The whole relational outcome with its conclusion completes the Trinity's relational work of grace with the whole of the new creation.

In his whole relational terms, Jesus calls us to "Come" to nothing less and no substitutes in order to be distinguished whole in God's image and likeness—without being optional for our person and relationships or negotiable to our terms.

Chapter 6 The Irreplaceable Replacement Person

He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and *share* it with you.

John 16:14

From the beginning, God's presence and involvement have been an open question—starting with “Did God really say that?”—that God's people have dealt with in one way or another. This commonly-experienced struggle has been the fact despite the reality of the incarnation, in which God's presence and involvement were whole-ly distinguished by the unmistakable Face of the irreducible Subject of the Word.

A major cause of the lack or absence of relational connection with the whole of God's presence and involvement had to do with his followers' theological anthropology. Jesus consistently addressed (and confronted) our reduced ontology and function; and then he ongoingly distinguished the whole ontology and function that are necessary for the outcome of reciprocal relationship together in wholeness, both with God and God's family. As our theological anthropology is epistemologically clarified and hermeneutically corrected by the complete Christology embodying Jesus, we may also need further clarification and correction in our theology and practice so that they are whole-ly distinguished as trinitarian—that is, by no less than the whole of God.

When Jesus was close to his physical departure from the earth, he rightly assumed that his followers would not struggle with staying relationally connected with God's presence and involvement, and thus not have to live as relational orphans. He based their reciprocal relational connection with the whole of God on the experiential truth and reality of the trinitarian person who was to continue, extend and bring to completion his relational work on earth (Jn 14:16-18).

After the incarnation, the experiential truth of God's presence and involvement has been vested primarily (not solely) in the person of the Spirit. It is only the Spirit's reciprocal relational work that fully unfolds the constituting relational work of Jesus as his relational replacement (Jn 14:26; 15:26; 16:7-15). As Subject Jesus made unmistakable in relational terms, a complete Christology by necessity composes the primary presence and involvement of the Spirit, and together the trinitarian persons integrally constitute the whole of God for our theology and practice to be whole. The Father's imperative to his Son's followers once again urgently challenges, if not confronts, us to “Listen to him!” (Mt 17:5) in all his relational words, without being overly christocentric. Any imbalance in our perception and understanding of God actually fragments the presence and involvement of the whole of God, and thereby distorts the gospel and its relational outcome.

The Spirit is neither an option available to followers of Jesus nor a resource at our disposal as Christ's body-family in the twenty-first century. Yet, if we acknowledge or pay attention to the Spirit at all, he is likely the least understood and most misappropriated of the persons of the Trinity. Throughout Jesus' vulnerable presence and

relational involvement, the Spirit dwelled (*meno*) with Jesus together (Jn 1:32; 3:34; Lk 4:1,14,18) to constitute the improbable relational context and process of the whole of God. On this relational basis, the relational work of the Spirit is irreplaceably the necessary relational means who constitutes theology beyond the referential terms of the probable in the relational epistemic process to the improbable. The Spirit provides the needed hermeneutic for the embodied Word's whole theological trajectory and relational path (Jn 14:26; 15:26). This necessitates going beyond mere acknowledgement of the Spirit. For our theology to go further and deeper than self-referencing we need to honestly examine our theological assumptions of pneumatology. The gospel and its relational outcome that Jesus embodied in whole are contingent on who the Spirit is and what his function is.

Just as Jesus identified the Spirit as the integral key to what unfolds after his ascension (Jn 14:16-18,26; 15:26; 16:8-15; Acts 1:4-5, 7-8), Paul confirmed the Spirit as that key and affirmed his reciprocal relational work as the innermost of God's presence and involvement (1 Cor 2:9-16; 12:3-13; 2 Cor 3:17-18; Rom 8:9-16; Eph 1:13-14; 2:22). The synthesis of Jesus *into* Paul and their gospel of wholeness and its relational outcome of the new creation family unfold only in our whole understanding of the Spirit. Accordingly, as we transition from 'God's relational context and process to transformation' (Section I of this study) to 'the relational outcome of wholeness' (Section II), the composition of this outcome pivots on the Spirit—the irreplaceable replacement person.

The Person Missed or Misunderstood

The title of this chapter not only assumes the Spirit as person—not an *it*, for example, as a force or power—but demands both the perception of the Spirit as person and the understanding of the Spirit as person in order for the integrity of God to be distinguished whole. That is to say, the triune God from beyond the universe is revealed to us distinguished as trinitarian persons: Father, Son and, equally, the Spirit, distinguished from the limits of the human person yet nevertheless distinguished as persons who are present and involved as Subject in reciprocal relationship together. Anything less and any substitutes of their persons reduces the integrity of the Trinity to be whole, and fragments relationship together in wholeness, and thus what we can know and experience of God.

This perception and understanding of the Spirit's person are indispensable both to know the whole of God as personal Subject (not an Object in referential terms), and to experience the Trinity's presence and involvement that are distinguished vulnerably in the trinitarian persons only for intimate relationship together as God's whole family (Jn 14:17,23; Eph 2:22). For the reality of this relational outcome, Paul makes it a relational imperative "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit" (Eph 4:30). And Paul certainly was focused on grieving the person, not an *it* of whatever force or power.

As noted above, the Spirit's presence and function dwelled (*meno*) with the embodied whole of Jesus together to constitute the trinitarian relational context of family and relational process of family love in ongoing reciprocal relational involvement with the Father—an irreducible relational dynamic ongoingly integrated through post-

resurrection and into post-ascension. While the Spirit is certainly an integral member of this triangulated context and process, his person and function in the Trinity tends to be minimalized and often functionally ignored. When given attention, what we tend to pay attention to are various functions related to the Spirit without the involvement of his person. This reduces both the Spirit as an integral person in the Trinity and consequently the Spirit's involvement as person in relationship together with the Father and the Son. The functional repercussion, if not theological conclusion, from this is a binitarian view of God focused on the Son alone with the Father. When the Spirit is reduced from personhood, the Spirit's person is lost in the whole of God, thereby relegating the Spirit at most to some dynamic between the Father and the Son—for example, a de-personalized dynamic of “love.” Yet, the Spirit grieved like the other trinitarian persons, and this makes evident his involvement as a person (Isa 63:10, Eph 4:30).

Moreover, reduced from personhood, the Spirit only functions apart from the primacy of relationships; and without this primacy what the Spirit does no longer has the qualitative significance of relational work, thus only involves the quantitative aspects such as guiding in cognitive truth, providing spiritual gifts and empowering to do things. Whatever reduction or variation takes place, the relational consequence for the Spirit is to be the missed Person, the forgotten Person, or even the lost Person in the whole of God. This then puts God on a different theological trajectory and relational path.

It is critical to understand: when the Spirit is reduced from personhood, the Spirit's function is without relational significance; and this condition implies a condition about Jesus. This is a condition in which the Spirit serves a Jesus who has been reduced to his teachings, principles and example in an incomplete Christology for a truncated soteriology with a fragmentary ecclesiology that is not whole. Essentially, however, the Spirit can be no less in substance and no more in significance than what, who and how Jesus is. Their theological integration composes the extent of our perception and depth of understanding of God. Pneumatology is conjoined to Christology and is contingent on it. In other words, as Jesus goes so goes the Spirit. When the whole of Jesus embodies the whole of God and vulnerably discloses the whole and holy God only for relationship together to be God's whole, then the Spirit's person, presence and function extend the relational Whole as the ontological One constituting the Trinity with the same qualitative substance and relational significance as the Son to complete our relationship together in God's whole. This was the what, who and how of the Spirit that the whole of Jesus definitively disclosed.

In Jesus' vulnerable interaction with the Samaritan woman at the well in which he intimately disclosed God's strategic shift, he offered her living water (Jn 4:10,14). While he continued on to disclose the Father's intimate desires for communion in relationship together, we must not overlook the relational significance of the living water. Later, John's Gospel informs us that the living water is the Spirit (Jn 7:38-39, cf. Rev 22:17). Jesus did not reduce the Spirit from personhood with the metaphor of living water; that would have reduced his own person since the Spirit dwelled with him in relationship together. Rather, Jesus disclosed to the Samaritan woman the strategic shift of God's thematic relational action, in which the living water pointed to the Spirit's person who together with Jesus constituted the trinitarian relational context of family and trinitarian relational process of family love. In conjoint involvement, they functionally and relationally embodied God's strategic shift for intimate relationship together. Therefore,

Jesus opened to her access to the whole of God for relationship together with all the trinitarian persons. Though the Father was highlighted in this interaction, all three trinitarian persons were extended to her. And in Jesus' definitive disclosure, we must not overlook or reduce this reality:

1. The emerging person of the Spirit integral to the whole of God for relationship together.
2. The emerging relational significance of the Spirit's person in Jesus' salvific work, whose relational significance further increased integrally for what Jesus saves us *to*.

This ongoing two-fold relational reality evidences the Spirit's function as the irreplaceable person.

The increased relational significance of the Spirit's person emerged as Jesus' salvific work approached the critical steps to its climax. Jesus disclosed to his disciples in his so-called farewell discourse, not in referential terms but using relational language to communicate that his whole person embodied the Truth for relationship with the Father—relationship together as the whole of God's family (Jn 14:6). After startling them with the intimate disclosure of the Father (14:9-11), he further disclosed in relational terms that the Spirit's person will soon replace his person as this truth (14:17, later 15:26; 16:13). Jesus' relational language is crucial to fully understand both *what* is replaced and *who* replaces. Without this understanding we are limited to assumptions from an incomplete Christology, which then re-forms the gospel from its transformation to wholeness.

Jesus as the Truth was always for the purpose of relationship and functioned only for relationship together to be the whole of God's family (see Jn 8:32,35-36). As discussed previously, his well-known relational communication on the truth is usually taken out of its relational context of God's family by reducing the truth to the cognitive aspects of propositional truths and referential doctrine. Additionally, Jesus' own person tends to be separated functionally (not theologically) from his teachings, thereby reducing the qualitative whole of his person to such quantitative parts of him that disciples follow in a reductionist discipleship without relational significance to his whole person (contrary to what 8:31 makes definitive, and Jn 12:26 makes imperative). Jesus' whole person embodied the Truth only for relationship together in God's family; and this is *what* is replaced.

This is *what* Jesus focused on when he disclosed "I will ask the Father and he will give you another" (Jn 14:16). The term "another" (*allos*) means another of equal quality, not another of different quality (*heteros*). The Spirit then is defined by the Son as of the same qualitative substance and as equal to himself, that is, as whole person in full personhood; this is *who* replaces. The Spirit's person as truth needs to be understood in function as the Son's relational replacement whom the Father gave as "another" in lieu of the Son; Paul later described them in a relational sense as interchangeable (2 Co 3:17-18).

Therefore, '*who* replaces' needs to be in conjoint function with '*what* is replaced' to maintain compatibility and congruence with the whole of Jesus and to have continuity of his relational work. The Spirit's whole person functioned in the trinitarian relational context and process as the Son's relational replacement and as the relational extension of the Father only for relationship together as God's family (Jn 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-15).

Therefore, as *who* replaces, the Spirit of truth must not be reduced from personhood to no longer be *allos* of the whole of Jesus. As *who* replaces *what* is replaced, the Spirit's person as truth cannot reduce truth from the relational significance of Jesus as the Truth. Just as the Truth cannot be reduced to his teachings and referential knowledge, the Spirit's function must not be reduced to merely a guide in referential truth, a helper, counselor, or empowerer for the individual. When the Spirit is utilized only for these ends, these become reductionist functions and a misuse of the Spirit's person. Contrary to common practice, the Spirit is not a mere resource at our disposal. Jesus defined the Spirit as *who* replaces *what* is replaced: "the Holy Spirit...will remind you of all that I have said to you" (14:26), "the Spirit of truth ...will testify on my behalf" (15:26), "he will not speak on his own but will speak whatever he hears...take from what is mine...all that the Father has is mine...and declare it to you" (16:13-15). Therefore, Jesus conclusively disclosed the whole of the Spirit's person with the same functional and relational significance as his person: the truth and self-revelation of the whole and holy God only for our relationship together to be whole as God's new creation family in likeness of the Trinity.

The whole of the Spirit's functional and relational significance emerges and converges with Jesus' defining enactment of family love: "I will not leave you orphaned" (14:18). The Spirit's person with full personhood in the relational ontology of the Trinity completes this family love to make functional our relationships together in likeness of the Trinity and on this basis to consummate Jesus' formative family prayer. The whole functional and relational significance of the Spirit's relational work integrally involves convicting of sin, redeeming and sanctifying for what Jesus saves us *from*; in the same process, by the nature of *what* is replaced, the Spirit's work is further integrated with reconciling, transforming and perfecting what Jesus saves us *to* for our relationships together to be the whole of God's family, and for us together to live God's whole and to make God's whole in the human condition throughout God's eschatological plan. For church function to be in likeness of the Trinity, it must (*dei*) by its nature ongoingly practice in relational cooperation with the Spirit. Therefore, as *allos* for the Son, the Spirit of truth is and functions in the following:

1. The *functional truth* only for this relationship together.
2. Only the *experiential truth* for this relationship together to be whole.
3. The *relational truth* for this relationship together to be only God's whole on only God's terms.
4. And accordingly, the only *definitive truth* for our relationships together to be Jesus' church and not relationships in a mere gathering of relational and emotional orphans signifying a virtual orphanage.

Furthermore, as Jesus disclosed, "the Spirit of truth...will guide you into all the truth...and he will declare to you the things that are to come" (Jn 16:13): "guide" (*hodegeo*, lead, explain, instruct) us in all the above truth for relationship together to be whole, and conjointly "declare" (*anangelo*, declare freely, openly, eminently) to us the big picture "to come"; the verb *erchomai* (to go, to come) implies motion from the Spirit's person to the person of the Son who is to come (cf. v.14), the relational process in which the Spirit is directly involved (as indicated by *erchomai* in Gk middle voice). Yet

this language is not about informing us in referential terms, because God's truth and self-revelation are communicated in relational language only for relationship. As the 'who replaces', the Spirit's person is only involved in *what* is replaced. The Spirit's disclosure is only about the unfolding, completing and concluding of the whole of God's new family in God's eschatological plan and final thematic relational action in response to the human condition to be whole. Eschatology (doctrine of last things) functionally emerges with the Spirit and involves the relational process of the Spirit's reciprocating movement (*erchomai*) to the Son for only this eschatological relational conclusion, not a mere eschatological event. Hence, the Spirit of truth additionally functions as follows:

5. The *eschatological truth* for church function within the big picture to be in likeness of the Trinity in movement to our ultimate communion as family together with the whole of God consummated by the Son's return.

For church function to be in likeness of the Trinity both in its immediate life and practice 'already' and conjointly within God's eschatological big picture 'not yet', it must ongoingly engage the whole of the Spirit of truth in reciprocal relationship and not assume the Spirit's work in unilateral relationship.

If we reduce soteriology to only what Jesus saves us from, or we lack whole understanding of what Jesus saves us to, then we will not take seriously the relational significance of never being left as orphans. This would mean that we neither have adequately understood the truth of the Spirit nor have integrally experienced redemptive reconciliation with the embodied Truth in relational progression to the Father (as Jesus made imperative earlier, Jn 8:31-32, 35-36). Complete Christology involves Jesus' full salvific work for adoption to relationally belong to the whole of God's family as the Father's very own daughters and sons in transformed relationships together. Adoption (however the term is perceived) is the trinitarian relational process of family love to be constituted together in the trinitarian relational context of family. The Father replaced the Son with the Spirit's person to consummate his family so that we would not have to live in the relational condition as orphans. Jesus also disclosed that the Spirit's definitive feedback (*elencho*, to expose, rebuke, refute, show fault, convince, convict, Jn 16:8-11) directly addresses the barriers to relationship together—namely our sin of reductionism, our difficulties in counting on God (for relational righteousness) in Jesus' embodied absence, and our unawareness and susceptibility to reductionism's counter-relational work promoted by Satan. Without the functional and relational significance of the Spirit's person in our church life and practice, we have no other basis and means to be God's relational whole on God's relational terms. Moreover, without embracing the Spirit's *eschatological truth*, a church struggles to find its place, purpose and function beyond itself locally to the whole of God's family in the eschatological big picture.

The personhood of the Spirit signifies that the Spirit's presence engages us in *interpersonal* relationship, and that the Spirit's function is involvement with us in reciprocal *interpersonal* relationship. The relational work of the Spirit's person is not unilateral but only in cooperative reciprocal involvement with Jesus' followers as family together. Despite his embodied departure, Jesus conclusively declared the ongoing truth of his church family not having to experience the relational condition of orphans only because the Spirit would replace him to extend and complete the relationships together

necessary to be the whole of God's new creation family. Yet, the mere presence of the Spirit's person engaging us in interpersonal relationship is not sufficient for this relational outcome and conclusion; it is necessary for this outcome but not sufficient for it. This is a critical distinction that the church must keep in focus about the Spirit's involvement, both for its necessity and the nature of its sufficiency to be family together.

That is to say, the Spirit's person is present to be involved in relationship that by nature must be reciprocal relationship together—not unilateral relationship, not optional or arbitrary relationship, nor relationship negotiable to our selective terms. Accordingly, Jesus' intended relational outcome of the Spirit's involvement extending his relational work is contingent on our compatible reciprocal involvement in the relationship; in this limited sense, whether the Spirit's relational work is sufficient can be in part measured by the extent of our relational reciprocity. This is not to say that we are the significant cause of the outcome of the Spirit's relational work, but only to indicate that the Spirit does not work unilaterally and impose any outcome or conclusion on us as in power relations. This cooperative-bilateral relational approach is evident in the metaphor of the Son knocking on church doors, not breaking through them to impose himself, for relationship together to be whole (just as he knocked on the church door in Laodicea, Rev 3:20)—which also needs to inform how church leadership is approached (cf. Mk 10:42-44). Consequently, though the Spirit's person is always vulnerably present and ongoingly relationally involved intimately with us, the Spirit's person can be missed, ignored or even forgotten specifically in functional and relational significance to render the Spirit's presence and involvement without significance, and hereby causing the Spirit's person to grieve.

To ignore the whole of the Spirit's functional and relational significance, or even to inconsistently pay attention to the Spirit's person—including misusing the Spirit's person with selective reductionist functions—must be understood clearly as consequential for church life and practice. The main consequence is unavoidable. When our focus ignores or pays attention to the Spirit in this narrowed way, we are using the very lens from which orphans are the relational consequence and orphanage-gatherings emerge—however unintentional and despite good intentions—which nevertheless is contrary to the Son's defining enactment of family love not to leave us in that relational condition. Such reduced ontology and function, both for the person and persons together as church, are unable to be whole with God, to live whole together in the world, and to make whole the human condition.

Christology is not complete without this integral pneumatology, nor can soteriology be full, ecclesiology be whole and eschatology be functionally clear without the Spirit of truth—the *allos* ('who replaces', 'what is replaced') person never forgotten by nor apart from the Father and the Son. This is the ontology of the whole of who, what and how God is: ongoingly vulnerably present and intimately involved with us only for whole relationship together. This is the ongoing involvement with us intimately in family love, by which the Trinity holds us ongoingly accountable to be in likeness, just as the Son clearly made evident for church practice to be whole (Rev 3:19). And Jesus, in post-ascension, ongoingly makes this reciprocal response the relational imperative for the new wine table fellowship of his church (Rev 3:20) because his relational replacement remains (*meno*) in the reciprocal relationship necessary to complete the new creation family.

The Whole of Paul Distinguished by the Spirit

The whole of Paul's gospel and the whole in his theology integrally emerged from the embodied whole of Jesus. Furthermore, and equally significant, this distinguished wholeness of Paul unfolded only from the relational outcome of the Spirit's reciprocal relational work. This relational process is critical to account for by Paul's readers. We should not look for a unity in Paul's thought and theology within his letters until we understand where Paul is coming from, that is, what primarily defines and determines his life and practice. Without this understanding of Paul, any apparent unity and coherence will either be imposed on Paul by his readers or remain elusive to them. The congruence in Paul's life and practice to his purpose and thus his coherence were composed in cooperative relationship with the Spirit. This is the often missed-understood and forgotten trinitarian Person, whom Pauline scholarship has neglected or conveniently minimalized.¹ Paul, however, depended on the Spirit to further unfold, develop and bring to completion the whole of God's thematic relational response to the human condition in the eschatological big picture—including the relational outcome 'already' of the new creation family constituted by the Spirit, that is at the heart of Paul and distinguished his ecclesiology to be whole.

Prior to the Damascus road Paul's theology and practice were on a different theological trajectory and relational path than the triune God, which evidenced "a veil" hanging over his whole person that distorted his interpretive lens and prevented intimate relational connection with his God (as in 2 Cor 3:14-15). He received epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction from his pivotal encounter with Jesus that removed the veil. This process of transformation from inner out removing the veil was composed by Jesus and ongoingly constituted by the Spirit to make whole Paul's theology and practice (2 Cor 3:16-18; Rom 8:6-16). Therefore, the Spirit was irreplaceable for Paul, first in relational terms for his practice and then on this experiential basis in his theology.

Paul was focused on and concerned for communicating theology that illuminates the good news and constitutes the relational outcome of whole relationship together—perhaps also articulating their doctrinal clarity but not formulating a systematic theology. While these concerns involved the historical Paul, they emerged from the relational Paul who constituted the theological Paul in the relational epistemic process with the whole of God, notably with the Spirit. This vulnerable involvement signified the relational Paul without the veil qualitatively determining the functional significance of the theological Paul without the veil; therefore, to have whole understanding of Paul's theology also implies a contingency to understand this relational Paul. In this relational epistemic process without the veil, what emerged was not his theological speculation and theory from bottom-up but God's vulnerable self-disclosure from top-down in the whole of God's relational context and process, distinguished clearly from human contextualization and terms. What unfolded in Paul's theological systemic framework and integrated his theological forest was the relational embodiment of the *pleroma* (fullness, complete, i.e.

¹ As one exception to this urgent discussion on pneumatology, see the exegetical study by Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994). See also Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Holy Spirit—in Biblical Teaching, through the Centuries, and Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 70-130.

whole) of God (Col 1:19; 2:9-10). In the relational epistemic process with the whole of God, the theological Paul (unified with the relational Paul) was restored to whole knowledge and understanding in the relational context and process of God's communicative action, specifically, as relationally embodied by the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:6) and relationally extended by the Spirit (1 Cor 2:10-13). The relational outcome was the wholeness of Paul who was taken from partial knowledge and understanding to whole knowledge and understanding to compose the whole in his theology. This included both understanding signified as the grasp of meaning (not its density but its intensity, cf. Eph 3:18-19) and wisdom signified as the understanding of the whole, God's relational whole (cf. *synesis*, Eph 3:2-4; Col 1:9).

Since Paul's theology was first his experiential truth of this good news, theology for Paul was always inseparable from function and can never be reduced to conventional theological discourse (notably in referential terms). The relational discourse, jointly theological and functional, in Paul's letters puts together (*syniemi* for *synesis*) the theological basis for the truth of the whole gospel (Eph 3:4-6; Col 2:2-3), by which he also engaged in the deconstruction of ontological simulations and epistemological illusions from reductionism (e.g. Gal 1:6-7, 11-12; 5:6; 6:15; Rom 2:28-29; Col 2:4,8-10; 3:10-11) and, when possible, engaged in their reconstruction/transformation to be made whole (e.g. 1 Cor 3:21-22; Gal 2:11-14; Phlm; cf. Eph 2:14-18). The relational outcome of Paul's theological engagement is the integrated dynamics of the theology of wholeness, relational belonging and ontological identity—the relational outcome 'already' and the relational conclusion 'not yet' in the whole of God's relational context and process vulnerably embodied by the Son in *pleroma* Christology for *pleroma* soteriology, and ongoingly being completed by the Spirit.

Paul's only concern, both theologically and functionally, is for the irreducible embodiment of the *pleroma* of God to be further relationally embodied and extended in nonnegotiable ontology and function for the inherent human need to be fulfilled and the human problem to be resolved. This further embodying vulnerably involves the whole ontology and function of those who relationally belong to Christ in reciprocal relationship without the veil. In the experiential truth of Paul's theology, how does the relational progression of God's relational dynamic of grace and *agape* involvement become embodied from the *pleroma* of God to the *pleroma* of Christ (his church, Eph 1:22-23) and continue in its eschatological trajectory for the relational conclusion of the gospel of wholeness? And according to the experiential truth of the whole of Paul's person and the whole in his theology, how do persons belonging to Christ—by necessity both as individual persons and as persons together in God's family—engage in this relational progression *with* God and accordingly participate *in* the whole of God's life to the relational completion of whole relationship together? These questions require theological answers but more significantly involve the ongoing practice of whole ontology and practice, with nothing less and no substitutes.

This qualitative process of embodying and its relational process of participation deeply involve the theological dynamics that are whole-ly integrated in Paul's theological forest to *pleroo* the communicative word of God—thereby illuminating the embodied *pleroma* of God who is relationally from God, and now in relational extension for God (cf. Col 1:25; 2:9-10). And for Paul, the Spirit is the key to the wholeness of this relational process.

A prevailing presence in the systemic framework of Paul's theology that pervades his theological forest is *pneuma* (spirit). The presence of *pneuma* is in both ontology and function, both in God's ontology and function (1 Cor 2:10-11; 3:16; 2 Cor 3:6,17; Rom 8:11; 1 Tim 3:16) and for human ontology and function (1 Cor 6:11; 12:13; 2 Cor 1:22; 3:6,18; 7:1; Rom 8:11; Eph 2:18,22). What is *pneuma* for God and what is *pneuma* for human person?

In terms of God's ontology and function, *pneuma* is not *what* but *who*, though Paul does not specifically call the Spirit a person. Yet Paul implies personhood for the Spirit by identifying the Spirit as having a will to decide and using it (*boulomai*, 1 Cor 12:11), who also can be "grieved" (*lypeo*, afflicted with sorrow, distressed, mournful, Eph 4:30; cf. Heb 10:29), and, moreover, who bears witness to us of our family status (Rom 8:16). The Spirit's grief, for example, is over not being engaged in reciprocal relationship together (cf. Eph 2:22), which is not an anthropomorphism but signifies the whole of God's being and relational nature. This identification is the *who* of a person, the person of the Spirit, who is also vulnerably present and relationally involved. This does not imply, however, that Paul was a trinitarian in the later sense, though his theology certainly provides definitive basis for trinitarian theology.

As noted earlier about trinitarian theology, essentially from the fourth century into the twenty-first, we have observed one aspect of God emphasized over another (e.g. the oneness of God or the divine threeness), and some aspect of God reduced (e.g. God's substance [*ousia*] or the persons/personhood [*hypostasis*] of God), as well as redefined or ignored (e.g. as "begotten" or the relationality of the Trinity). If not in the theology most certainly in function, these perceptions and interpretations critically affect how we define God's ontology and function—notably in the relational nature of the whole of God. However, much of this theological difficulty can be resolved or prevented if trinitarian theology emerged first and foremost from complete Christology, not fragmentary aspects, and thereby better put together (*syniemi*) the whole in Paul's theology needed for the whole knowledge and understanding (*synesis*) of any theology of the whole of God.

Since Paul was no trinitarian, his purpose and responsibility to *pleroo* the word of God was not to theologially clarify the Trinity or to develop theological concepts like *homoousios*, *hypostasis* and *perichoresis*. His purpose was more functional and distinctly relational in order to make definitive the gospel as whole without any reductionism. Within his purpose—which emerged from his own experience being clarified and corrected—Paul instead epistemologically clarified the whole of God and hermeneutically corrected human shaping and construction of theological cognition, challenging theological assumptions that were either limiting or reductionist. Therefore, Paul indeed took Judaism's monotheism beyond its limited knowledge and understanding, and he extended the Jesus tradition into the depths of the whole of God. In making relationally functional the *pleroma* of God, Paul focused also in making relationally definitive the whole of God in the relational presence and relational work of the Spirit.

In *pleroma* Christology of Paul's theological forest, salvation was constituted by Christ and completed in Christ for the relational outcome of *pleroma* soteriology. *Pleroma* soteriology is the relational act solely by Christ and the relational outcome is the function solely of relationship with Christ (Rom 6:5-11); and both of these are constituted in reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit (Rom 8:11; 1 Cor 6:11; 12:13; 2 Cor

1:22; 3:6,17; Eph 1:13; 2:18,22; 1 Tim 3:16; cf. Jn 1:32-33; Lk 4:1). In the whole of God's ontology and function, *pneuma* is person, the Holy Spirit, and not to be reduced to a power, also noted by Paul (1 Cor 2:4; Rom 15:13,19). There is a dynamic interaction for Paul between the embodied *pleroma* of God and the person of the Spirit—that is, the Spirit as the functional cohort of Jesus who shares in, even constitutes, and now completes the relational work of the Son, whose embodiment (prior to and after the cross) fulfills the relational response of grace from the Father (Gal 4:4-6; Rom 8:9b-11). This is the dynamic interaction between *pneuma* and *soma* (body) of the *pleroma* of God, that is vital for integrally understanding the whole of God's ontology in its depth, as Paul claimed for the Spirit (1 Cor 2:10-11) and Jesus promised about the Spirit (Jn 16:12-15). Paul understood that *soma* without *pneuma* can be confused with or reduced to *sarx* (“flesh,” cf. Paul's polemic about the resurrection, 1 Cor 15:35-44). In this sense, *pneuma* is also a *what*—distinguished from *who*—that signifies the qualitative depth (the innermost) of God's ontology which is irreducible for God to be God (cf. Phil 3:3 and Jn 4:23-24). God's ontology is vulnerably disclosed to the innermost for us to intimately know God in whole, not a reduced or fragmented God.

Moreover, the dynamic interaction between *pneuma* and *soma* is critical for putting together the whole of God's function, as well as understanding God's ontology, in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes. *Pneuma* will not allow for the embodied *pleroma* of God to be reduced or renegotiated to anything less than and any substitutes for whole ontology and function. There is indeed mystery involved in this interaction, but for Paul *pneuma* is unequivocally the person of the Spirit. Even though Paul had whole knowledge and understanding (*synesis*) from the Spirit, he did not claim to totally understand this dynamic (1 Tim 3:16).

This dynamic interaction with the Spirit likewise points to the embodiment of the *pleroma* of Christ, the church (Eph 1:23). *Pneuma* is the person who constitutes also those who belong to Christ (Rom 8:9). In cooperative reciprocal relationship as well with these human persons, the Spirit—who functions as the relational replacement of the Son, as Jesus promised (Jn 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; cf. Eph 1:13)—constitutes persons (both individually and together) in whole ontology and function, that is, the qualitative ontology and relational function from inner out in likeness of the *pneuma* of God's whole ontology and function (2 Cor 3:17-18; Rom 8:11, 14-17). For Paul, in other words, the Spirit is not a mere Object of theological discourse but the experiential truth of Subject-*theos*, who is present in us and relationally involved with us for relationship together as God's whole family (“dwells,” *oikeo* from *oikos* and its cognates in reference to family, Rom 8:11, 14-16; 1 Cor 3:16; Eph 2:22). Paul goes beyond merely the Spirit's agency (e.g. power, instrumentality) to make definitive the depth of the Spirit as Subject's *agape* relational involvement as the whole of God (Rom 5:5). Importantly, Paul understands that the person of the Spirit is Jesus' relational replacement for the continued involvement necessary to complete the relational work Jesus constituted. When Paul speaks specifically of “the Spirit of Christ” (Rom 8:9; Gal 4:6; Phil 1:19; cf. Acts 16:7), this is Paul's shorthand-relational language implying the Spirit's relational replacement and extension of Jesus (‘*who* replaces’ and ‘*what* is replaced’). Critical for Paul, the Spirit's further involvement is irreplaceable for extending the qualitative process of embodying the *pleroma* of Christ and making functional its relational process of participation in the whole of God's life and family together (cf. 1 Cor 6:14-15a; Rom 8:11; Eph 1:23).

What emerges from this reciprocal relational involvement together with the Spirit?

Paul first addresses what does not emerge when relationship with the Spirit becomes incompatible. The issue of incompatibility, incongruity or discontinuity with the Spirit (as with Jesus and with the whole of God) hinges on theological anthropology and our assumptions about the human person. This specifically involves defining the person by what one does/has and, on this basis, engaging in relationships with both God and each other, individually and together as church. What underlies this process is an ontological deficit and reduced function of the person. Paul exposed such reductionist assumptions of theological anthropology in the church at Corinth (1 Cor 3:1-4; 4:6-7). This reductionism directly fragments the person from the dynamic interaction between *pneuma* and *soma*, thereby leaving *soma* without the quality of *pneuma* to then be confused with or reduced to *sarx*: “I could not speak to you as *pneuma* people [*pneumatikos*] but rather as people of *sarx*, as infants in Christ *without identity formation as whole persons*” (1 Cor 3:1). *Sarx* (and its cognates *sarkikos* and *sarkinos*) signifies reduced human ontology and function in Paul’s discourse, whereas *pneuma* is inseparable from *soma* in the whole ontology and function of the person.

This reduction of *soma* to *sarx* is the issue in Paul’s polemic (1 Cor 6:14-20) when he made the ambiguous claim: “Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself” (6:18). Paul’s focus goes beyond sexual immorality and is not implying that all other sins are inconsequential for human ontology and function. He is focused on the sin of reductionism that fragments *soma* from *pneuma* to reduce a human person’s ontology and function to that signified by *sarx* (6:16-17). The consequence is reductionist embodiment diminishing the whole person, which further includes the relational consequence of fragmenting the embodiment of whole relationship together (6:14-15, 19-20). Essentially, Paul argues rather that every sin a person commits is the sin of reductionism, therefore against the embodiment of wholeness. Whole human ontology and function is the inseparable embodiment of both *soma* and *pneuma* by the Spirit (Rom 8:11), which is irreducibly and nonnegotiablely embodied together by and with the Spirit in God’s whole family (1 Cor 12:13).

In Paul’s theological systemic framework and theological forest, the Spirit functions to bridge the quantitative of *bios* (including all creation) with the qualitative of *zoe*. Even more than bridge, the Spirit integrates the quantitative into the qualitative to embody irreducible wholeness and the nonnegotiable embodiment of God’s whole (2 Cor 3:18; Col 1:20; 2:9-10; 3:10-11,15; Rom 8:18-23). Without the Spirit’s integration, any aspect of creation is fragmented, unable to be whole. This is why cosmology and theological anthropology converge in Paul’s theological systemic framework, and how they are integrated in the theological dynamic of wholeness. Therefore, the Spirit’s person is inseparable from both the whole of God and God’s whole, and the Spirit’s involvement is irreplaceable for the embodying of wholeness. Anything less and any substitutes of this whole, either of the Spirit or of human persons, are reductionism for Paul, the sin of reductionism that must always be exposed and its counter-relational work confronted—whatever its form, conditions or assumptions.

In Galatians, Paul extended his polemic against these assumptions reducing theological anthropology and their broader relational consequence for human persons. While the situation in Galatians involved “false believers” (2:4) who were teaching “a

different gospel” (1:6) and “confusing you” (1:7), and had “bewitched you” (3:1), the underlying dynamic involved assimilation in human contextualization (3:2-5; 4:8-31)—an ongoing issue today needing to be addressed with Paul. Paul challenged their theological anthropology by framing the issue within the further and deeper relational context and process embodied by Christ and extended by the Spirit. Here again, the dynamic interaction between the *soma* of the *pleroma* of God and the *pneuma* of the whole of God is inseparable. If fragmented, *soma* becomes confused with or reduced to definitions from human contextualization (“elemental spirits,” *stoicheion*, basic principles, 4:9; cf. Col 2:8,20) and consequently shaped by the reduced ontology and function of *sarx* (3:3). Moreover, when fragmented, *pneuma* is reduced to mere Object, at best only in agency to do something or to help us to do something based on the reductionist self-definition of what one does: “Having started with *the person of the Spirit*, are you now *epiteleo* [fully completing your purpose] with *sarx*?”—that is, by human effort in reduced ontology and function (3:3). For Paul, this is incompatible, incongruent and discontinuous with the Spirit (5:16-17; 6:8; cf. 2 Cor 7:1)—a relational condition that even acknowledgement of the Spirit is insufficient alone to make whole.

The whole of the Spirit is received, experienced and ongoingly engaged in relationship together solely on the basis of our reciprocal relational response and involvement of trust, not on the basis of human effort shaped by human terms from human contextualization (Gal 3:5-14). The latter is consequential for the human person and persons together to be enslaved in a reductionist comparative system of human ontology and function based on quantitative human effort/possessions—the self-determination and self-justification to erase the ontological deficit—resulting in constructing false human distinctions that relegate persons to stratified relationships together in systems of inequality (3:28; 4:3, 8-9), which continues today even in churches and the academy.

This fragmentation can never be whole as long as the *who* of *Pneuma* as Subject is not engaged in relationship together within the whole of God’s relational context and process (5:16,25; Rom 8:5-6; cf. 1 Thes 4:7-8), and since the *what* of *pneuma* is divided from *soma* in dualistic ontology and function characteristic of shaping by *sarx* from human contextualization (cf. the wholeness in 1 Thes 5:23; 2 Cor 7:1). These are the consequences of assimilation in human contextualization and its defining and determining influence by reductionism. For Paul, the dynamic interaction between *pneuma* and *soma* precludes this fragmentation and duality (cf. his claim in Phil 3:3). And although throughout his letters, Paul addressed various situations involving moral and ethical issues, Paul’s readers must understand what Paul is further speaking to and where he is speaking from. As Paul addresses these situations, he goes beyond moral and ethical behavior to speak directly to the underlying and more far-reaching issue in human contextualization: reductionism, exposing reductionism as sin and confronting the sin of reductionism, and its pervasive consequence on human ontology and function. Paul was definitive and decisive about this without being shaped, diminished or minimized by human terms from human contextualization because with epistemic humility he spoke from God’s relational context in God’s relational process through reciprocal involvement with the Spirit, the integral Subject of the innermost of God (1 Cor 2:9-16, cf. Rom 8:27).

What does Paul also make definitive as the outcome of reciprocal relational involvement together with the Spirit?

What clearly emerges from ongoing relationship together with the Spirit is the functional wholeness that is incompatible, incongruent and discontinuous with reductionism pervading human contextualization, as Paul clarified functionally and theologically (Gal 6:14-16; Rom 8:6). When Paul boasts of the cross of Christ through whom he has been crucified to human contextualization (“to the world,” Gal 6:14), the *soma* of the *pleroma* of God and the *pneuma* of the whole of God are integrated and resurrected for the whole embodying of the new creation. That is, this is the embodying in qualitative *zoe* (not quantitative *bios*) and wholeness (“life and peace,” Rom 8:6), in which the *Pneuma* inseparably dwells also in mortal *soma* for whole relationship together as God’s family (Rom 8:11, 14-16; cf. Eph 2:22). The theological dynamics Paul illuminates have only functional significance for this relationship together (Eph 2:18). Apart from the function of relationship and its relational embodiment Paul’s theological clarity has no significance, both to God and to human persons for the fulfillment of the inherent human relational need and the resolution of its relational problem (Eph 2:14-16). The Spirit is present and relationally involved for the whole ontology and function necessary for the ongoing relationship together to be God’s whole—the embodying as the *pleroma* of Christ ‘already’ in relational progression to its completion in the relational conclusion ‘not yet’ (1 Cor 12:13; cf. Jn 7:37-39).

The Spirit’s relational involvement notably emerges in the resurrection, in which the Spirit’s dynamic interaction also involves us wholly (*soma* and *pneuma*) to be embodied in the new creation (new person, new life, new covenant, Rom 8:11). Involvement together in this relational process is also defined by Paul as being baptized in the Spirit (1 Cor 12:13; cf. Mt 3:11; Acts 1:5; 11:16). The theological dynamic of baptism is complex and mysterious but the relational process involved is uncomplicated yet rigorous: death to the old and raising of the new (Rom 6:3-8). Being baptized with the Spirit makes functional the redemptive change from reduced ontology and function (consequential of the sin of reductionism) necessary for the emergence of whole ontology and function (cf. Ti 3:5). The relational outcome of this relational process is the redemptive reconciliation of whole persons embodied in relationship together as the new creation family of God (Col 1:19-22; Eph 2:14-22)—“baptized into one body” without false human distinctions from reductionism (1 Cor 12:13). This *zoe*, the embodying of the new creation, emerges specifically from the relational work of the Spirit (Rom 8:11; 2 Cor 3:6; cf. Jn 6:63; Rom 8:6)—“we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13; cf. Jn 7:38-39). On this basis, Paul declares unequivocally: “Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. . . . For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God” (Rom 8:9,14); furthermore, “no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3). Therefore, the experiential truth of the theological dynamics of wholeness, relational belonging, and ontological identity functionally emerge from reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit for their experiential reality.

The dynamic interaction of the Spirit and the *pleroma* of God always constitutes ontology and function in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes. Accordingly, the reciprocal relational involvement by the Spirit is neither with only the human *pneuma* nor

with just the human *soma*. Such involvement would create a duality that fragments the person—which must be accounted for ongoingly to distinguish the Spirit’s engagement. Human *soma* without *pneuma* is a critical condition because it is a reductionism focused on the outer in that the person cannot distinguish unequivocally from *sarx*, consequently is rendered to the sin of reductionism notably in ontological simulation (as discussed earlier about Paul’s polemic beyond the situation to the underlying reductionism in 1 Cor 6:12-20). Likewise, human *pneuma* apart from involvement of *soma* becomes disembodied, which is also a reductionism focused on a subjective part of a person, not the whole person qualitatively integrated from inner out. The focus of such a person cannot distinguish from subjectivism, esoteric individualism or self-centered separatism—as often found in spiritualism, mysticism and asceticism—thus rendered to the sin of reductionism notably in epistemological illusion (cf. Paul’s polemic about reductionism in spiritual practice disembodied from the church in 1 Cor 14). This must also inform Pentecostal and charismatic theology and practice today. The Spirit is relationally involved only with the whole person (*soma* and *pneuma* inseparably) from inner out signified by the function of the heart and embodied in the primacy of relationship together (2 Cor 1:22; Gal 4:6; Rom 5:5; 8:16; Eph 1:17-18; 3:16-19). Additionally, the Spirit’s relational involvement with the whole person from inner out includes both the person’s mindset (*phroneo*, Rom 8:5) and its basis, the person’s perceptual-interpretive framework (*phronema*, 8:6). In this involvement, the Spirit transforms quantitative *phroneo* and reduced *phronema* and composes the qualitative *phroneo* (interpretive lens) in its whole *phronema* (interpretive framework). Both of these changes are necessary for the Spirit to embody persons in qualitative *zoe* and wholeness together (“life and peace”), and to function ongoingly in this new embodiment (1 Thes 5:19,23; 2 Thes 2:13; Rom 15:16).

Paul is clear about the experiential truth of the Spirit’s relational involvement. Yet, it is important for his readers to understand that by God’s relational nature the Spirit is involved in reciprocal relationship, not unilateral relationship. The Spirit’s reciprocal relational involvement implies a necessary compatible reciprocal relational response to and involvement with the Spirit—not as contingency limiting God’s relational nature but as the condition/terms for relationships together according to God’s relational nature (cf. Paul’s conditional sense in Phil 2:1; 2 Cor 13:13). Therefore, in relation to the Spirit, Paul always assumes the presence of the Spirit (e.g. 1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 1:21-22; Gal 5:5), but he does not assume that the Spirit has the opportunity to engage in reciprocal relational involvement and work, as he implies in his ongoing relational imperative (not moral imperative) “Do not quench the Spirit” (1 Thes 5:19). Certainly, the Spirit can and does act unilaterally; yet his primary concern and function is in reciprocal relational involvement with persons who “belong to Christ” (Rom 8:9) to extend and complete the whole relationship together constituted by the embodied *pleroma* of God—all of whom the Spirit also raised up together in order to functionally embody the *pleroma* of Christ as Jesus’ relational replacement.

This is the depth and breadth of the Spirit’s relational involvement with persons belonging to Christ, and the likeness of involvement necessary from those persons to be compatible, congruent and continuous in reciprocal relationship together with the Spirit. The dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes constitutes the ontology and function of the Spirit and needs to constitute the ontology and function of those in whom the Spirit

dwells. In Paul's theological forest, anything less and any substitutes of the Spirit's ontology and function are an immature pneumatology still undeveloped and needing to be whole; anything less and any substitutes of human ontology and function are a deficient theological anthropology, the assumptions of which for Paul always need to be challenged in order to be made whole. That wholeness, however, is made functional solely by the relational dynamic of *pleroma* pneumatology.

In the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes, the relational involvement of the Spirit's whole ontology and function makes functional the theological dynamics of wholeness integrated with relational belonging and ontological identity for the experiential truth of their embodiment in those belonging to Christ. The emergence of the new (wine) identity for these persons is functionally constituted only by the reciprocal relational work of the Spirit; human terms from human contextualization cannot establish the identity formation of who they are with Christ and whose they are in Christ (Rom 8:9-11). Paul is definitive that this identity is not formed by a social process but by the relational dynamic of the Spirit in reciprocal relationship together (Rom 8:12-17; Gal 5:16-26). The new creation identity constituted in this relationship together as family is neither a static condition nor a contextual characteristic, but a dynamic process of relationship together necessitating by its nature ongoing reciprocal relational involvement with each other without the veil. Paul also describes this reciprocal response as "we are debtors" (*opheiletes* from *opheilo*, Rom 8:12), that is, not in human terms and contextualization but to God's favor (indebted to a benefactor). Yet, *opheiletes* in this context should not be reduced to an obligation (*opheilo*) to fulfill. Paul is not defining an ethical mandate but illuminating, by the nature (*dei*, not *opheilo*) of God's relational response of grace, the reciprocal relational response necessary for whole relationship together. Moreover, when Paul further defines this reciprocal response by "Live by the Spirit" and "are led by the Spirit" (Gal 5:16,18), he is also not defining a moral imperative for our conduct (outlined in 5:19-24). Rather this is another relational imperative by which he further illuminates the reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit necessary for functionally constituting the new identity distinguishing who we are with Christ and whose we are in Christ (5:25).

What this reciprocal involvement with the Spirit constitutes is the ontological identity and embodying of God's new creation (Gal 5:6; 6:15; 1 Cor 12:13; Col 3:10-11; cf. 2 Cor 3:17-18). Just as *pneuma* and *soma* are inseparable for the whole ontology and function emerging from the Spirit's involvement, ontological identity and embodying of the new creation are also inseparably integrated for the wholeness made functional by the Spirit (examine Paul's relational connections: 1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:26-28; 4:6-7; Rom 8:14; 12:5; Col 3:15; Eph 2:14,18,22). And this ontological identity and embodying of the new creation are integrally based on the functional reality of relational belonging to God's family as definitive daughters and sons, the experiential truth of which only emerges from the reciprocal relational involvement of the Spirit (Eph 1:13-14; 2 Cor 1:21-22; Rom 8:14-16; Gal 4:6-7). Without the Spirit's reciprocal involvement and relational work, this identity and new creation are rendered, at best, to only ontological simulation and epistemological illusion of wholeness—simulation of whole relationship together with illusions of the whole of God (Gal 6:16; Col 3:15; cf. Rom 12:3-5; 1 Cor 3:21-22).

This relational dynamic of belonging or not belonging is either the relational outcome with the Spirit or the relational consequence without the Spirit, which Jesus made unmistakable in his promise “I will not leave you orphaned” (Jn 14:18). The term for “leave” (*aphiemi*) means to let go from oneself, essentially abandon to a condition deprived of their parents and family, which in the ancient Mediterranean world was an unprotected, helpless position. What Jesus defines here, however, is only that the significance of orphans is relational, not situational, which directly involves the condition of wholeness in relationship together constituted by the Spirit—the what and who, respectively, that Jesus *did* leave them (Jn 14:26-27; 16:33). Paul further illuminates the relational belonging emerging with the Spirit and its embodying by the Spirit, which includes the counter-relational issue of orphans, to be discussed in Paul’s ecclesiology (later in this study).

In Paul’s theological forest, along with God’s relational dynamic of grace, the Spirit’s reciprocal relational involvement is indispensable—and thus irreplaceable as with grace—for the experiential truth of the theological dynamics of wholeness, relational belonging and ontological identity. Clearly for Paul, those who are relationally involved with the Spirit in reciprocal relationship together—“who are led by the Spirit of God”—are the daughters and sons of God (Rom 8:14). Paul is not using family language merely for emphasis in a kinship-oriented context, perhaps as a hyperbole, for example, to evoke obligation in response to the Spirit. Rather Paul is illuminating the depth of the theological dynamics involved in the gospel of transformation to wholeness and clearly identifies the person who is necessary for its fulfillment and completion. In dynamic interaction with the embodied *pleroma* of God, the Spirit of the whole of God relationally extends *pleroma* Christology to make functional *pleroma* soteriology by the embodying of God’s new creation family. That is to say, the Spirit makes functional the experiential truth of the whole gospel in its relational outcome ‘already’ in whole relationship together, just as the Son prayed for the formation of God’s family (Jn 17:20-26).

What is the significance of distinguishing this relational outcome ‘already’ by the Spirit?

As Jesus’ relational replacement, the Spirit both fulfills this relational outcome ‘already’ and completes what is necessary for its relational conclusion ‘not yet’ (2 Cor 1:21-22; 5:4-5; 1 Thes 5:19-23; Rom 8:23; Gal 5:5 Eph 1:13-14; Phil 3:21). In Paul’s theological forest, pneumatology is conjoined with eschatology. Paul adds theological and functional clarity to the relational outcome already of the embodying of God’s new creation family by engaging his family further and deeper into the big picture of God’s eschatological plan framing the trajectory of God’s thematic response to the human condition (Rom 8:18-23). Just as the Spirit is the functional bridge for the quantitative of *bios* with the qualitative of *zoe*, the Spirit functionally connects the whole embodying of God’s family with all of creation, with the cosmos and those in it in order to be involved as well with the world for the redemptive reconciliation necessary to be restored to God’s whole in the innermost—as Paul also made definitive (2 Cor 5:17-19; Col 1:20), and as Jesus constituted in prayer for the already (Jn 17:21-23).

The big picture Paul paints goes back to creation and the emergence of the human condition (cf. Gen 3:17-19 with Rom 8:20). Not only human persons were enslaved in the

condition ‘to be apart’ from God’s whole but the rest of creation was also (Rom 8:20-22; cf. Gen 5:29). God’s whole also encompasses all of creation; and God’s relational response of grace to the human condition is the redemptive key for the rest of creation to “be set free from its bondage to decay” and restored to God’s whole—“obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (8:21). God’s whole is what holds together the world and all in it in their innermost. Therefore, all of creation is dependent on the relational outcome and conclusion of the Spirit’s relational involvement to raise up and embody God’s whole new creation family: “For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God” (8:19). The timing of this revealing is ambiguous in this verse but the contingency is clearly eschatological. If our eschatology involves both ‘already’ and ‘not yet’, as Paul’s did, then that new creation family ‘already’ is revealed by the Spirit’s relational involvement in those who belong to Christ (8:9), in those whom the Spirit has whole-ly embodied along with Christ and already dwells in now (8:11), and thus in those “led by the Spirit” (8:14) and the Spirit relationally constitutes already and ongoingly as the whole daughters and sons of God’s family (8:15-16).

Paul further illuminates this already/not-yet eschatological picture to provide deeper clarity for God’s family. As all of creation waits eagerly for the embodying of God’s children together, “we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom 8:23). Paul is not suggesting that the theological dynamics of redemption and adoption have not taken place, only that their functional significance is in the relational process and progression of being completed by the Spirit—who has already constituted the relational outcome for those belonging to Christ as God’s daughters and sons, and who continues to embody them for the relational conclusion ‘not yet’ in this eschatological process. Paul clarifies that the Spirit has not yet completed this relational progression, and the basis for this expectation (“hope”) is conclusive in the experiential truth already of having been both saved *from* and *to* (*sozo*, delivered and made whole in Gk aorist tense, 8:24). This hope for full completion “now” is always present and ongoing along with the already (“wait for it with patience,” v.25); yet this unequivocal hope should not be confused with ‘already’ (“hope...we do not see”), nor should it be perceived with a reductionist interpretive lens (“hope that is seen,” v.24).

As Paul clarifies the line between the already and the not yet, he understands that God’s children vacillate between them, even unintentionally or unknowingly. This happens notably when situations and circumstances are difficult. These tend to create various scenarios, drama and anxiety that can define and determine who we are and whose we are, thereby rattling our sense of belonging and straining our relational response of trust, just as Paul summarized (8:28-39). In such moments, God’s presence may seem distant and perhaps too transcendent to make relational connection with. Paul addresses the equivocation of relational connection and the ambiguity of relational involvement in those moments. With more than just his own empathy, Paul makes definitive God’s deep understanding and intimate involvement with us through the relational involvement of the Spirit (8:26-27). Especially in our deepest moments of weakness when “we do not know how to *be relationally involved* as is necessary” (Paul uses *dei* not *opheilo*, v. 26), the Spirit helps us be involved in God’s relational context and process—“that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words; and God who searches the heart, *intimately* knows what is the *phronema* of the Spirit because the Spirit

is reciprocally relationally involved with and for the saints according to *the whole ontology and function of God.*” This further clarifies Paul’s relational experience with the whole of God while in his weakness, in which Christ’s power is the Spirit’s person (2 Cor 12:9, cf. Acts 1:8; Eph 3:20). Therefore, the Spirit ongoingly helps God’s children in the relational connection and involvement with God necessary for engagement in the process of reciprocating contextualization (dynamic interaction between God’s context and human context) in order not to be defined and determined by human contextualization, whether in difficult moments or not—just as Paul’s weakness did not define his ontology and determine his function.

The already-now embodying of God’s new creation family, ongoingly functioning in reciprocal whole relationship together, unequivocally in relational progression to ‘not yet’, is the integrated relational dynamic at the heart of Paul’s pneumatology. The presence of the person of the Spirit as Jesus’ relational replacement and the Spirit’s reciprocal relational involvement must be accounted for both theologically and functionally. Therefore, Paul’s pneumatology is a theological dynamic always in integral function with an eschatology that is not either-or but both-and, both already and not yet. The significance of Paul’s eschatological picture above is to further deepen theologically the experiential truth of the whole gospel for the definitive wholeness in both the theology and function of the church as God’s new creation family. Paul’s primary concern always focused on the present from which the future will emerge—necessarily because the depth of the gospel is the sole source for responding to and fulfilling the breadth of the human condition.

In the complex theological dynamics of Paul’s theological forest, the dynamic presence and involvement of the whole person of the Spirit functions while inseparably on an eschatological trajectory. Yet for Paul, this does not and must not take away from the primary focus on the Spirit’s presence and involvement for the present, just as Paul addressed the Thessalonians’ eschatological anxiety with the relational imperative not to quench the Spirit’s present relational involvement (1 Thes 5:19). The Spirit’s present concern and function is relational involvement for constituting whole ontology and function, for making functional wholeness together, and for the embodying of the whole of God’s new creation family in whole relationship together as the church, the *pleroma* of Christ—which is why the person of the Spirit is deeply affected, grieving over any reductionism in reciprocal relational involvement together.

In Paul’s theological forest, the theological dynamic of the Spirit in wholeness is *pleroma* pneumatology, which is integral for all theology and function, not only Paul’s. Anything less or any substitute for the Spirit is an immature pneumatology, both underdeveloped and stunted, the practice of which signifies the reduction of our reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit. In such reductionism, Paul rightly defines the Spirit’s grief (Eph 4:30) because it clearly diminishes the Spirit’s relational involvement for wholeness and being whole already (“blameless,” *amemptos*, as in *tamiym*, 1 Thes 5:19,23; cf. Gen 17:1). Even the historical theology of the church’s spirituality and spiritual formation often has diminished involvement in whole relationship together reciprocally with the Spirit’s person, ironically in efforts to participate in God’s life. Any such immature pneumatology is underdeveloped or stunted and continues to grieve the Spirit. Moreover, any fragmentary efforts, even with good intentions to know God, serve Christ and participate in God’s life, by its nature

participate in reductionism with its counter-relational work, and essentially reflect, reinforce or sustain the human relational condition (cf. Mt 7:22-23; Lk 13:26-27).

Irreplaceable Connection with God in Life Together

If our gospel distinguishes the relational significance of God's relational response to the human condition, it must be congruent with the whole of God's improbable theological trajectory and intrusive relational path. If this gospel has relational significance for the human condition, it must distinguish without ambiguity in function its relational outcome of transformation to wholeness. Only the irreplaceable presence and involvement of the Spirit provides the ongoing relational connection with God necessary for the gospel and its outcome to have this relational significance. Without this relational connection, our gospel and its outcome are rendered to human shaping and thus to the epistemological illusion and ontological simulation from reductionism. Such an outcome is on a different relational path than Jesus and thereby lacks relational significance for those filling our churches—rendering them to relational orphans contrary to Jesus' promise and incongruent with the presence and involvement of the Spirit.

The primacy of whole relationship together is the theological trajectory and relational path that Jesus embodied in whole. As 'who replaces' and 'what is replaced', the Spirit's presence and involvement function only in this primacy of relationship to complete the theological trajectory and relational path of the whole of God, whose relational response 'already' resolves the human relational condition and fulfills the human relational need (as Jesus prayed, Jn 17:21-23). The relational outcome of whole relationship together as God's new family is contingent irreducibly and nonnegotiable on the Spirit's reciprocal relational work (Jn 14:16-17; 1 Cor 3:16; Eph 2:22; Rom 8:9,15-16). Without the Spirit's presence and involvement there is no relational belonging to God's family, only a membership in referential terms (negating 1 Cor 12:13); and without the Spirit's ongoing reciprocal relational work there is no intimate relational connection to participate in God's life, only an association in referential terms (contra Rom 8:9, 26-27). The primacy of whole relationship together is the innermost of God's desires, and the whole of God's presence and involvement vulnerably constitute the heart of God's family love to remove the veil for participation in relationship together Face to face to Face—relationship both improbable and intrusive. This was the experiential Truth and his relational replacement who transformed and extended into the whole of Paul.

For Paul, participating in God's life is neither precluded by a somatic limitation nor limited to just a pneumatic experience, but rather involves the relational dynamic of whole human ontology and function with the whole of God's ontology and function. In contrast, and at times in conflict, with how some of Paul's readers (past and present) have interpreted him, this relational involvement was not defined or determined by mysticism, nor was its depth esoteric and thus limited to certain individuals (cf. 1 Cor 14:36; Col 2:8). In Paul's theological forest, participating in God's life is the relational outcome that emerges from ongoing reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit.

How does this relational outcome emerge? Related to this question, I think it is accurate to say that prior to the Damascus road Paul participated (however limited by reductionism) in the life of God's *people*, and that after the Damascus road he began

participating in the life of *God*. What is the difference, and how is this difference constituted and its dynamic significance experienced ongoingly?

Participating in God's life necessitates by God's qualitative being and relational nature the following: the relational involvement of whole persons (*pneuma* and *soma*) of whole ontology and function from inner out, who are vulnerably involved by the heart with the whole of God's ontology and function, who initiates the relational process of vulnerable disclosure to them in direct Face-to-face, intimate heart-to-heart relationship together as family. As Paul indicated previously, Moses participated face to face in God's life, but it was limited (2 Cor 3:7-13; cf. Num 12:6-8). By the nature of reciprocal relationship, God's children can participate in God's life only to the extent that God participates in theirs; however, participation in God's life is never the result of unilateral human effort. In Paul's theological forest, the whole of God's thematic relational response and involvement is fulfilled by Christ and completed by the Spirit (2 Cor 3:14-18; 4:4-6). In other words, with the depth of God's whole participation, it is now insufficient for God's children to participate in the whole of God's life with anything but face-to-Face involvement compatible with God's qualitative being and congruent with God's relational nature—that glory of God vulnerably disclosed in the distinguished face of Jesus Christ's whole ontology and function (not just *soma* or *pneuma*, as some have interpreted the incarnation, but *soma* and *pneuma* together, inseparably without reduction). This is “the gospel of the glory of Christ” (4:4), the meaning of which is rendered without relational significance by the lack of reciprocal relational involvement face to Face, thereby reducing the gospel of its experiential truth.

Paul focuses all participation in “the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” first on Christ's blood and body and participating in his death (1 Cor 10:16-17) in order to participate in his resurrection (Rom 8:11,17; Phil 3:10). This integral participation involves being baptized with Christ and the Spirit for the death of reduced ontology and function and the raising of whole ontology and function (Rom 6:3-5; 1 Cor 12:13). Relational involvement with Christ and the Spirit in these theological dynamics is critical for face-to-Face-to-face involvement compatible with God's qualitative being (the whole and holy God) and thus congruent with God's relational nature. To participate in the whole and holy God's life begins with the necessary transformation of human persons integrally both to ontology in the image of God's qualitative being vulnerably disclosed by Christ (“the image of God,” 2 Cor 4:4), and to function in the likeness of the whole of God's relational nature together (2 Cor 3:18; Rom 8:29; Col 3:10). Paul defines this critical initial participation with the term *koinonia* (“sharing,” 1 Cor 10:16) and its cognate *koinonos* (“partners,” 10:18), from which our notions of fellowship and Communion come. Basically these *koin* terms define a common bond among its participants that is relational involvement definitive of having a share in something together—that is, the intimate involvement of the new wine table fellowship with the veil removed. This understanding of participation goes further and deeper than what our practices of fellowship and Communion tend to be; moreover, it goes beyond common efforts of spirituality to participate in God's life.

For Paul, the definitive relational involvement of sharing together in Christ's death is a complete participation in his sacrifice behind the curtain, which is irreducible and nonnegotiable to *koinonia* and *koinonos* in human contextualization (1 Cor 10:20-21). Accordingly, this undivided-complete participation is inseparable from sharing

together also in Christ's resurrection, by which the necessary transformation to whole ontology and function emerges without the veil (2 Cor 3:16-18) in order to wholly participate compatibly and congruently in God's life as God's whole family in relationship together (Rom 6:5; 8:11,15; Gal 4:5-6). This inner-out change from the process of redemptive reconciliation is an ongoing necessity for increasing and deepening participation in the whole of God's life. The embodying of this new creation in *koinonia* with the whole of God is both of the whole person and of whole persons together (1 Cor 10:17) in reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit (1 Cor 12:13; Eph 2:22; 4:3-4). Therefore, participating in the qualitative whole of God's life is neither limited to the intimate involvement of the individual person, nor is individual involvement sufficient by itself to constitute participation in the relational whole of God's life. Participation is complete with only whole persons together (Col 3:15; Eph 2:14-18); this challenges our theological assumptions about God, the human person, and the church. Paul makes these vital distinctions for the reciprocal relational involvement in whole relationship together both with God and with each other, which is integral to embody God's new creation family—the intimate dwelling in relational terms (not referential) for the whole of God's participation in whole relationship together (Eph 2:22; cf. Jn 14:23).

Through the relational involvement of the Spirit, participation in the whole of God's life is unequivocal in its relational outcome 'already' (Eph 2:18,22; 3:12; Rom 5:5; cf. Jn 17:23). And by reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit, participation in God's whole life in family is ongoing to its relational conclusion 'not yet' (Rom 8:14,17; Phil 2:1; 3:10)—just as Paul prayed for the church family (Eph 3:16-19) and Jesus vulnerably disclosed in his face and prayed for his family (Jn 17:26). The whole of Paul's person and the whole in his theology fight for nothing less and no substitutes of this gospel of wholeness, and thereby nonnegotiable against any and all reductionism.

As those belonging to Christ through the Spirit gather for the *koinonia* at the Lord's table to celebrate the Eucharist—that is, without reductionism to human terms shaping relationship together by human contextualization, as Paul's polemic makes indisputable about incompatible and incongruent participation (1 Cor 10:21; 11:17-22, 27)—their whole persons together deeply participate in the embodied *pleroma* of God. This integral participation does not unfold in quantitative referential terms but only in qualitative relational terms. Conjointly, their intimate relational involvement with the whole of God in whole relationship together also embodies them together in the whole ontology and function of the church, the *pleroma* of Christ (1 Cor 10:17; Eph 1:23; 3:19; 4:13). This embodying is the relational outcome of only direct participation in God's life without the veil, not from participation just in church life in front of the curtain (note Paul's polemic, 1 Cor 11:20, 29).

Therefore, the church emerges as God's new creation family only to the extent that its reciprocal relational involvement is compatible and congruent with the extent of God's participation in its life, notably now by the Spirit. Given that God's participation is solely by the relational response of grace with the theological dynamic of wholeness to remove the veil, the participation of God's children likewise can be nothing less and no substitutes. Only this whole relationship together embodies the *pleroma* of Christ in Paul's theological forest, which Paul makes theologically definitive in Ephesians for the functional clarity necessary for the whole ontology and function of the church in the relational belonging of family in contrast and conflict with a gathering of relational

orphans. The latter is the distinct alternative commonly identifying churches today from the relational connection constituted by the Spirit to distinguish (beyond human comparisons) the church in whole relationship together.

Paul was reciprocally involved with the Spirit embodying the theology and hermeneutic of the whole gospel that constituted the integral extension of Jesus *into* Paul. The theological dynamics deeply involved in this qualitative process of embodying and its relational process of reciprocal participation not only have converged and are integrated in Paul's theological forest. These dynamics, both theological and functional, are also relationally extending 'already' "by the power of *the Spirit's person* at work within us" to go beyond what Paul can only rightly describe as "abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church" (Eph 3:20-21).

At the same time, the Spirit does not function in unilateral relationship but vulnerably involved with us in reciprocal relationship together for this relational outcome. As the Spirit faithfully fulfills his relational work in righteousness for irreplaceable connection with God in life together, we are accountable to fulfill our part of the relational work in righteousness—that is, in reciprocal response with the whole of who, what and how we are in his image and likeness (as in 2 Cor 3:18).

Our reciprocal relational response with the Spirit to distinguish the gospel of transformation and its relational outcome of wholeness is under ongoing pressure to be re-formed by anything less and any substitutes from reductionism. Accordingly, we are challenged in the most basic aspects of Christian belief in both our theology and practice—perhaps challenged uniquely today in a modern surrounding context more complex than in any other period of history. Yet, any fog of modernity should not obscure our perception of the human condition shared by all of us, a condition whose essential nature as a relational condition has not changed since the primordial garden. The whole of God created the human person to be in the image of the qualitative innermost of God and created the relational design of human persons together to be whole in likeness of the Trinity; both are necessary to constitute *imago Dei*. The embodied Word as Creator fulfilled the function of this human ontology by redemptively reconciling us back to the whole of God's creation as constituted in the Trinity functioning as family.

The embodied Word didn't leave us in the dark about the Trinity's likeness. As the Light, he embodied the full significance of both the created human ontology as the whole person and the created relational ontology of persons together. As the Truth of God's vulnerable self-disclosure, he constituted his followers in relationship together as his new creation family. The whole of God's new family is signified by his church in likeness of the Trinity. Extended conjointly by the Spirit of truth, his church in likeness of the Trinity is the only church Jesus constituted, and thus the only church that has functional and relational compatibility to and congruence with the Son, the Spirit, the Father, and thus the Trinity. Anything less and any substitutes have no functional and relational significance to God and for the human condition.

We need more vulnerably to engage this whole Truth as Subject in relationship without the veil—not merely the propositional truths and doctrines of our beliefs—and start responding to the relational reality that his church in likeness of the Trinity is neither optional nor negotiable to our variations. If we hold to the truth and authority of the Word, necessarily both embodied and written, then we have to embrace the *whole* of Jesus in sanctified life and practice distinguished beyond human contextualization, which

includes his truth about his family (implied in his discourse on his kingdom-family, Lk 11:23): Any practice less than whole conjointly of the human person and persons together as church is only an ontological simulation and epistemological illusion from reductionism. We have yet to meet this challenge from reductionism.

This points to a similarity in the condition of Western churches and Eastern orthodox churches despite their different emphases and practices. Whereas Western churches tend to focus on Christ and the cross for an individual faith in church practice, Eastern churches look to the Trinity and the church as community, thus a communion with God, for example, through icons and the corporate context of church liturgy. Their focus and practice essentially represent two ends of a spectrum, yet both similarly suffer from an incomplete Christology and an ecclesiology needing to be made whole. Generally speaking, the West focuses on the work and teachings of Christ apart from the whole of Jesus' person, thus using this reductionist ontology for person and church and tending toward epistemological illusion embedded in individualism. The East sees Christ in the Trinity and thus in the church, yet their working ontology lacks the involvement of the whole person necessary for their relationships together to be whole, consequently tending toward ontological simulation embedded in their traditions of church practice. Beyond these examples, the influence of reductionism common in many church practices—including in the global South—ongoingly challenges the integrity of the whole of God's family and the relational significance of his church in likeness of the Trinity.

In this twenty-first-century world, his church is further challenged today, and the issue is who and what will significantly meet this challenge and how. All the global changes and instability experienced since the latter third of the twentieth century have created much more uncertainty in our lives, collectively and even individually—with 9/11 and the so-called war on terrorism in this century, and recently extended against Islamic State, only adding to this uncertainty. With the extent of the changes taking place around us—including repercussions from climate changes—relational changes are the most critical. Globalization has been forcing us to think more about the interrelationships beyond our provincial boundaries and comfort zones. For example, the West is faced with the increasing shift of global economic power emerging in this century to Asia (namely China and India) and needing humbly not only to acknowledge this shift but also to change for harmony with it. Additionally, emigration (voluntary and involuntary) has affected all our lives in one way or another, even in our neighborhoods and perhaps our churches. At no other time in history have groupings of persons “faced” so many other persons different from themselves than exists today; and the global projections indicate only furthering this trend. This has created a *relational ambiguity* between, on the one hand, the spreading phenomenon of globalization and, on the other, the increasing fragmentation of relationships in the midst of this diversity—the relational ambiguity of which is compounded by the virtual simulation and illusion of communication generated by electronic technology.

The church lives within this world today whether it chooses to function in it or not. Aside from physical attributes (viz. skin color, sex), human diversity is the product of human constructions (including race, ethnicity) making distinctions between persons/peoples, which, intentionally or unintentionally, effectively cause some degree of separation in relationships. What a church does with all these human differences depends

on how it lives. Churches are influenced by and participate in the human construction of distinction making. When roles, functions and spiritual gifts in church operation do not serve for relationship together to be whole but rather serve to define persons in a church, they become practices inadvertently reinforcing the counter-relational work of reductionism. The reality is that such reductionist distinctions common within church life and practice only amplify human differences making relationship together difficult and stratified.

Though the trinitarian persons fulfill different roles and functions to love us downward for relationship together to be whole, they cannot fulfill their relational purpose and have this joint relational outcome unless they function whole (*heis eimi*) in the primacy of their relationships together (*en eimi*) for the relational Whole as the ontological One—not by giving primacy to their different roles and functions. Likewise, though there are different roles, functions and spiritual gifts in the church body, we cannot use these to draw distinctions between us to define who and what we are, just as we cannot for the trinitarian persons. To define human or trinitarian persons based on distinctions of role and function would reduce their persons and create barriers to the intimacy in their relationships together necessary to be whole. For us as church, we cannot function whole (*heis eimi*) in our relationships together (*en eimi*) unless we are redemptively reconciled to transformed relationships both equalized and intimate, just as constituted in the Trinity. Having a different role, function or spiritual gift only provides us in a church family with a uniqueness (primarily quantitative) in *what we do and have* but they do not define the specialness (qualitative) in *who, what and how we are*. Christian function in Christ's church body is unique to individual persons but not special to those persons. Full Christian identity, on the other hand, which defines us as the whole of his church family is special but cannot be unique to individual persons.

This is his church in equalized relationships necessary for the intimacy together to be whole as his new creation family in likeness of the Trinity. Whether in the first century or the twenty-first, his church is called to come together in the transformed relationships to be whole, and conjointly is sent to live whole so that the globalizing world may know the relational truth of God's whole (Jn 17:23), and further sent to make whole so that this world will respond back for the experiential truth of belonging in God's whole (Jn 17:21). Therefore, his church is about the whole of Jesus in complete (neither fragmentary nor selective) Christology. His church's function is only about the ongoing fulfillment of Jesus' formative family prayer, in which the Trinity and ecclesiology converge, cohere and relationally progress to the eschatological relational conclusion—most notably but not exclusively by the Spirit.

Jesus has definitively defined and determined who and what will be significant in meeting the challenge of his church to fulfill his prayer, and how. As clearly as churches today are challenged both within its life and practice and in the world, we must make no assumptions for churches, and thus must openly consider how much churches may likely be threatened by the whole of Jesus in complete (without negotiation) Christology and Jesus' prayer, and subtly be resistant to redemptive change, while relationally uninvolved with the Spirit. Jesus in post-ascension keeps knocking on church doors, along with the irreplaceable Person, for the gospel of transformation's relational outcome to wholeness (Rev 3:20,22).

Unmistakably, then, all who profess belief in Jesus and claim to be his followers are both challenged by and accountable for the gospel of transformation and its distinguished relational outcome of wholeness. Nothing less and no substitutes! Equally important, for those who have, or at least claim to have, good news today for new life, the human condition demands for us to demonstrate the full relational significance of integrally being whole persons and living in whole relationships together that will make whole the fragmented and broken human condition. Anything less and any substitutes will be neither significant nor whole—a pervasive reality existing in churches that causes the Spirit to grieve. Furthermore, given the irreplaceable vulnerable presence and intimate relational involvement of the Spirit's person, if we do not or cannot demonstrate being and living whole in our ontology and function, in our theology and practice, then by default we reflect, reinforce or even sustain the human condition.

Indeed, just as Jesus clarified and corrected the theology and practice of churches in his post-ascension discourse for ecclesiology to be whole, “Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches” (Rev 2:8,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22).

Chapter 7 The Kingdom of God's Dwelling

Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is *here*.

Matthew 4:17

**For the kingdom of God is not *about secondary matters*
but righteousness and *wholeness* and joy in the Holy Spirit.**

Romans 14:17

The whole of God's theological trajectory and relational path in response to our human condition unfold for only one purpose: our redemptive reconciliation to new relationship together in wholeness. This outcome has been perceived as the kingdom of God, the church 'already' and the new Jerusalem 'not yet' (Rev 3:12; 21:2). Whether its reality is understood as in the present or to come, its discourse in referential terms has been a source both of diminishing our theology of primary matter (as Paul states above) and of reducing our practice to having little experiential significance—specifically of God's relational response to our human condition. It may be difficult to accept but any such good news composed in referential language can only have a referential outcome, which would not be on God's trajectory and relational path and thus not have the primacy of the relational significance distinguishing the gospel's only outcome.

In terms of the relational work composed from the beginning by God's definitive blessing (Num 6:24-26), how we experience God's response may have some variation among us. The what and the who we experience, however, cannot vary from one person to another, from one church to another. By the relational nature of God's relational response, there can only be one relational outcome to this good news. From God's definitive blessing through the incarnation and *into* Paul, the relational outcome composes 'already' God's new creation family in whole relationship together—which always involves by necessity both equalized and intimate relationships without the veil. We are saved to nothing less and no substitutes in order for our ontology and function to be whole. Therefore, we necessarily have to account for this relational outcome in our theology and practice for our gospel to be on the same trajectory and path as God's response to our human condition.

As we concentrate our focus on the gospel's only relational outcome, our theology and practice will be challenged, may also be threatened, and perhaps will be resistant to go beyond re-formation to transformation. On the one hand, limiting our focus to what we are saved from is both comforting and comfortable. Extending our involvement to be inclusive of what we are saved to, on the other hand, makes us vulnerable from inner out, requires our whole person in whole relationships, and demands our ongoing accountability for no less without substitutes (as Jesus proclaimed above). The Spirit is present and involved for the reciprocal relationship necessary to take us through this relational process together to complete the relational outcome of wholeness.

Understanding *What* Has Come

Knowing relationally *who* came remains elusive for the gospel if its experiential truth of whole relationship together is not based on the complete Christology of the whole of God. Likewise, understanding *what* has come remains ambiguous for the gospel if its outcome does not have the same relational basis. For Jesus, the *what* he saved *to* focused on the kingdom of God, which was the relational realm of his qualitative focus from outside the universe (cf. Jn 18:36) that encompasses the whole of God's whole. As he delineated his kingdom, he also by necessity clarified misperceptions and corrected misunderstanding of the kingdom (as in Lk 17:20-21)—all vital for his gospel and its outcome. Distinguishing and understanding *what* has come—that is, distinguishing it from our human shaping—has been problematic and necessitates the whole knowledge and understanding from complete Christology. An incomplete Christology is insufficient to distinguish the relationship of God from human shaping, which is necessary to delineate the kingdom in other than referential or quantitative terms.

Each of the canonical Gospels provides its evangelist's unique portrait of Jesus and his composing of the kingdom of God. Yet, none of them alone is definitive of the whole of Jesus or of the kingdom. Taken together, the whole of God in Jesus integrally emerges and the kingdom becomes definitive in the whole of God's thematic relational action embodied by Jesus for this new relationship together. Integrally understanding this in Jesus is receiving the qualitative presence of the whole of God and the relational involvement of the whole of God as Trinity.

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 raised 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.

In his hermeneutical discourse defending his salvific work, Jesus exposed a false eschatological hope of those Jews incorrectly embedded in the Scriptures (Jn 5:39-40, noted earlier). This eschatological hope was the life to come, or the kingdom of God's kingship and sovereign rule, which John's Gospel correctly embodied in the full relational context and process of the whole of God. Keeping this hermeneutic in mind, we shift to Luke's Gospel, who was concerned for a kingdom for all peoples.

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

When some Pharisees questioned Jesus about the coming of the kingdom of God, he could have replied as he did in the above discourse and with Nicodemus: "You study and teach the Scriptures but do you not understand this?" (cf. Jn 3:10) Yet, the clear implication of such a reply came in another response he gave elsewhere: "The kingdom

of God is not coming with things that can be observed, nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is,’ or ‘There it is!’ For, in fact, the kingdom of God is *within* you” (Lk 17:20-21).

The focus of Jesus’ response tends to be on “is within you.” Before, however, this can be understood, we need to address the issue Jesus raised about ‘observation’ (*parateresis*, watching closely), which includes the implication his reply involves. “Careful observation” characterized the rigorous practice of Pharisees observing their covenant code of behavior, which, more importantly, reflected the lens of their perceptual-interpretive framework operating in their approach to the Scriptures and their eschatological hope—which also reflected their underlying theological anthropology defining the person by what they do. Jesus implied (as with those in Jn 5:39) that their careful observations through the lens of their perceptual-interpretive framework only focused on the quantitative aspects of the kingdom—a process somewhat analogous to the Enlightenment’s scientific method.

Accordingly, the issue Jesus addressed about the kingdom “within you” (*en*) is less about any measured-temporal sense of the kingdom—that is, “among you collectively,” and thus is present (‘already’, realized eschatology), or “within you,” understood as merely an inward (spiritual) nature pointing to the future (‘not yet’, future eschatology). More significantly, I affirm, Jesus addressed the issue between reductionism of the kingdom to mere quantitative terms as opposed to the qualitative integrity of the whole of the kingdom’s relational significance. This is the major issue of the kingdom in its past, present and future—in Israel’s past, in Jesus’ present, in the whole of God’s thematic action in relational progression to the future—which directly involves how the Scriptures are approached, how God’s kingdom is perceived and responded to. When we also adequately address this major issue, we more congruently follow Jesus on his relational path for the outcome of what has come.

The kingdom of God cannot be reduced to quantitative aspects, though it certainly involves them in secondary ways that can never be made primary to determine God’s kingdom. The kingdom can only be defined in whole by qualitative terms, which vulnerably involves the whole person (signified by the heart), though the whole of the kingdom is contained neither in the individual person only nor spiritually within us. Conjoined with this definition, the kingdom can only be determined in function by qualitative relational terms directly involving the relationships together necessary to be whole, the whole of God’s whole in likeness of the Trinity.

This was the qualitative significance that the whole of the Word embodied to disclose vulnerably the whole of God for covenant relationship together in “the kingdom of God has come to you” (Lk 11:20). Luke’s Gospel narrates Jesus’ salvific discourses and work with the emphasis of the kingdom of God for all peoples. A Jewish bias, particularly in a reductionist hermeneutic of their Scriptures, would reduce the whole of the kingdom and preclude access by all, or at the very least stratify the access for others. Thus, it is important in Luke’s narrative accounts to interrelate Jesus’ discourses about approaching the Scriptures integrally with understanding the relational significance of the kingdom of God that has come (cf. Lk 10:21).

This interrelated focus necessitates revisiting Jesus’ demonstrative joy with the Spirit in praising the Father for “your gracious will” (*eudokia*) in “disclosing the whole of God and God’s thematic action to little children,” not to “the wise and the intellectual” (Lk 10:21). Those who represent “little children” are persons vulnerably engaged in

qualitative relational involvement with the whole of Jesus—neither distant relationally by engaging a disembodied Word, nor detached relationally by analytically observing the secondary details of the Word and God’s action, as “the wise and learned” were, incorrectly embedded in the Scriptures. The latter approach includes the referentialization of the embodied whole of the Word, which creates a hermeneutic impasse to the irreducible Subject of the Word (discussed in chap. 3). The whole of God’s self-disclosure in Jesus involves his relational context and process, in which “little children” relationally respond compatibly for the connection necessary for the relational flow of communication, as Jesus made definitive (Lk 10:22). The referentialization of the Word has been a hermeneutical issue through Israel’s history in search of the eschatological hope (10:23-24), and continues to be a hermeneutical issue today in church and academy.

“The wise and the intellectual” (in Lk 10:21) were directly associated with the “careful observation” in Lk 17:20. This evidenced both their reductionist interpretive framework imposed on the Scriptures (and on God’s self-disclosure in the Word embodied), and their reductionist perceptual framework narrowing down the kingdom of God to quantitative parameters without the qualitative relational significance of the whole accessible to all “little children.” This was earlier summarized in John’s Gospel (emphasizing the big picture) with Jesus’ disarming words in his hermeneutical discourse of his salvific work: “You search the Scriptures *but you depend on your own perceptual interpretation to signify your eternal life, your membership in the kingdom*” (Jn 5:39). Moreover, what is composed from their study of Scripture has a fragmenting impact on the kingdom by redefining its nature and integrity in two ways: (1) it creates false distinctions of who can know about God better than others, and thereby (2) establishes a comparative process that composes members in a stratified system of “better” and “less” (both implied in Mt 21:15-16).

Transposed from Old to New

When Jesus illuminated the kingdom, it unavoidably involved the redemptive change implied in “repent” (Mt 4:17, cf. 3:2)—the process from old to new, the old dying and the new rising, which necessarily involved deconstructing human shaping of God’s kingdom. We need to embrace this change in order for his kingdom to clearly emerge from any of our shaping, and thereby distinguish God’s dwelling in our midst—dwelling vulnerably and intimately. This certainly may require changes in both our theology and practice.

In Matthew’s portrait of Jesus as the Messiah, Jesus came to fulfill God’s covenant promise and the eschatological hope of Israel as God’s people, not as nation-state. Accordingly, Jesus’ kingdom of heaven had continuity from the OT (Mt 3:1-3; 4:12-17, cf. 25:34). Yet, there was also a clear qualitative distinction about this kingdom (Mt 5:3, 10, 20; 7:21; 12:48-50; 18:3; 19:14). While the kingdom of heaven was an extension of the old covenant and the fulfillment of its covenant promise, there arrived also directly with Immanuel—the vulnerably present and intimately involved “God with us”—a new and deeper covenant relationship together that he composed in the kingdom of heaven. In relational terms, Jesus fulfilled both the quantitative terms of the old covenant and its qualitative relational significance, which Jesus vulnerably embodied for the direct experience of this covenant relationship together in its new and deeper

relational process. And Jesus appeared to further associate this relational significance with his church (*ekklesia*, gathered body, Mt 16:18-19), which involved building (*oikodomeo*, to build a house, v.18, whose root is *oikos*) his household family (*oikos* and kingdom together in Mt 12:25). Building “with me” is in the trinitarian relational context of family and by the trinitarian relational process of family love to “gather with me” (*synago*, Mt 12:30, the root for synagogue, the counterpart to *ekklesia*) the family of God, both signifying and constituting “the kingdom of God has come to you” (12:28).

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

Yet, the *mysterion* of the kingdom can remain hidden even though they were vulnerably disclosed by Jesus and made directly accessible even to “little children.” This happens for two important reasons, which Jesus identified at the beginning of the above discourse with his disciples (with the parables of the kingdom directed to the crowds, Mt 13:13). First, Jesus the Messiah and the kingdom of heaven were disclosed only for covenant relationship together, not for the quantitative aspects and functional implications of his kingly rule. The latter become the focus determined by a reductionist perceptual-interpretive framework, which Jesus identified as an ongoing issue in Israel’s history (vv.13-14). Predisposed by reductionism, what they paid attention to and ignored precluded their understanding (*syniemi*, denotes putting the pieces together into a whole) and prevented them from perceiving deeply (*horao*, not merely to see but 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,” v.15) to function without the critical significance of both qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness, thereby biasing what they paid attention to and ignored. This had a direct relational consequence “to be apart” from the whole of God, to which God’s thematic relational work of grace in Jesus would respond if they opened their heart.

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 in for their experience of the truth of new covenant relationship together. This reciprocal relational involvement in his relational process is the nothing-less-and-no-substitute terms necessary for whole knowledge and understanding of the kingdom of heaven—the qualitative relational terms Jesus illuminated, which he affirmed the disciples engaged, however imperfectly, while the others did not (vv.16-17).

These terms for relationship are the terms for adherence that Jesus defined for his disciples (*mathetai*). These terms for adherence to Jesus are inherent in 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, to “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 of God and for the experiential reality of God’s kingdom to emerge. Without the function of whole relationship together in Jesus’ relational context and process, there is no experiential truth of the kingdom of God, regardless of whether the kingdom is ‘already’ (present) and/or ‘not yet’ (future).

This leads us to a further issue that makes problematic both receiving who came and responding to what has come. The pervading difficulty in the ongoing discussion to define the *what* and *when* of the kingdom appears to arise from a similar hermeneutical issue that kept the kingdom hidden from Jesus’ contemporaries. I submit that the prevailing working definition of the kingdom focused on God’s kingly rule becomes an epistemic problem when approached with a similar perceptual-interpretive framework illustrated by those in the above discourse. A primarily quantitative tendency has difficulty understanding the depth of “God reigns” and the qualitative relational significance involved, and consequently tends to reduce it merely to the function of sovereign (kingly) rule. This narrows down the relational ontology of the whole of God and essentially puts constraints on how God functions in that ontology, notably in the incarnation. For example, if the angel’s words to Mary about the child she would birth (Lk 1:30-33) are interpreted apart from the qualitative relational significance of Jesus’ whole person and his relational context and process, Jesus can only be a king who rules. This constrains the whole of Jesus and God’s thematic relational action in a ‘quantitative box’ without any further and deeper significance. This certainly has relational consequences for receiving the whole of Jesus and responding to “the kingdom of God has come to you.”

Moreover, the focus on God’s kingly rule reflects a predisposition to see God’s rule only on certain terms, tending toward our terms (e.g. as demonstrated in Jn 6:14-15).

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.

This predisposition is seen in Israel's history. God's thematic action was epitomized in their redemption from Egypt (Dt 4:32-37). Yet, God's self-disclosure in this redemptive experience was not about showing God's power and rule, but about perceiving (*ra'ah*, v.35) the whole of God ("his own presence [*paneh*, face]," v.37) and God's ongoing action for relationship together in the covenant of love (cf. 7:8-9). If God's people only focused on a reduced God, that is, on the quantitative aspects of what God did (power and rule), then their focus would always be essentially about "What have you done for me lately?" and not on the whole of God's qualitative being (the ontological One) and relational nature (the relational Whole) and relationship together in the covenant of love. This predisposition characterized their wilderness experience and pervaded their eschatological hope, consequently reducing their salvation to deliverance from situations without the relational significance of what God saves them to—the *what* that has come to transpose them from old to new.

The tendency to see God's rule only on such terms is a reductionist consequence from an imbalanced focus on God's kingly rule. The irrefutable reality is, God already sovereignly rules; as expressed in the ancient poet's reflection in Psalm 93, as Creator the Lord already and always reigns—that is a given. God does not have to prove it, though at times does demonstrate it. Even when the disciples asked themselves on the sea of Galilee, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him" (Mk 4:41), his action was not about Jesus proving he reigns, nor a great display of power of the Creator. God simply reigns—a reality that was insufficient to deeply impact those disciples and change their lives in the days ahead with Jesus, which Mark's Gospel critically portrays of the disciples.

It is also insufficient to make God's kingly rule the purpose of the kingdom and of Jesus' salvific work. God's thematic action since creation is not about ruling, and the purpose of incarnation of the Word (the one and only Son) was not to establish a king to rule. This was a discussion Jesus had with Pilate about being a king and his kingdom, which Jesus qualified by his purpose "to testify to the truth" (Jn 18:36-37). John's Gospel provides the overarching picture, to which Jesus testified (*martyreo*, witness as a participant, not mere observer) as of the transcendent and thus of the transcendent God (Jn 3:31-36), intimately making vulnerable the whole of God (*exegeomai*, Jn 1:18). His truth, accordingly only in relational terms and not referential, was for redemption to be in relationship together as family (Jn 8:31-36). As the Truth to the Father (Jn 14:6), Jesus embodied this experiential truth only for this relationship (Jn 1:14, then 12)—the only relational outcome of this good news. At that time of his farewell discourse, the disciples still had difficulty integrally understanding the whole of Jesus because they were predisposed by their lingering quantitative perceptual-interpretive framework (Jn 14:4-9). Even though earlier they had shifted from the quantitative to qualitative kingdom, they had yet to distinguish the whole of who came necessary to fully understand the whole of what has come.

When Jesus initiated the Lord's supper for the ultimate table fellowship, he illuminated that the "cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Lk 22:20). The disciples had not yet understood the significance of the new covenant for relationship together in the kingdom, since immediately after the supper they disputed about which of them was the greatest (Lk 22:24-30, cf. 13:29-30). While Jesus exposed their reductionism and constituted their relationships in the relational whole of his

kingdom, the disciples exposed their need to be changed (cf. Mt 18:1-4)—that is, the process of redemptive change in which the old dies so the new rises. Earlier Jesus pointed to the significance of the *new* with the parable of new wine (Lk 5:33-39). As previously discussed, this tends to be used incorrectly to emphasize new forms and practices, but the new only involves changed persons experiencing new relationship together (the focus in vv.34-35) that distinguished the new wine communion together of God’s kingdom (Lk 13:29-30).

The process to the new is what Jesus’ salvific work saved us to: the kingdom of God, or its equivalence in John’s Gospel, eternal life. John’s Gospel replaces “kingdom” language with eternal life, possibly in part to avoid any conflicts such language could create with Gentiles, yet more importantly to provide the further and deeper significance of the kingdom in the relational context and process of the whole of Jesus. The kingdom that had come came embodied *in* Jesus, the whole of the Word. As he told Nicodemus, the qualitative relational shape of the whole of God’s kingdom was “born from above,” not by human shaping but born new by the Spirit as the new creation in the image of the relational ontology of the whole of God, thereby made whole in new relationship together in likeness of the Trinity—just as Jesus asked the Father in his formative family prayer (Jn 17). On this basis, the kingdom of God indeed signifies more than God’s kingly rule; and Jesus embodied that significance and constituted the kingdom in the trinitarian relational context of family by the trinitarian relational process of family love for this new covenant relationship together—functioning beyond the quantitative limits of the old to intimate relationship together in the very likeness of the relational ontology (*zoe*) of the Trinity.

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

The experiential truth of who came and the experiential reality of what has come require the following: covenant relationship together necessitates reciprocal relational response and involvement, the function of which needs to be compatible with the whole and holy God from outside the universe. This was the significance of the relational process Jesus both initiated in the incarnation with the strategic shift of God’s thematic action, and made his whole person vulnerable for with the tactical shift of his salvific work. Not only had the kingdom of God come, but most significantly the transcendent,

immanent, whole and holy God was vulnerably present and intimately involved for relationship together. There is no latitude to reshape this truth and reality, nor the means to renegotiate our response.

Accordingly, this necessary reciprocal relational response and involvement are reciprocated only on the basis of the *agape* involvement of family love experienced first from the whole of God's relational work of grace in the functional shift, which constitutes both the whole person and those persons together in the relationships necessary to be whole in likeness of the Trinity. There is no other relational context and process involving the Trinity's thematic action, and only this relational context and process composes what *is* the kingdom of God that encompasses the whole of God's dwelling, vulnerably and intimately involved with us. That is, the kingdom ('already' and 'not yet') cannot be separated from the embodied whole of Jesus' trinitarian relational context and process; the whole of Jesus' person and actions (in word and deed) illuminated and distinguished the whole relationship of God constituting "the kingdom of God has come to you."

Until we integrally understand this qualitative relational nature and function of the kingdom, we cannot adequately address the present-future issue of the kingdom; nor can we fully interpret Jesus' relational words that the kingdom "has come" (*ephthasen*, Lk 11:20) and "has come near" (*engiken*, Mk 1:15). After John was put in prison, Jesus began "proclaiming the good news of God... 'The kingdom of God has come near; respond to the good news'" (Mk 1:14-15). "Proclaim" (*kerysso*) is also rendered "preach"—conventionally perceived in a role of preaching. We can either disembody Jesus' relational words about the kingdom to merely referential words (preached), which is the pervasive practice preaching has come to signify involving the referentialization of the Word. Or, we can interpret those words of the kingdom as the embodied whole of the Word in relational language. The former just transmit information about God but the latter communicate the relational messages of God in relationship.

Engiken and *ephthasen* have an abstract sense (a reduced sense) if *what* has come near, or has come, involves merely referential words (even if it includes deeds) about the kingdom. Such disembodied words would not likely constitute good news to evoke your response, especially if you expect more than words (even if they speak truth and hope). On the other hand, *engiken* and *ephthasen* have a distinguished whole sense when *what* is the *Who* has come near, and has come, to embody the very kingdom of God itself. *Who*, as Subject and not merely Object, becomes good news indeed, whom persons can receive (not merely hear words) and relationally respond back to ("repent and *trust* in the good news"). Words by themselves are not good news (or bad); embodied words become either the gospel to relationally respond back to, or the threat from "bad" news to relationally react against—both of which are played out in the Gospels' narratives. With this understanding, then the hermeneutical issue for *engiken* and *ephthasen* becomes whether Jesus' relational context and process embodying the kingdom has relational significance for the present or only the future.

Furthermore, the epistemic problem of the kingdom involves not only disembodiment of Jesus' words but also reducing his person merely to his deeds—both signifying the referentialization of the Word. Jesus' deeds (or his ministry) were certainly quantified in history, and this historical aspect is valid and necessary. George Ladd aligned the two to render *ephthasen* as a fulfillment of the kingdom of God in history (i.e.

in Jesus' ministry) as well as the kingdom's full consummation at the end of history (Jesus' second coming, parousia).² This makes the kingdom of God both present and future, which is certainly good news. Yet, this perception emerges from a reduction of Jesus' person to his deeds, and thereby becomes too quantitative and conceptually fragmentary for the kingdom of God to have significance. This is insufficient to understand the significance of Jesus' words, which was relational language, and his actions, which were salvific as God's thematic relational action—the qualitative relational function of which constitutes the kingdom of God. Both disembodiment of Jesus' words and reducing his person to his deeds create an epistemic problem to integrally understand the qualitative relational significance of the whole of Jesus' salvific action, and therefore the experiential truth of what Jesus saved us to. What Jesus saved us to is to experience the reality of the kingdom of God's present relational outcome embodied with Jesus in new relationship together, the relational progression of which comes to completion by the Spirit in the relational conclusion at the eschaton.

The shape of the kingdom of God as the whole of God's vulnerable and intimate dwelling cannot emerge from reductionism. Reductionism always counters the relationships of the whole, separating or distancing persons in the relationships to be whole—for example, by stratifying relationships in a system of inequality, which Jesus found operating in the temple and throughout the surrounding context. Revisiting the disciples' dispute about which of them was greatest, Jesus redefined the significance of ruling in relationship together in his kingdom by composing their relationships in unstratified intimate involvement together (Lk 22:24-30). 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 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.

Reductionism reshapes the kingdom of God into ontological simulations, and distorts its shape with epistemological illusions. Consequently, we need to fully understand Jesus' relational context and process for the *whole* of his kingdom to expose the presence and influence of reductionism. The only shape constituting the kingdom of God emerges from the whole of Jesus embodying the whole relationship of God for new relationship together in likeness, thereby fulfilling God's thematic relational action in response to the human relational condition "to be apart" from the whole of God's whole family.

The kingdom of God had come near even before the beginning of Jesus' ministry proclaiming the good news; Luke's Gospel provides its biographical roots. Mary's song and Zechariah's song pointed to him in their summation of God's thematic action of grace fulfilling the covenant promise of salvation (Lk 1:46-55; 67-79). As Simeon received the child Jesus into his arms, he confirmed that God's salvation and kingdom for all had come near (Lk 2:28-32), which the prophetess Anna also affirmed upon meeting the child (Lk 2:38). Then, at age twelve, Jesus took action to initiate the function for the kingdom of God that had come near (Lk 2:49).

² George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 54-78.

As Jesus began to proclaim the good news for relationship together with the whole of his person and action, the kingdom of God had come nearer. As he functioned in the trinitarian relational context of family by the trinitarian relational process of family love, and his salvific work relationally progressed, Jesus increasingly gave shape to the kingdom of God until it had come—whole-ly embodied for new relationship together. This qualitative relational shape is the experiential truth of the kingdom of God accessible to all for compatible relational response to the good news of the embodied whole and holy, transcendent God vulnerably present and intimately involved for the experiential reality of this covenant relationship together—the new creation made whole as family with God’s vulnerable and intimate dwelling.

Further Clarification and Correction

Just as Jesus demonstrated in his function, “The kingdom of God has come to you” (Lk 11:20), therefore compatibly respond relationally to the good news. And as he made definitive an ongoing relational imperative for his followers, “Seek *the primacy of his kingdom and the whole of God’s relational righteousness*” (Mt 6:33). To help us respond compatibly in the primacy of ongoing reciprocal relationship together, there are further matters to clarify about the qualitative relational shape of his kingdom and some summary issues to address about its significance.

The kingdom of God still signifies God’s sovereign rule, though as a dynamic rule without involving a material realm, as well as signifies God’s eschatological rule with the *new* realm. In the previous salvific discourse, Jesus clearly identified driving out demons with the kingdom of God (Mt 12:28; Lk 11:20). This was certainly about Christ’s authority and kingly rule. Yet, driving out demons, along with his other healing (cf. Lk 7:20-23), was also part of his deeper salvific relational work to *sozo*, that is, to make whole those apart from the whole. Thus, the function of God’s reign with this action was not in relation to those made whole but God’s reign over Satan in general, and over Satan’s counter-relational work of reductionism in particular. Even though reductionism’s struggle with God’s whole is ongoing, God’s rule prevails—that is a given, which even the demons understood (cf. Mk 1:24; Mt 8:29-31). To give primary focus for the kingdom to God’s reign is to reduce the relational significance of the outcome for those now made whole for relationship together as the kingdom of God’s dwelling vulnerably and intimately as family (cf. the inclusive table fellowship of those made whole in the kingdom of God, Lk 13:29-30). To reduce this relational significance is to reduce those in the kingdom to relational orphans, which would signify the counter-relational work of reductionism.

When the appointed seventy-two followers returned to Jesus joyfully to report that the demons were subjugated to them in his name, Jesus clearly put his authority and rule into this further and deeper perspective: “I have given you authority *to rule (exousia)*...over the enemy; nothing will harm (*adikeo*) you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Lk 10:17-20, NIV). Jesus shifted them from the quantitative focus of his kingly rule to the qualitative focus on relationship together, with future relational implications. Consistently for Jesus, God’s kingdom implied God’s reign while more deeply involving God’s dwelling, the vulnerable and intimate dwelling which constituted the relational context and process of

the Trinity's presence and involvement in relationship together as God's whole family. This was the only purpose of the whole of God's thematic relational action and the significance of God's strategic shift. Salvation and the kingdom of God are not about the primacy of God's rule but about the primacy of belonging to God's kingdom in whole relationship together in the covenant of love. *Adikeo* essentially involves violating, and thereby reducing, the whole of covenant relationship together, against which Jesus' reign over Satan will always prevail (cf. Mt 16:18). Thus, our response must always be determined by the primacy of whole relationship together composing his kingdom, just as Jesus made an ongoing relational imperative for his followers (Mt 6:33).

I maintain, therefore, that the significance of God's present dynamic reign is relationship-specific to Satan, to rule ongoingly over him and his counter-relational work of reductionism; as such, God's rule is not the primary functional focus of the kingdom with those in covenant relationship together. Though by prevailing over Satan's struggle against God's whole, God's reign is certainly relationally significant ongoingly for those in the kingdom (cf. Mt 16:18). Furthermore, God's present rule continues until God's eschatological rule will conclude Satan's ultimate defeat and the *new* realm (new heaven, new earth, new Jerusalem) for God's people will commence. This, I uphold, is the significance of God's reign and its function in the kingdom, both present and future.

With this focus for the kingdom, we can integrally understand its deeper shape, which foremost involves defining Jesus' person and the whole of God by the deeper significance than merely what they do, namely rule kingly. This helps us understand the direct interrelation between the kingdom and the ontology of the whole of Jesus. Jesus' whole person constitutes his relational involvement in the incarnation to make *whole* the human condition in the trinitarian relational context of family by the trinitarian relational process of family love; his embodied function signified the relational ontology of the whole of God, the Trinity functioning as family. Therefore, the kingdom of God that has come is the direct relational outcome (experienced in the relational progression of the present) and relational conclusion (completed in the future) of the whole of Jesus' salvific relational presence and involvement, nothing less and no substitutes. This means that the qualitative relational significance of the kingdom of God must (*dei*) by this nature integrally be about being God's whole family and also involve the relationships together necessary to be whole in likeness of the Trinity as family. The kingdom, then, in this specific relational context and process can only be on God's qualitative relational terms—never human terms and shaping, which are always fragmentary at best—consequently irreducible and nonnegotiable in the new covenant relationship together.

Matthew's Gospel clearly focused on the kingdom of heaven in continuity with the OT, yet also affirmed its relational process to the new. After Jesus disclosed the significance of the parables of the kingdom to his disciples, only Matthew recorded Jesus' analogy for them as leaders that made necessary the experiential truth of the new of the kingdom (Mt 13:52). The new of the kingdom, however, has its strongest identity in Luke's Gospel (and developed in his second volume, Acts), whose concern for the Gentiles was an accessible gospel signifying the kingdom of God for all. While there is no shortage of kingdom language to maintain continuity with the OT, Luke integrated the kingdom with a feast composed integrally by all people groups to ensure the new (Lk 13:29-30). Thus, it is helpful to connect various accounts of table fellowship in Luke to further understand the qualitative relational significance of the kingdom and its process to

the new. This clarification and correction are critical for ongoingly composing the kingdom in whole relationship together.

We can start with Jesus' surprising statement to Zacchaeus that he must (*dei*) by the nature of his salvific work have table fellowship at Zacchaeus' house, and thus the relational outcome of that experience (Lk 19:5,9-10). Next, Jesus was anointed by a prostitute during table fellowship at a Pharisee's house to disclose both the *agape* involvement of his salvific work and the reciprocal relational response by a person made whole (*sozo*) having received him (Lk 7:36-50). These narrative accounts evidence the table fellowship of the new wine involving changed persons experiencing new relationship together, persons who were not stuck in, constrained by or satisfied with the old but had embraced the new (Lk 5:34-39, cf. table fellowship with Martha and Mary, Lk 10:38-42). Thus, the new wine table fellowship is a function of the new creation, the relational reality of which was constituted by the experiential truth of the blood of the new covenant (with the veil removed) initiating in the present the pivotal table fellowship for this relational outcome 'already' (Lk 22:20).

The experiential truth of God's presence and involvement exposes the fact that artificial and false distinctions are made about "the kingdom of God has come to you." These distinctions have no functional significance to God's intentions in response to the human condition, or to God's desires for relationship together. Yet, their existence to this day further exposes the pervasive influence of reductionism shaping the kingdom contrary to Jesus' relational path.

The convergence of this new fellowship 'already' has the relational conclusion 'not yet' at the ultimate table fellowship of the kingdom of God for all in new covenant relationship together as God's whole without reductionism (Lk 13:29-30). An ongoing issue about the kingdom of God is the tension between 'already' and 'not yet' (whether present or future), yet this conversation has been about a quantitative tension, not a qualitative matter. This tension involves the temporal focus of *chronos*: the quantitative perception of time denoting a period measured by the successive passing of moments (or events). Despite various references Jesus made to temporal aspects of the kingdom, he was not focused on *chronos* (cf. his Olivet discourse on end times, Mt 24:36). Having been asked when the kingdom of God would come, he made definitive that it cannot be determined by a quantitative focus (Lk 17:20). Why? Because by its nature, as he embodied, "the kingdom of God is within (or among) you" (Lk 17:21). That is to say, not that the kingdom is spiritual (in the sense of being only subjective and esoteric), but rather the ontology of the kingdom is qualitative; "the kingdom is" (*eimi*, verb of existence, also a copula) conjoined "within you (pl)" as qualitative whole persons and "among you" in the qualitative relational significance of whole relationships.

The ontology of the kingdom of God is set forth further in Jesus' statement distinguishing the kingdom as "little children" in relationship together (Lk 18:16). This cannot be measured in reductionist terms like *chronos* and determined by a quantitative focus, even on the Word. Jesus embodied the kingdom and gave it its qualitative relational shape in *kairos* (qualitative time, season, characterized by the critical importance and decisive influence of something, see Lk 12:56). Though this certainly happened in *chronos* of human history, that is secondary to the primacy of the kingdom's qualitative relational significance in *kairos*—the experiential truth of which is only for

new relationship together with those “little children” who relationally respond back in qualitative compatibility (cf. Lk 10:21, Mt 18:3).

Thus, the experiential reality of relationship together signifies the experiential truth of the kingdom that, I affirm, makes the already-not yet issue rather insignificant and an artificial distinction for the kingdom of God. Such notions serve to diminish the whole of Jesus (*who* came) and “the kingdom of God that has come to you” (*what* has come). Without the relational significance of God’s relational response to our human condition, what difference does it make when this relational outcome happens?

Moreover, the whole of God’s strategic shift in the mystery of the incarnation reconstituted God’s dwelling from a quantitative sanctuary (mountain, tabernacle, temple, cf. Jn 4:21) directly to the qualitative sanctuary both “within you” and “among you” as whole persons in the relationships necessary to be whole together with God. This was the purpose Jesus vulnerably disclosed to the Samaritan woman that the whole of God seeks new relationship together with persons only “in spirit and truth” (Jn 4:21-24). It is an artificial distinction to separate the kingdom as God’s kingly rule and realm to the future from the present reality of the vulnerable presence and intimate involvement of the whole of God for new relationship together as God’s family. Paul clearly illuminated this experiential truth with the Spirit (1 Cor 3:16) and distinguished this experiential reality in the church (Eph 2:22). God’s kingdom, then, is no less than the kingdom of the whole of God’s vulnerable and intimate dwelling—whose context of family and process of family love are only relational and on God’s whole terms.

Likewise, it is a false distinction to separate out any notion of the kingdom in the present from the present reality of God’s life and action within and among God’s people. This fragments God into kingly rule apart from *agape* involvement as family, which includes the affectionate expression of *phileo*, and thus into merely what to do without relational significance. In addition, this reduces the relational ontology of the whole of God and constrains God and God’s action to the quantitative aspects of *bios*, as opposed to the qualitative significance of *zoe*. This then shapes the kingdom differently from the qualitative relational “kingdom of God that has come to you”; furthermore, in this same discourse Jesus made clear his position against reductionism, indicating that the kingdom and family were equivalent (Lk 11:17-26). What Jesus embodied *into* Paul, therefore, and Paul extended, composes his kingdom in the church as family.

What Jesus embodied in whole relational terms cannot be limited to the quantitative aspects of *bios*. The life Jesus embodied in whole, and in which he constituted his followers, only has significance in *zoe*—that is, the qualitative relational life of the whole of God, the *zoe* of the Trinity, of whom having whole knowledge and understanding ‘already’ composes eternal life (given Jesus’ prayer, Jn 17:3,26). The whole of Jesus is the qualitative relational nature of those together born by the Spirit as the new creation. The whole of Jesus’ action in the trinitarian relational context of family by the trinitarian relational process of family love is the qualitative relational shape and significance of the new creation. Jesus functioned only for relationship together as his family and ongoingly constituted his followers as God’s family, even while on the cross (as discussed in chap. 11). His kingdom cannot be distinguished from his family without fragmenting the whole of God’s whole. This signifies “the kingdom of God that has come” not merely as kingly rule but, more importantly, as the function of new relationship together as family. This new relational function is relationship-specific to the

whole of relationships Jesus constitutes his followers both in and for: his family, his family in the present as the church, thus the church as God's family in which the whole of God ongoingly dwells in family love (Jn 14:23; 17:26; Eph 2:19-22).

Therefore, it is a false distinction to say that the kingdom of God is God's kingly rule and the church is another context of the fellowship of those who have experienced God's rule, and to maintain that the church is not the kingdom.³ There is no basis to separate them other than the shaping from reductionism, which involves the human shaping of relationships. The kingdom of God is quite humbly this family of "little children" vulnerably enacted to us in love by the whole of Jesus, through whom we become God's very own family in new covenant relationship together—however incomplete in the present, nevertheless in the relational progression with the Son by the Spirit to the Father for the complete whole of God's whole in ultimate communion together. This is the new creation, which in whole ontology and function is the church as family today and the presence of God's kingdom in the world—however imperfect, yet in the reciprocal relational process with the whole of God for redemptive change to the transformation of persons and relationships together in wholeness.

Understandably, one purpose to separate the kingdom from the church is in order to not associate it with imperfection. While this may have human purpose, it has no basis for significance to the whole and holy God. The original creation was made whole in the image and likeness of the relational ontology of the Trinity, yet created with human will and thus the volition "to be apart" from the whole of relationships together—consequently, the human condition. God's relational grace responded to restore the whole of relationship together. In the new creation, human volition remains necessary by the reciprocal nature of relationships together as family by family love, which cannot be decreed, legislated, or otherwise imposed, as can be assumed for kingly rule. Thus, the choice to be whole or "to be apart" is present and will ongoingly remain in tension with reductionism, notably susceptible to its ontological simulations and epistemological illusions in the life and practice of the church—all of which we are accountable for ongoingly and must always account for in our theology and practice.

At the same time, the new creation has been redeemed to relationally belong to the whole of God's family, therefore never to be orphaned but in ongoing reciprocal intimate relational involvement without the veil with the Spirit, who will complete the relational process to the perfection of the whole as family in new relationship together with the whole and holy God. In other words, even in the present ontology and function, the new creation goes qualitatively well beyond original creation, human volition notwithstanding; and God's relational grace in the vulnerable involvement of reciprocal relationship indeed is sufficient basis to ongoingly meet its relational needs. It is this qualitative relational shape and significance of the new creation (and the kingdom of God) that will always meet the need in the human condition for wholeness, and thereby will emerge as the light in whatever situation and circumstance "to be apart" it may find itself or may encounter in the world. This is the relational outcome 'already' that Jesus illuminates and distinguishes in his defining prayer for his whole family, in likeness of the Trinity (Jn 17).

This challenges our theological and functional assumptions. The theological implication of the above discussion is that our knowledge and understanding of the

³ For a discussion of this notion, see George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 103-117.

kingdom of God must by nature cohere with the whole of Jesus and his salvific action in the trinitarian relational context of family by the trinitarian relational process of family love in order for our knowledge and understanding to be whole. The functional implication is that without this coherence, we lack the experiential truth of the kingdom of God on which to base in relational terms (not referential) our integral belonging to God's whole family in the innermost (not merely as a belief), or even the eschatological hope of belonging. Without congruence with both Jesus' whole person and his whole relationships, we cannot be on the same relational path with him. This lack tends to leave Christians in the emotional condition (often unknowingly) of, and renders their relational condition to, relational orphans, of which many Christians experience the relational distance, especially as members of churches.

Until we are accountable in our response to be compatible with Jesus' reciprocal relational terms, we will always require his clarification and correction—much like Peter, who struggled to be vulnerable with his person and intimate in his relationships. Relational orphans are never acceptable to Jesus for composing his kingdom in the church, much less for building his church as family.

Building the Church

When the kingdom of God's dwelling is understood as unfolding in his church, the basis for the church must be defined and determined by complete Christology. That is to say, Jesus' whole person and his relationships (both within the Trinity and with others) are definitive for the church's theology and practice, and therefore determinative of its ontology and function. Nothing less can be compatible with the theological trajectory of God's relational response to our human condition; and no substitutes can be congruent with Jesus' relational path.

As discussed throughout this study, God's thematic relational action unfolds from original creation in the convergence of all the following: the covenant relationship of love, the kingdom of God, the new wine fellowship, the new creation of God's family, and the church as God's whole family. The flow of this relational outcome 'already', progressing to its relational conclusion 'not yet', is the integral relational responsibility of the Spirit (as Jesus' relational replacement) and the church in reciprocal relationship together as family.

As we transition from the kingdom to the church, it may appear premature to identify the church in the Gospels and establish ecclesiology in the narrative life of Jesus. Yet, the church in wholeness is rooted in and emerges from only complete Christology. An incomplete Christology is the basis for ecclesiologies shaping the church other than the whole of God's whole family.

When Jesus revealed "I will build my church," the Greek term he used for church was *ekklesia* (Mt 16:18). The term meant the assembly or gathering of those who were called out (*ekkletoi*). *Ekklesia* also has roots in the OT; it is the term that the Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT) uses for Israel as the covenant community (*qahal*, Dt 9:10)—suggesting Matthew's Jewish emphasis as the apparent reason why only this Gospel records Jesus' statement about the church. This embeds the Christian church in the context of God's dealings with his chosen people and their covenantal relationship

(Ex 19:5, Dt 7:6, Heb 8:10, 1 Pet 2:9-10). The NT extends this salvation history as the Father pursues a people for himself in his eschatological plan (Lk 1:17). This was Jesus' salvific relational action in complete Christology and full soteriology to build his church.

The term *ekklesia* itself appears to have only limited descriptive value for what his church is (its ontology) and does (its function). As far as function is concerned, *ekklesia* is a static term that is not useful to define the church (notably the local church). We need a more dynamic understanding for the church's ontology and function than merely a gathering. The functional significance of his church emerges when we focus on the process Jesus implied in his statement above, and that he embodied in his life and practice—and made further evident in post-ascension discourse with various churches (discussed later in this chap.).

In Jesus' disclosure "I will build my church," the term for build is *oikodomeo*. This term denotes building a house, derived from its root *oikos* meaning house, home, family, that is, a family living in a house. These terms were conjoined later with their significant cognates illuminated by Paul: *oikeios*, belonging to a certain family (Eph 2:19); *oikodome*, building (Eph 2:21); *oikonomos*, a person who manages a family (1 Cor 4:1). The function of these relational terms points to the relational process of the new creation family of God and building his family together. This provides us with the vital relational context of his church and the dynamic relational process for the function of his church, both of which Jesus vulnerably embodied progressively in his trinitarian context of family by his trinitarian relational process of family love. On this basis, the church as God's family was distinguished by Jesus even before the cross, and was fully constituted by his salvific work during the week of equalization to the cross—the relational work that the Spirit came soon afterward to mature for completion, and that Paul, not Peter, would later distinguish for the church's whole ontology and function. Therefore, ecclesiology is necessarily integrated within a complete Christology to establish the experiential reality of the gospel's relational outcome in full soteriology. Any ecclesiology that is not functionally integrated within complete Christology is insufficient and lacks wholeness. This points ahead to Paul's irreplaceable *pleroma* theology for the church to be whole.

It may be argued that church today bears little resemblance to the church that emerged in the first century. The validity or invalidity of this discussion also depends on our perceptions and understanding of the church being built in Jesus' disclosure.

When Jesus cleansed the temple, this was for "my house" (*oikos*) to be a context for communion (notably communication through prayer) together with God "for all peoples" (Mk 11:17). During his crucifixion when the curtain was torn open to reconstitute the temple, this removed the relational veil between God and his people for a new context and process of relationship together. This context of God's intimate dwelling shifted to the new relational context for God's people to have communion directly in relationship together Face to face without the veil. Relationship together in this new context, however, was only on God's qualitative relational terms—irreducible to human shaping and nonnegotiable to human terms—just as Jesus initially disclosed to the Samaritan woman at the well about God's strategic shift. God's terms ("Listen to my Son") involved following Jesus in relational progression to his Father to belong to his new family, which he redefined as functionally distinguished from his biological family (Mt 12:49-50). It was in his trinitarian relational context of family by his trinitarian relational process of family love that Jesus composed his followers in transformed

relationship together as family in the new relational order with no veil. Just as he relationally established Mary and John with each other, becoming family together while he was on the cross, it was this gathering (*ekklesia*) of his followers being “built” together in relationship who formed his church.

The church, which emerged *with* Jesus, is thus the direct relational outcome of his relational dynamic involved in establishing the new relational order for the human relational condition; they are inseparable. The formation of his church is vitally integrated with Jesus’ vulnerable relational work to equalize persons from ontological and identity deficit and intimately involve those persons in the relationship together necessary for the new relational order of wholeness—signified by the new wine communion. His church follows him on his relational path, and thereby is composed by transformed persons in transformed relationships together as family.

If church formation is separated from this relational process, then church is no longer about his family and becomes subject to human shaping of relationship together. At best, human shaping can only be incomplete and thus fragmentary. His church as family is a function only of whole relationship together. Yet this relationship has significance only as a function of transformed relationships—that is, redeemed and reconciled relationships together with the veil removed, which Paul illuminated and distinguished for the church. By its nature, these are the relationships together necessary to be whole in likeness of the Trinity, just as Jesus prayed to the Father. Therefore, church formation must (*dei*, not *opheilo*) involve equalizing persons, whose hearts then open to each other and come together intimately in the relationships as family in the new relational order—coming together to be and live whole among themselves, and in integral function to live and make whole in the world.

This is what we need to perceive and understand about his church, and thereby how we need to function to be his church in likeness. Anything less in church formation is insufficient to be whole, the whole of God’s whole family on God’s relational terms, and becomes merely a substitute from reductionism shaping a different ontology and function of the church. While such shaping has been prevalent throughout church history to the present—even through the Reformation, in spite of its re-forms—there appears to be little if any understanding that such churches remain contrary to the church Jesus builds. This condition is unacceptable in complete Christology, wherein Jesus’ critique of churches makes it inexcusable for churches to continue on a contrary course.

Jesus’ Unanswered Post-Ascension Discourse for Ecclesiology

Even after the incarnation, Jesus continued to provide the clarification and correction needed to build his church into the wholeness of God’s family. The pervasive influence of reductionism shaping churches is directly addressed in Jesus’ post-ascension discourse to help us further perceive and more deeply understand the purpose and function of his church and for ecclesiology to be whole—along with holding churches today accountable for nothing less and no substitutes.

In the flow of God’s relational response, the distinguished Face of Subject Jesus continued to turn to his family not only to bless but necessarily to challenge for the new relationship together in wholeness that distinguished his church. We need to look back into his face and be accountable to his feedback for the church today.

It is important to understand the experiential truth that in Jesus' claim that seeing him was seeing the Father, he vulnerably disclosed in this twofold ontological and relational reality (ontological One and relational Whole) the importance of both what constitutes God's triune being as well as what matters most to God. God's self-disclosure embodied in Jesus was the who and what of the whole of God, and of how God only does relationships to be Whole. It is in this trinitarian relational context by this trinitarian relational process that the whole of God's thematic action is extended in response to the human condition for relationship together as family in family love. While those who respond back cannot experience ontological oneness (*heis eimi*) with the whole of God, they can have in reciprocal relationship the experiential truth of relational oneness (*en eimi*) together with the Trinity. The experiential truth of *en eimi* with the Trinity is the integral relational basis and ongoing relational base for Jesus' followers to have *heis eimi* with each other together as his church for the ontological oneness to be whole in likeness of the Trinity (*kathos*, in congruence with the Trinity, Jn 17:21-22). The whole of Jesus embodied nothing less than who, what and how the whole of God is in his relational work of grace only for relationship together and to make relationships together whole, God's whole on God's terms. His formative family prayer constitutes his followers together in this qualitative relational significance that matters most to God. Therefore, his church lives "ontologically one," *heis eimi* together, *en eimi* the relationships with each other necessary to function to be "relationally whole" in likeness of the relational ontology of the Trinity specifically as family, not in referential likeness to a concept or characteristic.

Jesus' composing for ecclesiology to be whole did not stop with the end of his formal earthly ministry; that was only the prelude. He had other defining interactions specific to his church, which can be considered his post-ascension discourse for the ecclesiology definitive for his church to be whole.

After the Spirit came to his church for its development and completion, the face of Jesus shined on Paul to engage him in relationship for his transformation and called him to be whole to clearly distinguish the church's wholeness for the experiential truth of the gospel (Acts 9:1-16; Gal 2:11,14). Then Jesus challenged Peter's perceptual-interpretive framework for making distinctions about persons/peoples, in order to redeem his bias in relationships that created barriers in his church preventing all persons from coming together in transformed relationships as God's family without the veil (Acts 10:9-36; 15:7-9). In family love Jesus clarified the full significance of his relational work of equalization to establish the function of his church also as equalizer, and thereby the ecclesiology of the whole was being made definitive. Yet, what was formed (and likely only reformed for Peter) theologically was not always made functional in practice, which was the reason Paul later had to chasten Peter in family love for him to practice the relationships together necessary to be whole as God's church family congruent to the truth of the gospel.

What initially unfolded from Peter in the early church was a hybrid theology: reshaping God's self-disclosure communicated only by God's relational terms and fragmenting the whole of Jesus and redefining his person in a narrowed-down epistemic field—all based on the limits (and convenience) of Peter's reduced terms that substituted God's relational terms and Jesus' relational path with referential terms to referentialize the embodied Word on a de-relationalized path. Moreover, hybrid theology not only divides theology but also separates theology from function (even unintentionally), such

that its practice can be simply neither congruent nor even compatible with its theology, and consequently reducing (even inadvertently) both to a fragmented condition. This fragmentary condition is easily ignored or unrecognized by those in the fog of a limited epistemic field, whose knowledge and understanding are not defined and determined by complete Christology that includes Jesus' post-ascension discourse for ecclesiology.

The hybrid process of dividing Christ is also evident in Jesus' further post-ascension communication with various churches. In this relational discourse for ecclesiology to be whole, Jesus' family love exposed reductionism in church practices to hold them accountable for engaging in a fragmenting process in order to have the integrity necessary to be whole as his church (Rev 2-3). The skewed emphasis of the secondary over the primary in churches was clearly evident in his post-ascension discourse. We need to continue focusing on this discourse (noted previously). Examining his discourse with these churches will help us fully understand the functional and relational significance of Jesus' continued involvement in the ecclesiology needed for churches to be whole—God's relational whole only on God's qualitative relational terms.

A hybrid process emerges clearly in the church in Thyatira (Rev 2:18-29). Thyatira's economy emphasized trades (including brass-working) and crafts (cf. Acts 16:14). In the Greco-Roman world of that time, trade guilds organized the various trades and were necessary to belong to if one wanted to pursue a trade (much 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,⁴ which may suggest a pragmatic approach to church practice in Thyatira.

In the nature of this surrounding context, Jesus acknowledged this church's extensive "works" (*ergon*, work that defined them, Rev 2:19): "love" (*agape*), "faith" (*pistis*), "service" (*diakonia*, service, ministry that benefits others, especially compassion to the needy), "patient endurance" (*hypomone*, enduring and not giving in to bad circumstances, in contrast to *makrothymia*, which is patience with respect to persons), and that their "last works are greater than the first," indicating not a status quo situation but actually doing more *ergon* than before. Yet, their practice also "tolerated" (*aphiemi*, to let pass, permit, allow, v.20) Jezebel's teaching. What they let pass, permitted or allowed is important to understand in the above context.

Jezebel (probably a byword symbolizing the OT character of Jezebel, cf. 1 Kg 18:19) appears to be a woman (or possibly a group) accepted within this church fellowship. The practice associated with her teaching probably refers to compromise with prevailing activity related to trade guilds prominent in the city, which "misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols" (2:20, NIV). What is significant to understand here is not the obvious disparity of this teaching and practice with the desires of God. What is more significant is how these prevailing influences of the surrounding context were absorbed into the practices of this church along with all its other so-called good works acknowledged above. This is not simply an issue about syncretism, synthesizing competing ideologies, or even pluralism, and goes beyond merely maintaining doctrinal purity to the deeper issue about participation *in* a

⁴ 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).

surrounding context having the prevailing presence of reductionism and its subsequent influence on their perceptual-interpretive framework. This is the lens that determined what they ignored and paid attention to, thus the lens by which they practiced their works. When reductionism is not negated, its influence then affects how those other works would be engaged with something less and some substitute for the whole of persons and relationships, therefore raising critical issues of their qualitative and relational significance, and their wholeness since the fragmenting process is not disengaged—issues needing to be raised in churches today.

Theologically, Thyatira demonstrated a weak view of sin, namely without sin as reductionism that was the normative character of their surrounding context and was embedded in its collective order. Functionally, they also lacked relational involvement with, or maintained relational distance from, God in the process of reciprocating contextualization needed to distinguish their identity as God’s family in that surrounding context without being determined by it; and any pragmatism in their practice became a euphemism for reductionism—the rationalizing composing ‘a wide gate and road’. Their tolerance was essentially a fragmentation of both their theology and function in a hybrid process, consequently they reinforced the counter-relational work of reductionism and functioned incompatibly to being whole, God’s relational whole on God’s whole terms. The influence of reductionism is usually more subtle than that observed in the Thyatira church.

As long as our perceptual-interpretive framework is reductionist—most notably with a reduced theological anthropology—our lens’ view of the qualitative, the ontological and the relational will not discern the extent of the surrounding influences reducing the whole of church practice. The underlying issue critical for our understanding is the ontology and function of both the person and persons together as church; and the challenging question remains: Is it reduced ontology and function or whole ontology and function? The relational demands of grace, however, clarify for church ontology and function that nothing less and no substitutes than to be whole is the only practice which has any significance to God (as Jesus made definitive about worship, Jn 4:23-24). Additionally, Jesus’ lens of repentance (the turn-around in relational terms of the whole person) in conjoint function with a strong view of sin makes no assumptions to diminish addressing sin as reductionism, first and foremost within church practice and then in the surrounding contexts—in other words, holds person and church accountable for nothing less and no substitutes. This is the ontology and function that composes ‘the narrow gate and road’ leading to whole life (*zoe*) and its theology. And Jesus wants “all the churches” to clearly “know that I am the one who searches minds and hearts” (Rev 2:23, as he did with Peter); that is, he examines the qualitative significance of persons from inner out, whom he holds accountable to be whole in the relationships that hold together in the innermost as the whole of God’s family (2:25; 3:11). In their effort to be relevant and possibly pragmatic in the surrounding pluralistic context, by engaging in a hybrid process the Thyatira church overlooked (knowingly or unknowingly) in their many admirable church practices what was necessary to be whole and to make whole (cf. a similar error by the church in Pergamum in a reductionist context, Rev 2:12-15).

Being whole always involves the issue of reductionism. That is because what prevails in (*en*) any context of the world is reductionism. Jesus calls his followers relationally out of (*ek*) these contexts in order to be whole together as his family, then

also relationally sends them back into (*eis*) those surrounding contexts to live whole together as his family and to make whole the human condition (as defined in his formative family prayer, Jn 17). Without the reciprocating dynamic of this *ek-eis* relational involvement, church practice is functionally based on just *en* (in) the surrounding context and thereby shaped in its influence. Modern contextualization of the gospel, for example, has not made this distinction and thus has been subject to reductionism. This is problematic in function for the ongoing relational involvement with the whole of God and God's terms to constitute the whole of who we are as church and whose we are.

Without the ongoing function of the reciprocating *ek-eis* relational involvement, there is no engagement of a culture's life and practice in the surrounding context with the necessary process of reciprocating contextualization. In conjoint function with triangulation, reciprocating contextualization provides the relational process imperative for the qualitatively distinguished identity of a church to function in the surrounding context without being defined or determined by what prevails in that context, even in its culture. That is to say, without this reciprocating relational process in church practice, there is no consistent functional basis to negate the influence of reductionism. This leaves church practice susceptible to subtle embedding in the surrounding context, or engaging in ontological simulation and epistemological illusion, despite the presence of apparent indicators of important church practices illuminating its identity. This is illustrated in the various churches Jesus addressed, each notable for its own variation of church practice that parallel church practices today. The influence of reductionism is usually more subtle than witnessed in the Thyatira church (Rev 2:18-29, discussed previously). This is evident increasingly in the other churches Jesus addressed, as we look next at the church in Laodicea (3:14-22).

Laodicea was a rich city, the wealthiest Phrygian city, ten miles west of Colossae. It was known as a prosperous banking center, for its textile industry and its renowned medical school. Their residents had great pride in their financial wealth, fine clothes and famous eye salve. But Laodicea lacked a natural water supply. Hot water was piped in from hot springs and cold water came from the mountains. Both were lukewarm by the time it reached Laodicea. Since hot water was preferred for bathing and cold for drinking, there were frequent complaints about their water as inconvenient to their exceptionally comfortable lifestyle. This background gives important context for Jesus' discourse and helps us understand further the significance of his concern for ecclesiology to be whole.

To Jesus, how the church in Laodicea functioned was just like their water: lukewarm. Though tepid does suggest that their church practice was "hot" earlier, church life and practice was now comfortable, self-satisfied and complacent, essentially status quo of what prevailed (3:16). Their self-assessment reflected the perceptions of the surrounding city: that they were rich and had everything they needed (3:17a)—relatively speaking, of course, since the comparative process always makes such self-definition provisional. More importantly for those whose self-definition is based on what they do and have, Jesus addressed the illusion of those perceptions and exposed their reductionism (v.17b). They functioned in the epistemological illusion of reductionism, consequently their church practice was without functional substance and relational significance. For Jesus, their lukewarm practice was not only inconvenient but distasteful

("I am about to spit you out of my mouth"), which Laodiceans could readily identify with given their water condition. Moreover, their neither-cold-nor-hot practice was a lie of reductionism implying their fragmentary theological assumptions. First, there is no intermediate condition of church practice between being God's whole as family or not, that defines its existence. Jesus held this church accountable for their integrity—even "cold" was better than a lie—which is how family love functions with its working assumption. Then there was the assumption of their theological anthropology that defined them by what they did and had, which determined their church practice. Both assumptions involve reduced ontology and function.

The Laodicean church practice should be familiar to Western churches, notably in the U.S. Yet, this is not merely about relative affluence and comfortable lifestyles. This is about the first major issue of what defines the person, and how this eventually determines how church practice functions. The surrounding context of Laodicea defined itself by what it did and had. The human person was perceived from the outer in, thereby functionally reducing the importance of the whole person from the inner out signified by the heart. In this quantitative process, both the importance of the whole person and the primary priority of whole relationship together are replaced by secondary areas of interest and concern. Substitutes are made for the functional substance of our heart and for the quality of our relationships. Substitutes involve any alternative that reduces the qualitative and functional significance of being whole as persons in relationship together. These substitutes from reductionism are what the church in Laodicea accepted (intentionally or inadvertently) from its surrounding context of the Greco-Roman world to determine its church practice, consequently creating the illusion (the epistemological illusion of reductionism) about the well-being of their existing condition. This false sense of self-understanding is ongoingly promoted, reinforced and developed by Satan, who encourages churches with Christian substitutes in ontological simulation (cf. 2 Cor 11:14-15)—which Jesus addressed further in two other churches.

While Jesus exposed the Laodicean church's reductionist substitutes and deconstructed their illusion, he also extended further family love by making his whole person vulnerable to them for the redemptive change imperative in relationship together to be whole (3:18-19). He was clarifying for them that relationship together on God's terms is incompatible with any reductionist practice. As family love always functions, he redefined them to pursue their whole persons from the inner out to be redeemed to come together in transformed relationships. This is signified in Jesus' well-known words which followed—an intimate relational message of family love for his church, usually taken out of this context. The classic image of Jesus knocking at the door (v.20) is a metaphor of these deep desires of the whole of God to have intimate relationship with his family—signifying the new wine communion together. The change they needed, therefore, must (by its nature as signified in the Trinity) be a relational change transforming their practice from a mere gathering without relational belonging (church as orphanage) to whole persons intimately involved in relationships together as family (signified by "open door," hearts coming together in intimate communion). This metaphor clearly illuminates that redemptive change is *the relational imperative* for his church; and the absence or lack of redemptive change in the church renders it to the illusions and substitutes from reductionism—notably shaped by human contextualization.

This metaphor is helpful to locate the ongoing involvement of Jesus with his church: pursuing his followers for transformed relationships together as family with the veil removed. We cannot continue to reduce Jesus' intimate relational message of family love for his church in this metaphor by perceiving it only for the individual, as is Christian convention. This metaphor of Jesus' relational work of grace needs to be returned to its full context for use in ecclesiology. Therefore, the significance of Jesus still knocking should not be lost on even the most mature Christian because it is a relational key in Jesus' involvement for ecclesiology to be whole (cf. 3:7-8). This metaphor functionally interacts with the metaphor of church as orphanage to make whole his church.

Any church practice "to be apart" continues to function with the veil. This misrepresents the gospel and is a contradiction of God's desires specifically for the new creation family in likeness of the Trinity, which Jesus constituted earlier with his defining family prayer. Since what integrally reflects the life of the Trinity is church practice only in likeness of the Trinity's relational ontology of intimate interdependent relationships as family, any alternative to the relationship of God's whole family always becomes church practice shaped as an orphanage, notably operating as an organization or as a voluntary association (cf. church in Thyatira and trade guilds). This either-or defining process is an ongoing tension for church practice. For churches to address the influence of reductionism, even in pragmatic practice, they need the presence of the whole, God's whole. This is the whole that the relational function of the Trinity ongoingly provides as the church's integral relational basis and ongoing relational base, by which Jesus knocks on church doors. Therefore, embracing the relational function of the Trinity emerges as the primary issue facing churches to define and determine how they will function both within themselves and in the world.

This relational issue was involved in two other churches Jesus addressed. The next church, the church in Sardis (Rev 3:1-3), had "a *reputation* of being alive" apparently in the prevailing perception, although the city hosted many pagan cults whose practices pervaded the surrounding context. The implication here is that this church lived behind their "reputation" (*onoma*, used as the substitute of what a person actually is). Even with their reputation of being alive, Jesus made no such assumptions about them. Rather he examined how they functioned through the qualitative lens penetrating inner out with family love. Uninfluenced by the surrounding bias, he exposed what existed beneath the outer layer of "being alive": "you are dead" (*nekros*, the condition of being separated from the sources of life, thus being unaccompanied by something) based on the fact that "I have not found your works *complete* in the sight of God"—that is, incomplete or fragmentary based on God's terms, not as defined by the surrounding context. With the perceptual-interpretive framework Jesus makes definitive here for ecclesiology, their "works" (*ergon*, works denoting what defined them) were not "complete" (*pleroo*, to fill up, make full, complete or whole). In other words, what defined them was not whole. What was missing in their church practice?

Since no explicit sins such as idol worship and sexual immorality were mentioned (as in Thyatira), their incomplete deeds point to something more subtle or lacking. Their activity was perceived as alive, yet likely in the quantitative aspects of *bios*, not the qualitative function of *zoe*. Their reputation signified only a substitute (*onoma*) of the integral identity of who, what and how his church is, consequently lacking the integrity of

wholeness. While Jesus' polemic about soiled and white (*leukos*, bright, gleaming) clothes described those incomplete and a remnant who weren't incomplete respectively, bright clothes symbolized those who participated in God's life (3:4). Participating is about relationship and involvement together, which soiled clothes symbolized a barrier to, or either precluded or maintained with relational distance. Any type of "soiled" clothes—whether stained by blatant sin or dirtied from subtle incomplete work—would have this relational consequence. I conclude this all implies the following: their deeds were not whole because they were substitutes from reductionism; and they were not whole because what defined them was based on reductionist practices; thus how they practiced church was separated or distanced from the relational involvement of God's life, unaccompanied by the vulnerable presence and function of the Trinity, because of their sin of reductionism—in what defined their persons and determined their relationships together, and thereby in how they practiced church.

The issue of not being complete and being whole started back at creation and the purpose to "fill the earth" (Gen 1:28). The Hebrew term for "fill" (*male*) generally denotes completion of something that was unfinished. When God declared "not good for human persons to be apart," God started with Adam and Eve the relational context and process of the function to be God's family. This was now fulfilled by Jesus—as he declared "I will not leave you as orphans" and sent us the Spirit for completion—in the trinitarian relational context of family by the trinitarian relational process of family love. This relational context and process were not the primary function of the Sardis church's involvement and ministry, so Jesus critiqued what they "filled their church" with, as he does all churches.

In spite of how well the Sardis church presented itself (its appearance) and how well it was perceived (its image), qualitative substance was lacking. This reflected a shift in how they defined themselves from the inner out to the outer-in aspects and functions (*metaschematizo*). Their lack of deeper qualitative substance exposed the credibility of their reputation as essentially meaningless—though worth an image in comparative reductionists terms—while the validity of their work (apparent service and ministry) was relationally insignificant because they were separated ("to be apart") from the substance primary to wholeness of life. These are severe critiques Jesus made of a church 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* that distinguishes the *pleroma* of Christ (as Paul illuminated, Eph 1:23).

Family love functions for the integrity of relationship together to be whole, and for accountability for anything less and any substitutes. Thus, Jesus' critiques were 'a critique of hope' in his call to be whole—a functional key in his involvement for ecclesiology to be God's whole 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. They needed to be transformed in the inner-out aspects and functions (*metamorphoo*) of a person, while being redeemed from the outer-in aspects and functions (*metaschematizo*) that did not give full importance to the qualitative function of the whole person (signified only by the heart). Their outer-in over inner-out way of defining themselves determined what they paid attention to in how they did relationships and how they practiced church—which were not complete but fragmentary and thus without wholeness. This certainly diminished their relationships both with God and with each other, though they were unaware of this condition due to the simulation and illusion of reductionism that critically reduced their qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness; consequently they ignored the lack of qualitative relational substance.

With the lens of repentance by the function of family love, Jesus called them back to what they had “received” (*lambano*, v.3) in relationship from the beginning: his whole person, not just his teachings. As disclosed in John 1:12, *lambano* means to embrace and follow him as person-teacher—that is, be his disciples not as students in the rabbinic tradition but as adherents in relationship together in progression to be whole as God’s family, thereby pointing to his formative process in the ecclesiology necessary to be whole. In other words, Jesus called them back to be whole in the qualitative function of relational work inherent in who, what and how the Trinity is, and therefore who his followers are and what his church is: the whole of God’s family distinguished by whole relationship together. For nothing less and no substitutes of this relational reality, they needed to become transformed persons from the inner out who vulnerably engage in the relational work necessary to integrate equalized and intimate relationships together to be his church family in the new relational order.

The rigorous nature of this relational process makes church practice more susceptible to reductionism; church practice accordingly is also tempted to use the easier (also read pragmatic) alternatives of reductionist substitutes—notably with a less vulnerable shaping of relationship together. The lack of primary involvement in this definitive relational work for church practice becomes even more acute with the church in Ephesus (Rev 2:1-4).

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

Jesus knew not merely the information about their deeds but also knew (*oida*) the nature of them, and the extent of their functional significance. It may seem somewhat perplexing that Jesus was not impressed with this church and even felt to the contrary

about their church practice: “You have abandoned the love you had at first” (v.4). As noted previously, if this 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—which would include functionally maintaining relational distance even while in close physical proximity or in mutual activity. *Aphiemi* is the same term Jesus used in his promise to “not leave *his followers* orphaned” (Jn 14:18). Connecting these relational messages provides the context and process for the function of ecclesiology to be God’s whole. In the church context at Ephesus this strongly describes not paying attention to the whole person and not giving primary priority to whole relationship together. They worked hard doing things *for* God but the relational process necessary for their functional significance was deemphasized or misplaced in their effort. This often happens as churches develop and the goals of church growth become the priority of church practice. In the process, as the Ephesian church demonstrated, there is a subtle shift in which the *means* become the *end* and its primary purpose for relationship together to be whole is abandoned or made secondary.

As the term *hypomone* for “perseverance” denotes, they were so focused on circumstances and situations such that persons (especially God) unintentionally were ignored in relationship, inadvertently left in relational distance or emotionally forgotten. 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. 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 and not ecclesiology of the whole. They did not have the relational involvement of family love, which is the only involvement having relational significance to God (cf. Mary’s anointing of Jesus as a priority over ministry to the poor, Mt 26:8-13, 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). Since they focused primarily on what they did—indicating their theological anthropology in how they defined themselves—they paid attention to related situations and circumstances and less important issues, while ignoring the primacy of relationship together in family love. Functioning with this perceptual-interpretive framework of a reduced theological anthropology resulted in the relational consequences of forsaking their first love that reflected the lack of relational involvement in their church practice and signified their renegotiated ecclesiology.

This was the relational involvement Jesus called them to turn around and get back to for them to be whole: "Repent, and do the *relational* works you did at first" (2:5). Jesus was restoring their misplaced priorities and more deeply made discipleship definitive by further illuminating the relational significance of his paradigm for serving. This involved the first priority of discipleship, which is ongoing vulnerable involvement with Jesus in the relational progression to the whole of God's family—the *formative process* in Jesus' involvement for ecclesiology to be whole. His ecclesiology is the ongoing relational outcome of discipleship in this relational progression to the whole of God; and this by necessity vulnerably engages reciprocal relationship with the Trinity and conjointly is intimately involved in reciprocal relationships together as church family in likeness of the Trinity. Both discipleship and ecclesiology are distinguished whole only in the primacy of these relationships together, which emerge only from the relational outcome of God's relational response.

The basic complaint Jesus had against this church is about the primary issue facing all churches for defining their ontology and determining how they will function: embracing the whole ontology and relational function of the Trinity, and embodying church practice in likeness of the Trinity's relational ontology, therefore in congruence with and ongoing compatibility to Jesus' defining prayer for his family (Jn 17:20-26). In all that the Ephesian church was doing (which was a lot), they were not directly involved in the relational context and process of the whole of God and did not function in the context of family and process of family love constituted in the Trinity. By their lack of relational involvement, they indirectly demonstrated a direct correlation between the priority we give relationships and the extent to which we are loving, as defined by relational involvement, not as doing something, however dedicated. For Jesus, this correlation is irrefutable for ecclesiology to be whole. Whether Jesus' complaint against this church included both their relationship with God and with each other is not clearly indicated in the text. Yet we can strongly infer that it included all their relationships, because their primary emphasis on their work reflected the three major issues ongoing in life: (1) how they defined themselves, which further determined (2) how they did relationships and thus (3) practiced church. These three major issues are always deeply interrelated, and also in integral interaction with the primary issue of the Trinity, noted above, thereby together they need to be accounted for in ecclesiology in order to be whole.

The practices of both the churches in Ephesus and Sardis were contradictions in function that reflect the subtle influence of reductionism. What they focused on and

engaged in were reductionist substitutes for the trinitarian relational context of family and the trinitarian relational process of family love. The relational consequence was to become embedded in ontological simulation and epistemological illusion, mainly (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 removed, diminished or deemphasized from the relational context and process of the Trinity and needed to be recontextualized in the relational nature of the Trinity. This is the function of reciprocating contextualization in the *ek-eis* relational involvement that Jesus made imperative to distinguish his family in the ecclesiology to be whole and to make whole. Without this reciprocating relational dynamic, church practice increasingly finds its functional basis only *en* (in) the surrounding context, in which reductionism prevails.

Whatever a church’s surrounding context may be, we can expect the prevailing influence of reductionism to affect the whole of church practice. It will, that is, unless there is the ongoing function of the reciprocating *ek-eis* relational involvement to definitively distinguish church purpose and function from beyond merely its position *en* the world. Jesus’ church’s purpose and function in the primacy of relationship together to be God’s whole family necessitate nothing less and no substitutes for this whole, as the terms of God’s relational grace demand. Without function in the relational terms of grace in reciprocal relational involvement, reductionism is able to shift grace’s demand for nothing less and no substitutes than the whole in church practice to anything less and any substitute (cf. “Did God really say that?”). The shift entails 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.

We need to underscore repeatedly: as long as our perceptual-interpretive framework is narrowed down to referential terms, 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; most importantly, therefore, having the lens of repentance in integral function with a strong view of sin makes no assumptions to diminish addressing sin as reductionism, first and foremost within church practice and then in the surrounding contexts. Jesus is emphatic in his discourse: “all the churches”

need to “know that I am he who searches minds and hearts” (Rev 2:23)—that is to say unequivocally, examines the qualitative significance of persons from inner out, whom he holds accountable for their integrity to be whole in relationships together as the whole of God’s family (2:25; 3:11).

These churches were not unique in church formation and they cannot be considered exceptions in church history. Each church has a counterpart in the contemporary church that must be taken seriously because of Jesus’ critique for his church to be whole:

1. Church at Ephesus—the theologically orthodox or doctrinally correct church
2. Church at Sardis—the successful “mega” church
3. Church at Thyatira—the activist, service oriented, or missional church
4. Church at Laodicea—the consumer church.

All these churches have in common what continue to be critical interrelated issues needing epistemological clarification and hermeneutical correction: a weak view of sin not including reductionism, and a fragmentary theological anthropology reducing ontology and function.

It is not sufficient for churches to be a mere presence, or even merely to function, *en* the world; their only significance is to function *ek-eis* (whole relational movement into) the world both to be relationally involved with others as God’s whole family and, by the nature of this whole function, also to confront all sin as reductionism of the whole. That is, the church’s whole ontology and function makes whole the human condition; his church does not reflect, reinforce or sustain it. Jesus communicates directly to us about the whole of ecclesiology in his discourse, and the relational message we need to learn to listen to and receive him in about the Thyatira church is clearly illuminated: to let pass, indifferently permit or inadvertently allow—“tolerate,” which the other churches also did more subtly—the influence of reductionism in any form from the surrounding context directly diminishes the wholeness of church practice and minimalizes their relational involvement with God, with each other in the church and with others in the world. For churches to get beyond practice merely *en* the world, they need a different dynamic to define their life and determine their practice.

By searching hearts Jesus communicates clearly to us that church function in its innermost is about being whole, not merely engaging in correct ecclesial practices. And the *eis* relational engagement of church ontology and function *en* the world must by its nature be integrated with the *ek* (movement out of) relational involvement with the whole of God as its defining antecedent in the *ek-eis* dynamic. This reciprocating relational process negates the continuous counter-relational work of Satan and its reductionist influence (Rev 2:24) by ongoingly engaging, embracing, experiencing and extending God’s whole in the qualitative significance of the integrated ontology of both personness and the church constituted in and by the Trinity, that is, only in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the Trinity.

In his relational discourse Jesus communicates a critical relational message to us that delineates a simple reality of life about the human person and the existing social order—matters we either pay attention to or ignore depending on our working assumptions of humanity and society. Since we do not live in a vacuum or in social

isolation, our practice is either shaped by the surrounding context we are *en* (thus embedded) or constituted by what we enter *eis* that context with. In the latter function, for *eis* to define life and determine practice necessitates the *ek* relational involvement to disembed us from a surrounding context in order to transplant us into the whole of God's relational context and process, hereby integrally constituting God's whole for the *eis* relational movement back. This reciprocating relational process signifies the relational demands of grace compatible with the working assumptions with which Jesus came *eis* the world and his assumptions of humanity and the existing social order with which he engaged the world. On this basis, Jesus (as well as Paul) ongoingly challenges both our theological anthropology and our ecclesiology for the only purpose of wholeness.

For our practice both as person and persons together as church, disembedding from the influence of reductionism to transplant into God's whole is the issue we need to understand in relational terms and not in conventional referential terms. Without the function of nothing less and no substitutes, which grace demands for person and church, wholeness is diminished and the whole is minimalized—that is, functionally no longer whole. For church practice to fulfill its divine purpose and function, it must account in its function for being relationally transplanted in the whole of God and God's theological trajectory and relational path for its globalizing commission “sent to be whole” in integral relational function with its “call to be whole and holy” (as Jesus pointed the Thyatira church to, 2:26-29).

Jesus' post-ascension discourse is not merely an addendum for his church; it is what in pre-ascension he vulnerably embodied with nothing less and no substitutes of the whole of God and ongoingly accounted for within the whole of God's intimate response for whole relationship together. After his church had opportunity to establish its practice in his integrated call and commission, his relational message communicated in family love the critique of hope necessary for all churches also to embody in its practice the qualitative relational function to be God's whole family in likeness of the Trinity. Now in deeper reciprocal relational responsibility, his church is ongoingly accountable for the whole of God's whole as family with compatible relational response back. And his post-ascension discourse for ecclesiology is clearly definitive for his church's response to be whole as God's new creation family, and for his church to live and make whole as equalizer for God's new relational order in response to the human condition. His relational communication for ecclesiology composes church function—necessarily by the nature of the church's whole ontology—only in relational congruence with his embodied function as the equalizer in the trinitarian relational context of family by the trinitarian relational process of family love, distinguished by nothing less and no substitutes but the triune God's irreducible whole on God's nonnegotiable relational terms.

For the church to have this relational outcome in likeness of the Trinity, it has to emerge and flow from the redemptive change that constitutes the new wine relationships together in wholeness without the veil. As demonstrated by the inauguration of the new wine table fellowship (Lk 5:33-39), redemptive change requires an ontological and functional change from inner out that is distinguished from what shapes human contextualization.

Therefore, Jesus' post-ascension discourse unanswered involves ignoring, rejecting or otherwise not responding to Jesus' whole person and the relationships he embodied. Complete Christology, by its whole relational nature, composes both

discipleship and ecclesiology to integrally build the whole ontology and function of his church family. Unanswered, churches today struggle for relational significance—unable to be the kingdom of God’s dwelling in family together and thus to avoid composing a gathering of relational orphans, without any significance for their human condition and any good news for the human condition of others.

The Cross Reconstructed, God’s Dwelling Reconstituted

When our discipleship and ecclesiology are not distinguished integrally by the transformation to wholeness of what Jesus saves us to, this condition signifies both of the following: (1) the cross we use is fragmented and needs to be reconstructed, and directly interrelated, (2) the whole of God’s dwelling remains behind the curtain and still needs to be reconstituted to remove the veil in order for relationship together as family to connect in wholeness.

When our cross revolves around sacrifice, it becomes embedded in an ontology and function that reduces both Jesus on the cross and our theology and practice of the cross. We need to embrace the whole person on the cross (as discussed in chap. 4), whose sacrifice tore open the curtain to reconstitute the relational context of God’s dwelling in the direct relational process that permanently removes the veil for intimate relational connection Face to face, heart to heart. Only this intimate relational connection composes belonging (in relational terms, not referential) to God’s whole family and experiencing God’s dwelling in wholeness (not in part or merely in name). Our cross must, by the nature of Jesus’ cross, constitute God’s new dwelling.

The prevailing cross still used today needs to be reconstructed with Jesus’ whole person building his kingdom *into* his church family. When the second criminal asked Jesus to remember him in his kingdom, Jesus equalized him and embraced him in whole relationship together. This was not a unique circumstance but an integral extension of the whole person and relationships Jesus embodied. In his whole ontology and function on the cross, then, Jesus was building his church in the primacy of whole relationship together as family when he connected his mother Mary and his beloved disciple John in new creation relationship together distinguished by family. Our cross must, by the nature of his cross, also be constructed to build his new creation family.

His new creation family, however, certainly requires redemptive change (“repent” as Jesus proclaimed, Mt 4:17) for this reconciliation to be composed in the primacy of whole relationship together. Redemptive reconciliation requires hard choices and deep changes from inner out. This unavoidably necessitates epistemic and ontological humility, just as Jesus made requisite in the first beatitude for the identity formation of those belonging to his family (review Mt 5:3 discussed in chap. 5). To build his family Jesus clearly distinguished the primacy of his family over what is only secondary, and which cannot be used to displace or be a substitute for the primary position and function of his family. For example, “Who is my *family*...*persons* who *respond relationally* to my Father is *my family*” (Mt 12:48-49). Biological family represents only one of many ways that preoccupation with the secondary reduces the primacy of his family (as Paul made definitive, Rom 14:17), all of which require redemptive change. These of course are hard

changes to choose, likely getting to the roots of our own identity or self-worth. All of this by design converges on the cross, that is, when whole-ly constructed.

What also by necessity converges on the cross is all our sin, specifically all reductionism. This necessarily includes reduced ontology and function, reduced theology and practice, notably engaged in relationships unequalized from inner out and lacking intimacy—all of which need to be transformed for the outcome of wholeness. Obviously, this condition necessitates the deep changes from inner out (transformation, *metamorphoō*) that any incomplete changes (*metaschematizō*) or re-forms will not accomplish. Critical for us to embrace to address this condition, then, is this mutual understanding assumed by Jesus in “It is *complete*” (*teleo*, Jn 19:30):

The cross of Jesus’ whole person does not allow for redemptive change to be optional and for redemptive reconciliation to be negotiable. Rather his cross makes them unavoidable and inexcusable, and therefore demands the relational outcome of transformation to wholeness—both in our person and in our relationships.

When our cross is so constructed and constitutes God’s new dwelling, then our discipleship and ecclesiology become distinguished integrally by the transformation to wholeness that Jesus saves us to—already, with nothing less and no substitutes.

This is the integral relational dynamic unfolding God’s relational response to the human condition, which the whole of Jesus embodied *into* the whole of Paul to embody the kingdom *into* the church—integrally both to illuminate the experiential truth of the good news of whole relationship together and to distinguish the experiential reality of the gospel’s outcome of whole relationship together as God’s family to make whole the human relational condition, and even to address this condition as it may be reflected, reinforced or sustained in the different shapes of churches. With their gospel and its only outcome composed in whole, Jesus and Paul (discussed further in the next chap.) out of necessity challenge any and all human shaping of the primacy of whole relationship together. Their challenge continues to be urgently necessary because human shaping renders both the gospel and the church without their qualitative and relational significance in the innermost.

With its narrowed-down epistemic field, the referentialization of the Word continues to turn away from the distinguished Face vulnerably present and involved in relationship—with the prevailing relational consequence of church and academy turning to a more probable theological trajectory and a less intrusive relational path. We cannot persist in the sin of reductionism and claim to have the gospel, and most importantly experience its relational outcome of wholeness. Therefore, the relational message of Jesus for his followers to be whole still communicates unavoidably today to pursue us for our reciprocal relational response: “Seek *the primacy of his kingdom’s whole relationship together and its relational basis, the whole of God’s relational righteousness,*” who vulnerably and intimately dwells with us only for this relational outcome.

The kingdom *into* church *into*...?—this is an open question that we still need to address and account for today.

Chapter 8 Ecclesiology Transformed to Be Whole

**Let the *wholeness* of Christ be the *only determinant* in your hearts,
to the *wholeness* indeed you were called in the one *family*.**

Colossians 3:15

The early followers of Jesus' relational path were known as the Way. It is ironic, sadly, that many today who would identify as belonging to the Way, are threatened by or, at least, don't follow the intrusive relational path of Jesus. It is no irony that Paul, who was threatened by the Way (Acts 9:2; 22:4), became a pivotal follower of Jesus on his intrusive relational path. Paul's story is no irony because it was composed by the transformation that made whole his fragmentary theology and practice and his reduced ontology and function.¹ He speaks to us today.

As God's relational response to the human condition was embodied whole by Jesus, it unfolded *into* Paul from the Damascus road to embody his kingdom *into* his church. What unfolded was the truth of the gospel of transformation and its relational outcome of whole relationship together as God's family. Paul, together with the Spirit as Jesus' relational replacement, assumes the lead in the reciprocal process on Jesus' intrusive relational path—Paul didn't change because of unilateral action by Jesus—and becomes pivotal for our theology and practice in discipleship and ecclesiology to be integrated whole. We need to follow Jesus into Paul and then through Paul with the Spirit in order for this relational outcome to unfold further *into* us.

The Transformation of Paul's Theology and Practice

Before we move into Paul's ecclesiology, we need to understand what Paul first experienced in his own life and thought. What unfolded in Paul's journey was no transition simply from the OT to the NT, from Judaism to Christianity. What developed for and in Paul as a Jew was the transformation from *old* to *new*, not a mere conversion of religion (2Cor 5:17, cf. Col 3:9-10; Eph 4:22-24). Though continuity with the OT was distinct for Paul, his journey was distinguished beyond OT antecedents by the transformation from old to new. From the Damascus road and after, Jesus embodied God's face that turned to Paul, not for Paul's observation but only for the experiential truth of relationship together to make Paul whole from above—thereby embodying God's definitive blessing on Paul, Face to face (Num 6:24-26). This relational outcome determined the ongoing development of Paul's involvement with Jesus directly in relationship together, the experiential truth (neither propositional truth nor doctrinal certainty) of which then defined Paul's Christology and thus his soteriology. Paul's

¹ An expanded discussion of Paul's life and theology is made in my study, *The Whole of Paul and the Whole in His Theology: Theological Interpretation in Relational Epistemic Process* (Paul Study, 2010). Online: <http://4X12.org>.

development would deepen the continuity with the words from God in the OT as well as widen the discontinuity with any of its reductionist faith-response and practice.

The continuity-discontinuity emerging from Paul's development involves a hermeneutical issue. In the process of transformation to the new, I suggest that Paul's lens of Hebrew Scripture also changed. That is, Paul changed from a hermeneutic of the OT that reduced meaning to reference or representation of God—for example, by reducing God's desires and terms for covenant relationship together to a code of behavior to observe and perform, or simply to identity markers as God's people (Rom 2:29; 7:6; Col 2:14). Paul's change from referential terms was partly the result of *tamiym*'s hermeneutical correction and, of further importance, was more deeply a relational outcome. Paul was restored to whole meaning in the relational context and process of God's communicative action—the words from God's mouth (cf. Dt 8:3; Ps 119:13; Mt 4:4; Jn 6:63, 68-69). This changed his hermeneutic of the OT from situational content to the relational context and process of God's thematic action for covenant relationship together, of which Paul was a unique recipient of God's relational response of grace. This also took his hermeneutic beyond an apocalyptic interpretive framework.

Was Paul introduced to a new covenant relationship on the Damascus road? Yes and no. No, since the relationship still involved the same covenant relationship with Abraham. Yes, because the relationship necessitated the further and deeper involvement in it than was accessible as well as practiced in much of Israel's history, which signified the need to go beyond reductionism, as Ezekiel pointed to (Eze 11:19; 36:26-27) and Paul clarified (2 Cor 3:6-18, cf. Jer 24:7).

The continuity-discontinuity issue is compounded by reductionism, the function of which must be recognized as the source of discontinuity and thus distinguished from the new song (cf. Ps 40:3). Paul's new song was only the transformation from old to new: a new creation of the heart of the person from inner out made whole from above for new covenant relationship together (cf. Gal 5:6; 6:15), just as the embodied Word from God made conclusive for Nicodemus (a key antecedent for Paul, Jn 3:1-15).

This transformation to wholeness was the heart of Paul's experience and ongoing development, and thus the heart of his thought and theology (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; Rom 6:4). In order to fully understand Paul, he needs to be contextualized deeply into God's relational context and process. Paul was being transformed from old to new to go beyond a prophetic call and function in order to take the lead of God's people, perhaps analogous to Moses' call, yet beyond even that. In this sense Paul was neither an apostle of Israel nor an apostate from Israel.² Moreover, by having his heart circumcised conclusively, Paul shifted essentially from 'majority Israel' to 'minority Israel', as he clarified theologically (Rom 2:28-29; 9:6-8; 11:1-10). On this significant basis, Paul was neither an apostle of majority Israel nor an apostate of minority Israel.

What has continuity in Paul's development involves only God's whole and covenant relationship together only on God's relational terms. What has discontinuity is only about any reductionism of these. Paul's journey developed beyond those OT antecedents because the embodied Word from God directly spoke "face to face" with Paul, with the relational outcome that went beyond merely seeing mystical visions; Paul

² James Dunn raises this paradox about Paul as apostle of Israel and apostate from Israel that must be taken into account to fully understand Paul. See "Introduction" in James D.G. Dunn, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to St. Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 13.

more deeply experienced the whole of God's vulnerably-involved-person, and thus understood God even more clearly than Moses did (cf. *horao*, Acts 26:16). In this ongoing relational process Paul also grasped the functional and relational significance of God's whole. It was on this developing basis that Paul spoke unequivocally, decisively, and without compromise about the truth of the gospel (just as Peter experienced from him, Gal 2:11-14). And by its nature Paul increasingly made definitive the whole of the gospel's functional and relational significance, and thereby distinguished the experiential truth and reality of the gospel's relational outcome of wholeness for all persons (Col 1:19-23; Eph 2:19-22).

As a Jew and a Christian, what was Paul's understanding of God's people?

Paul's understanding is directly tied to his theological cognition of who, what and how God is, and his theological assumptions of human ontology and function.

On the one hand, God's people—whether Jews or Christians—were the same for Paul, though, on the other, there was a qualitative and functional difference that needed to be understood and made whole. A Jew was not unclear about the identity of 'who God is'. Most Jews in ancient Israel, however, typically had difficulty with the ontology of 'what God is' and often had problems with the function of 'how God is'. These ontological and functional issues certainly influenced and shaped, if not constructed, knowledge and understanding not only of God but also of God's people. Whether God's people were the same for Paul or had a difference depended on his theological cognition of God's ontology and function and his directly related theological anthropology, both contingent on where Paul was in his unfolding journey.

Prior to the Damascus road Paul claimed his identity with God's people through membership in Israel as a nation-state. As a nation-state in Paul's day, Israel was dominated by the Roman state and threatened by the Way in its identity as God's people. Jewish identity was based on the identity of their God, rooted in the monotheism of the Shema. The identity of 'who God is' may have been compromised in Israel's history but never redefined. Only the one God prevailed and would save them from their plight. The issue, however, was not the identity of who the Deliverer was but the insufficiency of both the ontology of the one God and the function of this God as well as the full significance of God's salvation. Their God, for example, was also the holy God, yet the full significance of God being uncommon was not understood in depth (cf. Eze 22:26). This lack equally signified and constituted a reduced ontology and function from outer in by human terms and shaping, which redefined the qualitative being and renegotiated the relational nature of God and of the ontology and function of God's people in likeness (cf. Moses' lens, Ex 33:15-16). In the process, Israel's identity as God's people shifted to nation-state in a truncated soteriology and away from the covenant people of God being saved to whole relationship together as God's family. Paul had to account for this as a Jew and be ongoingly accountable for as a Christian.

Paul received the needed epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction to understand the inner-out significance of God's people (Rom 2:28-29). This further and deeper significance was based on the experiential truth of his whole knowledge and understanding (*synesis*) of the whole of who, what and how God is, that is, Paul's *pleroma* (complete, whole) theology as relationally revealed to him face to face in the embodied face of Christ (2 Cor 4:6). His integral understanding of the whole of God and

God's relational whole involved his own ontology and function made whole. Having been restored to God's relational context and reconciled in God's relational process, as a Jew now from inner out, Paul turned from identity in a nation-state back to the covenant relationship of God's people; and as a Christian, he experienced the full significance of the relational belonging and ontological identity of God's people (cf. 2 Cor 6:16; Ti 2:14).

Turning away from nation-state, Paul's discourse partially turned to "the kingdom of God" (e.g. Acts 19:8; 20:25; 28:23,31). This focus for some of God's people, however, did not clearly distinguish "the kingdom of God" from nation-state as long as it was still perceived with a quantitative lens from outer in. Paul's discourse about the kingdom was an extension of Jesus' kingdom discourse, who made definitive its qualitative ontology from inner out (Lk 17:20-21) and relational function (Lk 11:20; 18:16-17). Paul extended this qualitative ontology and relational function of the kingdom as God's people (cf. Rom 14:17; 1 Cor 4:20), and he also further distinguished the kingdom and deepened the understanding of God's people in his *pleroma* theology (Col 1:12-13; Eph 1:4-14, 22-23).

In the whole of Paul's theology, and in the relational progression with Christ (the *pleroma* of God) and the Spirit (Christ's relational replacement), God's people became the relational outcome 'already' that emerged in the church (the *pleroma* of Christ). Yet, for Paul the *pleroma* of Christ (Eph 1:23) is not the institution of the church but the embodying of the church in the qualitative ontology from inner out and the relational function of *agape* involvement in the whole relationship together of God's new creation family—integrally in the image of the one God's qualitative ontology (the ontological One) and in the likeness of the whole of God's relational function (the relational Whole). Nothing less and no substitutes of who, what and how God is and God's people are could signify and can constitute their whole ontology and function. More important than as a Jew and a Christian, Paul's experiential truth as the adopted son in the whole and holy God's family was 'who he is' and 'whose he is', in whole relationship together, both intimate and equalized, with his sisters and brothers.

The Transformed Paul's Transformed Ecclesiology

In the systemic framework of Paul's theology, God's creative and communicative actions are always relational actions only for whole relationship together. God's relational action does not impose a template on the human person to reduce human function. By God's relational nature, relationship is never unilateral but necessitates compatible reciprocal response and involvement. On this relational basis, Paul never assumed that the function of wholeness would simply emerge, nor did he leave wholeness' function to the interpretation of human terms. Therefore, as Paul made definitive the integrated function necessary for wholeness, he also made imperative the ongoing redemptive change vitally necessary to turn from reductionism to wholeness, and the choice involved to be whole, live whole and make whole—God's irreducible relational whole on God's nonnegotiable relational terms (Rom 12:1-2).

In the first eleven chapters of Romans, Paul provided the theological clarity for the whole of God's thematic relational response of grace to the human condition. Paul now concentrates on the functional clarity (building on his Galatians letter) necessary to function whole. Based on his theological discourse in the previous chapters, "therefore" (12:1), Paul issues to his family ("brothers and sisters") a nonnegotiable call (*parakaleo*, "appeal to") "to present" (*paristemi*) their persons to God in the necessary reciprocal relational response to God's relational response of grace ("by the mercies of God"). What is this necessary reciprocal relational response?

A variation of this call was first issued to Abram: "I am *El Shaddai*, walk before me and be *tamiym*" (Gen 17:1). Just as Abraham was not reduced to being defined by the perfection of what he did ("blameless"), *paristemi* ("to present," stand before) also should not be reduced to 'what to do' (i.e. "sacrifice") according to religious norms (e.g., *torah* or a reduced popular gospel)—which would essentially be done in front of the curtain. Rather Paul's call to *paristemi* was only about 'how to be involved in relationship' according to the whole gospel constituted by God's relational response of grace that removes the veil. Then, "to present, stand before" God in what necessary way? How?

This involves the three basic interrelated issues integral for determining all practice, as discussed throughout this study:

1. The integrity and significance of the person presented before others.
2. The quality of what that person communicates to those others in relationship.
3. The depth level of involvement that person engages with those others in those relationships.

These issues are implied in Paul's discourse. In his nonnegotiable call, he is making definitive a further functional paradigm to extend his earlier functional paradigm of "holy and blameless" (discussed previously). This added paradigm is necessary both to be whole in reciprocal relationship with God and to live whole in transformed relationships together as God's church family—which is a functional requisite to make whole in the world, just as Jesus prayed about relational wholeness together (Jn 17:21-23). This function forms the basis for ecclesiology to be so transformed.

For Paul, the church (the *pleroma* of Christ) is God's relational context for the convergence of the theological dynamics in Paul's theological forest (Eph 1:4-14,22-23), and embodies God's relational context and process for relationally extending these theological-functional dynamics to wholeness (Eph 2:22; 4:12-13). *Pleroma* (fullness, completion) is the wholeness that reflects the development not only in Paul's thought and theology (e.g. Col 1:19) but also in the whole of Paul's person (e.g. Col 2:10; 3:15; Eph 3:19; cf. Phil 2:1-2; 3:12, 15-16).

Paul's Development

The experiential truth of Paul's development—the whole of Jesus *into* the relational Paul to compose the theological Paul—is questioned or obscured by disputes over the authorship of some of these letters, notably Ephesians. Ephesians emerges in the Pauline corpus without the usual context—no personal greetings and situations noted,

with the Ephesian title added later—to understand Paul’s purpose, or that he even wrote this text. Yet I conclude for Paul’s authorship despite any style and language differences from his undisputed letters, and that Ephesians closely followed his Colossian and Philemon letters. My conclusion of the insufficiency of these disputed details to deny Paul’s authorship is based on the depth of its content, which emerges to be an even further development of Paul’s thought and theology than Colossians presents. That is, this development is his integrated content based on Paul’s claim to have received further revelation (Eph 3:3-4), while in ongoing relationship with Jesus Christ (Gal 1:11-12; Acts 26:16) and in reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit (1 Cor 2:10, 12-13). Paul’s depth of development reflected in Ephesians is, to be specific, about his theological forest, which integrated his previous theological dynamics (notably in Romans); and then he extended these dynamics in the ecclesiology necessary for the relational function of the embodied *pleroma* of Christ, the church reconciled in wholeness ‘already’ by the *pleroma* of God, just as Paul introduced earlier and was developing about God’s new creation family (2 Cor 5:17-19; Gal 3:26-28; 6:15-16; Col 1:19-22; 3:10-11,15). It is highly unlikely that any author other than Paul could have formulated this theological integration; and the existence of a Pauline school has not been established to attribute this to one of his students. This is the outcome of Paul’s *synesis* (whole knowledge and understanding) of the church that was developing from its earlier beginning in 1 Corinthians (e.g. 10:17-18, 12:13, 27). Paul’s readers also need to *syniemi* further than the historical Paul in human contextualization to account for the whole of Paul’s person (in the relational Paul) and the whole in his theology (with the theological Paul).

Paul’s summary of his theological forest (Eph 1:3-14; cf. Col 1:15-22) illuminates his *synesis* of God’s thematic relational action in response to the human condition—the condition that, as noted earlier, neuroscience defines also as the inherent human relational need and problem. Paul’s *synesis* is the whole understanding of God’s response that becomes the integrating process, framework and theme for the various theological trees (the complex dynamics) in his previous letters (particularly in Romans) that makes definitive their theological forest. It is within Paul’s theological forest that the ecclesiology necessary to be whole, God’s whole family only on God’s terms, is relationally embodied and whole-ly emerges in Ephesians. Without his ecclesiology in wholeness, Paul’s *oikonomia* (family relational responsibility) to *pleroo* (complete, make whole) the relational word of God would not have been fulfilled (Col 1:25).

The Roots of *Ekklesia*

In Ephesians, Paul makes definitive the ecclesiology that by the nature of its roots emerged from antecedents prior to Paul’s letters and even predating his studies in Judaism. These antecedents were necessarily integrated into his ecclesiology. Building on our discussion of Jesus in the last chapter, the first of these antecedents was rooted in OT Israel as the gathering of God’s people (*qahal*, Dt 9:10). The Septuagint (the OT Gk translation familiar to Paul, a Roman-citizen Jew) uses *ekklesia* for Israel as the covenant community. This embeds the NT *ekklesia* (“church,” e.g. Eph 1:22; Col 1:18) in the context of God’s ongoing relational action with his chosen people and their covenant relationship together (Ex 19:5; Dt 7:6-8; Eze 11:19-20). Beyond being a mere historical

root and religious heritage, this antecedent is important for understanding the whole of God's thematic relational involvement and the theological dynamics in Paul's theological forest enacted only for whole relationship together as God's family (Eph 1:4-5,14).

The term *ekklesia* itself, though used by Paul in his letters, has only limited descriptive value for the ontology and function of the church. Since *ekklesia* is a static term, it is neither sufficiently significant nor necessarily useful to define the church in whole. The more dynamic understanding for the church's ontology and function than merely a gathering (even as *ekkletoi*) necessarily came from the second antecedent integrated into Paul's ecclesiology: the whole of Jesus, the complete Christology spawning Paul's whole ecclesiology.

The theological and functional significance of Jesus' church emerged when the focus was given to the process Jesus implied in his statement to "build my church" (*oikodomeo*, Mt 16:18), which directly involves what he relationally embodied face to face in his life and practice, and which he made further evident in his post-ascension involvement with various churches (Rev 2-3). From Paul's direct relational involvement with Jesus, he understood the experiential truth that Jesus' relational involvement and relational work went further and deeper than a gathering, regardless of a gathering's doctrinal and moral purity, its extensive church activity and its esteemed reputation (as demonstrated by churches in Ephesus and Sardis, Rev 2:2-4; 3:1-2). The relational language used by Jesus with the relational word *oikodomeo* only composed and involved a family living in a house, not merely a gathering under the same roof.

Paul later integrated Jesus' relational word and its roots with their significant cognates for the church's ontology and function, with *oikos* as the basis for the church as God's household (1 Tim 3:15); *oikeios*, belonging specifically to God's family (Eph 2:19); *oikodomeo*, building God's family (Eph 2:21; 4:12); *synoikodomeo*, being built together as God's family (*syn* and *oikodomeo*, Eph 2:22); *oikonomos*, led by persons who manage God's family (1 Cor 4:1); and *oikonomia*, for which Paul was given the specific relational responsibility to administrate the relational outcome 'already' of God's family (Eph 3:2; Col 1:25), that which is in relational progression on an eschatological trajectory to its relational conclusion 'not yet' (Eph 1:10).

The relational function of these terms (relational not referential) points to the definitive relational process of the new kinship family of God that Jesus constituted in the incarnation. That is to say, the specific relational connections Jesus made throughout the incarnation to build his family together spawned the embryonic church from which the whole ontology and function of the church emerged. Jesus provided Paul, partly through the Jesus tradition and mostly by direct relationship together along with the Spirit, with the necessary relational context for the relational embodying of his church and the imperative relational process for the relational function of his church. This is the irreducible relational context and nonnegotiable relational process that the whole of Jesus vulnerably embodied progressively in the whole of God's relational context of family by his whole relational process of family love. Thus, the church as God's family was made definitive by Jesus even before the cross, and was fully constituted by his salvific relational work; and this relational outcome is what the Spirit, as his relational replacement, will bring to its relational conclusion—and Paul, not Peter, would engage the *oikonomia* to provide the ecclesiology necessary for the whole of God's family.

Therefore, Paul's ecclesiology is rooted in what germinated with the whole of Jesus' person and relational involvement, who relationally embodied for Paul the *pleroma* of God in *pleroma* Christology for *pleroma* soteriology. This integral theological-functional dynamic was first Paul's experiential truth and then was the key antecedent into which Paul's ecclesiology is integrated for the church to be the *pleroma* of Christ. Any ecclesiology not rooted and integrated in *pleroma* Christology is insufficient to make functional the relational outcome of *pleroma* soteriology (what Christ saves *to*), and thereby lacks wholeness for persons and relationships. Such an ecclesiology is shaped by human terms rooted in human contextualization, which at best is only a gathering—an ontological simulation and epistemological illusion of the *ekklesia* Jesus builds. While a mere gathering may have some functional significance for those gathered, it does not have relational significance both to the *pleroma* of God and for the inherent human need of those gathered (cf. Jn 14:9; Mt 15:8-9)—consequently reinforcing and sustaining the human relational condition rather than making it whole.

His Ecclesiology of God's Whole Family

The doctrine of the church and church function is either whole or some reduction. This doctrine either defines the extent of what emerges in church life and practice, or limits it. Christ's church rises up with him to emerge above and beyond a gathering in all of its shapes. The whole ecclesiology that emerges for Paul is not a mere doctrinal truth of this new church body but the experiential truth entirely of whole relationship together in God's whole family on God's qualitative relational terms. What unfolds in Paul's ecclesiology?

In going beyond a doctrinal statement, Paul's ecclesiology does not become a metaphor, an organizational structure or programmatic system for church life and function. Rather, his ecclesiology is the integral theological-functional dynamic signifying the embodying of the whole ontology and function of the church in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God. On this relational basis and ongoing relational base, whole ecclesiology signifies the embodying of God's new creation family in the functional significance of its relational outcome 'already' in ongoing relational progression with the Spirit to its relational conclusion 'not yet'. This ecclesiology emerges only from the embodied *pleroma* of God, who constitutes the embodying of the *pleroma* of Christ with the Spirit. For Paul, ecclesiology is rooted in God's whole and is the theological dynamic of this wholeness, nothing less and no substitutes. Paul's ecclesiology then is always synonymous with *pleroma* ecclesiology, the ecclesiology of God's whole family. Therefore, the ecclesiology of this new creation is irreducible in the church's ontology, and its shared new covenant is nonnegotiable in the church's function. Anything less and any substitutes in the church are a renegotiated ecclesiology shaped by human terms from human contextualization, which renders the church to a fragmentary composition of persons and relationships lacking wholeness.

The experiential truth of being whole and its experiential reality of function in whole relationship together are both the theological purpose and functional concern of Paul's ecclesiology. When he made the relational imperative in his Colossians letter to "let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one

body” (Col 3:15), his concern for the church was to be whole and to function in the wholeness of relationship together. For this purpose of church ontology and function, he wanted this letter to be read also in the church at Laodicea (Col 4:16). One person in particular whom Paul most likely targeted for this relational imperative of wholeness was Philemon, though whether he resided in Colosse or Laodicea is uncertain. Philemon was the slave-owner of Onesimus (4:9), who ran away from Philemon and with whom Paul shared family love and who now belonged to Christ as a son in God’s family (4:9; Phlm 16). We will discuss the specific implications of their relationship in chapter ten, but for now it is important to identify his personal letter to Philemon as a key letter for the relational function of the church to be whole in its relationships together as God’s new creation family. The Philemon letter is a specific relational context in which wholeness in ecclesiology is made functional.

Though written before Ephesians and closely aligned with Colossians, Philemon reflects what was already developing in Paul’s thought for ecclesiology to be whole. Following the course of Colossians’ theological dialogue (discourse in relational context) on God’s new creation family (Col 3:10-11) and relational imperative of wholeness (3:15), Philemon emerges prior to Ephesians to become a functional bridge to Paul’s thought and theology in Ephesians. In this letter vital to the Pauline corpus—both of whose understanding are diminished without their integrated development—Paul clearly illuminates the theological basis specifically for church-leader Philemon’s relational function and generally for the whole ontology and function of the church in the ecclesiology of the whole, Paul’s *pleroma* ecclesiology—the relational outcome distinguishing God’s whole family.

Its Functional Basis

In spite of its basic need in those who belong to Christ, the experiential truth of a whole ecclesiology is often reduced to, not distinguished from, or even indeed, never realized as other than a doctrinal or propositional truth. While the objective truth is necessary, doctrinal and propositional truths are not sufficient in themselves to constitute whole ecclesiology. Paul’s ecclesiology is not compatible with such theological reductionism, nor is this reductionism an option capable of replacing experiential truth. This reductionism predictably happens apart from the Spirit, as Paul has functionally identified throughout his previous letters (1 Thes 5:19; 1 Cor 12:13; 2 Cor 3:17-18; Gal 5:16,25; Rom 8:9,14,16; Phil 2:1). Yet, Paul is not leaning to subjectivism or even fideism. Conjointly in his dialogue with churches about the church, Paul challenges the assumptions of ecclesiology and its related theological anthropology held by his readers (both past and present).

The functional basis for Paul’s ecclesiology is clearly identified as the Spirit’s presence and involvement. In Ephesians, Paul integrates and relationally extends the Spirit’s relational work. By reciprocal involvement with the Spirit, the Spirit baptizes and raises up those who share in (*koinonia*) Christ’s body and blood for the redemptive change necessary to embody the new creation. The new creation is not a theological concept with only theoretical significance; rather, this new creation is the experiential truth of the relational outcome that emerges only from relational participation in Christ’s death and resurrection together with the Spirit for the death of reduced human ontology

and function and the raising of whole ontology and function (Eph 2:1-10; 4:24; Rom 8:6,11). This participation relationally extends to the Father to involve the whole of God in whole relationship together in order, theologically and functionally together, to embody God's new creation family (2:18-22). The theological dynamics in Paul's theological forest (1:3-14), which are involved in this process of redemptive reconciliation, by necessity transform human persons from being defined and determined by reductionism to be defined and determined by whole ontology and function created in the image and likeness of God—that is, that to which the Spirit raises those in Christ (2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10). This new creation of wholeness involves conjointly and inseparably the whole person and whole persons in relationship together to embody the whole ontology and function of God's new creation family—all of whom and which are constituted together by the relational involvement of the Spirit. The collective ontology and function of God's family define and determine its relationships together on the basis of this wholeness. These new and whole relationships together signify the transformed relationships between transformed persons that are necessary to be God's whole family, the *pleroma* of Christ, therefore which are also irreducible for church ontology and nonnegotiable for church function (as Paul pointed Philemon to Onesimus).

The reciprocal relational involvement by and with the Spirit is indispensable to this transformation process to wholeness and whole relationship together, and the person of the Spirit is inseparable from the embodying of the whole ontology and function of God's new creation family. On this determining basis, Paul prays decisively for and makes relationally imperative the church's deeper relational involvement both with the Spirit and with each other together (Eph 1:17-20; 3:16-21; 4:3-6; 5:18b-21). He also identified unmistakably the relational consequence for the Spirit when the church's relationships together function in reductionism (the context of 4:30).

In addition, Paul implies that the relational consequence for church ontology and function is to be reduced to persons as *epistemic orphans* without whole knowledge and understanding of who they are and whose they are (contrary to Paul's prayers and Jesus' promise, Jn 15:26; 16:13-15); and thus the deeper relational consequence for the church is to be reduced to a gathering of those who are *relational orphans* from inner out despite bearing the family titles from outer in. That is, in function such a gathering has no relational significance both to the whole of God (in Jesus by the Spirit with the Father) and to those gathered, leaving them essentially as orphans (contrary to Jesus' claim, Jn 14:18, cf. 14:1,27; 16:33).

Jesus' assurance to "not leave you orphaned" is contingent on the reciprocal relational involvement of the Spirit. The Spirit's relational presence and work is certainly assumed by Jesus as his relational replacement and is further illuminated by Paul. The wholeness of relationship together as family promised by Jesus (Jn 14:18-20,23,27) and constituted by the Spirit (1 Cor 12:13; Rom 8:6) is the whole relationships together basic to Paul's ecclesiology and the wholeness he builds by making it the relational imperative for the church (Col 3:15; Gal 5:16,25; 6:16). Yet, Paul is not imposing a template for church conformity. As Jesus does, Paul also illuminates the reciprocal relational nature of the Spirit's involvement, which includes exposing the lack or absence of the church's reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit. In Paul's ecclesiology, the relational consequence of function apart from the Spirit is to be rendered orphans, both relationally and epistemically (cf. Rom 8:12-16). 'Relational orphan' is a functional condition lacking

the experiential truth and reality of relationally belonging to God's family, even while claiming its propositional truth or professing its doctrinal truth. 'Epistemic orphan' is a condition of cognitive and existential homelessness, signifying distance, detachment or separation in God's family, which leaves God's children in ambiguity, confusion or even deeper conflict about who they are and whose they are. Apart from relational involvement with the Spirit, how church members address this inner longing for relational connection (which they may not consciously acknowledge) or handle the fragmentation of their beliefs/faith directly involves reductionism and substitutes of ontological simulation and epistemological illusion signifying renegotiated ecclesiology. Further discussion of this reductionist dynamic will be helpful for fully understanding the whole in Paul's ecclesiology.

There is a counter-dynamic at work—"beyond what is written" (1 Cor 4:6)—underlying the condition of epistemic orphans that interacts with the condition of relational orphans in church contexts where distance, detachment or separation exists in their relationships together. This counter-dynamic overlaps in function with those living apart from God's created design and purpose for life in whole relationships together (cf. Gen 2:18), that is, the relational consequence that emerged in the primordial garden that involved both relational and epistemic issues (Gen 3:1-13). The loss of whole relationship together became the prevailing condition for human ontology and function, thereby embedding and enslaving human life in the reality of relationships needing to be whole—the inherent human relational need and problem underlying the human shaping of relationships. Whether it is the general loss of whole relationship together in humanity's family or the lack of whole relationship together in the church as God's family, the consequential condition of relational orphans interacts with the condition of epistemic orphans to create the basis for either human shaping, construction and even reification of alternatives for the inherent human need, which includes alternative forms of church life and practice.

Or the interaction between these conditions creates the basis for acknowledging the inadequacy of human effort and turning to the constituting source of whole relationship together—God's thematic relational response embodying the gospel of transformation to wholeness. This vulnerable response-dynamic is critical for the basis of Paul's ecclesiology, while the counter-dynamic becomes the basis for renegotiated ecclesiology. **How does this response-dynamic work to determine ecclesiology?**

It will be helpful to use the church at Corinth as a working example, since Paul's readers are given an overview of this dynamic in 1 Corinthians. Paul addressed this gathering of fragmented relationships with the epistemological clarification (e.g. 1 Cor 8:1-3) and with the hermeneutic correction of wholeness and the whole relationships together to be God's whole family (e.g. 3:21-22; 10:17; 12:13)—similar to the clarification and correction he experienced from *tamiym*. His focus for their clarification and correction was centered on their learning from his personal example the meaning of "Nothing beyond what is written" (4:6). Assuming Paul is referring to more than his earlier quotes from Isaiah, Jeremiah, Job and the Psalms (1:19,31; 2:9,16; 3:19-20), Paul focuses on the whole OT canon existing during his time. For Paul, however, what is written goes beyond texts and is deeper than mere words, that is, texts and words as the same narrow lens of the referentialization of the Word. The canon Paul focused on are the words of God and thus the relational words from God communicated to his people. God's

communicative action is the response-dynamic in question that Paul raises, whose initiating relational involvement Paul further illuminated in the next verse with the rhetorical question “What do you have that you did not receive?” (4:7), and later reinforces with “did the word of God originate with you?” (14:36). Paul focuses his readers on this relational dynamic. He is not raising a propositional truth for their epistemological clarification, nor is he teaching them a doctrinal truth for their hermeneutic correction. Rather his purpose is to illuminate the experiential truth involved in this relational response-dynamic initiated by God’s communicative action. That is, Paul’s epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction made definitive that it is the experiential truth of what is written that is primary; and this experiential truth is not found in the text alone (i.e. merely as a text) and is not located in mere words, both of which are disconnected from their relational source by the counter-dynamic. Texts and words apart from their relational dynamic are reductionism that has relational consequences characteristic of reductionism’s counter-relational work (cf. Jesus’ critique, Jn 5:39-40).

Paul’s clarification and correction illuminate that what is written are relational words only of God’s communication, which by its nature involves a dynamic process of relational interaction: the reciprocal response-dynamic. The reciprocal nature of this relational interaction necessitates involvement in the relational epistemic process with the Spirit to know and understand what the author-God is communicating. An epistemic process with words/texts by themselves, even exegetic words about God, become disembodied, relationally separated from their author, and narrowed down to referential information about God. Consequently, any results at best can be no more than mere words known only as exegesis for propositional truth just *about* God, and simply texts understood only as a conventional biblical theology for doctrinal truth just *about* God, each without any relational significance *of* God and limited to reductionist functional significance only for reader-user. Such results or less signify the following consequence: when ‘what is written’ is reduced to words without relational significance of God and to reader, as Israel often experienced with Torah (cf. Paul’s assessment, Rom 11:7-8; 2 Cor 3:15), the relational consequence is the condition of epistemic orphans, who knowingly or unknowingly are without whole knowledge and understanding of who they are and whose they are. This condition directly involves and affects human ontology and function, and is consequential for determining their further reduction in relationships together.

Having this whole knowledge and understanding is nothing less than the experiential truth of what is written. This experiential truth is entirely the relational outcome of direct involvement in the relational epistemic process with God by the reciprocal involvement of the Spirit—which is in contrast to engaging a conventional epistemic process revolved around mere human effort (as Paul contrasts, 1 Cor 2:13), including efforts at exegesis and integrating what is written in a biblical theology. Apart from this relational epistemic process with the Spirit, epistemic orphans also become relational orphans. The interaction of these two conditions creates the basis either for disillusionment and even despair, or for dissatisfaction and even desperation, which further creates the basis for human shaping of what is written (e.g. reader-response determination). Consequently, such persons go beyond those words having “lost” their relational significance, in order to find alternatives for relational significance to fulfill

their inherent human relational need—whether they are aware of their relational condition or not. Moreover, this orphan-interaction creates the further basis for constructing substitutes whose ontological simulation and epistemological illusion often get reified as the source of fulfillment for the human need and resolution for the human problem. This reification, for example, has happened in mysticism and spirituality practices (cf. Paul’s polemic in 1 Cor 14:1-33).³ Such human construction and reification are what Paul confronts in his rhetorical question “did the word of God originate with you?” (14:36).

The response-dynamic of God’s communicative act in what is written and the relational consequence of being apart from it are the issues that Paul raises to challenge the ontology and function of his readers. For Paul, however, the most significant consequence of reducing what is written and going beyond it is the emergence of a renegotiated ecclesiology. Epistemic-relational orphans renegotiate the ontology and function of the church as God’s family in the absence of the experiential truth of God’s communicative relational action and involvement (e.g. 1 Cor 11:17-21, 27-30), renegotiating ecclesiology in contrast and conflict with *pleroma* ecclesiology (10:17; 12:13). In one sense, you can’t blame them for wanting more, signified in re-forming their theology and practice, if the alternative is to remain in the status quo.

It is also insufficient for Paul’s readers merely to acknowledge what is written as God’s communicative act. Paul assumes that affirmation involves the reciprocal relational response necessary for its experiential truth. Without the experiential truth of God’s communicative action, readers are still left functionally in the condition of orphans, epistemic and/or relational orphans. The only recourse is to turn to the source of the word for the experiential truth of its Subject. This critical process of experiential truth necessary to change from orphans to family starts with the reader’s interpretive lens (*phronesis*) and what is perceived of what is written in the word of God. The hermeneutic by which the reader engages the word/text is determinative of what emerges from this epistemic process. Just as Jesus critically distinguished the hermeneutic of “a child” from the hermeneutic of “the wise and learned” (Lk 10:21), the epistemic results are in contrast, if not in conflict.

A limited epistemic process of human effort from a quantitative lens dependent on outer-in rationalized interpretation alone invariably separates the object of the text from its Subject’s relational context and process. This reduces the ontology of the object-God by fragmenting the whole of God into components (e.g. laws, promises, teachings, example, etc.) without whole knowledge and understanding of the object-God as communicator-Subject disclosing the whole of God for relationship together. This reduces God to an object position and renders God to function without the relational significance of being Subject. The epistemic result is without the experiential truth of the object-subject God of what is written. This is the unequivocal relational consequence because engaging the object of the text also as Subject is a function only of relationship.

In contrast, the hermeneutic of “a child” vulnerably engages in a relational epistemic process, not to be confused with subjectivism or fideism. This hermeneutic certainly does not eliminate reason but puts rational interpretation into congruence with its whole relational context and into compatibility with its whole relational process; thus

³ For a discussion of the reification of worldviews, religion and ideology, see David K. Naugle, *Worldview: the History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 101-2, 178-80, 185-86, 236-38.

it does not disembody the relational words by the author that reveal object-God communicated from subject-God in relationship. For Paul, experiential truth must by its nature involve the relational epistemic process in which truth is from beyond the reader as “subject” and is definitively found in the object-God of the text disclosed by subject-God in relational terms. The reader alone cannot define and determine the object of the text without reducing the ontology and function of God to merely an object; and involvement in the relational epistemic process with the Spirit is the conclusive means to disclaim reification by the reader. Yet, this does not complete the relational epistemic process for experiential truth.

It is vital not only to distinguish object-God from subject-reader but equally important to distinguish unmistakably the subject-God who relationally communicates with subject-reader for relational involvement together in Subject-to-subject, Face-to-face relationship. The reader as person cannot have relational connection with an object but only with the Subject whose reciprocal involvement can be experienced vulnerably in relationship together. This distinction is not conceptual but the experiential reality of any and all relationships. The relational epistemic process is complete with this reciprocal relational connection with the whole subject-object God through the Spirit, and the integral relational outcome is the experiential truth of the whole of God’s ontology and function in relationship together as family. It is this experiential truth of the *pleroma* (fullness, complete, whole) of God embodied for Face-to-face relationship together without the veil that is the basis, by the Spirit, to further embody the ontology and function of the *pleroma* of Christ and, with the Spirit, to ongoingly compose the whole ontology and function of the church—participating in the life of God’s family. The experiential reality of nothing less and no substitutes for wholeness is the functional basis for Paul’s *pleroma* ecclesiology. Anything less and any substitutes, even in correct exegesis as referential truth or rightly cohered for doctrinal truth, are a renegotiated ecclesiology signifying a reduced ontology and function of a gathering of epistemic and/or relational orphans.

Its Ontology and Function of the Church

Previous to Ephesians, Paul had identified the church as the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27; Col 1:24), yet his later discourse in Ephesians on the church helps to distinguish this as a metaphor to illustrate an organic structure and system. In Ephesians, Paul’s *synesis* (e.g. 3:4) has deepened and not provides the theological-functional clarity to distinguish the body of Christ beyond a metaphor of the church and makes functional the embodying of the church’s ontology as the *pleroma* of Christ (1:23; 4:12-13; cf. his prayer, 3:16-19). Christ’s wholeness is the peace (cf. *tamiym*) that Paul’s epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction have illuminated to the churches throughout his letters (e.g. 1 Cor 7:15b; 14:33; Gal 6:16; Rom 14:19; Col 3:15). In contrast to a Greek emphasis on peace, this is not about the mere absence of conflict for Paul, despite the conflict situations he was addressing in the churches. This peace is the presence of wholeness, even in situations of conflict, that only Jesus gives (Jn 14:27). Moreover, this is the wholeness that those “in me” will have, Jesus declared (Jn 16:33); that is, the relational outcome “in Christ” Paul illuminated by the *koinonia* with Christ’s body and blood (1 Cor 10:16-17) and baptism in Christ’s death and resurrection through the Spirit

(Rom 6:4; 8:11; 1 Cor 12:13)—the wholeness that Paul theologically and functionally clarifies in Ephesians (2:14-17; 4:3-6), and that embodies Jesus' new wine fellowship *into* the church. This new wine relational flow of his church cannot be constrained to a body or a gathering.

In full congruence, then, the whole ontology and function of the *pleroma* of God that Jesus embodied in death and the Spirit raised whole in the resurrection is also participated in by those in Christ through the Spirit (as discussed in chap. 6). The relational outcome of this communion together also embodies them in the whole ontology and function as the *pleroma* of Christ, in the image and likeness of the whole of God (Eph 4:24; cf. 2 Cor 3:18; Rom 8:29). From the convergence of these complex theological dynamics in Paul's theological forest emerges this reciprocating relational dynamic of embodiment by the Spirit, in which the embodied *pleroma* of God is relationally extended in likeness not by a metaphor but by the integrally distinguished embodying of the *pleroma* of Christ, that is, the embodied wholeness of the ontology and function of the church (1:9-10, 22-23).

What theological-functional clarity does Paul make definitive for the whole ontology and function of the church? First of all, that the body of Christ clearly is not a concept, a doctrine, a truth-claim or a confession of faith. This is the embodying of the wholeness of the church's ontology and function in likeness of the embodied whole ontology and function in the face of Christ, distinguished in whole relationship together. Thus, this embodying is not theoretical, an ideal or an intention. The embodied church of Christ is the experiential truth of this relational outcome 'already' and its ongoing experiential reality in relational progression to 'not yet', both in reciprocal relationship with the Spirit. Therefore, the church is fully accountable to be whole in its ontology and function now for the primacy of whole relationship together. By its nature in the present, neither epistemic orphans without whole knowledge and understanding of who they are and whose they are, nor relational orphans with distance, detachment or separation in their relationships together can account for the embodying of the *pleroma* of Christ in its primacy of unreduced relationship without fragmentation. For Paul, anything less and any substitutes of whole ontology and function cannot embody *pleroma* ecclesiology, but only constitute a renegotiated ecclesiology of reduced ontology and function. Embodying in likeness of the embodied *pleroma* of God in relationship together is the initial function that Paul makes definitive for the church. This function is not optional for a church's life and practice, nor is it reducible or negotiable. The embodying in Paul's ecclesiology is the key for the emergence of the church.

What emerges in this embodying that distinguishes it clearly from all other church life and practice? Embodying should not be confused with a common incarnational notion. Just as the incarnation of the *pleroma* of God is constituted in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes, so is embodying. That is, embodying is conjointly whole ontology irreducible to human shaping and construction, and whole function nonnegotiable to human terms from human contextualization (including of culture and other contextual aspects). To embody the *pleroma* of Christ, by its very nature, is defined and determined by only the combined transformation of 'who the church is' to its ontology in the qualitative image of the holy God, and of 'whose the church is' to its function in the relational likeness of the whole and holy God. This transformed identity of 'who and whose the church is' is the new creation of God's family, which emerges

only by the reciprocal relational presence, involvement and work of the Spirit. Embodying of the church, therefore, is only the new creation; otherwise, its ontology and function cannot be in likeness to the embodied *pleroma* of God, as Paul clearly distinguished (4:23-24; cf. Rom 8:29). A diminished ontology and function can be rendered at best as just an ontological simulation by relational orphans and an epistemological illusion by epistemic orphans; but relational-epistemic orphans in the church neither can constitute nor do they signify the whole ontology and function of the church in the primacy of whole relationship together of transformed ecclesiology—the ecclesiology of God’s new creation family.

The transformation to the new creation that is necessary to embody the *pleroma* of Christ involves both individual persons and relationships. In Paul’s theological forest, the theological dynamics of this transformation process are made functional by the Spirit, and thus the transformation of persons and relationships is inseparable from the reciprocal relational involvement of the Spirit. For Paul, the Spirit is simply indispensable for the embodying of the church to emerge in whole ontology and function distinguishing the new creation.

Paul reviews first the transformation of persons to whole ontology and function (Eph 2:1-10). The sin of reductionism prevailed in reduced human ontology and function, to which God’s thematic relational action of grace responded in *agape* involvement for the redemptive change necessary from reduced to whole ontology and function. The process from reductionism to wholeness involves the theological-functional dynamic of equalization, integration and reconciliation, or what I simply call *redemptive reconciliation*.

The redemptive change from *old* to *new* involves freeing human persons from being defined and determined by reductionism. A church with a weak view of sin, which does not address reductionism, is unable to emerge whole, mature in wholeness, or survive in living whole. Churches must understand that the sin of reductionism reduces human ontology and function to be defined and determined from the outer in, for example, by what persons do and/or have. This fragments human persons and enslaves human integrity, worth and identity to these reductionist criteria, to which are ascribed human distinctions not only fragmenting but stratifying human persons as ‘better or less’. Enslavement to reductionism is redeemed by God, and persons entrenched in better-or-less distinctions are equalized from inner out before God, which frees them from fragmentation to be integrated and made whole in ontology and function both as persons and in relationships. Therefore, transformed persons are equalized persons who have been freed from reductionism. Yet, transformed persons are not just free persons who have been equalized before God but who also have been equalized as persons with each other. The above influence of reductionism on the human person also results in the human shaping of relationships together (cf. Gen 3:1,7-8), most notably fragmenting and stratifying relationships. Thus, the nature of their relationships together necessarily also undergoes redemptive change. Transformed persons have not only been saved *from* reductionism but they are also irreducibly and nonnegotiablely saved *to* wholeness together. In other words, being equalized from better-or-less distinctions conjointly and inseparably integrates persons to whole ontology and function and then reconciles those transformed persons into equalized relationships in order to transform their relationships

together to be whole also—just as Paul previously qualified for redeemed persons (Gal 5:1,13; 6:15-16; cf. 1 Cor 8:1).

Embodying of the *pleroma* of Christ is distinguished only in the process of transformation to the new creation in likeness of God, which necessitates transformed persons relationally involved in transformed relationship together for the church's whole ontology and function. The whole function aspect of this new creation, that Paul identified as the outcome of persons being equalized, is not merely the work of individual persons but also necessitates the collective function of persons together in relationship (Eph 2:10, cf. 1 Cor 12:12-13); this is the function that Paul qualifies as ontology and function in likeness of the whole and holy God (4:24).

As he develops ecclesiology to be whole, Paul illuminates the collective function of the church in order to be whole and distinguished from the common shaping of human contextualization (2:11-22). Transformed persons are equalized persons who are relationally involved in transformed relationships, which clearly necessitate equalized relationships (2:11-13, cf. Col 3:10-11). Paul makes equalized relationships together in the church the relational imperative for the whole function of the church to be compatible and congruent with the wholeness that Christ himself embodied only for the embodying of the church to be whole (*pleroma*) in equalized relationships together (2:14-17, cf. Col 3:15). In the transformation process to the new creation, the relational purpose primary in its theological dynamic of redemption and integration is reconciliation. Without equalized relationships in the church, relationships together are not transformed to whole relationships together with the veil removed between them, consequently they still labor in the fragmentation of persons and relationships defined by the better-or-less distinctions that stratify (2:15-16)—distinctions that totally nullify God's relational response of grace in Paul's ecclesiology (2:8-9). God's relational grace that removed the veil demands the decomposition of human distinctions in order to be in relationship with God as well as the elimination of the influence from distinctions to be in whole relationship with each other. When the relational demands of grace are not responded to, human shaping remains the primary determinant for relationship together in the church. If a church cannot clearly distinguish the source of its relationships, human shaping has assumed this function.

Without the transformed relationships of equalized relationships, what the church is saved *from* has lost its relational meaning and the functional significance for what it is saved *to*; in addition, the gospel of whole relationship together that Paul made definitive has lost the qualitative relational significance of what the church is saved *to* (3:6). This is the gospel of wholeness/peace (6:15) basic to what Jesus embodied and constitutes for the embodying of the whole church (3:6). Therefore, equalized relationships together are neither optional for church function nor negotiable for its embodying. The only alternative is reductionism, which fragments church ontology and function by its counter-relational work, notably and inevitably promoting better-or-less distinctions, even under the guise of spiritual gifts and leadership roles (as Paul will clarify, 4:11-16, cf. 1 Cor 3:21; 4:6-7; 2 Cor 10:12). Such relationships only sustain the human relational condition, not make it whole—which has been problematic in the church's witness through much of church history. This speaks to the depth of Paul's conjoint fight for the whole gospel and against its reductionism.

Just as embodying of the whole ontology and function of the *pleroma* of Christ should not be confused with a conventional notion of “incarnational,” the transformation of the church’s ontology and function should not be confused with an increasingly common usage of the notion “transformational.” Paul continues on to illuminate the transformed relationships embodying the church’s whole ontology and function, and, as he does, transformed relationships are taken deeper than equalized relationships (2:18-22). Though equalized relationships are necessary to constitute the transformed relationship for the church, they are not sufficient by themselves to complete the transformed relationships involved in the whole relationships together of God’s new creation family.

Transformed relationships are relationships both with God and with each other together as family. While transformed persons are equalized persons *before* God with the veil removed, they are not in equalized relationship *with* the whole and holy God. Nevertheless they have a unique relationship with God to participate in God’s life. This unique involvement more deeply signifies the transformed relationships necessary together with God and with each other to be whole as God’s new creation family and the *pleroma* of Christ. Paul initially defines this unique relational involvement as having “access in one Spirit to the Father” (2:18). The term for access (*prosagoge*) was used for an audience granted to someone lesser by high officials and monarchs; it comes from *prosago*, to bring near. This involved not merely an open door but the opportunity to interact with someone greater. Access for Paul goes deeper than this notion. He defines further the nature of this relational involvement with the Father as “access to God in boldness and confidence” (3:12). “Boldness” (*parresia*) involves to speak all that one thinks and feels, with “confidence” (*pepoithesis*, trust). This trust to share one’s person openly with the Father—as Jesus engaged with the Father at Gethsemane and on the cross—points to more vulnerable intimate involvement, beyond merely having access to the Father. This is the intimate connection that Paul previously defined for those who have been equalized to be relationally involved with Abba as his very own daughters and sons, and the connection that makes functional their relational belonging and ontological identity (Gal 4:4-7; Rom 8:15). Access to the Father, therefore, involves this intimate relationship together in which the whole of God is relationally involved by family love in being family together (Eph 2:4,22); and this intimate reciprocal involvement is reinforced by Paul’s prayer for specifically knowing God in their hearts (1:17-18; 3:16-19)—the communion that holds them together in their innermost.

Just as important as equalized relationships for church ontology and function is this involvement in intimate relationships together with each other. *Together* is not a static condition but the dynamic function of relationship. On the one hand, the transformation of equalized relationships provides the equal opportunity without the distance or separation of stratified relations for whole relationship together to develop; but, on the other hand, intimate relationship is the integral function that opens persons to each other from inner out for their hearts to fully come together as the new creation in likeness of the whole of God (4:24-25,32; 5:1-2, 18b-21). Intimate relationships integrally reconcile persons who have had the distance and separation in relationships removed by equalization. Moreover, intimate relationships go deeper than just occupying time, space and activities together, even as equal persons, and take involvement to the depth of *agape* relational involvement in likeness of the *pleroma* of God (3:19; 5:1-2; cf.

Col 3:14). *Agape* is not about what to do in relation to others but how to be relationally involved with others. It is vital for us to embrace that *agape* relational involvement goes beyond sacrifice for deeper intimate relationships together—just as Jesus vulnerably disclosed in relationship together with the Father and vulnerably embodied in relationship together with us (Jn 15:9; 17:23,26). This level of intimate involvement that distinguishes God’s relational terms for relationship together in God’s family cannot be substituted for by notions of sacrifice.

The experiential truth of the ontological identity of God’s new creation family depends on the function of these intimate relationships together. There is no alternative or substitute for intimate relationships that can bring persons into whole relationship together to embody God’s family in the experiential reality of their relational belonging. For Paul, being *together* is inseparable from relationship and is irreducible from the function of these relationships. This relationally belonging to each other in one family emerges only from the transformation to intimate relationships together. Relational belonging, however, should not be confused with “belonging” to a church-group, nor should ontological identity be mistaken for church-organizational identity.

Belonging in Paul’s theology and practice is clearly distinguished as relational belonging that is integral to belonging ontologically to God’s new creation family embodied by the church. By the nature of this ontological belonging, constituted by adoption, relational belonging is irreducible and nonnegotiable to the human shaping of persons and relationships. Therefore, relational belonging in our theology and practice of church must be distinguished from such shaping or it becomes incomplete, fragmentary and not whole. This reductionism is what Paul was always fighting against in order for the wholeness of persons and relationships necessary to distinguish belonging to Christ’s church, not just a church.

The relational outcome of adoption that Paul defined is the *relational belonging* of wholeness in God’s family. Relational belonging is not to be confused with mere membership or collective identity, yet that is what became Israel’s experience (Lev 25:55; Deut 7:6). Belonging can signify possession, relationship or ontology, or all three. However, whereas Israel had been redeemed to belong as God’s treasured possession, circumcision and observance of other purification and ceremonial laws became the markers of membership and national identity over the primacy of covenant relationship (cf. Ex 19:5)—thus renegotiating the covenant of love by prioritizing the quantity of their population and land (Deut 7:7-8; Gen 17:7-8). Perhaps in a secondary sense this practice of identity markers can be considered necessary for both gaining and maintaining membership in God’s people. Yet, this would not be sufficient to account for Paul’s primary concern against reductionism of God’s relational whole by human terms and shaping (cf. Rom 2:28-29) and for making conclusive the experiential truth of God’s relational whole (cf. his polemics in Gal 2:15ff). It would also be insufficient for the depth and meaning that Paul had in mind for relational belonging as the relational outcome of being God’s family in Christ (cf. Rom 7:4; 9:3-5). Their practice reduced the issue of belonging from the primacy of relationship in *being* God’s own people to the human terms and shaping of human contextualization, albeit with the designation of God’s name. Paul was decisive in differentiating their practice because previously he had had such membership and had claimed or achieved those identity markers for himself at

the highest level, only to realize their reductionism compared to belonging in whole relationship together (Phil 3:4-8; Gal 1:13-16a).

Moreover, further illustrations of reductionism in human contextualization must be distinguished from Paul's meaning of belonging, whose intensity of meaning deepens in Paul's whole theology. What determines this relational belonging for Paul is neither the limited participation commonly found in voluntary associations during Paul's time, nor the measured engagement of family obligation (*opheilo*) characterizing kinship groups in the Mediterranean world. Human contextualization is unable to define or determine the relational function of belonging without losing wholeness in relationship together. This relational belonging is determined entirely by transformed relationships (both equalized and intimate), the relationships necessary for wholeness together in likeness to the relational ontology of the whole of God (Gal 3:26-28; 6:15; Col 3:10-11; Eph 4:24).

When we talk about belonging to a church today, Paul holds us accountable to distinguish in our theology and practice what he personally experienced. If we cannot clearly distinguish our belonging along with Paul, then our church involvement is subject to the illusion and simulation from reductionism. The reality is that all persons have the created need to belong relationally—from which it is “not good to be apart”—and the fact is how persons usually meet this need is less than whole, even notably in and through church. Churches, then, need to realize that despite any cohesion of “belonging” and strength of identity in alternative church involvement, they are just simulations or illusions of the relational bond constituted only by transformed intimate relationships together (cf. Eph 4:3).

Paul conjoins these intimate relationships together with the necessary equalized relationships in a dynamic interaction to complete the transformed relationships together to embody the whole ontology and function of the church. These conjoint-transformed relationships in wholeness embody “a holy temple...a dwelling place” for the whole of God's intimate relational involvement (2:19-22), which Jesus earlier disclosed (Jn 14:23). In Paul's transformed ecclesiology, the whole ontology and function of the church can be constituted only by transformed persons *agape*-relationally involved in transformed relationships together; and transformed relationships are constituted only by the conjoint function of equalized and intimate relationships together. Therefore, church ontology and function is this new creation in likeness of the whole and holy God, with no less or without substitutes. And the function of these transformed relationships together, both equalized and intimate, distinguish the church unequivocally as God's new creation family, whereby those who relationally belong in this definitive ontological identity are clearly distinguished from any other church gathering of relational and epistemic orphans. Most importantly, this relational dynamic and outcome of wholeness emerges entirely by the ongoing reciprocal relational involvement of the Spirit (2:18,22; 4:3-4; cf. Ti 3:5), which is why the Spirit's person is grieved by reduced ontology and function in the church (the context of 4:30).

Its Functional Significance

Embodying the whole ontology and function of the *pleroma* of Christ in transformed relationship together is a relational function composed only in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes—in likeness of the dynamic embodying of the whole of God by Jesus. The wholeness of God defines and determines who the church is and whose the church is. Yet, having this relational clarity of wholeness together is one issue for the church, and living its functional significance in wholeness together is a further issue ongoing in church life and practice. That is, for the church to be whole is one matter, and for the church to live whole 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 Paul illuminates in his transformed *pleroma* ecclesiology, the functional significance of the church is never assumed but is a relational imperative ongoing for church life and practice in wholeness together; and this includes assumptions of theological anthropology underlying the church. What is this functional significance and how does its dynamic work for wholeness?

When Paul defines the church as being reconciled in one body (Eph 2:16) and as equalized persons relationally belonging to God's family (*oikeios*, 2:19), this *oikodome* (church family not church building) is further defined as being "joined together" (2:21). Paul is providing further theological-functional clarity to his previous dialogue on the church (1 Cor 12:12-31; Rom 12:5). His earlier relational discourse appears to describe an organic or organizational structure of the church whose parts are interrelated and function in interdependence. Paul deepens the understanding of interrelated parts in interdependence by further defining the relational dynamic involved to make this function in wholeness together (4:16).

This *oikodome* is dynamic, not static, and by its dynamic nature necessitates ongoing growth ("building up," *oikodome*) for the embodying of the church's whole ontology and function as the *pleroma* of Christ, as Paul illuminates (4:12-13). The dynamic of *oikodome* both defines the church family in joint interrelations together, and determines how church family interrelations function in the interdependence necessary for embodying wholeness in its ontology and function. In Paul's ecclesiology, *oikodome* is relationship-specific to the church as family, not as a religious group or organization (2:22), and, therefore, the dynamic of *oikodome* is functionally significant in only the depth of its relational involvement together, not to the extent of its working relations (4:15-16,25). This points to two contrasting ways interrelatedness is defined and interdependence is determined. These distinctions are critical to understand and ongoingly are essential to make because each involves a different church ontology and function, with different perceptions of human ontology and function. Not surprisingly for Paul, this difference involves the contrast between wholeness and reductionism.

Oikodome is rooted ‘in Christ’ and thus embodies Christ’s wholeness (1:23; 2:21). The dynamic of *oikodome* is a function of the dynamic of wholeness in ontology and function, conjointly of whole persons and whole persons in whole relationship together (i.e. transformed persons in transformed relationships together). Accordingly, the interrelations of *oikodome* are constituted only by whole/transformed persons in whole/transformed relationships together both equalized and intimate. Reductionism more likely does not blatantly fragment these whole interrelations, for example, as Paul encountered between Jew and Gentile, but more subtly redefines ontology and function for person and church to create distance, detachment or separation in church relations and thereby making relationships together fragmentary. Such fragmentation is effectively accomplished by defining persons from outer in by what they do/have, and accordingly creating better-or-less distinctions in stratified relations that prevent deeper relational involvement (cf. 4:2). This is accomplished in a subtle yet insidious way when church leaders and church members define themselves by their roles and/or gifts and relate to each other in the church based on their roles or gifts, all for the work of ministry for building up the church. This dynamic may work for group cohesion or organizational identity in building up a gathering but it signifies a reduced ontology and function for both person and church; it is, however, not the work “created in Christ Jesus” that Paul means for the church (2:10). Such practice is a major misinterpretation of Paul’s ecclesiology—likely fragmented by using a model from 1 Corinthians 12 out of context—which does not have the relational outcome he defined for whole church interrelations and their function in interdependence (4:11-13).

In Paul’s whole ecclesiology, the functional significance of church ontology and function emerges as the church lives “created according to the likeness of God” (4:24). The church, for Paul, is the Father’s new creation family embodied in Christ and raised up by the Spirit in the relational likeness of this whole of God, who dwells intimately present and *agape*-relationally involved. If not created and functioning in this likeness, church becomes a gathering from human shaping or construction in likeness of some aspect of human contextualization, which then often reifies its ontological simulations and epistemological illusions as the body of Christ.

As noted previously, Paul was no trinitarian in his theological development, yet his monotheism went beyond the knowledge and understanding of the Shema in Judaism. His experiential truth of Jesus and the Spirit in ongoing relationship together gave him whole knowledge and understanding of the whole of God. The relational and functional significance of Paul’s whole God constituted him as a new creation in God’s family and provided the integral relation basis and ongoing relational base for the church as God’s new creation family to be in the relational likeness of this whole of God whom he himself was experiencing. The church in likeness of the whole of God was not a theological construct in Paul’s ecclesiology; and as a concept it has growing interest in modern theology, of course, as the church in likeness of the Trinity.⁴ Yet, Paul’s understanding of the church’s likeness emerged from engagement in the relational epistemic process with

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).

the whole of God, the *synesis* (whole knowledge and understanding) of which appears to elude many of his readers.

In complete ecclesiology rooted in complete Christology, church ontology and function in likeness of the whole of God is not a construct but the embodying of the relational dynamic that emerges from whole relational involvement together with both God and each other. The embodying of the interrelations of transformed/whole persons in these transformed/whole relationships is functionally significant only as it emerges in relational likeness to the whole of God's relationships within the Godhead (cf. Col 2:9-10; 3:10-11). The interrelations within the whole of God between the Father, the Son and the Spirit can best (not totally) be defined as 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 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 orphans, but by the Spirit's relational presence and involvement the Father and the Son will be also and they all will be intimately involved together as family (Jn 14:18,23; 15:26; 16:14-15). Paul was further illuminating this intimate interrelationship together in interdependence in his letters, which he develops theologically and functionally in transformed ecclesiology for the embodying of the church's whole ontology and function. In trinitarian theology, this relational dynamic of God is inadequately described as *perichoresis*, tending to be overly conceptual. 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.

The interdependence within the whole of God can only be understood to the extent that God has disclosed his ontology and function. In Paul's theological systemic framework and forest, his experiential truth centered on the function Jesus embodied and on the overlapping and extended function the Spirit enacted, both of which the Father initiated and ongoingly functions to oversee. Paul's relational connection to each of them appears to be in their specific functions, which seem to overlap and interact yet remain unique to each of them. How this is perceived and interpreted has theological implications or repercussions depending on the interpretive framework of Paul's readers—notably in defining our person and determining our relationships.

Interacting functions in themselves, however, do not account for the dynamic of the trinitarian Persons' whole relationship together, which underlies each of their functions and which integrates their uniqueness into the whole they constitute together in the innermost, the whole of God. The ontology and function of God's whole relationship together lives also in interdependence. In this dynamic, any distinctions of their unique functions are rendered secondary to the primacy of relationship together; and such distinctions should not be used to define each of them or to determine their position in the Godhead. As vulnerably disclosed, the Father, the Son and the Spirit are irreducibly defined and inseparably determined only by whole relationship together, and this relational dynamic functions in various involvements in human contexts and with human contextualization to enact, embody and complete the whole of God's thematic relational response to make whole the human condition, that is, to save both *from* reductionism and *to* wholeness together. To highlight their distinctions, for example, by being overly

christocentric, simply binitarian, just role-specific or even gender-specific, is to diminish the whole of God's ontology and to fragment the whole of God's function.

Paul understood their whole relationship together as the experiential truth of the whole of God relationally undifferentiated. His *synesis* of this relationally whole God was the theological-functional basis for the church's whole ontology and function to be embodied in likeness (Eph 4:4-6). Anything less or any substitute is neither in relational likeness to the whole of God, nor, therefore, embodies the intimate interrelationships together in interdependence to grow in the wholeness of the *pleroma* of Christ (4:12b-13).

The ontology and function of whole relationships together, either for God or the church, live in interdependence, which for the church is the relational outcome and ongoing dynamic of transformed persons relationally involved in transformed relationships together. Church interdependence in likeness of the whole of God's interdependence enters a critical condition when it shifts from being a function of transformed/whole relationships together. In an early letter, Paul warned against such a shift as he described this interdependence for the fragmented church at Corinth (1 Cor 12:12-31). This interdependence of the individual parts involved the connections together that resulted in covariation between the individual parts; moreover, if the parts are properly connected together, the implied result would be synergism in which the whole becomes greater than the sum of its individual parts (12:25-26; cf. Eph 4:16). What Paul points to that constitutes the connection is the relational involvement of *agape* (12:31). In his Romans letter, Paul provided the theological clarification needed to define the transformed relationships together as the basis for church interdependence (Rom 12:3-16). Both of these church scenarios struggled with the influence of reductionism and its counter-relational work affecting their relationships together.

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

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

church dependence on the individual's terms—in contrast to Paul's relational imperative for the church (Eph 4:2,15-16; cf. Col 3:10-15). Independence is the reductionist alternative to interdependence and, intentionally or unintentionally, serves as the functional substitute for it, with freedom as its identity marker. This dynamic also operates in non-Western churches in a less obvious variation of the human shaping of relationships together defining church ontology and church function. This was a major issue that Paul was fighting against, making epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction, even in that collective-oriented sociocultural context (e.g. Gal 5:1,13; Rom 12:3; Phil 2:1-4; 1 Cor 4:7; 8:1,9). Even modern neuroscience recognizes that interdependence is the natural state for human persons, and that independence is a political notion, not a scientific one.⁵

Paul challenged the renegotiated ecclesiology of churches in reduced ontology and function, and also challenged the assumptions of theological anthropology underlying the definition of the person and its determination of relationships together in reductionist terms. Both of these conditions existed in churches apart from, in contrast to, or in conflict with the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God. Paul's challenges to such reductionism are summarized in his response to make relationally specific the functional significance of the transformed ecclesiology of God's 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).

For the ontological identity of the church to be of functional significance, it cannot be shaped or constructed by human terms from human contextualization. In Paul's ecclesiology, the church in wholeness is the new creation by the whole of God's relational response of grace ("was given grace") from above top-down, the dynamic of which ("descended...ascended") Christ relationally embodied to make each one of us together to be God's whole ("he might fill all things," *pleroo*, make complete, 4:7-10; cf. 1:23). This is the church in wholeness embodying the *pleroma* of Christ. In God's relational response of grace, Christ also gave the relational means to church leaders for the dynamic embodying of the church (4:11), which Paul previously defined also as part of the Spirit's relational involvement to share different *charisma* from the whole of God (not a fragmented source) for the functional significance of the church body (1 Cor 12:4-11). Paul illuminates this further to make definitive the functional significance of embodying of the church in relational likeness to the whole and holy God.

Church leaders are given the relational means for the purpose "to equip the saints" (*katartismos* from *katartizo*, to put into proper condition, to restore to former condition, make complete, 4:12). This holds church leaders to be the most accountable, since it directly points to the dynamic of transformed persons reconciled and relationally involved in transformed relationships together in relational likeness to God, and integrated in interdependence of the various church functions ("work of ministry") necessary for the dynamic embodying (*oikodome*, 4:12) of the church's whole ontology and function of "the *pleroma* of Christ" (4:13). This means unequivocally: For church leaders to be of ontological significance, their ontology must be defined by the wholeness of the new creation in the qualitative image of God from inner out, not defined by their

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

gifts, resources or the roles and titles they have that reduce their persons to outer in; and for their leadership to be relationally significant as transformed persons, their function must be determined by *agape* relational involvement in transformed relationships together (both equalized and intimate) as God's new creation family in the relational likeness of the whole of God, not determined by the titles and roles they perform (even with sacrifice) that make distinctions, intentionally or unintentionally creating distance and stratification in relationships together. The latter practices by church leaders renegotiate ecclesiology from bottom-up based on a theological anthropology from outer in. This certainly challenges the theology and practice of 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.

In Paul's transformed ecclesiology of wholeness, church leaders in reduced ontology and function are not transformed or living new in the image and likeness of God and, therefore, cannot *katartismos* others in the interdependence necessary to be of functional significance for embodying the church in relational likeness of the whole and holy God. Nor can they proclaim the experiential truth of the gospel of wholeness (Eph 6:15). Only transformed leaders—whose persons are ongoingly being restored to the image and likeness of God (*anakainoo*, Col 3:10-11; cf. *ananeoomai*, Eph 4:23)—vulnerably involved in transformed relationships together with the Spirit can help make complete the saints—that is, *katarismos* emerges from integral interaction with *anakainoo*. Only whole leaders relationally serve to make complete the saints in the interdependence that is functionally significant for the church's whole function, as Paul makes definitive and nonnegotiable in the following relational dynamic:

to dynamically embody (*oikodome*) the *pleroma* of Christ until all those relationally belonging to God's family come to (*katantao*, reach, arrive) be together as one (*henotes*, unity), that is, whole in their relational response of trust in reciprocal relationship together and whole in specifically knowing (*epignosis*) the Son of God in intimate relationship, the relational outcome of which is persons who are whole-ly complete (*aner teleios*)—thus without distinctions (i.e. beyond *aner*)—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).

Paul is not outlining an ecclesial function of church growth models, missional models or any other ministry techniques of serving for the quantitative expansion of gatherings shaped or constructed by human terms. Paul is making definitive the theological paradigm for the whole function embodying the church's ontology and function of who the church is and whose the church is as God's new creation family in his qualitative image and relational likeness. This paradigm composes the theological dynamic of church ontology, whose function is entirely relational and whose whole ontology and function is the functional significance of just transformed persons *agape*-relationally involved in transformed relationships together in interdependence, the definitive paradigm especially for its leaders.

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

Its Functional Imperatives and Implications

Renegotiated ecclesiology may be considered to be pragmatic by some of Paul's readers, even a necessary reality for its survival in a surrounding context—which may include for a church to sustain its members or gain new ones.. On the other hand, *pleroma* ecclesiology may be perceived as “just theological” by his readers, perhaps an ideal not attainable in practice (as some perceive the Sermon on the Mount). Many of his readers may even argue that some of Paul's prescriptions for the church (e.g. about women and slaves) appear to be pragmatic ecclesiology, thus that he either contradicted his theology or suspended its ideal. While there seems to be ambiguity in some of his church prescriptions, key to understanding the whole of Paul and the whole in his ecclesiology is the perception of what context Paul is speaking *from*, not the context he is speaking in and to. Renegotiated or pragmatic ecclesiology is based on human contextualization and shaped by human terms. Paul's *pleroma* ecclesiology emerges from God's relational context and process and is defined and determined by God's terms through reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit—relational terms irreducible by the nature of the whole of God and nonnegotiable by the nature of the holy God down to referential terms reduced and fragmentary. In his prescriptions for the church, Paul is speaking from the relational context and process of God's response to the human condition. Therefore, Paul's prescriptions need to be seen in the strategic interest and concern for transformation, completeness, wholeness distinguished in *pleroma* ecclesiology, and his prescriptions 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 whole new family on God's terms to fulfill and complete God's thematic relational response to the human condition.

The church is God's new creation family that fulfills the inherent human relational need. The embodying of church ontology and function can be either reduced ontology and function based on the perception of pragmatics and/or a necessary reality—which by default becomes a disembodied gathering of Christ's body that is derelationalized as relational orphans. Or the church's embodying can be whole ontology and function constituted by being transformed from old to new as persons and relationships in the likeness of the whole and holy God, which composed Paul's own experience first. Paul's transformed ecclesiology makes the latter the functional imperative, not an obligatory moral imperative, by the nature of wholeness together being the only solution to the human problem that can fulfill the inherent human relational need. Moreover, by the nature of wholeness, transformed ecclesiology cannot be reduced in its ontology of the church or be renegotiated in its function of the church and still be distinguished having integrally the functional significance for the human problem and the relational significance for the inherent human need. This is the gospel of transformation to wholeness that Paul fought for without compromise, by which the church was constituted and in which it must be congruent for the church to claim ontological identity and relational belonging with the whole of God (Eph 2:14-22; 6:15). Unavoidably, Paul fought rigorously against any reduction of God's whole, which then includes must church theology and practice today—making his transformed ecclesiology a source of tension and discomfort for us, either to dismiss, deny or respond to.

When Paul said “Live as children of light” (Eph 5:8)—hereby extending what and how Jesus distinguished his followers (Mt 5:14-16)—he gave both a functional imperative and a relational imperative for embodying the church. Here Paul is defining neither an obligation (as in duty, *opheilo*) nor a moral-ethical framework, as the context of this verse may suggest (particularly for women and slaves). Rather, Paul is further illuminating what is necessary (*dei*) by the nature of the ontological identity of who the church is and whose the church is—that is, the ontology of the church in wholeness of those relationally belonging in God's new creation family. This is made necessary not by a theological construct of light but by the experiential truth of the Light in reciprocal relational involvement with Christ together with the Spirit, just as Jesus vulnerably disclosed (Jn 8:12) and relationally embodied in the whole ontology and function of his face (2 Cor 4:6). Paul makes definitive that in face-to-face involvement with Christ in relationship together, “you are light” (Eph 5:8) because God “has shone in our hearts” (2 Cor 4:6) to transform our ontology and function into the image and likeness of the whole of God (Eph 4:23-24; 2 Cor 3:18; 5:17; Col 3:10), and thereby now relationally belong to the family of the Light (1 Thes 5:5). For Paul personally, theologically and functionally, this is the experiential truth of “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor 4:4). On the basis of this experiential truth, therefore, Paul is decisive, that by the nature of the church's new and whole ontology it is functionally and relationally imperative to “Live as children of *the ontology of the light*,” no longer in the old ontology and function of darkness. Paul is unequivocal because the church's ontology in whole relationship together is the functional and relational significance of relationally belonging whole-ly in family ‘already’ as “children of light...not of darkness” in relational progression to ‘not yet’ (1 Thes 5:5, in its context of eschatological concerns).

The imagery of light and darkness is unlike a traditional dualism between good and evil. For Paul, light and darkness involve the dynamic of wholeness in ontology and

function and the only alternative, reductionism, which is anything less and any substitute for wholeness. “Darkness” is both an ontological condition and a relational condition, the full significance of which cannot be limited to quantitative conditions or described simply as evil. Darkness-reductionism encompasses the prevailing ontology and function of human contextualization “in which you once lived, following the course of this world” (Eph 2:2), that is, the counterproductive efforts (“unfruitful works”) of reductionism that need to be exposed, confronted and convicted (*elencho*, 5:11). This can only happen when light engages the darkness (5:13-14). Not to live in the ontology as light, however, is to diminish or minimalize the light by the influence of darkness, that is, by reductionism (cf. Mt 5:14-16), for which Paul makes epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction in order to embody the church’s whole ontology and function. The imperatives in Paul’s transformed ecclesiology are for the church to live whole, God’s relational whole on God’s relational terms, in the midst of reductionism surrounding it, and to make whole any reductionism, both within itself and in the world. For Paul, in other words, the church is not to conform to a template but simply to be who they are and whose they belong to.

Paul illuminates the light in transformed ecclesiology because in Paul’s theological forest the light’s ontology and function emerged from the *pleroma* of God in *pleroma* Christology for *pleroma* soteriology with *pleroma* pneumatology to be embodied whole as the *pleroma* of Christ in *pleroma* ecclesiology. Furthermore, since these theological dynamics of the light in wholeness are clearly distinguished from any reduced ontology and function in darkness, the light’s whole ontology and function in church life and practice becomes more easily recognized in contrast to reductionism in darkness. The light’s contrast, however, presupposes whole ontology and function; otherwise, the church’s light can no longer claim to be different from reductionism, and thereby not be recognizable either within the church or in the world—as Jesus made conclusive for his followers’ ontology and function (Mt 5:14-16).

“You are light” supposes only an inner-out ontology (2 Cor 4:6; cf. *metamorphoo*, Rom 12:2) that cannot function from outer in to give just the appearance of light (cf. “angel of light” of reduced ontology and function, *metaschematizo*, 2 Cor 11:14). This is a critical distinction to account for in our church theology and practice. Paul clearly distinguished that the light constituted in these persons’ hearts illuminates the glory of God’s qualitative being and relational nature in the whole ontology and function of Christ’s face, therefore this light can only be whole ontology in likeness of God’s; and that light’s inner-out whole function can be at best only simulated by outer-in function from reductionism, as with “an angel of light” and “ministers of righteousness” (2 Cor 11:14-15). Any outer-in simulations and illusions of light happen when light is disconnected from its source, because light is neither an energy nor ethereal and must not be disembodied and derelationalized from the Light. “In the Lord you are light” Paul said clearly. When Jesus disclosed his embodying of the light, he also made clear a contingency about light. Those who have his embodied light are determined by “whoever follows me” (Jn 8:12). This is not, however, a discipleship of merely following his teachings or example—which commonly get disembodied from his person—but of following “me, my whole person,” who embodied the *pleroma* of God only for relationship together (Col 1:19-20; 2:9-10). For Jesus’ whole followers, this integrally involved engaging him in the primacy of the relationship together of his kingdom and the

righteousness of God constituting the whole relationship of God in its innermost (thereby countering self-determination, Mt 6:33). On this integral relational basis, church leaders and any person wanting to serve Christ must first “follow me” in whole relationship together, as Jesus further made imperative in a paradigm for serving (Jn 12:26)—which Peter learned the hard way (Jn 21:22), and Paul points to (Eph 5:10).

In relational terms, Paul’s emphatic message is “you are light” only on the basis of your whole ontology from inner out, signified by the function of your heart whole-ly following Jesus’ whole person in reciprocal relationship together with the whole of God—distinguishing discipleship as the relational outcome of being transformed to wholeness. This defines our righteousness that necessarily determines the integrity of involvement in relationship together with God, whose involvement is determined by God’s righteousness—the way God engages in relationship. For the functional imperative “live as children of light” to be functionally significant, it must by its nature (*dei*), and not by obligation or duty (*opheilo*), be the embodying of whole relationship together as God’s new creation family (the primacy of his kingdom) in likeness of God (as his righteousness in relationship). Moreover, Paul conjoins other imperatives to support this primary one of embodying the whole ontology and function of the church: “discern, distinguish and determine [*dokimazo*] what is pleasing to the Lord” (Eph 5:10); “Be careful then how you live *both within the church and in the surrounding context...making the most of the time,*” that is, *exagorazo*, “redeem from reductionism in these days of opportunity” (*kairos*, not *chronos*, 5:15-16); and most importantly, “be made complete [*pleroo*] with the Spirit” (5:18).

Paul is emphatic with these imperatives in order for the embodying of church ontology and function to be whole, as light in the darkness, in wholeness in the midst of reductionism. He is also decisive because he never underestimates the surrounding influence of reductionism (“the days *exist in the sin of reductionism,*” 5:16), and the persistence of its author (6:16) and its subtle presence within the church (2 Cor 11:14-15). Yet, he is not pontificating about church life and practice and legislating relationships together, nor does he prescribe anything less and any substitutes of what the whole of Jesus relationally embodied for the experiential truth of the whole gospel—the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ’s whole ontology and function (2 Cor 4:4), the gospel of wholeness (Eph 6:15). In his conjoint fight for this gospel and against any and all reductionism, Paul is not apologetic about transformed ecclesiology, nor does he allow his readers to compromise about being complete, whole. The only embodying the Spirit raises up with the embodied *pleroma* of God is God’s new creation family, the church, the *pleroma* of Christ (Rom 8:11,14-15; Eph 1:23).

Wholeness is never optional in Paul’s ecclesiology. Wholeness is the basis for ecclesiology to be transformed, which is constituted by the embodied *pleroma* of God himself, who “is our *wholeness...making wholeness...proclaimed wholeness*” (Eph 2:14-18). Therefore, by the nature of God’s wholeness, church wholeness is irreducible in its ontology and nonnegotiable in its function. Transformed ecclesiology accounts for, signifies and constitutes nothing less and no substitutes. And for the church to live whole has inescapable implications for church life and practice.

With wholeness no longer being optional for the church and therefore no longer reducible in church life and negotiable in church practice, there emerge further

implications for its ontological identity and relational belonging that are vital to understand for church life and practice. We need to embrace them in our churches today.

In Ephesians, Paul illuminates *pleroma* ecclesiology. Yet he was not engaging in a conventional theological task but, in contrast, the experiential truth constituting the heart of who the church is and whose the church is as the *pleroma* of Christ. In the either-or dynamic between wholeness and reductionism, there are ongoing valid distinctions to be made and maintained for the church to embody its ontological identity. His theological dynamic of church ontology (4:7-13) is prefaced by this concern (4:1-6). Part of his concern can be understood in the relational terms of the church not experiencing identity loss or even identity theft. Thus, Paul is engaging the church directly in God's relational process of family love (from his earlier prayer, 3:18-19) for the transformed relationships together of 'who the church is' necessary to be 'whose whole family they are': "lead a life *corresponding to* [*axios*], *in congruence with*, the *klesis* to which you have been called" (4:1). *Klesis* can mean call or vocation, either of which signifies the identity of the church that needs to be clearly distinguished and ongoingly lived in correspondence, congruence (*axios*).

The implication here is that clarity of the church's ontological identity depends on two dynamics that must be engaged: (1) making the functional distinction of the whole integrity of who and whose the church is in church life together, and (2) maintaining and ongoingly living this relational distinction of wholeness together both within itself and in the surrounding context—"making every effort...in the bond of wholeness...one body and one Spirit...one hope of your *identity* [*klesis*], one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all" (4:3-6).

Moreover, Paul was relationally involved with churches whose surrounding context was the dominant Greco-Roman world, within the pervading ancient Mediterranean world. The further implication is that making and maintaining the distinction of the church's whole identity in these surrounding conditions necessitates having a *minority identity*—further extending the identity Jesus composed (discussed in depth in chap. 5; cf. Jn17:17-19). This minority identity signifies persons and persons together ("saints," *hagios*, holy, uncommon, 5:3) who are not distinguished by the ordinary, common, normative practices of the surrounding context, that which Paul has been identifying and detailing as sins of reductionism—which Paul's readers should neither limit to his specifics nor assume are the same for all surrounding contexts. Paul is not focused on moral purity and having a glorified status in an elite position with the notion of saints. A minority identity is *hagios*, uncommon, not common. Therefore, how the church lives in the surrounding context must not be with a bifocal identity (primary identity defined by human contextualization, secondary identity defined by God's context), a hybrid identity (crossbreeding both), or with any form of pluralistic identity in mutual coexistence without the distinction of its ontological significance, that is, distinguishing its ontological identity in the whole of who and whose the church is. These identities are reductionist substitutes that cannot make and maintain the necessary distinction for the whole integrity of who and whose the church is. This distinguished identity of wholeness is easily lost or "taken" from the church (identity theft) in the *common* of the surrounding context, which is less about the Greco-Roman and ancient Mediterranean worlds and more about reductionism. This does not imply that the church's ontological identity of wholeness is separated, isolated or disengaged from the

surrounding context, but that how the church can be involved in it and maintain its primary identity is a function only of wholeness, which is a function of its relationships together in righteous likeness of God.

If the church does not conjointly make the functional distinction of the whole integrity of its ontological identity and ongoingly live the relational distinction of its wholeness in relationships together, the church no longer embodies the whole ontology and function of God's new creation family. The relational consequence is various forms of *ekklesia*, shaping gatherings not family, to which epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction are directed for the church's wholeness within itself and in the surrounding context. The relational consequence of the loss of wholeness is not a conclusion Paul shaped from his own thought. Jesus already made conclusive the consequence for the new creation by mixing the new with the old (Mk 2:21-22; Lk 5:36-38). We cannot assume that we are immune from this relational consequence or that our church practice doesn't already reflect it.

The ontological identity of God's whole and holy family can only by its nature of wholeness be in congruence with its *klesis* (call and commission to be whole) when the church lives whole in the surrounding context in order to fulfill its relational purpose and function by making whole in the world. Anything less and any substitutes lack being distinguished for the three critical issues (discussed earlier) unavoidably involved in all church practice, for which each of its members in the body and members together are accountable, just as Paul himself accounted for in his own life and practice:

1. The integrity and significance of what and whom the church/members present of themselves to others in the surrounding context (e.g. *prepo*, "fitting" our identity, or not, Eph 5:3).
2. The quality of their communication while in their presentation of self to others and the message it communicates to them—for example, *morologia*, "foolish talk" (5:4), which includes style and content of broad spectrum of speech essentially without depth of significance, thus reductionist communication with "empty words," *kenos*, lacking content or hollow (5:6); also, for example, *eutrapelia*, "coarse talk," wittiness that essentially uses one's speech to draw attention to oneself and promotes one's knowledge, self-interest or other self-concern (cf. 1 Cor 8:1); in contrast, for example, to "thanksgiving" that does not focus on or revolve around oneself but is relationally communicating involvement with others (5:4).
3. The depth level of relational involvement the church/members engage with their communication while in what/whom they present of themselves to others—a level of involvement, for example, from the outer in without the primacy of inner out involvement in relationships (i.e. *agape* relational involvement of family love), thereby signifying reduced ontology and function (e.g. *eidololatres*, one submitted, even unintentionally, to outer-in form and appearance, i.e. reductionism), thus church/members who "disregard," *apeitheia*, disobey God's relational terms congruent to "the family of Christ and of the whole of God" (5:5-6), all in contrast to the wholeness about which Paul is decisive to make

imperative for the church and its members, “therefore *do not share in and be associated with [symmetochos] the reductionists in the surrounding context*” (5:7).

Paul simply illuminates further the consequence for God’s new creation family of mixing the new with the old that Jesus clearly defined for the new creation already, in which the reductionists perceive “The old is good *or better*” (Lk 5:39). It is unavoidable for the church and its members to give account of their practice in these three critical issues. As Paul continues on to make further imperative, this accountability is necessary both for the embodying of the church’s whole ontology to be light in the surrounding context and for the church’s ongoing function to be whole in order to “Live as children of light” (5:8ff).

In Paul’s transformed ecclesiology, God’s thematic relational response of grace, *agape* relational involvement and dynamic of wholeness (peace) converge only for this irreducible and nonnegotiable relational outcome:

to embody the ontological inner-out depth of church identity in the interrelated, interdependent and integrated function of who the church is together and whose family the church distinguishes, and on this integral relational basis and ongoing relational base to embody ‘already’ the new creation family of transformed persons *agape*-relationally involved in transformed relationships together for the whole ontology and function of the church—in nothing less than likeness of the whole of God.

This relational outcome emerged from Paul’s *synesis* of the theological dynamics of the whole of God (Eph 3:2-6)—from his involvement not in a theological task but in his *oikonomia* family responsibility to make complete the whole (*pleroo*) of God’s relational communication for his family (Col 1:25-28). Therefore, there are further implications inescapable for the church’s accountability.

Along with the implications for the church’s ontological identity are converging inescapable implications for the functional significance of relationally belonging to the church as God’s new creation family (Eph 2:14-16 in integral function with Col 3:10-11; Gal 3:26-29; 6:15). What unfolds in Paul’s theological development of *pleroma* ecclesiology go further and deeper, indeed well beyond, what many of Paul’s readers merely perceive as moral/ethical imperatives or household codes of collective life in the church while in the surrounding context. His transformed ecclesiology gets to the heart of the experiential truth of relationally belonging in God’s new creation family, the implications of which the church cannot avoid being accountable for to distinguish its experiential reality. They are simply as follows:

1. Relationally belonging in God’s new creation family is the relational outcome ‘already’ that cannot be set aside or relegated (and thus neglected) to ‘not yet’; therefore the church is accountable now to function in this experiential truth.
2. The experiential truth of this relational outcome also has a reciprocal contingency, which necessitates the experiential reality of the integral convergence of (1) the relational significance of the church’s intimate relationships together and (2) the functional significance of its equalized relationships together; and the integral

interaction between them implies that the church cannot have one (significant aspect of relationships together) without the other for the church to embody its whole ontology and function. In other words, transformed relationships together of the new creation can be nothing less than the integral function of intimate and equalized relationships together; and relational belonging in the church as God's new creation family can be nothing less than ongoing *agape* relational involvement in these transformed relationships together.

Therefore, the joint implication of being accountable already for the relational-functional significance of transformed relationships together is for the church to be making whole within itself and living whole in a new relational order of whole relationships together—which then distinguish the church to make whole the human condition in the world. These definitive relationships are the intimate relationships together in a new order that are without the determinacy of human distinctions from outer in and are equalized from inner out, and thus clearly in contradistinction with the reductionism of human contextualization that stratifies persons and relationships in a fragmentary condition. The church functioning intimately without human distinctions and as the equalizer may be perceived by Paul's readers as a theological construct, whose ideal transcends pragmatic function in the real world. Without the Spirit that would be the reality. The reality also for pragmatism is a hybrid theology whose ecclesiology and anthropology lack wholeness, thus unable to heal persons and reconcile relationships struggling to be whole and relationally belong. In the relational dynamic of Paul's theological forest, however, the *pleroma* of God relationally embodied nothing less than the whole ontology and function of God in order to embody with the Spirit nothing less than the whole ontology and function of the *pleroma* of Christ, the church, to fulfill God's thematic relational response to make whole the human condition. In this defining relational process of wholeness, the relational embodying of the church is whole-ly transformed into the qualitative image and the relational likeness of the whole of God—the relational outcome 'already' in fulfillment of Jesus' defining prayer for his family. The experiential truth of this ontological identity for Paul is found in the congruence of the church's identity to nothing less and no substitutes, regardless of its constituency or its situation in the surrounding context. On this integral relational basis and in these whole relational terms, the wholeness of relational belonging in the church is neither optional for church function nor negotiable to other church terms and shaping. The gospel of transformation to wholeness has no other relational significance and outcome for those claiming the gospel and for those hearing its proclamation.

Moreover, just as the whole of Paul experienced for himself, it is important to underscore that this relational-functional transformation to a new relational order in the church also requires a redemptive change in the church's perceptual-interpretive framework and lens from outer in to the inner-out framework and lens—the new *phronema* and *phroneo* with the Spirit that Paul made definitive for “*zoe* and wholeness” (Rom 8:5-6)—necessary for the following: for the church to have the sensitivity of quality over quantity in its life and practice, and for the church to have relational awareness in its ontological identity and relational belonging. This relational awareness is dependent on the qualitative sensitivity that is inseparable from relational function in likeness of the whole of God, which Paul clearly distinguishes from reductionism (Eph

4:14-24). This integral interaction composes the primacy of the qualitative and the relational in the church's ontology and function that by necessity involves the dynamic of wholeness. Accordingly, the church is accountable for all the imperatives and implications of *pleroma* ecclesiology in order to be transformed to wholeness together as God's new family—accountability that extends to all of Paul's readers (both in church and academy), who themselves may require a critical change in interpretive lens to pay attention to the whole of Paul (historical, relational and theological), and a basic change in interpretive framework to understand (*syniemi* for *synesis*) the whole in Paul's theology.

“But now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light.” The clarity of the ontology and function of this identity is clearly distinguished only in the whole relationship together of the church's ontology and function in likeness of the whole of God. The Spirit grieves over anything less and any substitutes—the grief from the vulnerable presence of the ontological One and intimate involvement of the relational Whole—whose sentiment necessitates the relational awareness from qualitative sensitivity for Paul's readers to understand (Eph 4:30, cf. Isa 63:10). As Jesus' relational replacement, the Spirit extended much greater the relational work of the whole of Jesus *into* Paul (as in Jn 14:12) in order for Paul to embody with the Spirit the kingdom of the whole of God's whole family *into* the church in the primacy of its whole ontology and function in likeness of the *pleroma* of God (Rom 14:17). God's face unmistakably shined on his family by the face of Christ and is illuminated in the new relationship together of wholeness embodying the church, the *pleroma* of Christ. This is the light that must be turned on in the church to distinguish its occupancy by God's vulnerable and intimate dwelling (Eph 2:22).

The Depth of Our Accountability

How we practice church today is directly correlated to our ecclesiology, whether we knowingly have a defined ecclesiology or not. At the same time, how we practice church in actual function directly emerges from how we engage in relationships in general; and how we practice our relationships unequivocally unfolds from how we define our person and thereby define other persons, even God. Inescapably then, at the heart of our theology and practice of church is our theological anthropology, which defines and determines our person and the level of our relationships. In other words, our individual ontology and function shapes our relationships that shape the ontology and function of our church. Along the way, we make various assumptions in our theology and practice that obscure our perceptual-interpretive lens, whereby we may find ourselves on a different relational path from Jesus, perhaps maintaining a religious status quo without qualitative relational significance, or even reflecting, reinforcing or sustaining the human condition in our person and relationships. This would not be ironic for those today, who would identify as belonging to his Way and who claim to be his followers, but tragic.

These irrefutable correlations are why Jesus always pursued his followers in their theological anthropology, with epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction as usually needed. From the beginning the whole of God has pursued us for our person

from inner out and in our relationships: “Where are you *as a person?*” (Gen 3:9) and “What are you doing here *in your relationships?*” (1 Kg 19:9). The church cannot be whole as God’s family without whole persons and whole relationships. Therefore, our discipleship and ecclesiology only become distinguished when their innermost ontology and function are the relational outcome of being transformed to the wholeness of what the whole of Jesus saves us to—indeed, nothing less and no substitutes.

“Did God really say that?”

Chapter 9 The Church on Jesus' Intrusive Relational Path

**Listen! I am standing at the *church* door, knocking;
if you *pay attention* to my voice and *respond*,
I will be *intimately involved with you in reciprocal relationship together as family*.**

Revelation 3:20

I consider the above communication from Jesus as an intimate relational message to summarize his post-ascension discourse for ecclesiology to be whole (discussed in chap. 7). His closing declaration in relational terms is conclusive of the primacy of relationship together in wholeness that distinguishes the discipleship and ecclesiology of what he saves us to. How he communicated in this summary declaration is also definitive of his intrusive relational path, which doesn't break the door down but intrudes for reciprocal relationship together. It is on his intrusive relational path that he intrudes on us as his family to follow him in the vulnerable intimacy of reciprocal relationship together. The various churches in his discourse received epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction because they were on a different path than Jesus—in spite of their dedicated, productive and esteemed church practices. Their contrary ways that Jesus exposed entailed the influence from human contextualization shaping their function—including the influence of culture distinctive in their surrounding contexts.

The relational outcome that Jesus, along with the Spirit and Paul, continues to intrude on us for is both challenging and threatening. Yet, it is encouraging because the relational path of this wholeness involves experiencing the intimate joy of the whole of God's vulnerable presence and thus intrusive relational involvement, just as Jesus communicated (Jn 15:11) and Paul echoes (Rom 14:17). So, what does it mean for the church to be on Jesus' intrusive relational path, and how does his church follow him accordingly in the world?

Defining the Steps on Jesus' Path

One of the main problems Peter had in following Jesus was Jesus' intrusive relational path. As we have witnessed, Jesus intruded on both Peter's messianic expectations (he should not go to the cross, Mt 16:21-22) and assumptions (he must not wash my feet, Jn 13:6-8). Peter's expectations and assumptions were shaped by human contextualization, namely by Judaism, which predisposed his perceptual-interpretive lens to follow a different path from Jesus, a path neither improbable nor intrusive. Peter's path then shaped or re-formed the early church contrary to God's whole family, which needed to be equally for all peoples (Acts 10; Gal 2:11-14).

Peter has not been alone on such a different path shaping the church during the course of its history. The consequence certainly has created ambiguity about the gospel

that the church embodies, and has misrepresented its mission—contrary to the relational outcome composed by Jesus in his formative prayer for his family (Jn 17:21-23).

The whole gospel and its integral mission have been problematic for the world to believe and know since their own understanding has been difficult to maintain due to human shaping. For example, the major cause creating the need for contextualization of the gospel in mission was the imposition of Western culture on foreign missions. Though the need to be freed from this biased and distorted view of the gospel certainly has been necessary, the contextualization of the gospel in other human cultures/contexts engages the same underlying reductionist dynamic of Western Christianity—that is, a gospel determined functionally, if not defined theologically, by human contextualization. Accordingly, contextualization in missions further reinforces a gospel also narrowed down by human shaping (albeit of its own variation) that cannot be whole as embodied by Jesus in the trinitarian relational context and process. In contrast and conflict, further embodied with Jesus was Paul, who fought against such reductionism in his ongoing fight for the whole gospel and its integral mission, embodied both by the experiential truth of the whole of God in the face of Christ and by the experiential reality of the relational outcome ‘already’ in the church.

Without reciprocating contextualization in the ongoing relational process of triangulation with the whole of God—the *ek-eis* dynamic of Jesus’ prayer in which God’s context is primary and human context is secondary—we are limited to only our context to define church ontology and determine church function with the gospel and its mission both within the church itself and in the world.

The truth of the incarnation has significance only in relationship as the experiential truth, which Jesus whole-ly embodied from outside the universe into the surrounding contexts of the world. This relational dynamic in relational terms over referential terms makes functional the theology of God loving the world from top down and sending his Son into the world to love it from inner out. This required an intrusive path that could not be shaped by human contextualization, or it would not have relational significance for the human condition. Making John 3:16 an experiential truth was neither a mere evangelistic program nor a gospel composed of referential words; moreover, this was not merely about what Jesus did to signify the propositional truth of salvation. This relational process involved how Jesus lived and functioned in the world because of who he was and whose he was. That is to say, his life and practice unmistakably distinguished God loving the world by being embodied in whole to be vulnerably present and intimately involved with those in it to make them whole in the innermost of relationship together. This necessitated both improbable moves and intrusive steps by Jesus. The referentialization of the Word narrows down Jesus to a more probable theological trajectory and a less intrusive relational path, which Peter tried to do with Jesus and his church.

Jesus’ sanctified identity (distinguished from the common of the surrounding context) always functioned in the relational context and process of God’s communicative action. Being so distinguished, however, his relational path in word and deed did not demonstrate a separatist function either isolated or relationally detached from the surrounding context, nor did his teaching illustrate ideals unattainable for function in the world. Sanctified identity in life and practice is the qualitative distinction from the common’s function while in the common’s context, and thus it has functional

significance only by relational involvement in the common's context (*koinos*) "in the world." This is the nature of Jesus' minority identity, which is directly correlated with his identity as "the light of the world" (summarized in John's Gospel, partly as an "I am" statement, Jn 1:4,9; 3:19; 8:12; 9:5; 12:35-36,46).

The clarity of Jesus' identity as the light "in the world" functioned vulnerably in the narrative of Lazarus' death and raising (noted previously, Jn 11:1-44). Jesus stated that Lazarus' sickness would not conclude in death (v.4, not that he would not die, vv.11,14). It is important to distinguish between the relationship with Lazarus (along with his sisters, whom Jesus loved, vv.3,5) and the surrounding context of the relationship. Jesus was vulnerably involved in both the relationship and the surrounding context for the same purpose, yet the functional dynamic involved was different for each. I previously discussed the relationship, and here I focus on the surrounding context.

Jesus defined the situation as having the purpose to highlight the vulnerable presence and involvement of the whole of God signified in the identity of the Son (as "glory" points to, vv.4,40). By its nature as communicative action, this could only be fulfilled by direct involvement of Jesus' whole person in the surrounding context, neither separated from it nor relationally uninvolved in it—in other words, nothing less and no substitute. His disciples raised an incredulous voice to his action to return to that hostile surrounding context trying to kill him (v.8). Jesus responded from his identity as the light (vv.9-10). His action to return was based on *what* he was as "the light of the world" (Jn 8:12; 9:5), and *whose* he was who sent him (Jn 12:45-46); therefore, *how* he functioned cannot be defined and determined by the surrounding context—even if it was receptive—as demonstrated by Jesus' timing to wait two days before responding to Lazarus, his family and extended community (v.6). How he functioned emerged from his minority identity as the light in interaction with his full identity as the whole of God who sent him (vv.41-42). Thus, as the light he "must by its nature (*dei*, not from obligation or compulsion) do the work of him who sent me" (Jn 9:4).

The distinguishing nature of Jesus' sanctified identity, defining who and what he was, determined how he was, and that always involved going deeper into the surrounding context. Identity as the light of the world only has significance when it is relationally involved in those contexts. While putting oneself in harm's way may seem misguided, or beyond the practice of many (consider Thomas' remark, v.16), that was not Jesus' purpose in this situation; later, he deliberately avoided contexts to kill him (Jn 11:53-54), which was an earlier reason he stayed out of Judea to extend his Galilean ministry (Jn 7:1). The issue about engaging the surrounding context was not about the extent of hostility or receptivity, but about relational congruence with the whole of God who sent him into the contexts of the world—just as he told his biological brothers who challenged him to go to Judea (Jn 7:3-6), and as he defined for his disciples in their identity together as the light (Jn 9:4, cf. 12:36).

Moreover, on Jesus' intrusive relational path, merely life and practice "in the world" and merely engaging the surrounding contexts are insufficient to function as the light of the world. The clarity of the light is not about having doctrinal purity, goes beyond having the proper character and conduct, and practicing the right ethics, as well as goes deeper than merely articulating the gospel message. The light embodies these in the whole of our qualitative significance as a person, not as characteristic or deed but in relational congruence with the qualitative significance of Jesus' whole person. Thus, the

identity of the light has clarity only as a function of sanctified identity, which is the relational outcome of the ontology of the whole and holy God embodied in Jesus transforming his followers in his likeness as the light of the world. Sanctified identity is the qualitative distinction from the common's function necessary to be neither defined nor determined by the common's contexts of the world (cf. the indictment in Eze 22:26). This is an ongoing tension with the common's function that comes with intrusive involvement in the common's contexts, from which we need qualitative distinction to be whole and to make whole. As Jesus vulnerably demonstrated in his sanctified identity, this necessitates the relational congruence of his followers' whole person with the relational posture of his full identity and the functional posture of his minority identity. In other words, the qualitative distinction of sanctified identity is relational congruence with the whole of Jesus, who sends us into the same contexts of the world just as (*kathos*, in congruence with) his Father sent him (Jn 17:18).

The relational significance of God's communicative action in the vulnerably distinguished Face of Jesus was only for the intimate involvement in relationship—Face-to-face relationship together in the whole of God as family. The Father sent the Son into the world to make it whole (*sozo*, Jn 3:17), that is, in congruence with the relational significance of the whole of Jesus and compatible with the qualitative distinguished whole and holy God.

The process of being *sent* is a relational dynamic involving the irreducible qualitative action of God's communication and the nonnegotiable terms of God's relational work of grace. This dynamic further signifies wholeness: the whole of the Word disclosing the whole of God and fulfilling the whole of God's thematic relational action. The implication of this relational dynamic underlying God's strategic shift is that who and what was sent was nothing less than and no substitute for the whole and holy God, that nothing less and no substitute could be sent to fulfill this relational dynamic and thereby to fulfill God's thematic action. This is the significance of the incarnation, the qualitative function of which Jesus vulnerably embodied to be intimately involved with others, including in culture and ethics along with mission. The referentialization of the Word, however, no longer distinguished his whole person in the world, even if the Word is centralized in ethics and mission. Understanding the steps of Jesus intruding in the surrounding contexts is crucial in order for us to be distinguished with him in the world with the whole gospel and its integral mission.

The process of being *sent into the world* is the functional outworking of this relational dynamic. For Jesus, only the ongoing function of his whole person embodied his incarnation into the world; and only the ongoing relational involvement of his whole person fulfilled his purpose and function in the world to make whole. Nothing less and no substitutes would be sufficient either to be whole or to make whole. Thus, how Jesus was in the world—whether in word or deed, his teachings or example—cannot be integrally understood apart from the function of who and what he was. This composed the steps of his intrusive relational path in the world. To disengage how Jesus was from the full identity of who and what he embodied in function is to essentially both disembody Jesus from his whole person and derelationalize him from his relational source. This has the relational consequence to reduce God's communication as Subject and renegotiate God's grace as relational response on Subject's terms, which creates relational distance with the whole of God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement.

“Sent” involves a relationship-specific dynamic, and “sent into the world” involves a relationship-specific function. We need to have whole understanding of these relational steps on the intrusive path in Jesus’ life and practice—notably in culture, ethics and mission—in order to understand our place in the world and our function to the world to be “just as” (*kathos*) the Father sent him (Jn 17:18).

Culture and Its Seduction

A major aspect of our surrounding context that usually receives little scrutiny is culture. We seem to routinely embrace a prevailing culture, or at least readily take on elements of it, to define our identity and determine our practice in key ways. Yet, when we follow Jesus deeper into the surrounding contexts of the world, the first aspect of the prevailing (common’s) function all his followers encounter is culture. The question then needing to be answered is: Do we function essentially as objects allowing ourselves to be shaped by culture, or are we subjects who intrude on a culture to help change it and make it whole?

If we don’t examine our culture, then we make assumptions about it that make us susceptible to any critical shaping of our person, our relationships, and thus how we practice church—all following a different path than Jesus’. Therefore, by the nature of who and whose we are, not out of obligation, we must fully address the seductive influence of culture on our theology and practice, unmistakably shaping the ontology and function of our person, relationships and church.

Culture is present in every human context, however culture is defined and whatever is the shape of a human context. Culture also has a particular identity, and, depending on your definition of culture, culture promotes an identity for the participants (active or passive) in that context, whether belonging to it or by association). When culture generates the identity of its participants, this becomes an ongoing issue of identity formation and maintenance—particularly as contexts intersect, which is the norm in human life and practice.

I define culture as inseparable from identity and use the following working definition in our discussion:

Culture is the life and practice (in its various expressions) of a collective group (formal or informal, large or small) of persons that relatively both defines who and what they are and determines how they function, thereby being a primary source of their identity. Culture is not about an individual person but a social dynamic of persons who belong and/or identify in a context together.

At its earliest stages of development, culture emerges from the life and practice of those persons gathered together, thus culture is defined and determined by them. As that culture is established, its shape remains consistent or firm, with ongoing minor modifications. In the subsequent process of its life and practice, culture essentially takes on a functional “life” of its own to shape its participants; that is to say, those persons become defined by their culture, and thus how they function is also determined by their culture. To be contrary is to go against the norms of culture, or, in other words, be counter-cultural.

Moreover, since we all participate in some type of collective group, we are all part of a particular culture that defines our person and determines how we function—relatively speaking, of course. To this extent we are never free of culture and always apply our culture to our activities, even in biblical interpretation and in studying ‘Jesus and culture’. This influence emerges as the significant issue of Jesus’ engagement with culture, which we will discuss with the need to understand the particular cultural lens we bring to this discussion.

Jesus Engaging Culture

How Jesus engaged a culture in a particular context was always first with his own culture. Put in relational terms, Jesus always looked at culture theologically because that was his identity: who, what and how he was in the relational context and process of the whole of God. This was not unusual since engaging another culture from one’s own culture is an assumption by which all persons engage a different culture. Thus, these are assumptions of our own that we have to understand and account for, even as we seek to further understand and more deeply follow Jesus, along with his culture.

To say that Jesus looked at culture theologically should not be separated from the function of his identity. Foremost, his theological lens was not about doctrine, propositions of static truth or systems of beliefs and values; though his lens was certainly theologically orthodox (not in a gospel-speak, salvation-speak sense), it was always in conjoint function with orthopraxy (i.e. sanctified life and practice) in the trinitarian relational context and process for relationship together. Jesus functionally engaged culture not only in orthodoxy but with orthopraxy, with the latter at times appearing to contradict the former, which was an ongoing source of controversy in many of his interactions—notably in a so-called orthodox religious context since his practice was often perceived as counter-cultural. Yet, Jesus’ theological engagement of culture was not for the end result of orthodoxy, or even orthopraxy, but only for the outcome of relationship together and being whole; thus, his engagement was always as communicative action of God’s thematic relational response to make whole the human condition (cf. Jn 12:46-47). In other words, he saw culture through the lens of God’s perception and desires, and this primacy defined and determined his response. For Jesus, any other engagement with culture was secondary, which should neither define nor determine what is primary or its shape—as Jesus demonstrated at the wedding in Cana (Jn 2:1-11).

By embodying God’s communicative action in the contexts of the world, Jesus did not engage culture “to condemn” (*krino*, to discriminate between good and evil) the identity it generates “but *to make whole*” (*sozo*, Jn 3:17) its life and practice influenced by reductionism. By the nature of its source, reductionism has always functioned against the whole since creation in the primordial garden. The reductionism in culture specifically involved the ontology of the whole person created in the image of the whole of God for the relationships together created in likeness of the relational ontology of the Trinity, thus which are necessary in conjoint function to be whole.

Along with his identity as the light, Jesus’ full humanity as the Son of man also fully affirms this creation. By the earthly human life made evident in Jesus’ whole person, human life is sanctified in a qualitative distinct practice that is imperative for all his followers to live and experience to be whole as God’s family (as he prayed, Jn 17:19).

Furthermore, their sanctified life and practice is necessary to be able to live whole in the surrounding cultural context for the world to “believe” (trust) and “know” (experience) the whole of God extended to them to be part of, and thus no longer “to be apart” from (as he further prayed, Jn 17:21-23). Only the intrusion of this ontology and function distinguishes God’s whole family in the world.

Any reduction in life and practice of the whole person and those persons’ relationships together need to be made whole to fulfill who, what and how they are as God’s creation. Thus, the reduction of what defines human persons (e.g., in a comparative process to stratify human worth or value) needs to be redefined for persons to be made whole. Likewise, the reduction of human relationships from qualitative function and significance (e.g. by diminishing intimate relational involvement or promoting barriers to relational belonging) needs to be transformed for the relationships together necessary to be whole. These reductions can be directly composed by the surrounding culture.

The whole of Jesus, therefore, functioned to engage culture intrusively in the surrounding context for the following purpose: (1) redefine its influence from reductionism, (2) transform its counter-relational work of reductionism, and (3) make whole the human relational condition “to be apart” from God’s whole.

Jesus’ Integral Approach

Jesus’ engagement of culture for his purpose to be, live and make whole involved a relational process; conjointly, this relational process was specific to the relational context of his identity and ontology in the whole of God. The dynamic involvement of this relational process cannot be categorized by typologies of the relation of Jesus and culture. The classic typology of Richard Niebuhr, for example, is of initial interest, yet this is a static framework insufficient to account for Jesus’ intrusion on culture.¹ This includes variations or refinements of his typology.² The dynamic relational involvement of Jesus in the surrounding contexts of the world was an ongoing process of engaging culture both to be whole and to make whole, which also required being vulnerable with his person and intrusive in his relationships.

A different framework is needed to account for the variable nature of this process and to understand the whole of Jesus’ various actions engaging culture. This involves three issues that Jesus ongoingly addressed to help us define why and how he engaged culture and aspects of it. Basic to his approach, Jesus vulnerably involved his whole person in the life and practice of a culture to function to be whole and to make whole. Therefore, the integrating theme “to be whole” defined his actions engaging culture, which were contingent on one or more of **three qualifying issues** involving a culture’s life and practice:

1. *Compatibility, or congruence*, “to be whole”—thus, there is no tension or conflict with the life and practice of a culture, and further relational involvement is for deeper development of the whole.

¹ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* 50th-anniversary ed. (N.Y.: Harper San Francisco, 2001).

² See, for example, Glen H. Stassen, D.M. Yeager, John Howard Yoder, *Authentic Transformation: A New Vision of Christ and Culture*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), and also Gordon Lynch, *Understanding Theology and Popular Culture*, (Australia: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 93-110.

2. *Partial overlapping areas* “to be whole”—some areas and/or practices in a culture are affirmed as part of God’s general revelation and common grace, and what is basic to humanity as God’s creation; thus this acceptance allows room for flexibility in some differences to cultivate and nurture the whole, but other areas and practices are in tension or conflict “to be whole” and, nonnegotiable, still need to be redefined, transformed and made whole.
3. *Incompatibility* “to be whole”—thus, there is conflict, not merely tension, with no room for flexibility in differences; the situation/condition is nonnegotiable and needs to be redeemed to be made whole.

A culture may involve more than one of these qualifying issues, and engaging various aspects of a culture’s life and practice tends to involve an interaction of these qualifying issues. Culture then cannot be responded to in its surrounding context with a predetermined set of behavioral responses—only predisposed with the relational involvement to be whole and to make whole. This is how Jesus engaged culture and why.

In the process of cultural engagement, Jesus in full identity appears to transcend culture (cf. Niebuhr’s categories, “Christ against culture”), yet while relationally involved in the surrounding cultural context (cf. “Christ in paradox” or “Christ of culture”) with his minority identity (cf. “Christ above culture”) to make it whole (cf. “Christ the transformer of culture”). The relational interaction of his full identity with his minority identity (signifying his sanctified identity) constitutes the qualitative distinction necessary to be distinguished whole in the surrounding cultural context, without which there is neither basis to make whole culture’s life and practice nor the significance to be compelling for the human condition.

The ongoing process of engaging culture both to be whole and to make whole involves this process of vulnerable and intrusive relational involvement embodied by Jesus. This was made evident in his various encounters.

His Whole Practice

Our first glimpse of Jesus engaging culture in the surrounding context during his public ministry was at a wedding in Cana (Jn 2:2-11, discussed previously). Revisiting that situation in terms of culture, Jesus made evident the practice of his whole person (who, what and how he is). This demonstrated how he functioned in the surrounding human contexts and in those public social interactions.

In this particular human context, Jesus was involved in three interrelated areas: (1) relationship with Mary, (2) the sociocultural context, and (3) relationship with his Father. The consequence of these areas of involvement helps us understand how Jesus engaged culture: first, “to be whole” in the identity of his own culture, then “to make whole” in response to some aspect of the human condition apart from the whole. He quickly established distinction from his cultural identity defined with Mary by simply addressing her as “woman” (*gyne*, general term for woman with no other significance). This distinction is specific to the relational context that defined his whole person. Accordingly, Jesus redefined the nature of his involvement with Mary from the human cultural context to the trinitarian relational context of family.

While Jesus had tension with Mary’s human cultural context of family earlier at age twelve (Lk 2:11-52), he still affirmed its life and practice (v.51) since it was

compatible or overlapped with him “to be whole.” As he began his public ministry, however, further qualitative distinction was necessary for the clarity of his identity to be whole in the surrounding context. This distinction fully progressed when Jesus publicly made definitive his family in the trinitarian relational context (Mt 12:46-50)—which no doubt created “culture shock” for both his biological family and the surrounding Jewish context by redefining a basic foundation of their culture based on birth and descent.

Jesus further clarified the function of his whole person with his question to Mary: “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?” (Jn 2:4) What defined Jesus was always in tension with efforts in the surrounding context to redefine him by reducing his whole person. Mary merely acted in who and what she was defined by in that cultural context for participation in its extended family-community identity. Jesus’ tension with Mary was not about her cultural practice (room for flexibility) but about her attempt to redefine him in her terms. By adding “My hour has not yet come,” Jesus wanted Mary to know that what his priorities were, and that what and who defined him, were determined by his Father. Critical for being distinguished, “what is that to me” cannot be defined and determined by “what is that to you.” This is somewhat a functional paradigm by which Jesus engaged culture in the surrounding context.

This is a necessary function in order to be whole and not to be reduced in identity and ontology by a culture in the surrounding context. Jesus maintained the whole of who, what and how he is by ongoing relational involvement with his Father, with the whole of God. His ongoing relational involvement with his Father served as the reference point for his involvement in sociocultural contexts (like the wedding culture and the necessity of wine, see previous discussion) and with relationships in those contexts (like with Mary). This highlights *the triangulation process* (cf. to navigation): Jesus used his reference point in the Father to define and determine his engagement with culture and his involvement in the surrounding contexts of the world, so that he could be whole in order to make whole. Triangulation served to give clarity to his identity as the light of the world and relational significance to “his glory” (as in Jn 2:11) vulnerably disclosed in the world in response to the human condition for the outcome only of relationship together in God’s whole.

This relational process of triangulated engagement of culture is further demonstrated as Jesus was involved with a pluralized identity of Judaism in Jerusalem. When Jesus addressed the identity of his followers in the Sermon on the Mount (discussed earlier in chap. 5), he made it imperative that who, what and how they are needs to function beyond the reductionists and their practice of reductionism (Mt 5:20). Those particular reductionists were various teachers of the law (scribes) and Pharisees, not all of them nor the sum of Judaism. Thus, as the above three qualifying issues involving Judaism’s complex life and practice emerged and interacted, Jesus accordingly engaged their “pluralistic” culture in Jerusalem. Yet, tension and conflict with reductionism was notable, which will always happen in the presence and function of the whole. And Jesus’ function in sanctified identity demonstrated this life and practice as he engaged those reductionists in the culture of their surrounding context.

The Judaism Jesus would engage lacked a united identity. Some focused mainly on a religious identity, others more so on an ethnic identity, and with neither being mutually exclusive and both interrelated with social and economic factors. While Israel’s national identity was underlying (even a source of national pride), this tended to fragment

or pluralize identity in Judaism (e.g., Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots).³ Thus, life and practices in the cultural context of Judaism lacked wholeness—namely specific to its historic roots in the whole of the covenant. Rather than a monolithic Judaism, its variable condition was the shape of the context Jesus engaged with the whole of his person, in which he vulnerably involved the whole of God to make it whole.

Jewish culture obviously was not foreign to Jesus, yet his engagement of Judaism's life and practices was a unique intersection as if it were. Thus, the three qualifying issues provide the basis for Jesus' various actions as he engaged Judaism in Jerusalem. John's Gospel includes most of the narratives of these encounters in Jesus' later Judean ministry, which seems to suggest their importance in the big picture of the whole of God's thematic action both in covenant fulfillment to Israel and in relational response to the human condition to make them whole.

Jesus was in congruence with covenant life and practice in Judaism that notably observed the major pilgrimages to the Jerusalem temple. That is, congruent with covenant relationship and its compatible relational function to come before the Lord—not as obligatory religious code but in response to covenant relationship together, namely in the covenant of love (defined in Dt 7:7-9). This was its culture's life and practice “to be whole,” which Jesus both affirmed and participated in, as we find him going to Jerusalem to observe Passover (and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Jn 2:12-25). The practice he saw at the temple was not an isolated incident, yet needs to be seen in its full context.

The current system of sacrifice had become an economic enterprise reflecting the prevailing priestly leadership, though not the sum of Judaism—and should not be used to stereotype Judaism and discriminate against it. On the one hand, Jesus' involvement in the temple signified the compatible nature of Judaism's covenant practice. What was taking place at the temple, however, was incompatible practice with religious, social and economic repercussions: access to God was restricted, a social system of stratification created inequitable participation, those with less economic resources were marginalized, and even denied access. This was incompatible with being whole, thus in conflict with Jesus, and had to be responded to with no room for flexibility or negotiation; it was a condition not only apart from God's whole but countering “to be whole,” which had to be redeemed.

Accordingly, on the other hand, Jesus' action in the temple constituted his involvement necessary to redeem it (Jn 2:14-17) to make the house of God's dwelling whole for covenant relationship together for all persons without false distinctions (par. Mk 11:17). At the same time, he remained in ongoing tension with certain segments of Judaism (the reductionists) who challenged the source of his identity, thereby the validity of his action (Jn 2:18). Their demand, in one sense, had some merit given the radical extent of Jesus' action; yet, the main issue focused only on what was perceived to be counter-cultural, and in apparent contradiction with orthodoxy noted earlier. Moreover, his intrusive engagement in this context, and relational involvement to make whole, was also in tension with those receptive to him because of their reductionism; thus, Jesus did not allow his person to be defined and determined by them (Jn 2:23-25).

³ For an overview of this historical development, see Bruce D. Chilton, “Judaism and the New Testament” in Daniel G. Reid, ed., *The IVP Dictionary of the New Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 603-616.

This temple encounter demonstrated Jesus' vulnerable and intrusive engagement of the cultural context of Judaism with various actions based on one or more particular qualifying issues. How these issues interact preclude a predetermined set of behavioral responses but only constitute predisposed relational involvement to be whole and to make whole. This provides us with a working understanding of Jesus' relation to culture, and further helps us fully understand the significance of his subsequent engagement with Judaism.

In the next encounter sometime later, Jesus returned to Jerusalem for another feast of the Jews (unspecified, possibly Feast of Tabernacles, Jn 5:1-47). Once again, his involvement reflected the compatible covenant practice of Judaism. Yet, they needed to understand further and more deeply that covenant practice is not an end in itself but only for covenant relationship together to be whole. As an assumption in any engagement of a culture, Jesus engaged their culture with his own culture, that is, with his sanctified identity (the conjoint function of his full and minority identity). Consequently, his practice to make whole by healing (*hygies*, vv.6-9) appeared to contradict orthodox life and practice in Judaism, and this became a major controversy among certain Jews since he practiced wholeness on the Sabbath (vv.10-16).

For the reductionists, it was clear and simple: Jesus broke the law basic to the cultural life and practice of Judaism. In a sense of the letter of the law, they had a valid point to raise but insufficient basis for their position. God's law was the terms for covenant relationship together to be whole and was never to be reduced to a code for national identity, self-determination or justification. Yet, in terms of Jesus' engagement of their cultural life and practice, unlike the temple cleansing earlier, there was partial overlap present "to be whole" allowing room for flexibility to at least discuss the significance of the Sabbath to be whole (see his polemic about the same issue, Jn 7:23). For the current situation, Jesus vulnerably responded to their attacks by making definitive his own culture and sanctified identity: to make whole is his Father's thematic action and his also (Jn 5:17); he disclosed the source of his identity and ontology (5:19-23) and the significance of his salvific work (5:24-30); and he clearly delineated the alternatives for their life and practice as the choice between the whole of God or reductionism (5:31-47, note again v.39 discussed in chap. 7). Any variation of the whole, even well-intentioned or inadvertently, is a form of reductionism. With that being said, he gave them the responsibility to decide.

After his ministry in Galilee to purposely create space from the reductionists in Judea, Jesus returned to Jerusalem for the specific Jewish Feast of Tabernacles (associated with the period in the wilderness living in tents, Jn 7:1-38). His return, however, was not determined by his biological brothers' misguided challenge; his involvement in the surrounding context was always defined and determined by the triangulation process with his Father (7:2-9). Partial overlap continued to allow room for flexibility to extend his dialogue with Judaism, even as the tension grew in this cultural context. Yet, his purpose and function to make whole appears more directed and urgent. As his Father determined for him, his involvement in this compatible covenant practice did not emerge until mid-week of the week-long Feast (7:10,14). While this has the appearance of caution, triangulation suggests guidance only by his Father's purpose ("who sent me," 7:16,28-29) to make whole. This involved God's communicative action, which also necessitated intensifying his intrusion into this context of partially

overlapping Judaic life and practices—namely with the aspects of life and practice needing to be made whole.

This intrusion on Judaism's "pluralized" culture (i.e. among themselves) involved God's communicative action in Jesus' teaching. Yet, Jesus taught not for the issue of orthodoxy but for the relationship to be whole (7:15-19). He clarified the Torah as only God's terms for covenant relationship together to be God's whole (7:21-23) and made definitive his basis to disclose this relationship together necessary to be whole (7:27-29). And this dialogue in Jesus' intrusive engagement of Judaism further precipitated the growing tension between reductionism and God's whole: "How...such learning without having studied" (v.15, NIV); "you have a demon" (v.20); "we know where this man is from, but when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from" (v.27)—all of which are in juxtaposition to Jesus' imperative "Stop judging by mere appearances and make a right judgment" (v.24, NIV, cf. Jn 8:15).

As this dialogue continued and the tension escalated, Jesus impressed on them the urgency of their choice between reductionism and the whole of God (7:30-38). On the last day of the Feast, Jesus deepened his involvement to vulnerably make his person accessible directly to them for the intimate relationship to be whole (7:37-38)—pointing to the fulfillment of God's covenant promise for relationship together and the living water associated with this Feast to end the wandering in the wilderness of reductionism (Zech 14:8,16-21). In God's communicative action, the whole of God was vulnerably present and intimately involved—whole-ly embodied only by Jesus' intrusive relational path.

Jesus engaged culture in his identity and function to be whole, and thus in his purpose to make whole. By the nature of his function and purpose, notably as the light, it was inevitable that the heightened tension with reductionism would result in conflict with the dogmatic reductionists. This was the fluid condition of Jesus' engagement with Judaism, which nevertheless neither defined nor determined who, what and how he was in this cultural context. His further engagement with Judaism even intensified his identity and function as the light of the world.

When Jesus engaged them again at another time, there was still room for dialogue in this fluid condition of Judaism's partial overlap toward the whole (Jn 8:12-59). In his vulnerable involvement Jesus openly shared in dialogue the following: his identity and function as the light (8:12), thereby engaging this context in his sanctified identity—which certain Pharisees challenged him about his life and practice (8:13); this then necessitated identifying the source of his life and practice (8:14-18)—whereby they challenged the source of his cultural identity and ontology (8:19a,25a); to which his identity and ontology were vulnerably disclosed (8:19b,23,25b-26) and the purpose of his life and practice (in word and deed) made clearly evident (8:27-29). This room for flexibility by Jesus to dialogue nurtured some in that context for the relational outcome to be whole (8:30). To them, and any receptive reductionists, he made conclusive the need to be redeemed to be made whole (8:31-32). This further precipitated the relational consequence of the clear distinction and dynamic between the two alternatives: the whole intrinsic to God or the reductionism inherent of Satan, and therefore their incompatibility and conflict (8:33-59); and any variation from the whole always signified a form of reductionism.

Even under difficult conditions, the light continued to intrude on the cultural context of Judaism to be whole and to make whole (see Jn 9:1-7,35-39; 10:22-39) for covenant relationship together in the whole of God's family (fulfilling the covenant of love, Dt 7:9)—vulnerable involvement even to the dismay and misperception of his disciples (Jn 11:7-16). This relational outcome, or even relational consequence, is the effect on reductionism in a culture's life and practice that the identity and function as the light of the world has. Whatever the qualifying issues may be about a culture, this is ongoingly the light's identity to be whole and its function to make whole; and the identity of the light has clarity only as a function of sanctified identity triangulating with his Father to determine his involvement—nothing less and no substitutes, just as his Father sent him into the world. Without this vulnerable intrusion specific to the culture of the surrounding context, the light is extinguished and not distinguished—just as churches were critiqued in Jesus' post-ascension discourse (notably in Thyatira, Rev 2-3).

This is the bigger picture into which John's Gospel contextualizes the narratives of Jesus' relational involvement with the life and practice of culture as the embodied whole of the Word of God's communicative action. As the embodied Word, Jesus engaged culture not by merely contextualizing his involvement in a culture's life and practice, but with distinguished significance he contextualized a culture in his relational context of the Trinity and in his context's relational process of intimate relationship together in family love—the relational significance of his culture. This is *the process of reciprocating contextualization*, which needs to inform the current missiological practice of contextualization so that we can be distinguished in the primary and not shaped by the secondary.

It is vital to understand the dynamic of reciprocating contextualization, and to practice this as a relational process in necessary conjoint function with triangulation. This integrated relational process is necessary for the qualitative distinction in the surrounding common's context in order not to be defined or determined by the common's function; and culture is its most subtle and seductive influence on the ontology and function of persons and relationships. Indispensably then, the relational process of reciprocating contextualization converges with the three qualifying issues for the functional involvement necessary both to be whole and to make whole in a culture's life and practice.

Therefore, Jesus' engagement of culture in the surrounding context was always in congruence with, and thus the definitive extension of, the whole of God's thematic relational response to the human condition to make whole his creation. This is the irreducible and nonnegotiable function of the whole of God's relational work of grace only for new covenant relationship together in love, which extends *into* his church family on his intrusive relational path. That is, this relational outcome will extend into a church that makes no assumptions about the culture of its surrounding context, and thus functions in relation to that culture by the three qualifying issues. When this ongoing process does not clearly distinguish the minority identity of church ontology and function, churches become co-opted by prevailing cultures and thereby seduced in their theology and practice to follow an incomplete (fragmentary, not whole) Jesus on a different path.

To be on a different path than Jesus has major consequences. In contrast to what Jesus embodied in his whole person and how he functioned, persons are reshaped from inner out to outer in, and relationships are reconstructed accordingly with secondary matter to substitute for what is primary, and on this reduced basis, church practice is established. We cannot ignore the role culture plays in these consequences because its seductive influence is far-reaching on shaping our person, our relationships and our church practice. Consider further, it is vital for us to examine church practice of worship and what determines its shape. How congruent is this worship with who and what the Father seeks in those worshipping him (Jn 4:23-24)? And how much does our worship correlate to what Jesus critiqued of worship (Mt 15:8-9)? We cannot assume that the seductive influence of culture is not present, has not diminished our worship,⁴ and has not co-opted us from the primary, the primacy of reciprocal relationship together without the veil, indeed from the intrusive relational path of Jesus.

Ethics and Its Illusion

We also make further assumptions about ethics or morality. Few would deny that ethics is the correct thing to do, even though many may not practice it. We assume that ethics is right for everyone (e.g. for the common good) without considering if that moral code is simply the common's function of the world—the function that routinely composes an illusion that does not result in wholeness for persons and relationships (e.g. that peace should constitute). Such an assumption renders ethics to an end in itself, or perhaps a means for self-determination that may serve some quantitative end (e.g. less tension or better reputation) but have little or no qualitative and relational significance.

In this regard, Jesus may in fact be part of the minority who disclaim that ethics is the right thing to do. His conduct was a cause of much discord among his religious counterparts, who objected to Jesus not following the moral code of the law. The issue Jesus consistently raised was distinguishing the primary from the secondary, thereby exposing what had become merely an end in itself and a means for self-determination—as he exposed conclusively in the Sermon on the Mount (discussed shortly). Directly underlying this issue is the plenary issue of theological anthropology and the ontology and function used for their/our person and relationships. We make assumptions involving these issues, which then create illusions about our ethics and for its practice. For the light to be illuminated clearly, we have to eliminate any fog in our theology and practice.

Getting on Jesus' Ethical Path

Sociology correctly helps each of us understand that we are all part of a larger context and a life and practice greater than our individual self. This rightly points to the relational design of humanity and the need for certain character qualities and conduct to optimize function of human persons together. Contextualization, however, cannot stop at the social level, as tends to happen in various biblical studies (e.g. new Paul perspectives) and missions. While sociological contextualizing provides useful descriptive information

⁴ To better understand the shaping influence of culture on worship, see Kary A. Kambara, *A Theology of Worship: 'Singing' a New Song to the Lord* (2011). Online at <http://4X12.org>, and *Hermeneutic of Worship Language: Understanding Communion with the Whole of God* (Worship Language Study, 2013). Online at <http://4X12.org>.

of collective behavior, this is insufficient to understand the significance of humanity's relational design, and thus inadequate to explain what is necessary for relationships together to be optimal. As much as our knowledge of human life has advanced, it is still based on a limited epistemic field that is unable to complete our understanding of the human person and relationships. We need theological anthropology to take us deeper.

When whole and not fragmentary, theology in general, and Christology in particular, makes definitive the specific relational design, purpose and function of the human person in relationships together. This relational understanding was vulnerably disclosed by the whole of Jesus who embodied the ontology and function needed to complete our understanding of the person and relationships. When we become relationally connected and involved with the whole of Jesus, he involves us conjointly in the greater relational context and process of the whole of God while living in the limits of the human social context.

The dynamic of reciprocating contextualization is critical for our whole understanding of life and practice in the surrounding contexts, whether for Jesus' life and practice or ours. With reciprocating contextualization Jesus connects us to an even greater context and an even deeper process of life and practice beyond the limits of sociology, that is, to the theological anthropology that is integrated to the embodied light. As the light, Jesus functioned to embody the relational design and purpose of the human person created in the image of (and his relational context in) the whole of God, and he embodied the function of the relational ontology of human persons together created in likeness of (and his relational process with) the Trinity. Following Jesus on his relational path involves going further than moral ideals, values and virtues, and deeper than ethical character and conduct, to intrusively engage human persons together not only for optimal function but for the ongoing relationships in everyday life and practice necessary together to be whole, God's irreplaceable whole.

Jesus' involvement in the surrounding context cannot be separated from his identity as the light, which is the *zoe* of the whole of Jesus, the Word (Jn 1:4). His involvement cannot be reduced to quantitative aspects of *bios*, and thus merely to certain character qualities and conduct. By the nature of *zoe*, his involvement was constituted by the function of his sanctified identity (in both his full and minority identity) in the relational process of *triangulation* with his Father. This ongoing life and practice in qualitative distinction was neither a static framework for engagement nor a program of ethical involvement, no matter how useful such ethics may be conceived. This was a process of the vulnerable presence and relational involvement of the *zoe* of the embodied whole of the Word as communicative action of the whole of God. Thus, involvement in his relational context necessitates more than character, and function in his relational process necessitates more than conduct—that is, as character and conduct are commonly perceived in ethical studies.

Ethics in general involves a moral philosophy of how persons should live in a certain context and/or in the presence of others, thus establishing a system or code of moral values, standards and principles for character and conduct. This tends not to be directly associated with identity, yet in function ethical practice (or its absence) does indeed relatively define who, what and how persons are. Christian (biblical) ethics should signify Christian identity and, moreover, needs to be constituted by the identity that is

both relationally compatible and congruent with the whole of Jesus. Otherwise, as good as our ethics are perceived, we will be on a different path than Jesus.

Jesus' sanctified life and practice in his kingdom and the surrounding context, and in relation to persons in those contexts, went beyond a system of ethics and a predetermined code of conduct. This is not to say that situations determined his ethical practice (as in situation ethics, situationalism), nor to only emphasize principles (as in principalism). Ethics, in specific practice, require a forensic framework that is applicable for all situations and circumstances, or else ethics become merely situational. The three qualifying issues involved in his engagement of a culture continue to inform us of his ethical practice. His sanctified life and practice, in both his kingdom-family and the surrounding context, was a predisposed relational involvement of his whole person guided by triangulation with the Trinity to fulfill his purpose and function in the relationships to be whole and necessary to make whole. This is *the integrating theme of Christian ethics*, to which practice adheres ongoingly. This relational context and process are only on God's terms, which defined and determined Jesus' identity and function, and thereby defined and determined his ethical practice—all of which cannot be reduced to referential terms.

Jesus was sent into the world by his Father in congruence with God's terms for the relational context and process to be whole and to make whole. This purpose of living and making whole in the new covenant relationship together as God's family is the end (*telos* in Greek) of this relational process—the teleological focus guiding all life and practice in his kingdom-family and the surrounding context. Yet, this *telos* does not justify the use of any means to this end or disregard the nature of all means used, even if compatible with existing ethical practice. Any means from reductionism is incompatible to be whole or to make whole. This *telos* by its nature necessitates congruence of its means, thus the *telos* to be God's whole also constitutes what means are compatible for this end.

The focus of means to balance a teleological focus in ethical studies is defined as the obligatory (*deon* in Greek) means necessary to an end, or refraining from the wrong means—known as a deontological focus.⁵ Yet, the issue for ethics in terms of character and conduct is when ethical practice becomes the primary focus. That is, as ethical means become separated or blurred from their particular end, ethical practice is problematic in clearly understanding its significance to that end, tending to become an end in itself, at least in function if not also in purpose. This also reduces the significance of such character and conduct, whose attributes and right behaviors tend to become the end subtly revolving around oneself, for example, for self-determination or even self-justification.

Deontological ethics (based on the obligation and duty to do what is right) is synonymous with the biblical term *opheilo*: morally obligated to (e.g. do something) or by virtue of personal obligation. *Opheilo* in the practice of God's law easily becomes the fulfillment of covenant obligation rather than the response to God on God's terms (relational not referential) for covenant relationship together. In contrast to *opheilo*, Jesus consistently made a matter definitive and/or imperative (as discussed throughout this study) with the term *dei*: must, necessary by the nature of things. Yet, for Jesus, a matter

⁵ For a discussion on teleological and deontological reasoning, see Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2003), 119-122.

was necessary not by the nature of some principle, value or virtue; that would be reductionism, notably of the whole of God. For Jesus, *dei* involved only by the nature of who and what he is in relationship together with the whole of God (e.g. Mk 8:31), thus defining and determining the nature of how he functioned (e.g. Lk 19:5).

In relational compatibility with Jesus, Christian (biblical) ethics implies a transition from *opheilo* to *dei*, the nature of which necessarily involves a transformation to *dei* by redemptive change from reductionism to be made whole with Jesus in new covenant relationship together. In relational congruence with Jesus, this process of forming Christian ethics is following Jesus in the relational progression to the Father, which (1) defines and determines who and what we are in relationship together with the whole of God, and which (2) thus defines and determines the new nature of how we function. Being relationally compatible and congruent with Jesus will then by its nature reconstitute deontological emphasis and refine teleological significance. While Christian ethics may still be considered a teleological type, it is foremost functionally significant as the relational process to wholeness on God's terms—the relational outcome of the gospel of transformation embodied by Jesus. Therefore, the practice of Christian ethics can be summed up as follows: *the process of living in relationships to be whole only on God's relational terms*. And getting on Jesus' ethical path is the only way this relational outcome unfolds.

How Jesus lived and practiced emerged ongoingly from the who and what of his identity and function to be whole and to make whole—only on God's relational terms defining and determining identity, function and practice. The forensic framework—required for ethics to go beyond being merely situational—emerges from God's terms of wholeness, which Christian ethics must have as its basis to constitute the integrity and significance necessary to be compelling in all human life and practice. This is the sum of Christian ethics that Jesus embodied, and the definitive terms of his embodied ethics he vulnerably disclosed as the communicative action of the whole and holy God and God's thematic relational work of grace. These terms, only for relationship together to be whole, compose the specific relational involvement necessary in his kingdom-family to be whole and in the surrounding context to make whole. To understand integrally the terms for ongoing relational life and practice Jesus disclosed by communicative action, we have to correctly understand both his words and his actions, that is, his whole person in his relational context and process.

As Jesus declared in the Sermon on the Mount (discussed initially in chapter four), his coming adhered to and integrated with the collective word of God in the OT, not to abolish but to fulfill (Mt 5:17-20). The Sermon on the Mount is framed in the larger context of the OT and thus in the full context of God's thematic action. What his embodying adhered to and integrated with, however, was not a mere list of demands of the law, nor a system of ethics and moral obligations (*opheilo*). The law specifies God's desires and terms for covenant relationship together. In his relational context and process, Jesus paid attention not merely to the oral and written word of God but to those *words from God*—that is, the communication from God. Unlike much of human communication, God's communicative action is not merely informative for a cognitive purpose, nor was it to announce terms for ethics. God's communication composes distinct relational purpose and function to which Jesus' embodying adhered and integrated with: God's thematic relational action in response to the human condition for the purpose only

to be whole in relationship together. His incarnation was indeed Emmanuel, God vulnerably present and intimately involved *with us* for relationship together.

By the nature necessary (*dei*, not *opheilo*) of his identity, all of Jesus' words and action integrated with God's thematic relational action. Thus, Jesus' teachings (*didache*) need to be understood with integration into the whole of God's communicative and thematic action, and the terms he disclosed should not be separated from this action. Conjointly, Jesus' life and practice (including, yet beyond, character and conduct) was both in relational congruence with God's action in the trinitarian relational context, as well as ongoingly relationally compatible fully to the dynamic grace and love of God's action by the trinitarian relational process. This relational involvement goes further than character and conduct, and deeper than doing the right ethic or fulfilling moral obligation. Without this relational congruence and relational compatibility, there is no functional integration with God's thematic action, and thus with God's terms for conjoint function to be whole in new covenant relationship together in his kingdom-family and to make whole in relationships together necessary in the surrounding context. And the only alternative to the function of God's whole is anything less or any substitute of the whole from reductionism, which the study of Christian ethics urgently needs to examine—including accounting for our practice of ethics.

His Definitive Terms for Ethics

As we focus on the definitive terms for Christian ethics that Jesus disclosed, we need to pay attention to the whole of his relational context and process—namely, that Jesus' teaching was communicative action, and that he used relational language to disclose (not merely *apokalypto* but *phaneroo*, signifying relational context and process) God's desires and terms for the function of relationships together to be whole. To fully understand his relational language is to receive the whole of Jesus extended to us in the context of relationship, which necessitates relational involvement and further engaging him in the relational process of discipleship.

From our initial discussion in chapter five, the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7) was Jesus' summary discourse for his followers of *what* we are and *who* we become, and thus *how* we live and function—whether in his kingdom-family or the surrounding context—because of *whose* we are. This directly addressed the issue of human ontology and the determination of the person and wholeness in human practice. The issue here, as is consistently evident throughout the narratives of Jesus, was the tension/conflict between God's whole and reductionism. Jesus' conflict with a segment of Judaism was with the reductionist who defined and determined life and practice based on the ontology of the person from the outer in, not from the inner out. Thus, Jesus made imperative for his followers that our righteousness—the integrity and quality of functional involvement of our whole person that others can expect in relationships—must by the nature of our identity go beyond reductionism (Mt 5:20). That is, this goes beyond merely displaying character traits and practicing the right ethic to the integral righteousness of who, what and how we are that functions in likeness to what, who and how God is in relationship.

Righteousness is the process (not attribute) that makes functional our new identity as Jesus' followers and whose we are. Identity formation (as he defined in the beatitudes) is integrated with the process to be righteous (the growth characteristic of the fourth beatitude, 5:6), the extent and depth of which is constituted by the righteous God in

relationship together. Identity and righteousness are conjoined to present whole persons in congruence with who, what and how they truly are, namely those constituted with Jesus in his trinitarian relational context and process. Righteousness is necessary so that his followers, by the nature of their identity, can be counted on to be those whole persons in relationships—both in his kingdom-family and in the surrounding context, nothing less and no substitutes. His summary discourse makes deeply evident this qualitative relational process signifying God's whole and God's irreducible and nonnegotiable terms for them to function in relationship together to be and live whole and thereby to make whole.

The definitive terms Jesus disclosed for the integrity and quality of their functional involvement in relationships ("righteousness" ethics if you wish) are also a necessary function of his followers' identity based on the ontology of the person from the inner out. This ontology of the person underlies his summary discourse and points to *the integrating theme of God's terms*: the function of whole persons (constituted by the involvement of the heart, yet not in dualism) in relationships together (signified by the primacy of intimate involvement) necessary to be whole and to make whole, the function of whom are defined and determined only by the whole of God and not shaped by human terms in the surrounding context.

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

As we discussed in chapter five, Jesus clearly defined the process of identity formation for his followers (Mt 5:3-12) and the identity issues of clarity and depth necessary to have qualitative distinction from the common's function of reductionism, and to distinguish who, what and how we are with others in the surrounding context (5:13-16). This necessitates by its nature (*dei*, not *opheilo*) the ontology of the whole person created in the image of God and those persons in relationship together created to be whole in likeness of the relational ontology of the Trinity; moreover, this is the theological anthropology that integrates with the light. This composes the relational compatibility and congruence necessary to function as whose we are. Thus, the remaining sections of Jesus' summary teachings (a primer for discipleship) for all his followers (5:21-7:27) distinguish unmistakably the function of this new identity conjoined with relational righteousness and the ontology of the whole.

Along with his relational context and process, Jesus' summary teachings need to be framed throughout his discourse in the three major interrelated issues for all practice (introduced from the beginning of this study):

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

As Jesus seeks to constitute his followers in relationships beyond reductionism to the whole of God, his terms need to be understood as directly involving these interrelated

issues—which directly also involves the above two basic issues of how we define ourselves and do relationships, and thus, of course, implies how we practice church.

In addition, Jesus' summary teachings are further integrated throughout with the progression and interaction of three critical concerns: (1) self-autonomy, (2) self-determination, and (3) self-justification. It may seem like a modern or Western bias to say Jesus addressed something self-oriented in a non-individualistic setting. Yet, as noted previously, in this collective-oriented sociocultural context, self-autonomy was not the modern self-autonomy of individualism in the West but rather the self-autonomy of persons (individually or collectively) who determined function in relationships together “to be apart” from the whole—for example, by the absence of significant involvement while in relationship together, or by merely keeping relational distance in those contexts (cf. Martha and Mary). This condition pervades in a collective context as well (even in churches in the East and global South), though due to ontological simulation and epistemological illusion it is less obvious than in the individualism of the modern West. The subtlety of self-autonomy (as an individual or a collective) involves the work of reductionism, which signifies its influence. Jesus disclosed the terms to be whole, and thus ongoingly confronted human life and practice reducing the whole in each of these terms. In the process, he broadens and deepens our understanding of sin, and its functional implications and relational repercussions. Therefore, these three concerns evidence the general applicable character of the Sermon on the Mount and the need in particular for all his followers in the present to respond to his summary teaching in order to follow him on his ethical path of, to and in wholeness together. Jesus' relational words are neither for the future nor unattainable ideals for realistic practice today.

Matthew 5:21-48

In this section, Jesus began to define specific terms for the function of the new identity formed by the interdependent process of the beatitudes—the new identity redefining the person and transforming persons to be whole. Since he already disclosed his complete (*pleroo*) compatibility with Torah (5:17-18), his focus remained on the law of the covenant in terms of this issue: either essentially reducing (*lyo*) these commandments (*entole*) or acting on (*poieo*) them (5:19). This issue precipitated Jesus' definitive statement to his followers about the nature of their new identity (righteousness, what and who they are) determining how they function, thus acting on the relational righteousness necessary to go beyond the reductionists (5:20). This involved the interrelated issues outlined above, which necessitate going beyond the mere practice of ethics.

The commandments (*entole*) Jesus focused on was not a specific list of demands, code of behavior, system of obligations or rules of ethics—all denoted by the term *entalma*, a synonym for commandment. While *entalma* points directly to its content and stresses what to do, *entole* stresses the authority of what is commanded, that is, its qualitative relational significance. In other words, with *entole* Jesus focused on the law beyond merely as the charter for the covenant, but he went further to the whole of God's desires for covenant relationship together in love (cf. Ex 20:6, Dt 7:9) and deeper to God's necessary terms for relationship together to be whole in likeness of the Trinity (signified by his emphasis on the Father). Jesus' teaching engaged this communicative action.

This is not to say that Jesus did away with the *entalma* of the law. Jewish ceremonial law, for example, served to maintain purity, and thus to have clear distinction as God's people. Sanctified life and practice serves this same purpose to have qualitative distinction from the common's function and to be defined only by God as God's—that is, who they are and whose they are. Yet, Jewish practice (post-exilic Judaism in particular) of the law often fell into ethnocentrism and national protectionism—maintaining the law was a symbol of this—thereby essentially reducing God's terms for covenant relationship and making their collective self-determination an end in itself—that is, merely for themselves rather than as “the light to the nations” for the whole of God and the relationships necessary to be whole. This is how the practice of the law deteriorates when seen only as *entalma*.

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

Such reductions have relational consequences both with God and with others, the counter-relational implications of which Jesus contrasted with God's terms to be whole and to make whole in new covenant relationship together. This is the ongoing tension/conflict between reductionism (and its counter-relational work) and God's whole (and the relationships necessary to be whole) that Jesus addressed in his summary teaching by placing in juxtaposition the following six examples of the law (or its tradition) with God's desires. These six examples should not be seen separate from each other but seen together.

When Jesus interjected God's desires by declaring “But I tell you” (5:22,28,32,34,39,44), his intrusive juxtaposition made evident the substantive meaning of the law and the prophets. The focus of *entalma* on the ‘letter of the law’ was a prevailing norm in his day. That practice, however, operated essentially as a system of constraints to prevent negative acts, without any responsibility for further action: “Do not murder” (v.21), “Do not commit adultery” (v.27). Based on the ontology of the person from the outer in, which is defined primarily by what one does, this kind of system invariably focused on outward behavior as the main indicator of adherence to the law. No physical murder and adultery meant fulfilling those demands of the law, without consideration of the significance of that behavior. This opened the way for God's law to be reduced and its function to be shaped by self-autonomy, self-determination or even self-justification. To formulate practice based only on the letter of the law is to reduce the integrity of human ontology in the divine image and to redefine the significance of human identity based on merely the quantitative aspects of what we do. Furthermore, this self-definition also determined how others are perceived and how relationships are done—which filters how church is practiced.

For Jesus, this was an inadequate human ontology and an insufficient response to God's purpose for the law. More specifically, it was contrary to both. In contrast, he disclosed what can be called the 'spirit of the law' (not to be confused with spiritualizing) for which to be responsible, thus deepening the involvement necessary on God's terms. This must by its nature (*dei*, not *opheilo*) involve the conjoint function of both the following: (1) the ontology of the whole person from inner out, thus the words (vv.22,37), thoughts and feelings (v.28), as well as the overt behavior, constitute actions; and (2) based on this ontology of the whole, other persons also need to be so defined and thus engaged for the relationships together to make and to be whole (vv.23-25,32,34-36,39-42,44-48). By embodying involvement in the spirit of the law, Jesus essentially restores the person and their relationships to their created ontology of God's whole. Conjointly, the spirit of the law restores the primacy of covenant relationship together and makes definitive its priority in life and practice. In other words, the spirit of the law demands that persons and relationships go further and deeper than the limited ethics of the letter.

The law signifies God's desires and terms for covenant relationship together. This is neither about merely avoiding the wrong behavior nor about a code of merely the right thing to do, neither about not making mistakes nor about trying to be right—that is, about mere ethics. Such action becomes legalistic, and its preoccupation is legalism. Rather these are terms for relationship together and how to be involved, thus *the positive action to live whole necessary to make relationships whole*. Accordingly, the specific prescriptions Jesus presented to these six examples should not be taken as an end-practice for ethics; they are only provisional steps in the relational process to wholeness. For example, merely clearing up something someone has against you is not the sum of reconciliation—nor all that peace involves—yet is a provisional step to that end to be whole. When Christian ethics stops at provisional steps, its practice will not function to be whole and make whole but only as a reductionist substitute in an incomplete or fragmentary process.

Jesus clearly countered the underlying concern of the reductionists about doing the "right" thing by the letter, which did not serve to lead them to this positive action. While refraining from negative behavior certainly has some value, the absence of positive action is of greater importance to God—distinguishing the deeper significance of God's design and purpose for those relational terms involving murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, an eye for an eye, and love for enemies. As the counterpart to legalism, even moralism is not the righteousness that God expects and that Jesus constitutes in his followers. Moralists and legalists are misguided in thinking that such conformity is congruent with, and even compatible to, God's desires and who, what and how God is. We should not be thinking in the limits of mere conformity to God's terms, which would tend to become merely about doing the right thing.

Conversely, since the law signifies God's terms for relationship together, the practice of God's law is irreducibly the function only of our whole person, thus making practice vulnerable (vv.44,46-47), threatening (vv.39-42), if not even demanding (vv.29-30) for us. Yet, the further relational responsibility of God's desires in the spirit of the law is not given to burden or constrain human persons, and thus should not be considered negotiable. It was disclosed only for relationships together to be whole; and the various terms of this deeper responsibility signify positive relational opportunities to grow in the

new identity of our whole person to make relationships together whole. The interrelated focus and conjoint function between the whole person and relationships together always emerges in the whole of Jesus' words and action because they embody the essential relational ontology of who, what and how the triune God is. In his summary teaching, Jesus is giving us understanding of the heart of God's desires for human persons and the integrating purpose for God's relational terms vital for his followers together, therefore irreducible and nonnegotiable. As we reflect on these six examples together integrally in this section, they clearly disclose the loving purpose God has: to relationally belong in the relationships together as the whole of God's family.

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

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

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

This self-autonomy emerges in the priority or dominance given progressively to these reactions: (1) self-interests, for example, signified in acting on anger or sexual desires (involving issues of how the person is defined and how relationships are done); (2) self-concerns, for example, signified by unwarranted divorce (overlapping in self-interest), or depending on oaths for validation (involving issues of the significance of the person presented, integrity of one's communication and level of relationship engaged); and (3) self-centeredness, for example, signified by seeking restitution/vengeance (overlapping with self-concern), or keeping relational distance from those who contest you, are different or are simply not in your social network (involving issues of how the person is defined and level of relationship engaged). The concern for self-autonomy overlaps into self-determination and interacts with the major and basic issues outlined above.

Each of these six expressions of self-autonomy can find some justification, yet at the expense of reducing human ontology and reinforcing reductionism's counter-relational work "to be apart" from the whole of relationships together. The persons involved are reduced to less than whole persons, and relationships become self-oriented instead of relationships together—even in a collective context. This is the contrary dynamic Jesus confronted in his juxtaposition of the qualitative relational significance of the whole of God's terms necessary for relationships together to be whole, and to be made whole as needed. In the process, he deepens our understanding of sin by introducing us to the functional workings of the sin of reductionism. His summary teaching exposes the sin of countering (knowingly or inadvertently) God's desires, as well as God's created relational design and purpose, by reducing one's own person and then reducing other persons to reinforce the human condition "to be apart." This is how the limits of ethics can reflect, reinforce and even sustain the human condition in spite of intentions to improve it.

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

The only alternative to function in anything less or any substitute of our whole person is to function in nothing less and no substitute of who, what and how we are in our new identity formed through the beatitudes in relational involvement with Jesus as his followers together. Following Jesus in his relational context and process involves us in the relational progression to his Father for relationship together in the whole of God's family, thus constituting us as his very own daughters and sons by the redemptive process

of adoption (as discussed previously). The function of this relationship together in this new identity (sanctified identity) is only on the whole of God's relational terms that Jesus made definitive in his summary teaching. Therefore, these terms for function are irreducible to any alternative or substitute—notably to common human ontology and relationships together—and are nonnegotiable for all self-autonomy, self-determination and self-justification.

To provide clarity and depth of function for this new identity on God's terms, Jesus concluded this section with the functional key (the first of three for the entire discourse) with which the six examples converge and sanctified identity's life and practice is integrated.

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

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

Once again, Jesus' emphasis here is not on what to do but on how to be involved with others. Certainly, we cannot be involved with others to the extent in quantity or quality as God is involved. That was not what he stressed in this key. Quantity, like ethical or moral quantity, is not the goal of “be perfect.” Jesus' intent is focused on involvement with others by “how” (*hos*) God is involved; this is not an unrealistic ideal since God created us “to be” (*eimi*, verb of existence) in the image and likeness of the Trinity, to which the identity as the light points. While “perfect” can never be the outcome of what we do and how we do it, “perfect” (*teleios*, describing persons who have reached their purpose, *telos*, thus are full-grown, mature) can indeed “be” (*eimi*) the growing function (viz. *ginomai* in v.45) of who, what and how we are as the very daughters and sons of the whole of God's family.

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

Jesus does not want his followers “to become” reduced to mere *reactors* to that situation or circumstance and to those persons, even with ethical intentions; that would be counter-relational work, even on an ethical basis. He calls us “to be” persons who live in relationships to be whole and function to make relationships whole, thus free to be *respondors* in love. His call and its function are ongoingly challenged to be redefined and

determined by reductionism, notably with subtle self-autonomy apart from God's relational terms or by substituting referential terms. This first functional key begins to form the basis necessary for the process of triangulation in relational congruence with the triangulation Jesus used to engage the surrounding contexts and relationships with persons in those contexts without being redefined or determined by reductionism. Just as it was for Jesus, the main aspect of this triangulation process is ongoing intimate involvement in relationship together with our Father and the whole of God. In this relational involvement, the three major issues for all practice are also addressed ongoingly. Hereby also, the primacy of relationships together is conclusive to define ethics and determine the primary function of its practice.

Relational involvement with our Father is the guiding point of reference for the function of our sanctified identity in the surrounding contexts and in relationships with persons in those contexts, including in his kingdom-family. Furthermore, this involvement is the dynamic necessary for Jesus' followers to embody the reciprocating contextualization to clearly both be whole and make whole. In the next section, Jesus takes this relational process even further and deeper.

Matthew 6:1-34

In this discipleship primer preempted by assumptions (either assumed for the future or as unrealistic ideals) about the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus constitutes his followers in the relational righteousness that by its nature functions beyond reductionism. Relational righteousness is the process to ensure that our identity as his followers functions unambiguously in ongoing life and practice. It is crucial for our identity to be in conjoint function with relational righteousness in order to present whole persons in congruence with the nature of our full identity, thus as those who can be counted on to be those unreduced persons in relationships—both with God and with others, in his kingdom-family and in the surrounding context, nothing less and no substitutes. In this section Jesus makes evident that Christian identity without righteousness is problematic and merely righteousness without wholeness of identity is equally problematic (cf. 5:20), both of which are consequential for ethics. This addresses deeply two of the major issues for all practice: the significance of the person we present to others and the integrity and quality of our communication—underlying issues that determine the significance of ethics.

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

God's righteousness is absolutely essential for our confidence in how the whole of God (not merely some part of God) will be in relationship together. This makes evident that righteousness without wholeness of identity is also problematic, which in this section Jesus makes imperative in order to go beyond reductionism. In other words, a partial or inaccurate presentation, or semblance of the person are insufficient to establish confidence and generate trust in relationships. Completeness of the person is needed, which is the function of relational righteousness. The incarnation clearly demonstrated God's righteousness since Jesus (the *pleroma* of God) presented the embodied whole of God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement. How we present our person to others involves this issue of completeness and the function of righteousness, thus what others can expect and count on from us—including what God expects (cf. Jn 4:23-24, discussed previously). Ethics must, by its nature, be composed in this relational process to have validity.

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

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

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

As noted previously, *hypokrites* involved playing a role or taking on an identity different from one's true self. Just like an actor, this presentation of a person was made to a crowd, an audience, observers, that is, before others with interest, or anyone who took notice. When Jesus focused on righteousness, he was specific about "paying attention that you do not live your righteousness before others *in order to be seen by them*" (6:1). The

term for “to be seen” (*theaomai*) denotes to view attentively, deliberately observing an object to perceive its detail. In other words, this is a presentation intended to be observed and noticed by others. Moreover, *theaomai* (related to *theoreo*) involves more than merely seeing (as in *blepo*, to be discussed shortly); the observer regards the object with a sense of wonderment (maybe even imagination) in order to perceive it in detail. This implies that there is a certain effect, image, even illusion, that the “actor” seeks to establish about one’s presentation of self, which will result in a response “to be honored,” “be praised” by observers, and ultimately by God (6:2). The term *doxazo*, from *doxa* (glory), denotes to recognize, honor, praise. This is what they seek and this is all they will experience, as Jesus said unequivocally: “they have received their reward” (6:2,5,16) with “no reward from your Father” (6:1). Whether performed overtly (as Jesus illustrated) or enacted simply in performing a role of service (as commonly seen in Christian ministries), this points to the self-determination motivating the act; and the practice of ethics is not immune to this dynamic. Consider also how the person is defined, how relationships are done and the level of relationship engaged.

Such practice was addressed further when Jesus exposed such efforts to “be seen by others” in their praying (6:5) and “to show others” their acts of fasting (v.16). The same term (*phaino*) is used for both, which denotes to appear, be conspicuous, become visible—that is, essentially to be recognized by others for one’s presentation of self, and, of course, ultimately be recognized by God. Both of these acts were accentuated to elevate (v.7) or dramatize (v.16) the effects for greater attention, thus greater recognition and honor. Whether elevated, dramatized or performed simply in religious duty, the effort for self-determination underlying these acts is clearly exposed; and for some persons, this effort also overlaps into self-justification.

While the term *phaino* comes from *phos* (light), there is no clarity of light in this practice, even if punctuated with correct doctrine or accentuated with the right ethic and spiritual discipline. The identity of light in this presentation of the person is ambiguous at best, and mainly just reduced to outer simulation and inner illusion. In the absence of relational righteousness, there is no basis for completeness of the person presented or of the integrity and quality of the person’s communication. This is how we need to understand *hypokrites* and perceive its operation today—not so much as a blatant lie or subversion of the truth but as the reductionist substitute (sometimes even enacted unintentionally) for authenticity of the whole person, and thus for the function of one’s full identity with others, notably with God. When the pursuit of recognition and affirmation is left to self-determination, it invariably becomes reduced to being seen by others and how others perceive what one does, thereby easily compromising the complete presentation of self “to be seen in a better light.” Obviously then, to be “better” takes place in a comparative process with others, whether in the church or the surrounding context, which results in stratified relationships based on false distinctions.

This is Jesus’ purpose for making imperative the ongoing need to pay attention to how our righteousness functions. It has direct relational implications for determining the level of relationship we engage. In highlighting these three important areas of religious practice, his concern is foremost our relationship with our Father and the level of relationship we engage with him. The major implication of merely performing roles in Christian duty is the significance of the specific relational messages we communicate to God implied in such practice: (1) about how we see ourselves—with an outer-in human

ontology and the responsibility for fulfilling obligations by self-determination; (2) about how we see God—that God is similar to us, and thus sees us as we see ourselves, holding us accountable to fulfill our obligations by self-determination; and (3) about our relationship together—it functions neither on the basis of grace nor on the intimate relational involvement of *agape*, which would be on God’s terms, but rather it functions on the basis of obligation (*opheilo*) and fulfilling those expectations (from *entalma*, not *entole*), thus the preoccupation with what we do, reducing the relationship to our terms. There are assumptions about God made in these relational messages that we have no legitimate basis to make—assumptions that Jesus corrected with the relational truth of the Father (discussed below). Ethics practiced on this basis becomes in reality unethical treatment of God.

These are pivotal relational messages implied in such practice constituted by self-determination. Their significance reflects a perceptual-interpretive framework and an outer-in ontology of the person that reduce life and practice to quantitative (over qualitative) function embedded in reductionism. How self-determination emerges in this process that reduces life and practice to quantitative function involves a two-fold dynamic: (1) it reduces function and practice to what a person can both control (overlapping with self-autonomy) and thus manage to accomplish for success in determining one’s self, identity and worth (in contrast, qualitative function necessitates more from the whole person); yet (2), this cannot be determined in a spiritual vacuum or in social isolation, but by necessity of its quantitative approach can only be determined in comparison (and competition) with others, thus the use of quantitative indicators to ascribe “better” or “less” to self-definition, identity and worth, and to establish higher and lower positions in stratified relationships (overlapping with self-justification, cf. 7:1-5, discussed in the next section). This reductionist focus becomes the preoccupation (even compulsion or obsession) in practice with the relational consequence implied in the above relational messages; and ethical and moral practice alone does not address this but indeed can reflect, reinforce and sustain this.

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

Jesus did not compartmentalize various acts (like giving to the needy) to different areas of function, thus fragmenting the person (“...do not let your left hand know what

your right hand is doing,” 6:3). Nor, in this, was he suggesting to be subconscious in practice (“so that your giving may be in secret,” v.4). Rather he was directly addressing the issue of practice becoming *self*-conscious, that is, self-oriented (for recognition) instead of giving one’s self in relational involvement with the person(s) receiving. Jesus rendered such practice unfulfilling and unnecessary, despite any benefit from such mere practice. Likewise for praying (6:6-7) and fasting (6:17-18), Jesus was not suggesting these practices be inconspicuous, neither inward nor detached. These are relational acts of involvement for relationship together—namely, prayer as a means for greater intimacy with God, and fasting as a means of submission to God for deeper relationship. And Jesus targeted the completeness of the whole person in intimate relational involvement together with our Father—nothing less and no substitutes, just as “in spirit and truth” (Jn 4:24)

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

In this relational process, then, he “will reward you” (*misthos*, wages, recompense received, 6:4,6,18), which needs to be understood in his relational context and process and not by a reductionist perceptual-interpretive framework. Jesus is using only relational language to build reciprocal relationship together. “Reward” involves our Father’s relational response to us—not with quantitative things, secondary matter, or on our terms—by giving his intimate Self further and deeper (including some things or matter, yet not on our terms). In this intimate relational outcome and experience, we are clearly being recognized for *what* we are and affirmed for *who* we are as persons belonging to his own family.

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

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

Just as with the incarnation of Jesus, this relational process begins with embodying of the person. The significance of any embodying, or incarnation, is a function of the person presented in relational context.⁶ The incarnation of Jesus had ultimate significance because Jesus presented his whole person vulnerably in relationship and functionally embodied the whole of God, nothing less and no substitutes. Likewise, the embodying of our person only has significance in this relational process when it is the function of our whole person presented for intimate involvement in relationship together. Anything less and any substitutes for the whole (of our person and of God) are a function of reductionism, notably and subtly emerging from self-determination. Jesus continued in this section to directly address the issue of whom and what we will pursue.

Anything less and any substitutes of our whole person are incongruent with the person created in the image of God (cf. 6:25b-28), and thus incompatible for intimate relationship together with the whole of God. Jesus made this clearly evident in his remaining teaching. The influence of reductionism pervades our perceptual-interpretive framework and how we see things (6:23), thus defining our priorities and determining our primary pursuits (6:19,24). As noted previously, the eyes and the heart are interrelated functions for the whole person, which Jesus made evident earlier (5:28, cf. Job 31:7, Ecc 11:9). He now also interrelated their functions to the ongoing tension-conflict issue of reductionism of the whole. In function, Jesus said "For what defines you also determines where your heart (signifying the whole person) will be also" (6:21). In conjoint function, he illuminated that what the eyes focus on determines the function of our identity as the light, that is, the full identity of our whole person (6:22-23). And he unequivocally delineated the complete incompatibility between reductionism and God's whole, as well as exposed any illusion that we can pursue and function in both (6:24).

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

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

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

This relationally penetrating polemic led to the second functional key to provide clarity and depth for the intimate relational involvement of our full identity in relational righteousness with our Father.

Second Functional Key: “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (6:33). “Seek” (*zeteo*, actively pursue to experience) in Jesus’ relational language is not about obligatory striving (*opheilo*) to belong to God’s kingdom, which becomes self-determination overlapping into self-justification. Likewise, “seek” is not about striving for an attribute of righteousness, and thus to be righteous in likeness of his righteousness to justify and/or ensure receiving “all these things.” Nor is this about practicing mere “kingdom ethics.” In his relational language, the imperative of *zeteo*, by the nature (*dei*) of God’s relational terms, is the qualitative pursuit of the whole of God (“his righteousness”) for intimate relationship together in his family (“kingdom”). This qualitative pursuit necessarily (*dei*) involves the vulnerable presence and intimate involvement of the whole person, constituted by the heart from the inner out, nothing less and no substitutes; such a pursuit, then, provides the clarity and depth for both who we are and whose we are in relationship together as his very own daughters and sons. This intimate relational process of belonging to his family and participating in his life has the relational outcome of ongoingly experiencing the whole of God further and deeper, as

well as receiving what belongs to our Father in his family—the qualitative relational significance of “all these things” necessary to be made whole, to live whole and to make whole, and thereby the only basis and means for ethics in God’s family and in the world.

This functional key also provides the relational process by which our Lord’s summary prayer needs to be submitted to our Father and from which it will be fulfilled in his reciprocal relational response. Moreover, this key relational process integrates with the interrelated process between the fourth and sixth beatitudes (5:6,8). The second functional key of pursuing our Father on his terms further composes—conjointly with the first functional key of living how our Father loves us—the basis for the process of triangulation by making functional in our life and practice the main aspect of this triangulation process: ongoing intimate involvement in relationship together with our Father and the whole of God as family. Guided from this intimate relational point of reference, we are defined in the surrounding context by the trinitarian relational context of family, and how we function in relationships and in all our situations and circumstances is determined by the trinitarian relational process of family love for relationships together to be whole.

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

Matthew 7:1-27

Self-determination is never an individual action (or an individual group action) done in isolation from others (or other groups). Self-determination is a social phenomenon requiring a process of comparison to others to establish the standards of measuring success or failure in self-determination. Invariably, these comparative (and competitive) differences lead to “better” or “less” social position (historically, even ontological nature, as seen in racism), thus the operation of stratified relationships together (formalized in systems of inequality). When relationships become separated, partitioned or fragmented, there is a basis of justification needed either to access a “better” position or to embed/maintain others in a “less” position. The pursuit of this basis is the effort for self-justification (by individual or group). That is to say, the effort for self-determination inevitably becomes the function in social context for self-justification; and the results of this effort invariably come at the expense of others, even unknowingly or inadvertently. Accordingly, our ethics cannot be distinguished with relational significance as long as it emerges from such a practice.

Jesus continued to expose the dynamics of reductionism, its counter-relational work and the functional workings of the sin of reductionism countering the whole of God’s desires. In his initial teaching, the subtle shift of self-determination to self-justification emerged from an invalid application of “righteousness”—or an inadequate practice of ethics and morality—to effectively create distinctions (“with the measure you use”) of “better” and “less” for relational position in religious and social context (7:1-2, cf. Mk 4:24). This so-called righteousness was not merely about “the holier the better”

but about “holier than thou.” Judgment based on an outer-in human ontology exposed their reductionism, with the relational consequence from counter-relational practice diminishing relationship together to be whole (7:3-4). This mere role performance of righteousness (even with good intentions, e.g., by church leaders) is characteristic of *hypokrites* and is a function of the sin of reductionism lacking the inner-out practice of the whole person constituted by the heart (7:5). In addition, to be whole is the outcome of God’s relational work of grace, not self-determination, thus humility precludes self-justification—for example, humility in ethical and moral practice, or in spiritual development, which would involve epistemic humility. Yet, this humility should not be confused, for example, with being irenic and thereby diminish Jesus’ intrusive relational path.

The dynamic of reductionism in religious/Christian life and practice is embedded in ontological simulation and epistemological illusion of God’s whole. Yet, Jesus exposed the efforts of self-autonomy, self-determination and self-justification as insufficient (not to mention unnecessary) to be whole. Reductionism and the whole are incompatible. Moreover, they cannot be conjoined in any pluralistic or syncretistic way, and any attempt to do so will fragment the whole (reducing the new, cf. Lk 5:37-38). It is the integrity and significance of this whole that Jesus pointed to in a vivid illustration of the issue of whom/what we will pursue (7:6). This verse is not merely an added injunction thrown into his discourse but needs to be directly integrated into this issue at hand. Given the full identity of his family in relationship together to be whole, to function in anything less is to pursue an alternative substitute of reductionism, even with good intentions. The dynamic Jesus described is consequential:

The integrity (“sacred”) and significance (“pearls”) of your whole person and relationship together in essence are thoughtlessly thrown (*ballo*) to reductionists, who treat with disdain (*katapateo*) anything whole, and even turn (*strepho*) on you to break down your wholeness and leave you fragmented (*rhegnymi*).

While this may appear as hyperbole, the dynamic is rightfully described because of the essential violence reductionism exerts on the whole—even though the influence reductionism exerts, notably in its counter-relational work, tends to be a very subtle process, even appearing in Christian roles (cf. 2 Cor 11:14-15) or as the Christian norm, for example, in ontological simulation and epistemological illusion of God’s whole.

The choice of whom/what we will pursue is really quite simple, as Jesus’ summary teaching made definitive: God’s whole or anything less and any substitute. The results are profoundly consequential, as Jesus fully disclosed in this concluding section of his most major discourse with his followers.

The summary word embodied by Jesus to communicate the whole of God’s desires is declared simply: self-autonomy, self-determination and self-justification are insufficient and unnecessary, no matter how their practice is punctuated and accentuated. The summary experiential truth embodied by Jesus to fulfill the whole of God’s thematic relational response to the human condition “to be apart” is profoundly simple: God does not define our person based on what we do and have, thus the whole of God’s vulnerable involvement and intimate response is fully based on the Trinity’s relational work of grace for relationship together to be whole—the whole of God’s family.

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

Third Functional Key: "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (7:12, NIV).

This teaching tends to be reduced by interpreting it only in the limited context involving us with others. This bases how we do relationships with others on the self-orientation formulated from two basic issues (which Jesus addressed throughout his summary teaching): (1) how we define our person, and thus, on this basis, (2) how we do relationships. If this self-orientation has been influenced by reductionism, then "in everything we do to others" will not go beyond and deeper than a reductionist practice of how we do relationships based on a reductionist self-definition. In other words, what we desire others to act on (*thelo*) in relation to us will always be seen through this lens, which in turn will determine how we function with them. This use of self-orientation, even with the best of intentions as the Golden Rule, is insufficient basis for our life and practice "in everything"—for example, even for Christian ethical decisions and practice. Moreover, the practice emerging from this approach is inadequate to be the sum and substance (*eimi*, what is) of the law and the prophets (i.e. God's communicated Word), which Jesus vulnerably embodied in his teaching for relationship together to be whole—and thus would diminish his intrusive relational path with more comfortable and less demanding relationships.

The alternative to this reduction is the whole. The third functional key cannot be limited to only the context involving us with others, which would then take it out of its whole context, as the Golden Rule does. Its whole context involves us further and deeper than this. This functional key can only be understood in the relational context of "your Father" and embraced by his relational process in intimate relationship together, which is the relational context and process Jesus disclosed and made definitive in his summary teaching. That is to say, in our Father's relational context and process we have engaged vulnerable relationship together and have been intimately involved to experience the whole of God's mercy, grace and *agape* involvement to be made whole. In his relational context and process, we ongoingly experience being redefined as whole persons, redeemed from reductionism and its sin, transformed necessarily in human ontology from the inner out and reconstituted in the relationships necessary to be whole. From this

vulnerable experience we know: (1) how we want to be seen (from the inner-out human ontology), (2) how we want to be treated by others (as whole persons, nothing less), and (3) what we want to experience in relationships (the intimacy together to be whole, no substitutes).

Therefore, on the basis of this relational experience together with our Father, Jesus calls those made whole to live whole “in everything,” notably with others in relationships to make whole. In other words, to **paraphrase his third functional key**:

“Use what you are intimately experiencing in your relationship with ‘your Father’ as the basis for defining and determining how to function with others, both in his kingdom-family and in the surrounding context—‘in everything’ live to be whole and make whole, as summarized in God’s terms for relationship.”

This points to the triangulation process. The third functional key completes the basis for the process of triangulation by making definitive the relational experience of being made whole in relationship together with our Father. In conjoint function with the second functional key (of pursuing our Father in relationship together as family on his terms), the third functional key uses what is being experienced in that intimate relationship to interact in conjoint function with the first functional key (of living how our Father loves us). Functioning together, these three functional keys provide this intimate relational point of reference by which to be guided in order to be defined in any context by the trinitarian relational context of family and to function in any relationship by the trinitarian relational process of family love. Triangulation with our Father takes us further than the right ethics and merely doing the right thing, and engages us deeper than acting in life and practice as mere *reactors* to others in situations and circumstances. As Jesus embodied and calls us to embody in likeness, triangulation with our Father takes our whole person and engages us to be vulnerably involved with others just as he is involved with us for relationship together necessary to be whole, God’s whole.

Jesus embodied the whole of God’s thematic action and relational work of grace in response to the human condition “to be apart” from God’s whole, nothing less and no substitutes; thus he functioned on God’s terms signified in the law and the prophets for relationship together to be whole—terms irreducible and nonnegotiable, embodying the whole of God’s Word. Our embodying, in likeness without reduction, will function in our full identity with relational righteousness to be also the sum and substance of the whole of God’s word—to function both in loving involvement to be whole and in loving response to make whole.

Without ongoing relational function in these three functional keys (all focused on our Father) and the triangulation process, Christian life and practice is left with only alternatives to the whole. To pursue, settle for or be resigned to anything less and any substitutes for the whole is to engage in reductionism. Jesus made clearly evident in the juxtaposition of reductionism with the whole throughout his summary discourse that there is no other alternative in-between. Consequently, in each moment, situation, circumstance and relationship encountered in our life and practice, we are faced with the decisions of what is going to define us and what will determine how we function, notably with others in relationships. And we have only two alternatives (7:13-14): God’s whole, which is irreducible and nonnegotiable, thus imperative to only one function (“narrow

gate and road”); or anything less and any substitutes, which is amenable to any variation away from the whole, thus adaptable to various functions (“wide gate and road”). “Gate” is a metaphor for what defines and determines us, while “road” is a metaphor for the ongoing function in our practice emerging from that “gate.” The wide one leads away (*apago*) from the whole to loss (*apoleia*, i.e. reduction) or ultimate ruin, while the narrow one brings before (*apago*, same word for opposite dynamic) the *zoe* of the whole of God and to the qualitative relational function of *zoe* in God’s whole.

Zoe signifies the qualitative relational function of the whole of God and the Trinity’s relational action in the trinitarian relational context of family by the trinitarian relational process of family love. *Zoe* involves the practice of this qualitative relational work made definitive in Jesus’ teaching, which is contrary to prevailing practices and norms (as implied above) and in conflict with quantitative outer-in presentations of a reduced human ontology (7:15-20). Moreover, authentic relational work is not about doing something (like performing ministry, 7:22), nor about beliefs, associations or having intentions with “Lord” (7:21). This qualitative relational work is only about involvement in intimate relationship together to be whole, experienced first with the whole of God (“I don’t know you” to the reductionists, 7:23). This is the qualitative relational work of those being made whole in relationship together in God’s family, and thus who are able to live whole as their Father’s very own daughters and sons—those “who do the will of my Father” (7:21b).

As Jesus vulnerably embodied and intimately disclosed the whole of God, he made definitive what constitutes completeness of God’s whole. In his closing communicative action to all his followers (then and now), he conjoined completeness with accountability (7:24-27). We are accountable for all his words communicated to us in his summary discourse, which was not merely to inform us but only God’s terms to make whole our relationship together and its relational significance to be and live whole with others in his kingdom-family and to live and make whole with others in the surrounding contexts. The completeness of how we live and practice emerges directly from the completeness of who and what we are in our full identity (see contingency of the sixth beatitude, 5:8), which inseparably involves whose we are. And what validates completeness is all his words and our relational involvement with him on those terms (“the foundation on rock”). This accountability is relationship-specific, and thus being accountable not for the self-orientation of what we do but rather for our vulnerable involvement in intimate relationship together—that is, accountable for this qualitative relational work of who and what we are in reciprocal relationship together with the whole of God. To separate how we live and practice from the function of our full identity renders how we live and practice to reductionism—namely defined by only what we do, which does not go beyond the righteousness of the reductionists (5:20).

As Jesus unfolded the truth for relationship in his teaching, he clarified for his followers: in reality, the function of self-autonomy is not free but only an ironic form of enslavement—namely because of the outer-in human ontology that defines it and determines its practice—which self-determination reinforces by being constrained to the limits of ontological simulation, and which self-justification then embeds even deeper in epistemological illusion. The events, situations, circumstances and relationships (“rain...wind,” 7:27) experienced in life and practice will expose their lack of qualitative substance to be whole, of qualitative significance to live whole, and of qualitative

function to make whole. This is a reality check for those engaged in any form of reductionism (even inadvertently or naively), which extends our accountability with the clear need to ongoingly account for what defines us and what determines how we function—notably in what we specifically characterize as our Christian practice.

As the primer for discipleship, Jesus' words to his followers made conclusive that discipleship is following him only in relational progression to his Father for relationship together as his very own to be whole as family (cf. Jn 12:44,49-50). This clearly involves discipleship and frames discipleship formation in only his Father's relational context and process. While there are more than a few variations of discipleship and approaches to discipleship formation, his closing metaphor of building a house warns us that they may only appear to be authentic to define his disciples and valid to determine discipleship. Jesus was unequivocal that the completeness and validity foundational for all his followers is grounded in the inner-out functional practice of all his words. All his words, communicating our Father's terms for relationship together, are what his Father also made imperative for us to "Listen to my Son." Therefore, all his words communicated to us from our Father are not optional, negotiable, nor can his complete followers be selective about which of his words to practice (cf. Lk 6:46). They integrate inseparably as the whole of God's terms necessary for relationship together to be whole.

Even as he shared his summary discourse, Jesus vulnerably embodied the whole of God and intimately involved himself in relationships with others to live whole and to make whole. Many also listening to his words, other than his disciples, recognized his qualitative difference (*exousia*, denoting his right and authority to be and make whole) and his qualitative distinction from the apparent reductionists prevailing in their context (7:28-29). Yet, what those persons did with his words they listened to with interest was an issue of accountability conjoined with completeness (cf. Eze 33:30-32, a pervasive practice in ancient times as well as modern). His followers are called beyond reductionism to be the unreduced whole relationally congruent to him, and thus ongoingly accountable to vulnerably embody God's whole and to be intimately involved with others for relationship together—to be whole, to live whole and to make whole, nothing less and no substitutes. This is the only relational path Jesus composed that distinguishes his followers living whole together as his church.

Ethics Sanctified and Made Whole

As Jesus vulnerably embodied and made conclusive intrusively in his teaching, how we live emerges from who and what we are. That is, more than a paradigmatic association, our practice directly emerges from what functionally (not ideally) defines who and what we are—composing our identity by which we actually function, not who and what we merely profess to be.

It is an illusion for a person to think one makes choices/decisions about how to live totally on one's own without any influence from others or the surrounding context. Jesus clearly challenges our consciousness in two ways conjointly: (1) to understand this influence and what actually shapes, determines, controls or even enslaves us; and (2), at the same time, he does not merely raise our consciousness level just to redeem/free us for independent choices from this influence, but, further and deeper than this, he reverses the dynamic (as signified by triangulation and reciprocating contextualization) for his followers from being reactors to that influence to responders who, as subject persons, are

involved with others and the surrounding context in love to be and make whole, thereby responding for their well-being and wholeness (cf. the function of seventh beatitude, 5:9).

For this reversal of influence in how we live, Christian ethics needs to be sanctified in our life and practice. Said in relational terms (not referential), Christian ethics needs to be relationally compatible with Jesus' relational context and needs to function in relational congruence with his relational process in order to have the qualitative distinction from the common's function of reductionism necessary to constitute the process of living in relationships to be whole on God's terms. The process of Christian ethics as sanctified life and practice emerges only from the function of sanctified identity (with the contingency of the sixth beatitude, Mt 5:8)—the interaction of our full identity with the whole of God conjoined with our minority identity sent into the surrounding context. By its nature (*dei*) sanctified identity is intrusive on (not segregated from) the surrounding common's context, thus the sanctified life and practice emerging from it will be intrusive on (while qualitatively distinct from) the pervading and prevailing common's function in that context—even intruding on church and academy as needed. Knowing what we are integrated in yet distinct from is crucial to Jesus' ethics. And the practice of Christian ethics can be nothing less and no substitutes of this qualitatively distinct function in “the process of living in relationships to be whole only on God's terms.”

If what and who we are, and thus how we are in the surrounding context, does not function “to be whole,” then whatever else we do—however well-intentioned with dedication, sacrifice or service—becomes a substitute from reductionism that composes illusions. Without the process of living to be whole, Christian ethics becomes mere ethics, thus essentially becomes some reductionist alternative about what to do—not who, what and how to be, though it does create illusions about them. This is the functional practice of Christian ethics when the underlying human ontology is less than whole, even if unintentionally or inadvertently shifted to focus merely on the right thing to do. In this practice, who, what and how we are is diminished in qualitative significance, even if high in quantitative activity. Again, unavoidably, his practice directly involves the issues of (1) the significance of the person we present to others, (2) the quality of what we communicate by our action, and (3) the level of relationship we engage in this practice.

The identity of Jesus' followers and the whole of God's family is rooted in his *call to be whole*. The functional embodying of his call involves whole persons intimately involved in the relationships together necessary to be whole in likeness of the whole of God, the Trinity. This implies that Christian ethics, though enacted by persons, is not about what the individual person does, nor about a form of righteous self-autonomy; rather, by the nature of God's whole, Christian ethics is always about persons together living as the whole of God's family. Furthermore, this relational context and process goes beyond the conventional function of community and merely its collective practice. Without the functional whole to belong to and to be an ongoing part of, the individual person cannot be whole, and thus merely strains to do the right ethics and to fulfill one's obligations, likely in self-determination and/or self-justification. Moreover, without the functional presence of the whole, these reductionist alternatives and substitutes are not exposed for us to understand their influence on us, such that we can further be made whole and reverse reductionism's influence in order to make whole. Apart from this relational basis, the practice of Christian ethics labors in illusions.

Therefore, by the nature of being relationally compatible with Jesus' trinitarian relational context of family and relationally congruent with his trinitarian relational process of family love, Christian ethics is necessarily both sanctified and made whole. And the practice of Christian ethics must by this nature (*dei*, not *opheilo*) be no less and without substitutes for the process of living in relationships to be whole only on God's terms. In other words, the practice of ethics integral to Jesus follows his vulnerable and intrusive relational path.

The prevailing practice of relationships in the surrounding context (and often in churches) effectively functions "to be apart" from the whole in the counter-relational work of reductionism. The whole of God's thematic relational work of grace intrudes on this human condition in loving response to make it whole, which Jesus vulnerably embodied and intimately involved his whole person for the relationships together necessary to be God's whole family. This embodied relational involvement is the process of living to be whole, and thus what Christian ethics is and what our engagement with culture in the surrounding contexts is for. Embodying Jesus' 'call to be whole' in sanctified life and practice distinguished from the common is a function of sanctified identity (both full and minority identity), which conjoins his call with his commission "sent to be whole" in salvific life and practice distinguished from all alternatives in order to extend God's family love to make whole the human condition.

The integration of Jesus' engagement with culture and practice of ethics naturally unfolds to extend our discussion to Jesus' mission. This, of course, has been increasingly made evident already by the clarity of function of his sanctified identity in qualitative distinction of his sanctified life and practice in the surrounding contexts of the world—with ongoing triangulation and reciprocating contextualization. Yet, this has not always unfolded naturally for his followers. With the seduction of culture and the illusion of ethics, mission has often become a simulation of what Jesus sends us out to be in the surrounding contexts of the world.

Mission and Its Simulation

Engaging culture and practicing Jesus' ethics are inseparable from participating in mission, and they converge in the same relational dynamic. It is this relational dynamic that provides both complete integration for these three areas and the significance necessary for their function to be constituted in God's whole family. This includes by necessity the convergence of sanctified life and practice to be whole and salvific life and practice to make whole, in which all three are involved by the nature of what this relational dynamic constitutes.

This relational dynamic is notable for participation in mission since, on the one hand, mission involvement is antecedent to involvement in culture and ethics in the apparent order of God's priorities—which some Christians use to minimize or ignore culture and ethics. Yet, on the other hand, their involvements necessarily interact and cannot be separated without reducing the integrity of mission (namely with an incomplete Christology) and fragmenting its significance (notably with a truncated soteriology). Participating in mission can be accomplished neither apart from a surrounding context (and its culture) nor apart from righteous involvement with persons in that context (thus

with ethics). Within the interaction of these three areas, mission in function often needs to emerge from engaging culture and practicing Jesus' ethics, though the process is not linear. There is one function, however, antecedent to mission, which this relational dynamic makes evident—and indeed imperative to respond to.

The incarnation evokes various images, but “intrusive” tends not to be one of them. Yet, Jesus embodied unavoidably the intrusiveness of God in response to the human condition—which was disconcerting for the reductionists and their counter-relational practice—because “the Father sent me into the world” (Jn 3:17; 5:36; 10:36; 17:18a). The term for “sent” (*apostello*) denotes to send forth on a certain mission, signifying Jesus' commission by his Father to fulfill his response to the human condition. In contrast to common practice, however, “commission” should not be reduced by disembodiment from its relational source in the relational dynamic of the Father with his Son. That is, the context for his commission should not be confused with the sending process of “into the world,” which the current missional emphasis on contextualization tends to confuse in their focus. The world is certainly where his salvific work is to be fulfilled but its situations and circumstances do not determine the context for the significance of his commission. There is a further *ek-eis* dynamic required to be distinguished both in and to the world.

In his formative family prayer (Jn 17), Jesus summarized his purpose to disclose (*phaneroo*, not merely *apokalupto*) his Father to us for intimate relationship together in the very likeness of their relationship in the Trinity (17:6,21-23,26). This relationship (defined as eternal life, 17:3), theirs and ours together, cannot function while under the influence of the surrounding context “of the world” (*ek*, preposition signifying out of which one is derived or belongs, 17:14,16); that is to say, relationship determined by our terms (even with good intentions) or by reductionist substitutes from the surrounding context. Jesus openly disclosed the ongoing conflict with reductionism this relationship encounters and pointed to the relational dynamic necessary to live in the whole of relationship together, which Jesus vulnerably embodied in sanctified life and practice to be intimately involved with his followers for their sanctified life and practice (17:19).

In his prayer, Jesus commissioned (*apostello*) his followers for the specific mission “just as” (*kathos*, to show agreement between) his Father commissioned him: “As you sent me into the world, I send them into the world” (17:18, cf. 20:21). In Jesus' paradigm for serving (Jn 12:26, discussed previously), the first priority of intimate involvement with him in relationship together is necessary over the work of serving, ministry and mission. For conventional paradigms for mission, sending workers out to the harvest fields becomes the urgent priority dominating our focus, thus disembodiment and derelationalizing the commission (however well meaning). Yet, as Jesus made definitive, the call to discipleship is the call to be whole, which, in order not be reduced, involves the need to be sanctified (holy) to distinguish the whole from the common's function in the surrounding contexts of the world, including those notable harvest fields. This clearly qualifies “Christ's commission” for mission and corrects prevailing perceptions of it by defining for his followers unequivocally: *what* to send out, *whom* to send out, *why* and thus *how* to send out.

For the Son's purpose and function from his Father to be transferred to his followers, the enactment of the commission has to be both sanctified and whole to be compatible ("just as," *kathos*) with the Father-Son relationship and then the Father-Son-disciples relationship. Jesus' prayer conjoins the call to be whole and his commission in the trinitarian relational context of family and relational process of family love (17:21-23). This unmistakably established the context of his commission in sanctified life and practice with the whole of God, not as the misconstrued context of "into the world." When there is congruence in intimate relationship together and compatibility of function in the trinitarian relational context of family and relational process of family love, his followers together (the church as God's new creation family) are not statically "still in the world" (*en*, remaining in it, 17:11) but now dynamically sent "into the world" (*eis*, motion into) to function whole in likeness of the Father and the Son with the Spirit in further response to make whole the human condition. Therefore, his followers' call to be whole is conjointly *his followers sent to be whole*. This constitutes the significance of *what* to send out and signifies the importance of *whom* to send out and defines more deeply *why* to send out (with the full soteriology), while providing the basis for *how* to function in his commission.

This relational dynamic for involvement in mission (as well as in culture and Jesus' ethics) is made further definitive in his formative family prayer. While the whole of life together in his relational context and process is uniquely intimate and sanctified, its practice cannot remain private nor individual. As he directly related the world (and life and practice in its surrounding contexts) to himself and then to his followers (in relationship together), Jesus prayed using the prepositions "in" (*en*, 17:11,13), "of" (*ek*, vv.14,16), "out of" (*ek*, v.15) and "into" (*eis*, v,18). Each preposition has its own significance that needs to be distinguished in any discussion on mission.

For Jesus to be "in the world" only described a general surrounding context in which he remained (*en*) temporarily. While *en* also signifies his followers remaining in the world, this position and posture are governed by the preposition *ek*. That is, how Jesus functioned while remaining in the surrounding context was determined by the nature of his context of origin (relationship together in the Trinity), not by what prevailed in the surrounding context "of the world" (*ek*, out of which one is derived, belongs). Likewise, for his complete followers, those also "not of the world," *ek* involves a dynamic moving from being embedded to motion out from within the surrounding context's influence, yet only in terms of the common's function and practice, not going out of the common's context. This dynamic of *ek* signifies going from being defined and determined by the prevailing culture (or situations and circumstances) in a surrounding context to movement out from within its influence—which certainly necessitates engaging culture, including intruding on it.

Yet, the dynamic of *ek* is not a statement or resolve of self-determination "not to be of the world." This dynamic more deeply involves a relational dynamic. Implied in the phrase "not of the world" is the relational process that involves movement not only away from the common's influence but conjoint movement to the holy (Uncommon) and whole of God. This relational movement and involvement signifies both *what* his followers together are and *whose* they are, which necessitates triangulation and reciprocating contextualization to constitute them while remaining "in the world"—just as Jesus was

“not of the world” and sanctified himself for his followers to practice “in the world” (17:19).

The practice of this relational involvement is always while “in the world,” which the above *ek* phrase does not include since it is limited to a shift only in purpose and function. In the same breath Jesus also prayed for his followers not to be removed “out of the world” (17:15). “Out of” is the same preposition *ek*, which is used differently in this phrase not for being embedded but for the matter of spatial location. The dynamic of this phrase signified the direction of their purpose and function to be relationally involved not away from but directly in the midst of the surrounding context and in the lives of persons in that context, that is, to be involved intrusively. Eliminating this sense of separation (spatially and relationally) also applies to not being removed from relational involvement even while practicing service, ministry and mission by maintaining subtle relational distance; this certainly includes righteous involvement with those persons in Jesus’ ethics so that they can count on his followers to be of significance and their actions to have substance (cf. 17:21b,23b).

Clearly then, Jesus gave his followers no option but to remain (*en*) and to be relationally involved (not the separation of *ek*) in vulnerable and intrusive life and practice in the surrounding contexts of the world; and he distinctly qualified what (who) is to define them and determine how they function in those contexts—that is, *en* is governed by the other *ek*, out from within its influence. While this relational dynamic is irreducible and nonnegotiable, there is always the functional alternative to remain “in the world” on ambiguous terms, which essentially become defined and determined by reductionist substitutes—notably in ontological simulation and epistemological illusion, whether by mission or with ethics. In this relational dynamic, fully understanding *en* and *ek* (out of) conjoined with the other use of *ek* (of) is a crucial distinction, the subtle difference of which is commonly blurred by reductionism. Being “not of the world” goes beyond having a static identity or self-determined status and deeply involves a functional framework imperative for the relational process defining the life and determining the practice of those who remain (*en*) in the surrounding context but emerge beyond (*ek*) the common’s function—indeed, beyond the reductionists, as Jesus made imperative (Mt 5:20).

This interrelated dynamic is the integral basis in his prayer for Jesus making imperative his call and his commission in conjoint function. The call to be whole (thus holy, sanctified) emerges in life and practice in the surrounding contexts of the world as *sent to be whole*. For this emergence to be unambiguously distinguished and thus clearly distinct from the common’s function in a surrounding context, it is necessary in function for the call to precede the commission because the commission alone is insufficient to fulfill the transfer of the Son’s purpose and function without embodying the qualitative relational significance to be whole constituted by his call. Indeed, his call composes his commission, which in only relational terms Jesus integrally composed his call *into* his commission.

The sanctified life and practice to be whole, the whole of God’s family in sanctified identity, constitutes his commission and signifies the integral basis for the complete undertaking of their mission in salvific life and practice to make whole in the surrounding context. To be whole is the basis for his followers to be sent “into the world” (*eis*). As *ek* governs *en* with the “motion out from” the world’s influence necessary to

constitute their functional significance to be whole, *eis* now governs “motion (back) into” the surrounding context for embodying their function to make whole to fulfill the transfer of the Son’s purpose and function from his Father to his family. *Ek* and *eis* are not in dialectical tension but operate ongoingly together in a reflexive interrelated process (with triangulation and reciprocating contextualization) for his followers to grow further and deeper in their conjoint call and commission. Therefore, Jesus made conclusive and thereby imperative for his followers: salvific life and practice to make whole emerges from sanctified life and practice to be whole in order to be integrated together with God’s thematic relational response to the human condition “in the world.” This vulnerable and intrusive relational path is irreducible and nonnegotiable for his followers.

How his followers live and practice in the surrounding context emerges from who and what they are; that is, what (or who) defines them determines how they function. The truth of this functional paradigm was embodied by Jesus throughout the incarnation: his full identity conjoined with his minority identity in sanctified life and practice, the conjoint function of which constituted his salvific relational work of grace for relationship together in God’s whole family. Only on this basis and for this purpose, Jesus prayed to constitute his followers in this interrelated process: to be “in the world” and “not of the world,” salvific life and practice must by its nature (*dei*) function distinctly with the minority identity he embodied “in the world” in qualitative distinction “not of it”; this minority identity necessarily by its nature is functionally conjoined in sanctified life and practice with the full identity of who, what, and how his followers are in relationship together—thus relationally congruent and compatible with the whole of God and God’s action (17:16-19).

Yet, what defines his followers in the surrounding context and determines how they function is constantly being influenced, challenged, even coerced by that context to be assimilated into its culture. To the extent that its culture is incompatible with the whole of God and God’s action, this is the ongoing tension and conflict with reductionism—the common’s function and practice contrary to sanctified life and practice. This makes it essential for his followers to intrude on culture and to ongoingly practice triangulation and reciprocating contextualization. Reductionism’s subtle influence shifts human ontology from inner out to the outer in, thus redefining the person and how persons function—notably in relationships “to be apart” from the qualitative significance of the whole, God’s relational whole. Under such influence how his followers practice relationships together is compromised, and how they engage in mission is fragmented—namely without the qualitative relational significance to be whole and to make whole, thus proclaiming an incomplete gospel. This includes engaging mission with social action, which alone reduces the whole of mission with a fragmentary understanding of what we are saved from and to.

As Jesus prayed, it is imperative for his family’s public life and practice that *eis* (“into” as the dynamic with *ek*) is not to be confused with only being *en*, that is, merely to be in the same context, remain in the same space, even merely occupy ministries in surrounding situations and circumstances. *En* only statically describes where we remain, not what, who, why and how we are in that context. *Eis*, however, is not simply dynamic “movement into” a surrounding context, which is the reason “into the world” is not the context for his commission. The *eis* dynamic further signifies active engagement of other persons in deep relational involvement the depths of which is “just as” (*kathos*, indicating

conformity) the Father sent his Son in the incarnation (17:18). This relational process of embodying invokes God's self-disclosure principle of nothing less and no substitutes. Thus, in the embodying of his followers to live whole, anything less and any substitutes of this depth of involvement to make whole are reductions of his family's conjoint call and commission. While the commission takes place "in the world," it can only be enacted and fulfilled "into the world" as salvific life and practice (to make whole) emerging from sanctified life and practice (to be whole) distinctly not from the influence "of the world." Anything other than relational involvement in this *ek-eis* process is less than whole—in other words, a substitute from reductionism laboring in simulation on a different path from Jesus.

The Father sent only the whole of God into the world. This good news is not merely the truth of a doctrine of salvation but definitive only as the experiential truth embodied by Jesus the Truth for relationship together in the whole of God's family. Salvific life and practice is the relational outcome of what Jesus saved us both from and to (the full soteriology), the experience of which is only in relationship together with the embodied whole of Jesus. It is the qualitative relational significance of this whole embodied in Jesus by which he constitutes his followers together to be whole as his church family. On this basis, the Son sends only the whole of his family to be whole, live whole and make whole—along with his Spirit to complete God's whole. Therefore, his family is not, and cannot be, sent on any mission in the surrounding context without function in their call to be whole; nor can their salvific life and practice make whole *into* (not merely *in*) that context without being holy in sanctified life and practice from the common's influence and function. To be distinguished in likeness of the whole of God and thus from the surrounding context while in that context, his church must follow him vulnerably on his intrusive relational path.

If *what* and *who* we "send out" for mission is anything less than the whole, then *how* we function essentially misrepresents the gospel—that is, re-presents the gospel with an incomplete, fragmentary gospel. Most importantly, to send out any substitute for God's whole vitally reduces each of the following: the whole of God, *what* and *whom* he sent, and *why* he sent his Whole to be embodied "into the world." For Jesus' mission, and thus ours, any separation of his commission from his call fails to understand (and thus fully receive) the whole of God's thematic relational response to the human condition "to be apart" from the whole of God. This only fragments his church's purpose and function as the whole of God's family in likeness of the Trinity, and thus reduces the significance of the gospel—fragmenting it namely with an incomplete Christology and reducing it notably by a truncated soteriology. With a reductionist practice of mission, what can "the world believe" about "the God who sent" and what does this "let the world know" about "the God who loves for relationship together to be whole"?—the relational purpose and function of his family that Jesus asks his Father to embody his followers together in his formative family prayer (Jn 17:20-23).

Any other steps by the church are on a different path from Jesus, whether in mission, ethics or culture. The relational consequence of such steps render us to a relational condition in relation to Jesus where "I never knew you"—despite claims of dedicated service and intense ministry "in your name" (Mt 7:22-23).

Intruding Vulnerably in the Surrounding Context

We cannot assume that anyone can proclaim the gospel without fully claiming it first. The gospel of transformation assumes its relational outcome of wholeness already. We cannot assume, however, that this relational outcome is our experiential reality simply because we consistently display the right ethic or engage in missions in the world. Nor can we assume that we are above the influence of culture in the surrounding context just because we identify with Christ or are identified as his church. We must never assume the wholeness of our person and relationships and thus of our church, as long as we have not confronted sin as reductionism and redeemed its counter-relational work in our midst.

The functional engagements of culture, ethics and mission revolve around how we are going to live and practice. These three areas present vital issues that ongoingly question our faith, test our understanding of Jesus, examine and critique our discipleship, and clarify and correct our church theology and practice, ontology and function as God's family. What Jesus vulnerably embodied throughout his life and practice—as he engaged culture, practiced ethics and fulfilled his mission—emerged only as a function of his full identity, which in the surrounding context is in conjoint function with his minority identity that he constitutes his followers to embody in likeness. Any engagement in the world by his followers must (by nature, not obligation) be on his intrusive relational path or this likeness becomes at best just some simulation or an illusion.

By default, culture, ethics and mission together persist to pursue us for a response to first and foremost: Who are we and what is our purpose in this world? Then they inquire out of necessity: How are we going to live? These are not philosophical questions for cognitive understanding but serve as both theological and social discourse for what we are accountable: to be (*eimi*, Mt 5:48) more deeply in full identity, to become (*ginomai*, Mt 5:45) further in minority identity, and thus to function in significantly with our whole person together as family with the whole of God (in the intimate process of triangulation, Mt 6:33) and to practice living whole without reduction in the world in order to make whole (with the experiential relational process of reciprocating contextualization, Mt 7:12).

Since the Christian faith is not a mere system of belief but a dynamic process of relationship with the vulnerably present and intimately involved whole of God, faith cannot be practiced in a spiritual vacuum—namely private and individual. Since Christian theology is about this self-disclosing God, irreducibly embodied in the whole of Jesus, theology is the relational dynamic of the vulnerable function of the Trinity only for reciprocal relationship together, and thus cannot be constrained to doctrine or reduced to disembodied-derelationalized theological perspectives and principles. Conjointly, since complete discipleship is this intimate relationship with the whole of Jesus on his intrusive relational path, the practice of discipleship cannot be engaged in social isolation or with relational distance, nor embodied by only the individual, but only in vulnerable relationship together as God's family “in the world.” Culture, ethics and mission interact to formulate the issues necessary to be responded to by the ongoing relational function of our faith, our theology and our discipleship in order to be distinguished whole, living whole and making whole—God's whole for relationship together on God's terms.

These issues needing our response in the surrounding contexts involve human ontology and the relational design of humanity, whose created nature necessitate the response from the convergence of our sanctified life and practice (to be whole) and our salvific life and practice (to make whole). This integral response cannot be relative to situations and circumstances, nor is it negotiable to be shaped by our terms. In other words, for us to be involved in the surrounding contexts of the world and to be responsive to others in those contexts, there is the necessity of a clear qualitative distinction in the function of our new identity. We have to demonstrate in relational terms (not proclaim in referential terms) the depth of our person and relationships—qualitatively distinguished from inner out—to illuminate the experiential reality of our new identity. Only from these distinguished persons and relationships emerge practice having relational significance for the whole of God and relational substance for others to experience also in relationship together (as Jesus prayed for ‘already’, Jn 17:20-23). Accordingly and unavoidably, these issues from culture, ethics and mission must be responded to while in the process of addressing ongoingly *two paramount issues*:

1. The increasing transformation of what defines and determines our own life and practice by submitting their basis only to the conjoint function of sanctified life and practice to be whole and salvific life and practice to make whole—the submission of which while in the surrounding context further necessitates the ongoing relational process of triangulation and reciprocating contextualization.
2. While involved in this first issue to define and determine our life and practice, also critically paying attention to and understanding the continuous presence of reductionism, specifically with our person and relationships, and then honestly examining any other influences to define and determine our life and practice— influences which would reduce our involvement in the first process, notably, for example, by diminishing our involvement from relational terms to referential terms, or even by separating his commission from his call.

These two paramount issues, of course, are in unceasing interaction, which reflects the ongoing tension-conflict between reductionism and God’s whole. How we will live and practice always emerges from who and what we are in function. The critical issue centers on what (or who) will define our identity and, in turn, determine our practice. Thus, the first paramount issue involves the need to critically examine each of the following: our working Christology (incomplete or complete) and practicing soteriology (truncated or full); the completeness of our discipleship based on his terms in the Sermon on the Mount, notably our relational involvement with our Father; therefore the unavoidable issues of the significance of the person we present, the integrity and quality of our communication, and the level of relational involvement we have. The second paramount issue involves the need to vulnerably examine: our working theological anthropology and human ontology (outer in or inner out) for both the person and relationships together, and our specific functional purpose in the created relational design of humanity; therefore the inescapable issues of what defines our person functionally (not ideally) and then determines how we actually function in relationships with others—both in his kingdom-church family and in the surrounding context.

The human redefining and shaping of God's whole have been problematic and reflect the human condition since the primordial garden. God's thematic relational response to the human condition, however, also has been subject historically to human shaping. The patriarchs were clear examples of this. They demonstrated the use of incongruent means to advance the covenant relationship by their human shaping, thereby displaying an ambiguous participation in culture, practicing contradictory ethics and self-determining their "mission." While staying in Egypt, for his own safety and prosperity, Abraham instructed Sarah to lie to the Egyptians, saying she was his sister. This led to her becoming part of Pharaoh's harem as his wife (Gen 12:10-16). To protect himself from being killed, Isaac acted similarly during their sojourn in Gerar by lying about Rebekah, saying she was his sister; Abimelech correctly admonished him for exposing his wife, Rebekah, to abuse (Gen 26:1-11). Later, Jacob used Esau's hunger as leverage for a calculating acquisition of his birthright (Gen 25:29-34). Then, Jacob schemed to deceive Isaac into conferring his blessing (meant for Esau) onto Jacob (Gen 27:1-29).

What was common in their human shaping is important to understand for its impact on God: first, the reduction of the human ontology for the person and for relationships making the covenant relational process amenable to human shaping; and, then, the relational consequences such efforts of self-autonomy and self-determination have to fragment the relationships necessary to be whole, and thereby seriously diminish the relational significance of the whole—the whole of God, whose relational work of grace is not amenable to human shaping. God's terms for covenant relationship together were yet to be fully disclosed to the patriarchs, which inexplicably allowed the latitude for this human shaping of God's thematic relational response to make whole in covenant relationship together—inexplicable since *tāmiym* was determinative for the relationship, though still to be fully defined. Yet, even later with the law in place, Solomon engaged the surrounding context on his own terms and shaping of relationships, which resulted in his being shaped by reductionism (1 Kg 11:1-10). In addition to God's terms for relationship given in the law, those relational terms have been clearly made conclusive by Jesus in both his teaching and in his vulnerably embodied life and practice, therefore irreducible by anything less and any substitutes, as well as nonnegotiable to our terms for human shaping. This always brings us back to the issue of what (who) will define our identity and, in turn, determine our practice. For the church on Jesus' intrusive relational path, there is no latitude (wide gate and road) for its theology and practice, its ontology and function as his family.

The reality is that reductionism is always positioned against the presence of the whole. While this tension-conflict can be an overt struggle, the genius of its promoter is the subtle counter-relational work operating in ontological simulations and epistemological illusions of the whole—the wholeness of the gospel's relational outcome. A major sign of reductionism's influence is when our primary focus is on the quantitative aspects of human function for the person and relationships, and then on those secondary and fragmentary aspects of church practice (e.g. composing worship and membership) and all related service, ministry and mission. This influence is also signified in preoccupation with secondary matter over the primacy of relationships together. With this focus, Christian life and practice easily get embedded in the ontological simulation and epistemological illusion of reductionist substitutes, evidenced in Jesus' intrusive critique of the churches at Ephesus, Thyatira, Sardis and Laodicea (Rev 2-3, review as needed in

chap. 7). The consistent consequence has been to diminish our qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness, thereby rendering us to a default human condition.

Our willingness to address these interrelated issues will indicate how seriously we take the sin of reductionism. Our vulnerable involvement in the *ek-eis* process integrally composing Jesus' call *into* his commission (just as the Father sent him) will indicate our submission to our Father to change in their likeness—that is, the redemptive change to be made whole, thus to live whole and to make whole, and be ongoingly defined and determined by nothing less and no substitutes conjointly within God's family and in the surrounding contexts of the world.

For persons following Jesus together as his church to be distinguished in the surrounding contexts of the world, the gospel of transformation's relational outcome of wholeness must be an experiential reality. And this experiential reality only emerges, grows and matures, as well as survives in the world, from following him vulnerably on the experiential truth of his intrusive relational path.

Extending his post-ascension discourse, Jesus keeps knocking on church doors to follow his whole person in the primacy of reciprocal relationship together as family on his intrusive relational path. Of course, first and foremost, Jesus intrudes with his Spirit on our person and relationships, the inescapable issues of how we practice church. Paul extends this intrusion with the relational imperative to “let the *wholeness* of Christ *be the only determinant* in your *person from inner out*, to which indeed you were called in the one *family of God*” (Col 3:15). When churches respond to his call and the Spirit's speaking, they will no longer function apart from the primacy of their first love, they will not tolerate the influence of reductionism in their midst, they will awaken from illusions and simulations and not be incomplete, they will not maintain the status quo and be lukewarm. But rather, they will be transformed to wholeness ‘already’ as the relational outcome of the whole of God's intrusive relational response of love to their condition.

Chapter 10 The Church Composed In and Composing the New Relational Order

**For he is our *wholeness*...he came and proclaimed *wholeness*
to you who were far off and...were near.**

Ephesians 2:14-17

Embody whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of wholeness.

Ephesians 6:15

When we rewind back to the primordial garden, there was a critical shift in the human relational order that established two defining assumptions—assumptions that continue to be underlying much of our thinking, theology and practice today. The first assumption involves our anthropology and the second encompasses our view of sin. Cast into juxtaposition in the primordial garden are human persons created from inner out and persons redefined from outer in. Persons from inner out engaged in relationship accordingly and were not distracted or diminished by secondary matters, therefore they were intimately involved with each other in a relational order that was not fragmenting (apart, alone) but whole together.

Persons from outer in highlighted their distinctions (i.e. level of knowledge, appearance of their bodies), and engaged in relationship focused on those distinctions and shaped by them. In this seemingly innocuous way they shifted to a relational order based on distinctions in a comparative process (more knowledge, be like God) that unavoidably made them feel “less,” consequently creating relational distance between them by outer-in measures. When these persons were challenged in their anthropology and confronted in their ontology and function (“Where are you?”), they did not recognize how they were reduced as persons; and that their relationship was no longer whole but labored in a fragmenting relational order composed by a counter-relational comparative process. In other words, they did not understand reductionism and thus set in motion a weak view of sin without reductionism—the assumption of which, combined with a reduced theological anthropology, continue to shape the relational order of persons and relationships in churches today.

Fast-forwarding, when Jesus called Levi to follow him and told Zacchaeus to have table fellowship together, when Jesus forced out the reductionists in his Father’s house and tore away the curtain to reconstitute his dwelling for all peoples, when Jesus corrected Peter’s ecclesiology for all persons to be whole, and when Paul made conclusive Jesus’ relational work of wholeness to compose his family with any and all persons, the human shaping of persons and relationships were deconstructed, transformed and reconstructed whole. Who, what and how this translates into our church theology and practice is crucial to understand in order for its relational outcome to indeed be whole.

When who, what and how of our person, relationships and church are composed by our default mode of function (review from chap. 5)—knowingly or unknowingly shifting back to reduced ontology and function in everyday life—there is diminished

qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness of what is primary and therefore important to God. The vulnerable presence and intimate relational involvement of God then becomes taken for granted, or simply not paid attention to in its primacy, thereby increasingly shaping our person, relationships and church with secondary matter more important to the surrounding context than to God. The consequence is to make indistinguishable the transformed relationships integral to the new creation church family, and therefore to require the deconstruction, transformation and reconstruction necessary to compose his family in the wholeness of the new relational order.

The Deconstruction to Wholeness

When persons in the primordial garden shaped their own relationship, it redefined their person from inner out to outer in and set in motion a comparative process for persons and relationships that the church has yet to fully understand, or at the least ignores, in its theology and practice. From this beginning, an encompassing comparative process has countered God's theological trajectory, and the counter-relational work inherent in its process has displaced Jesus' relational path (as composed above) as the defining determinant to wholeness for his followers—contrary to what Paul made the relational imperative for the church (Col 3:15). No matter the extent to which the comparative process prevails in the surrounding contexts of the world, its presence and influence shaping persons and relationships in the church needs to be addressed and deconstructed in church theology and practice. We cannot avoid God's questions of "Where are you?" and "What are you doing here?" and continue to ignore our own assumptions of theological anthropology and sin, as if our person, relationships and churches have not been subject to reductionism.

One critical human shaping of the church has been notable for countering the church's distinguished ontology and function in the world, and thereby for diminishing the whole gospel and its integral outcome and mission. This shaping is composed by secondary and false distinctions that reduce persons and result in stratified relationships, whereby barriers are explicitly or implicitly created to prevent building the transformed relationships intimately involving whole persons equalized to compose his new creation church family (as Paul made explicit, Eph 2:11-19).

The redemptive changes, which Jesus made the relational imperative for his post-ascension discourse churches to undergo, directly involved his relational work of equalizing. What Jesus embodied in experiential relational terms throughout his intrusive relational path was vulnerable relational involvement with the devalued, the dispossessed, the discounted and disregarded—that is, with those stigmatized by false distinctions that created barriers (vertically or horizontally) for relationships to come together to be whole. This required also being directly involved with those who benefited from such distinctions in a prevailing collective order, whether sociocultural, economic, political or religious, including the emerging church. These were persons and collective orders that Jesus never avoided but took initiative to engage intrusively (e.g. Jewish leaders, cleansing the temple). His relational work of family love always involves redemptive reconciliation, and to be redeemed is to be equalized for reconciliation in the relationships necessary to be God's whole family. These relationships, as Jesus

demonstrated, require invariable transformed relationships, both equalized and intimate. As much as we may avoid or ignore the matter, relationships are not fully reconciled until they come together intimately; and relationships are not intimately reconciled until they are first redeemed, thus equalized.

As long as this existing order is not changed, human communities utilizing this diversity of distinctions and related misuse of differences (e.g. about gender and age) consistently maintain relationships together in some condition “to be apart” (again, horizontally or vertically). When the discussion is about bringing together human diversity, it is misguided to think that persons can be united in relationship together without these distinctions being rendered secondary, even insignificant. Distinctions by their nature always engage a comparative process. Those who employ distinctions on others and for themselves knowingly or inadvertently use a *deficit model* in human relations: the treatment, however subtle, of others who are different as being essentially *less*. Whatever the distinction or difference, persons are perceived as less because ostensibly they do not measure up to the prevailing standards used in the reductionist process of defining human persons by what they do or have, achieved or acquired—resulting in ‘identity deficit’ or a sense of ‘ontological deficit’. This deficit model has been used even by well-meaning persons and groups trying to help others in what essentially amounts to their deficit, and thus the inadvertent perception and treatment of them as being “less.” The relational consequences of such perceptions is a stratified relational order embedded in the human relational condition “to be apart” from the whole. Whatever the variation of this human shaping of relationships together, it does not and cannot involve the experiential reality of whole relationships together necessarily composed by whole persons.

This counter-relational comparative process—of distinction making, with the use of a deficit model to stratify relationships, for creating barriers in relationships together reinforcing the human relational condition “to be apart” from God’s whole—was brought to the forefront of importance by Jesus in his post-ascension discourse, when he encouraged the church in Philadelphia by the experiential truth of his relational work as the equalizer (Rev 3:7-12). Apparently, this relational message was directed to Jewish Christians who had been ostracized from the Jewish community (excluded from the synagogue) because they no longer measured up to the prevailing standard of Judaism (v.9, as the church in Smyrna was, 2:9). Jesus identified himself as the functional and relational keys to God’s house prophesied earlier (Isa 22:22), who determines access to relational belonging to God’s family (v.7). He fully affirmed the experiential truth that they permanently belonged to God’s family (“open door,” v.8, cf. metaphor of 3:20, a relational key to Jesus’ involvement for ecclesiology to be whole). As the equalizer, Jesus’ family love rendered insignificant the distinction imposed on them by the Jews prevailing in that religious order and redeemed them from the barriers to full participation in God’s family (v.9b). This equalized them from any ontological and identity deficit to relationally respond back to be reconciled in reciprocating transformed relationships together as God’s family in the new relational order with the veil removed. Their response back was not of self-determination (“little strength,” *dynamis*, signifying being unable or incapable) or out of obligation (*opheilo*) to a code of the law, but ongoing relational response back to Jesus and his terms for whole relationship together as family: “you have kept my word of patient endurance,” that is, without letting secondary things

define them in order to respond in the primacy of ongoing reciprocal relationship together (v.10, in contrast to the perseverance of the Ephesian church, 2:3).

By equalizing them in the surrounding context of this prevailing religious order shaping relationship together, Jesus made unequivocal not only the experiential truth but the experiential reality also that “I have loved you” with family love to be whole in relationship together as God’s family. As the equalizer, he would also humble those Jews functioning in ontological simulation, who imposed this counter-relational comparative process and its false distinctions on them, to know as well that he has loved them as family together—in a dramatic image of equalization (3:9). This dramatic image should be projected back onto his equalizing cleansing of the temple to complete the relational outcome of equalization in the redemptive reconciliation necessary for “my Father’s house” to be for “all nations” without distinctions. In this relational outcome of wholeness ‘already’ Jesus constituted the Philadelphian communion further and deeper as his church family in the relational progression composed within the whole of God’s eschatological plan to the new Jerusalem (3:11-12). In doing so, Jesus’ concern for ecclesiology to be whole is functionally integrated with eschatology in the whole of God’s thematic action.

As those who have been equalized to permanently belong to the whole of God’s family, part of “your crown” (v.11) as the relational outcome of redemptive reconciliation involved their defining commission (in integral function with their call) to live whole and make whole as the church as equalizer. This was the experiential truth of the gospel they were to embody in the experiential reality of its relational outcome ‘already’, not in isolation merely among themselves but to embody to the world, just as Jesus embodied from his Father to make whole the human condition (Jn 17:18).

Ironically, the counter-relational comparative process of distinction making and discrimination by Jews to Christian Jews became the same counter-relational process used by various Jewish Christians to make distinctions of Gentile Christians to discriminate against them in stratified relationships with a position of ‘less’ in the early church. This was Peter’s perceptual-interpretive framework and essentially his contradictory practice in the church until Jesus’ post-ascension discourse with him directly. Peter’s and others’ rendering of persons to distinctions and shaping of relationships accordingly in the church had to be deconstructed. Peter later led the discussion in reordering the stratified early church to be the equalizer, though Paul would be the one to make it functional and to compose the ecclesiology of the whole. After Jesus redeemed Peter’s bias and transformed his ecclesiology, Peter declared at the Jerusalem church council that God “has made no distinction between them and us” (Acts 15:9). The term *diakrino* denotes to make a distinction, discriminate, and treat differently, which God does not practice in his family. This term and God’s family action help us understand that such distinctions are not neutral without repercussions. On the contrary, and we must include our distinctions, they are integrated in a counter-relational comparative process, which uses those distinctions to discriminate toward those persons by treating them differently, namely as being *less* by the deficit model, and thereby imposing an identity or ontological deficit on them. Peter learned that those distinctions are human constructs, not made by God (cf. Acts 10:14-15). Consequently, they need to be deconstructed, which was not without difficulty for Peter in his own practice.

In this pivotal action for ecclesiology, the early church turned from its fragmenting relational order to be composed in the new relational order as the equalizer. Its defining function for church practice became distinguished: dissolving false human distinctions of human construction and absorbing legitimate human differences from God in order to be and live the whole of God's family in the new relational order of transformed relationships together integrally equalized and intimate. As Jesus embodied in his equalizing, church function as equalizer by its nature necessitates being both whole and holy, therefore to be qualitatively distinguished from the function of *the common*—specifically in the human shaping of persons and relationships from the prevailing function of the surrounding context's relational order. That relational order must be deconstructed by the church in order for any church to be composed (both transformed and reconstructed) in his new relational order.

This relational outcome 'already' is not an experiential reality without ongoing redemptive change—the necessary deconstruction of church practice antecedent to its transformation and reconstruction to wholeness in the new relational order. Otherwise the church struggles to be distinguished within itself in the world, which then certainly limits its significance to the world. This change was illuminated in the whole of Paul's own life in order to distinguish his theology with the qualitative relational significance necessary for the church's whole and thus transformed relationship together, thereby making it imperative for the church today to change with Paul. Understanding of this emerges in response to the following question pointed to earlier: As a Jew and a Christian and an adopted son, to what extent did change need to take effect 'already' for his theology to be functional?

It was never sufficient for Paul to change from outer in, either by outward change only, giving the appearance of some inner significance (*metaschematizo*, 2 Cor 11:13-15), or by change just from conforming outwardly to a surrounding context's normative influence and terms (*syschematizo*, Rom 12:2). What unequivocally constituted change for Paul, together as a Jew and a Christian and an adopted son, involved a pivotal relational process that by its nature necessitated his whole person from inner out. The relational outcome of whole relationship together in God's family can emerge only from this pivotal relational process. In Paul's theology, the pivotal relational process is made definitive by being "baptized into Christ" for the redemptive change 'already' in which the old dies and the new rises with Christ (Rom 6:4-5) by the Spirit (Rom 8:10-11). The old is the reduced human ontology and function entrenched in the sin of reductionism—the two critical assumptions of our theological anthropology and view of sin—that need redemption to be integrally both freed and made whole as a person in relationship together (Col 3:9-11). The dynamic of the cross becomes paradigmatic for this ongoing process of the old to die 'already' and the reality of the new to rise (cf. Paul's desire for further intimate relationship with Christ, Phil 3:10-11). This is the irreplaceable dynamic through which the kingdom converges into the new creation family of the church.

The wholeness dynamic of redemptive change is the pivotal process of relational involvement with Christ for the inner-out transformation of the whole person by the Spirit (*metamorphoo*, 2 Cor 3:18; Rom 12:2), which is necessary for the experiential truth 'already' of the relational outcome for relational belonging and ontological identity in God's new creation family of transformed relationships together, both intimate and equalized (Rom 8:14-17; Gal 3:26-29; 1 Cor 12:13; Col 3:9-11; Eph 4:22-24). Without

full and ongoing engagement in redemptive change, there is no reconciliation to these relationships together—though perhaps giving that appearance from outer in, but not inner out, notably in the presence of distinctions. The inseparable dynamic of redemptive reconciliation is indispensable for relationship with the whole and holy God and for all relationships together to be whole in God’s likeness.

This relational outcome already entirely from redemptive reconciliation was the experiential truth of Paul, from inner out as a Jew and a Christian and an adopted son. Therefore, redemptive change is nonnegotiable and its pivotal relational process of baptism into Christ is irreducible in Paul’s *pleroma* (completeness) theology. And Paul’s readers need to understand ‘already’ that nothing less and no substitutes are of functional significance both for the whole of Paul’s person and the whole in his theology. Most important, only the experiential reality of this relational outcome ‘already’ composes the church in its transformation to wholeness in the new relational order. For Paul then, any deconstruction of church practice is always in conjoint function with transformation and the ongoing need to reconstruct the new. Since the focus of deconstruction in the church centers on persons and relationships living in a comparative process with distinctions, church transformation and reconstruction focuses both vulnerably on persons from inner out and intrusively in relationships.

Composed in the New Relational Order

Jesus’ intrusive relational path composed the new relational order on an experiential basis, not for his followers to observe but to follow him in, as Levi and Zacchaeus experienced, to relationally belong in God’s whole family. For the church to be composed in the same new relational order, it must follow Jesus on his intrusive relational path to be distinguished whole and holy in contrast and even conflict with the surrounding context’s relational order.

The significance of the church being holy involves a functional aspect and a relational aspect, for which church practice is accountable not only in distinguished minority identity but also in sanctified life and practice both distinct from and intrusive on the surrounding context. Since Jesus redeemed and thus equalized persons in extending to them the whole relationship of his Father as family together, what distinguishes his followers (his family, his church) on his intrusive relational path is to *live equalized*, and, in full congruence with his relational work, *to equalize* by extending this whole family relationship of family love. Moreover, while intruding on the existing relational order, Jesus made unmistakably evident throughout his sanctified life and practice that his equalization perspective and a reductionist perceptual-interpretive framework are irreconcilable, thus incompatible as a working basis for church practice—even as pluralism, multiculturalism or any other similar hybrid, all of which are unable to distinguish the whole of God and God’s whole family. Therefore, the functional aspect of being holy involves being freed from the influence of reductionism and its counter-relational work that explicitly or implicitly define and/or determine church practice, and that includes those fragmenting distinctions and their counter-relational comparative process. Accordingly and inseparably, the related relational aspect of being holy involves the integral practice of church relationships intimately involved together in likeness of the

Trinity, which is distinguished from any and all aspects of the relational condition “to be apart” from the whole, for example, shaped in likeness of orphans in an orphanage. Church likeness is not a concept to be addressed in its theology but a reality that must be accounted for in church practice. This functional and relational significance of the church being holy interact to compose the process of church qualitative development and growth in the transformed relationships of Jesus’ new relational order.

In the church’s transformation to wholeness of persons and relationships, the church in wholeness ‘already’ is neither passive nor in a defensive mode. The new creation of whole persons integrally involved in whole relationships together is by its nature dynamic and alive. Any condition of apparent homeostasis in the embodied church should not be confused with maintaining the status quo; the latter essentially is a deteriorating condition in a church (cf. the church in Laodicea, Rev 3:14-17). The dynamic in the church alive involves ongoingly distinguishing the church’s ontology and living the church’s function in wholeness while in the surrounding context of reductionism. The church’s whole ontology and function are ongoingly distinguished only in the relational context and process of the whole of God, which cannot be engaged passively or without reciprocal relational involvement.

Paul’s closing relational imperative for the church, “be strong,” stated in the Greek passive voice (Eph 6:10), appears to put the church in a passive position and a defensive mode with the armor of God (6:11-18). Yet, by combining the passive voice with the middle voice (indicating direct involvement of subject), Paul is further illuminating the church’s reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit, and thereby with the whole of God. This direct involvement with the Spirit is integral for the church’s whole ontology and function in the midst of reductionism, while not ignoring reductionism’s presence or underestimating its influence. This reciprocal relationship together does not render the church passive and on the defensive but rather embodies the church in the dynamic position to be on the offensive, alive in the experiential truth and reality of wholeness (6:15). In its ontological identity as light, the church does not just resist reductionism but also exposes, rebukes, refutes and shows its fault (*elencho*, Eph 5:11-14) in order to extend God’s family love to the human condition with the gospel of transformation to wholeness. This embodies the intrusive nature of Jesus embodying the gospel in his relational path. Paul assumes the offensive enactment of this whole function of the church, in which he personally engages in reciprocal relationship together with them (6:19-20; cf. 2 Cor 5:18-20).

Paul also assumes that the whole ontology and function of the church is in likeness of the *pleroma* of God. The whole of God’s thematic relational response to make whole the human condition was embodied and fulfilled by Christ. The truth of this gospel was not a proposition or doctrinal truth to Paul but only the experiential truth of the embodied *pleroma* of God in whole relationship together—Paul’s definitive basis for exposing, rebuking, refuting and convicting Peter in his reductionism (Gal 2:11-14). The evidence of the experiential truth of the gospel’s whole relationship together embodied by Christ is now embodied and extended by the church in likeness. Therefore, the experiential truth of the gospel of transformation to wholeness is already whole-ly embodied in the church to live whole together as God’s new creation family and to extend God’s family in the world to make whole the human condition. Pointing to his own past updated, Paul earlier reflected on this relational dynamic for those made whole

and their call and commission to share the experiential truth of the whole gospel: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news” (Rom 10:14-15; Isa 52:7). The functional significance of this gospel of wholeness is unequivocal when embodied in the church’s whole ontology and function, which is the basis for Paul’s relational imperative for the church in wholeness (Col 3:15) and its relational significance ‘already’ as God’s new creation family (Gal 6:15).

The nature of the church family as dynamic and alive in the new creation is distinguished only by the function of relationship—that is, whole relationships together, the function of transformed persons relationally involved in transformed relationships together. How deeply a church is distinguished by this function of relationship is the relational outcome of its reciprocal relational involvement together with the Spirit, starting foremost by the vulnerable involvement of its leadership.

Leadership Composed and Composing

Two recent critiques of modern church leadership have emerged in major contexts of the global church. In a pre-Christmas speech to the officials of the Roman Curia (Dec. 22, 2014), Pope Francis made a surprising critique of the cardinals, bishops and priests who run the Vatican—accusing them of succumbing to greed, jealousy, hypocrisy, cowardice and, in his words, “spiritual Alzheimer’s.” At the top of fifteen “illnesses” he listed was the fault of feeling “immortal, immune or even indispensable”; he also denounced their showing off, accumulating wealth and leading double lives, which he said could lead to “existential schizophrenia.” Does Pope Francis echo some of Jesus’ critiques in his post-ascension discourse, along with striking chords from the Sermon on the Mount?

The second critique emerged in South Korea on December 10, 2014, in the documentary film “Quo Vadis” directed by Kim Jae-hwan—which will open in Los Angeles and New York in January, 2015. The film focuses on mega-churches in South Korea with thousands of members, multimillion-dollar budgets and senior pastors who are feted like rock stars. In a picture of financial malfeasance and sexual abuse by those in control, Kim’s goal is to raise an overdue debate on whether churches have lost their moral authority in a quest to accumulate more congregants and money—a conclusion supported in the film by various professors, pastors and scholars of religion. A Korea Times column described the film as “a forceful reminder of the need for Korea’s Christian leaders to worship God, not mammon.”¹

Both of these critiques highlight a critical condition in the global church that no church or church leader can claim to be immune from. As long as a reduced theological anthropology and weak view of sin without reductionism pervade church theology and practice, this critical condition will prevail in any church—starting with its leadership and permeating throughout its members. What composes church leaders will compose those churches.

How is a minister of righteousness unmistakably distinguished from others appearing as “ministers of righteousness” (e.g. 2 Cor 11:15)? Not by their gifts, resources, role-performance or any other outer-in measure (as in *metaschematizo*, 11:13-

¹ Reported by Steven Borowiec, “South Korea churches challenged in film,” *Los Angeles Times*, Calendar, December 3, 2014.

15). Based on outer-in perception and assessment, Paul said the *telos* (end, goal or limit) of ministers will be determined by the workings of how they define themselves and thereby determine their function, specifically in how they do relationships and lead in church (“Their end will match their deeds.”). Church leaders defined from outer in cannot be distinguished from others in a comparative process, no matter what credentials they have; even Jesus had difficulty being distinguished among Jewish leaders when subjected to a comparative process rooted in outer-in terms. In other words, Paul makes the theological anthropology of church leaders a basic issue in church leadership and a basic antecedent needing to be congruent from inner out for leading the new creation church family (cf. Phil 2:1-5; 1 Cor 12:12-13). This builds on Jesus’ new relational order for leaders (Mk 10:42-44) and points to what in churches is always primary to Jesus (Rev 2:23).

Theological anthropology congruent with the gospel of transformation to wholeness is a function only of its experiential truth, not mere doctrinal or propositional truth. Given that the church now is to embody this gospel of wholeness, the church’s ontology and function must be an outworking of the theological anthropology that is congruent with the experiential truth and reality of wholeness. Anything less or any substitutes in the church—for example, leadership defined and determined from outer in—fragments the wholeness of God’s new creation to the various shaping of reduced ontology and function; the new creation then becomes indistinguishable from reductionism (cf. “ministers of righteousness”), no longer growing in the functional significance of the gospel of wholeness both to experience within its own life and to extend to the world. This is how reductionism functions in an outer-in dynamic contrary to the inner out of the new creation, signifying a subtle shift in theological anthropology of how persons are defined and thereby determined.

Paul’s theological anthropology is definitive discourse precisely on the experiential truth of whole ontology and function, invariable in definition yet growing in wholeness, in which Paul’s own person functions to integrate the whole of his witness—both within the church (e.g. 2 Cor 12:7-10) and to the world (cf. Acts 27:23-25)—and the whole in his theology (e.g. Phil 3:7-9). On the basis of the integrity of his whole person presented to others, Paul engaged others with the quality of his communication (e.g. honest and loving, Eph 4:15, 25) that relationally involved himself with others for the depth of whole relationship together congruent with God’s new creation family (e.g. 2 Cor 12:14-15). Integral to Paul’s church leadership was his whole person, which cannot be defined and determined by a comparative process that shapes persons and relationships from outer in (Paul’s critique in 1 Cor 4:6-7; 2 Cor 10:12). Persons congruent with the new creation are being transformed to live from inner out in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10-11; 2 Cor 3:18), contrary to church leaders functioning from outer in.

This theological anthropology of whole ontology and function for the person and persons together as church is nonnegotiable for Paul (1 Cor 4:6). The new creation is not open to be defined and determined by human terms and shaping (Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:9-10; 2 Cor 5:16-17). Only the wholeness of Christ *brabeuo* (“rules” as the only determinant) for the whole person and relationships composing the church (Col 3:15). Just as Paul holds himself accountable for his wholeness (cf. 1 Cor 15:9-10), he firmly holds church leaders accountable for theirs because, for all of them, their wholeness is

inseparable from the embodying of the church in whole ontology and function (Col 3:15; Eph 2:14-15; cf. 1 Cor 3:21-23). The new creation functions only in the inner-out dynamic in the qualitative image and relational likeness of God, the transformation which emerges from *anakainoo* (restored to being new again in one's original condition, Col 3:10) and *ananeo* (being made new from inner out, Eph 4:23). The responsibility for engagement in this process of transformation is reciprocal in only relational terms—not conceptual in referential terms, even with concern for the notion of sanctification. On the one hand, all persons being transformed by the Spirit are responsible for their ongoing relational involvement. On the other, church leaders are further responsible for what they share and teach (as Paul implies, Eph 4:20-22) since their definitive purpose and function is the *katartismos* (from *katartizo*, to restore to former condition for complete qualification) of church members to embody the whole ontology and function of God's new creation family (Eph 4:12-13). The latter function for church leaders cannot be assumed without their reciprocal involvement in the former, no matter how "gifted" they are; nor can the former be assumed as an experiential reality for church leaders simply because they are engaged in the latter.

Paul assumes for church leaders in their purpose and function in *katartismos* that their own persons have been and continue to be *anakainoo* and *ananeo*. If their ontology and function are not whole, then their theological anthropology has shifted (even by default) to a reduced ontology and function incongruent with the new creation, and consequently they no longer have functional significance for the embodying of God's new creation family and the experiential truth of the gospel of wholeness, much less to assume a leadership function. Church leaders (including in the academy) need to understand that *katartismos* has functional significance only in dynamic interaction with their *anakainoo* and *ananeo*, and that this ongoing interaction is requisite for their ministry to be integral for embodying the church as the *pleroma* of Christ, the whole of God's new creation family. On no other basis can ministers of righteousness be distinguished.

In Paul's transformed ecclesiology, church leadership in the new creation is a new creation of those who are defined and determined by whole ontology and function, not by their roles and resources. These prominent gifts of the Spirit cannot be claimed apart from direct relationship with the Spirit. Thus, these persons are in reciprocal relationship with the Spirit for the ongoing involvement together necessary to build (*oikodome*) God's new creation family in embodied whole (*pleroma*) ontology and function, which integrally involves their own person with persons together in transformed relationships both without distinctions and the veil. With this leadership the church is alive in the new relational order and grows in wholeness to maturity (*teleios*) as the *pleroma* of Christ (Eph 4:12-13). Therefore, Paul both expects this wholeness in church leaders and holds them accountable to be transformed persons who are *agape*-relationally involved in transformed relationships together that are conjointly equalized and intimate (Eph 4:14-16; Gal 5:6; 6:15). This expectation and accountability of church leaders was demonstrated earlier by Paul with Peter and Barnabas (Gal 2:13-14), and is demonstrated further with Titus, Timothy and Philemon.

Titus and Timothy were Paul's partners and coworkers in church leadership among various churches (1 Thes 3:2; 2 Cor 8:23; Rom 16:21). The depth of their relationship together as church leaders is expressed in Paul's so-called Pastoral Epistles

(1 & 2 Tim, Ti). Paul's authorship of these letters is debated in Pauline scholarship because of questions involving them: lack of general knowledge of these letters prior to the second century along with the rest of Paul's letters; terms and expressions not found in his undisputed letters; theological terms and concepts from undisputed letters either missing or used differently in the Pastorals; form of church order in Pastorals not found in undisputed letters; difficulty placing Pastorals into Paul's known career; and they point to a softer, domesticated and somewhat idealized Paul. The sum of these questions suggests that the Pastorals appear to be the work of someone other than Paul (e.g. pseudonymous, final form by a secretary, his fragments compiled after his death). There are lingering unanswered questions about the Pastorals as representative of Paul himself.²

I propose another alternative for the Pastorals: these letters are a compilation of Paul's personal thoughts, advice and written notes communicated directly to Timothy and Titus, who formed them with the Spirit into personal letter form for some edifying purpose (not for nostalgic reasons) after Paul's death, while contextualizing Paul in the church of this later period, thus accounting for apparent further development of church order and giving only the appearance of a softer Paul in his communication with these church leaders. Though Timothy and Titus may not have understood the full edifying purpose of compiling letters from Paul to each of them respectively, their reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit for this cooperative effort points to God's complete purpose for canonical inclusion. On this basis, I assume Paul's unintended authorship of the form of these letters yet his full responsibility of their content for church leadership, which in their canonical inclusion are representative whole-ly of Paul and not mere Pauline fragments. This is not to say that Timothy and Titus constructed Paul's thought, nor added their own shape to the Pauline corpus. They merely compiled what was from and of Paul—neither to idealize nor to give tribute to Paul—in cooperation with the Spirit in order to fulfill Paul's *oikonomia* to *pleroo* the whole of God's desires and thematic action to make whole the human condition in relationship together as God's new creation family.

For this relational purpose, what has become known as the Pastoral Epistles perhaps is better understood as Paul's Album of Family Love—which is more than pastoral but further and deeper involves Family Letters for the whole relationship together necessary to be God's whole family only on God's qualitative relational terms. And in this relational purpose for church leadership, Titus needed for accountability just a condensed summary from Paul, while Timothy necessitated greater input and feedback from Paul in family love.

Though not very much is known about Titus (he is absent from Acts), he became a key member of Paul's team (2 Cor 2:13; 8:23), notably in mission to Corinth (2 Cor 7:6-15; 8:6-23), now to Crete (Ti 1:5), and later to Dalmatia (2 Tim 4:10). Paul appeared to have confidence in Titus to address the difficulties in these situations (Ti 1:5,13; 2:15). In a sense, it can be said that Titus became Paul's troubleshooter for churches to function in transformed ecclesiology. This personal letter then needs to be understood for the edifying purpose for all church leaders to engage their responsibility for church ontology and function to be God's new creation family together.

² For a summary of this discussion, see Arland J. Hultgren, "The Pastoral Epistles" in James D.G. Dunn, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to St. Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 141-155.

Paul's personal communication reminds Titus what is expected of him and for what he is accountable as a church leader, which extends to all church leaders. This is focused for Titus (and for Timothy) on the necessity of "sound doctrine/teaching" (*hygianino*, sound, healthy, from *hygies*, sound, whole, Ti 1:9; 2:1; 1 Tim 6:3; 2 Tim 1:13; 4:3). As Paul made clear to Timothy, this involved nothing less than the whole teaching congruent with the experiential truth of the whole gospel that was relationally entrusted to Paul (1 Tim 1:10b-11). What Paul illuminated to center their focus as church leaders cannot be reduced to a static notion of "sound doctrine," which would be a reduction of the whole gospel, thereby reducing the experiential truth of the gospel's functional and relational significance in wholeness. The functional consequence would be a different gospel under the veneer of "sound doctrine" and the relational consequence would involve a renegotiated ecclesiology, both of which are not exposed without the presence of the whole. It is this tension and conflict with reductionism of God's relational whole that must be fully understood in these personal letters for them to constitute being from and of Paul. Only this whole understanding and accountability by church leaders extends Paul's fight for the experiential truth of the gospel of transformation to wholeness, which by necessity defines and determines their *katartismos* of the church to embody the whole of God's new creation family.

The Titus communication stresses similar aspects as in 1 and 2 Timothy, yet without the personal challenges, charges and even "pushing" Paul used with Timothy (1 Tim 1:18; 4:6, 11-16; 6:11-14; 2 Tim 1:6-8, 13-14; 2:1-7; 4:1-2, 5). Even though I assume their compilation of Paul's communication (oral and written) with each of them for their respective letters, this is not to suggest that Titus selectively left out those elements in his shorter account. Rather it illuminates that Timothy was less firm and decisive than Titus and thus needed more exhorting from Paul to be distinguished in whole ontology and function, not reverting back to reduced ontology and function even by default (e.g. back to timid Timothy)—that is, in what he presented of himself to others, in the quality of his communication and in the depth level of his relational involvement (the three unavoidable issues for all practice noted above). Paul, however, is not focused on Timothy becoming more assertive in his role as church leader, nor more dynamic with his gifts. Paul focuses Timothy only on living in his wholeness. The Greek Titus, even among Jews, seemed to more readily live in his whole ontology and function (e.g. 2 Cor 7:6,13; 8:6,16-17; 12:18; Ti 1:5), and likely was encouraged that Paul did not define him by external identity markers even on religious terms (Gal 2:3).

In these Family Letters, Paul is not suggesting a certain type of personality to be effective church leaders. Paul's nonnegotiable expectation of church leadership is unequivocally for wholeness in ontology and function and accountability as transformed persons *agape*-relationally involved in transformed relationships together without distinctions and the veil in the new relational order. His expectation and accountability are based on defining the person, engaging in relationships and practicing church (the three inescapable issues noted above) only in the new creation image and likeness of the whole of God—just as Paul made imperative for Timothy (1 Tim 4:12,15-16). Therefore, whether leaders are "stronger" like Titus or "weaker" like Timothy, Paul holds all accountable in family love for nothing less and no substitutes—which included himself in all that he is, or isn't (2 Cor 12:9).

Paul's expectation for church leaders to be accountable to be transformed persons relationally involved in transformed relationships together is even more clearly distinguished with Philemon. In his personal letter to Philemon, Paul identifies him as a beloved church leader in partnership with him and Timothy (Phlm 1,17). Extending our discussion from chapter eight, Philemon leads a house church in his own house (v.2), in which Paul indicates Philemon's role as a benefactor and points to the deeper function of the church as family beyond a mere gathering (vv. 5,7,9-10). The prevailing sociocultural role of benefactor combined with a leadership relational function in the church as family creates tension and conflict, even incompatibility, if the basis for the benefactor (i.e. outer-in distinction of reductionism) becomes the defining measure of the leader and thereby the determining influence for the function of the church. By implication, Paul addresses a potential problematic ecclesiology that redefines the relational dynamic of an embodied family. Whenever a part(s) in the church body, even if that person is a benefactor providing for the physical existence of a house church, determines the whole of God's family, then reductionism has taken effect, shaping the whole by the terms of a part(s)—becoming a gathering of reduced ontology and function in renegotiated ecclesiology.

Paul writes to Philemon to take him further and deeper into the relational whole of God's new creation family only on God's relational terms, as a direct extension of his purpose for the Colossian letter (read also in the church at Laodicea). Therefore, the Philemon letter needs to be read, interpreted and understood by the qualitative lens (*phroneo*) from the whole framework (*phronema*) Paul established in Colossians for the whole knowledge and understanding (*synesis*) necessary for the *pleroma* of God, who constituted the embodying of the wholeness of the church. Paul was developing, yet had not fully articulated, transformed ecclesiology. In this process for Paul, Philemon is a key letter for church ontology and function to be the relational whole of God's new creation family, and it becomes a functional bridge to Ephesians. In the Pauline corpus, Paul makes definitive in Ephesians the theological basis for Philemon's relational function as a transformed person *agape*-relationally involved in transformed relationships together to embody the church's whole ontology and function as family. These connections are integral in relational terms to distinguish the whole gospel and thereby its relational outcome of wholeness for the church.

For Philemon, as both benefactor of this house church and slave owner of Onesimus, the process of involvement in transformed relationships necessarily both equalized and intimate is not a simple transformation, and likely a threatening engagement to make himself vulnerable to. This required from Philemon nothing less than 'relationship together involving the whole person'. It is important to understand that Paul does not simply articulate to Philemon the expectation and accountability of church leadership. Because Paul writes from the whole of God's relational context of family by the relational process of God's family love (vv.9-10), Paul engages Philemon as a whole person (not merely as a benefactor or church leader) in a family dialogue within the very transformed relationships that he wants Philemon to experience further and deeper (vv.8,14). These are the distinguished relationships both equalized and intimate that constitute God's new creation to be whole persons in whole relationship together in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, these whole church relationships are not reduced by the false distinctions of persons from outer-in function in relationships fragmented by

vertical separation and/or horizontal distance. Whole church relational involvement together in family love is the relational and functional basis both for Philemon as a transformed church leader and for the church he leads to embody the transformed relationships together necessary as God's new creation family (vv.15-16). How does this relational outcome happen?

Composed Only in Distinct Relational Terms

Philemon's challenge as a new creation was to function as a person being transformed from inner out, thus to be vulnerable in his whole person without defining himself by the roles he had and performed and without engaging relationships on that basis—the significance of relationships without the veil. Equally challenging for Philemon was to define Onesimus as a person without those distinctions who was also being transformed from inner out on the same basis, whereby to see each other as whole persons vulnerably from inner out—in other words, 'relationship together involving the whole person'. On this basis, inseparably in integral function, Philemon's further challenge was to vulnerably engage Onesimus from inner out to be relationally involved together in family love as equalized and intimate brothers; and for this new relationship together to be the relational basis for their church family would necessitate Philemon to restructure his own household operation ("business") as a slave owner in order to deconstruct the old and reconstruct the new relational order embodying God's new creation family. These challenges illuminate the tension and conflict between wholeness and reductionism, and the interrelated crucial issues of how we define ourselves and do relationships on that basis, and thus practice church on the same basis.

Certainly, there was a human cost for Philemon to meet these challenges and engage in the relational work of equalizing. There was also a cost for engaging in intimate relationships but the cost was less obvious. It is important to understand a vital distinction about *agape* in this matter because Paul challenges (*parakaleo*) Philemon "on the basis of *agape*" (v.9). Paul was not calling upon Philemon for sacrificial action. There is indeed a human cost for equalizing relational work—first to be equalized within one's own person and then to equalize all persons in relationships—which is similar to the divine cost of the embodied *pleroma* of God (cf. Phil 2:6-8; Col 1:19-20). To reemphasize, this cost involves ongoingly giving up the benefits or letting go of the burdens from all elements of reductionist human distinctions that reduce persons to the outer in and fragment relationships in vertical stratification and/or horizontal distance; by comparison the cost of human shaping is immeasurable. With the veil removed (along with the human coverings from the primordial garden), the person thus presented without reductionist distinctions involves submitting one's whole person (as is, without the benefit or burden of those distinctions) to be vulnerably involved from inner out in relationships with others, therefore beyond the comfort or security of keeping distance in relationships. This vulnerability opens the functional door to the heart to engage the depth of *agape*, not as sacrifice but as intimate relational involvement together as family (Col 3:11,14-15; Gal 5:6; cf. 2 Cor 12:15; Rev 3:20). This is Jesus' intrusive relational path that must compose the ontology and function of his followers and church.

Agape family love was initiated by God's thematic relational response of grace to the human condition. In this relational process of family love, God pursued persons like

Paul, Philemon and even Onesimus, embraced them as they were from inner out, paid the cost to take them into his family and made them whole together as his very own sons and daughters (as Paul clarified, Gal 4:4-6). This irreducible relational process, irreplaceable relational action, and nonnegotiable relational involvement constitute the family love embodied by the *pleroma* of God to equalize and reconcile persons intimately together in God's new creation family (as Paul made definitive, Col 1:19-22; 2:9-10; 3:10-11; Eph 2:4-5, 14-22).

This is the *agape* by which Paul engages Philemon and into which he takes Philemon deeper. Family love is the depth of *agape* that changes incurring the above cost from the notion of a sacrifice, tending to signify a compelled obligation (*ananke*, "something forced," Phlm 14). Rather family love emerges from a transformed heart by choice (cf. the agency of a subject), freely and uncompelled (*hekousios*, cf. the conformity of an object), which is how Paul encouraged Philemon to function. Paul is making this rigorous relational process of family love functional for Philemon, and all church leaders and members living in reductionist distinctions, in order to live as whole persons in whole relationship together without the veil, the embodying of God's new creation family. On the relational-functional basis of family love, Philemon would give up a slave to gain a brother ("you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave but...a beloved brother," vv.15-16), give up a household shaped by the surrounding context to gain whole family together ("but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord," v.16). As Paul signified in his opening and closing greeting (vv.3,25), by the whole of God's relational process of family love, he takes Philemon further and deeper into the importance of his whole person from inner out involved in the primacy of relationship together to be whole in the experiential truth of God's family 'already', so that "your faith may become more effective when you *specifically understand* [*epignosis*] all the good that we may do for Christ" (v.6). This good was not about merely expressing morality or serving in mission but about deep involvement in relational family love together for the experiential reality of the gospel of transformation's relational outcome of wholeness 'already'. On this basis alone, the church and its ministry are composed in qualitative relational significance.

Paul made unequivocal to Philemon, to all church leaders and to the entire church that the embodied church becomes alive in the new relational order only in family love to be whole-ly the new creation in relational likeness to the whole of God (Col 3:14-15). This is the relational purpose of Paul's prayer for the church to specifically know from the Spirit God's family love from inner out in order to whole-ly embody the *pleroma* of Christ (Eph 1:17; 3:14-19). Moreover, as Paul clarified for Timothy, this relational process of family love necessitates the whole person (*pneuma* and *soma* together) to embody the *agape* relational involvement for whole relationship together, by which Timothy would engage in reciprocal relationship with the Spirit (2 Tim 1:7,13-14; cf. Rom 8:14-15). This depth of *agape* is not engaged merely by the quantity of deeds one does or resources one gives, even in great sacrifice. *Agape* family love is a function only of relational involvement from inner out, therefore composed only in distinct relational terms. This relational function emerges only from persons (and notably church leaders) being restored to new again (*anakainoo*, Col 3:10) and being made new from inner out (*ananeoo*, Eph 4:23) to prepare and be prepared (*katartismos*) to embody the *pleroma* of Christ, and on this qualitative relational basis to live and make whole (Eph 4:12-16).

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

Family love in relational likeness of the whole of God is neither optional nor negotiable in Paul's transformed ecclesiology. "Be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in *agape*, as Christ loved us" are relational imperatives for the new creation church family, which by their very nature necessitate being submitted to one another based on experiencing the love from Christ's submission. *Hypotasso* has been interpreted with a reductionist lens of human distinctions to mean to render obedience, be submissive, be subordinated, with implications of becoming objectified or reduced in ontology and function—notably for women and slaves as Paul's prescriptions for them appear to suggest. Moreover, this interpretation has application only for certain persons to submit, not all. In interaction with his relational imperatives, however, Paul uses *hypotasso* as every person's initiation of a voluntary relational action and should not be confused with a compulsory act of obedience or subordination to, for example, someone with authority, power or more status as defined by human distinctions. Paul's relational dynamic of submitting one's whole person to one another is a function only of family love extended to one another in relational likeness of Christ's family love for us. Christ's submission was not as an object conforming to the Father's will but only as Subject-person in relational response of the whole of God involved both within the Trinity and with us. This reciprocal relational involvement of family love signifies the whole person giving primacy to the relationships together of God's relational whole over an individual's self-interests and self-concerns (cf. 1 Cor 10:23-24, 31-33; Eph 4:14,19)—yet without sacrificing the whole person's significance in the family, for example, as experienced often in collective contexts and some human families. Personness is constituted from inner out in wholeness with the relational means of submitting one's person, not by highlighting it from outer in. The underlying issue illuminated here is theological anthropology and its ontology and function.

Paul's interpretive lens for 'submitting' is not from human contextualization but from the whole of God's relational context of family and relational process of family love vulnerably embodied by Jesus' whole person, in *pleroma* Christology for *pleroma* soteriology 'already' to embody the *pleroma* of Christ (Eph 1:22-23). Therefore, in clear contradistinction to any self-centeredness of self-autonomy, any self-interests of self-determination, and any self-concerns of self-justification—all from the influence of reductionism and its counter-relational work fragmenting relationships together (as Paul clarified earlier, Gal 5:13)—Paul makes conclusive this vital relational dynamic for relationships together to function whole in relational likeness to God: submitting our whole person to one another in family love while in intimate relational response to Christ,

who submitted his whole person to the Father in order to relationally embody the whole of God's family love for us to be equalized and intimately made whole together in God's new creation family. Only this distinct family love composes his church family in the new relational order.

This relational whole *in* family love is what Christ saved us *to* 'already' to constitute the whole ontology and function of who the church is and whose the church is (Eph 2:4-5, 14-22). What emerges for all persons and relationships from this relational whole in ontology and function *with* family love is the new relational order integrally signifying and further constituting transformed persons *agape*-relationally involved in transformed relationships together (Eph 4:15-16, 23-25). This is the new relational order with its essential relational process of family love that Paul identified previously (Gal 5:6) and distinguished integrally in transformed ecclesiology for the new creation church to be embodied alive in wholeness (Eph 2:15b; 4:2-6; cf. Gal 6:15).

Unequivocally for Paul, the church alive in wholeness distinctly in relational terms is the church composed in love, family love, *agape* family love in relational likeness to the whole of God. Yet, family love should not be idealized, nor should it be rendered to a "kingdom ethic." Family love is vulnerable relational work, made difficult in the midst of counter-relational work from human shaping of relationships together. As Paul has made unmistakable to various church leaders and churches, engagement in family love is a relational process continuously subjected to human terms and shaping that should not be underestimated for diminishing this engagement. Consequently, just as leadership in the new creation faces ongoing tension and conflict with reductionism, the church as the new creation family is ongoingly challenged to be defined and determined by wholeness or reductionism, by the new or the old, by transformed ecclesiology or renegotiated ecclesiology. What emerges from the church and its leadership signifies either the gospel of transformation to wholeness or a different gospel, the latter which Paul defined as no gospel for the inherent human need and problem even in the church (Gal 1:6-7). And it warrants ongoing emphasis that the new creation church family should not be confused with a gathering of relational-epistemic orphans, no matter how much sacrifice has been made for gathering.

A theological assumption Paul makes through the whole in his theology is that the new creation is 'already', even though not yet totally completed (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; Rom 6:4; Col 3:10; Eph 2:15b; 4:23-24). To embrace this assumption with Paul is to be accountable for its functional significance and implications both for the person and persons together as church, and for their witness and mission in the world—all of which assumes wholeness.

Directly as a result of the new creation 'already' for Paul, the outcome emerges of having a qualitative new *phroneo* (mindset and lens) from a whole new *phronema* (framework for thought, Rom 8:2,5-6; cf. 12:2). It is from this whole interpretive framework with its qualitative lens that life is perceived in the innermost of qualitative *zoe* (not the limits of quantitative *bios*), and that peace is understood with the presence of wholeness (not the absence of conflict). Paul clearly distinguishes that this new interpretive framework with the Spirit is "life and peace" (v.6), and its interpretive lens determines the qualitative depth level of life discerned and its wholeness realized inner out. When the new *phronema* and *phroneo* function by the Spirit, what emerges in the

church is distinct qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness that are vital for church practice to be whole.

This new interpretive framework is critical for Paul in his discourse about peace throughout his letters and is essential for his readers to know and understand the whole in his theology. When Paul addressed the church at Corinth in their disputes, he illuminated “God is a God not of disorder but of peace” (1 Cor 14:33). This may appear to illuminate the obvious but that depends on our interpretive framework. The term for disorder (*akatastasia*) involves being without a fixed or settled condition. Since Paul added that their church life and practice should be “in order” (*taxis*, v.40), that is, according to a set of guiding principles or an established framework, there are various conditions of church life and practice that would appear sufficient to establish order in the church—even by maintaining tradition or the status quo (cf. Jesus’ interpretive lens, Mt 15:8-9). If Paul understood peace as merely the absence of conflict, then these various church conditions (including the status quo) would qualify as sufficient ecclesial order.

A deeper tension and conflict emerge because this is not the peace of God that Paul illuminates. As urgent as disorder may be in some churches and around the world, Paul is deeply focused both on the quantitative of *bios* and the qualitative of *zoe*, with *zoe* always primary; and the absence of conflict does not adequately address the existing disorder, nor does it fulfill the order needed for the human condition, the inherent human relational need and problem neuroscience reminds us about. Before traditional churches applaud Paul’s position, they need to pay deeper attention to what Paul illuminates. The juxtaposition of disorder (*akatastasia*) with Paul’s peace reveals a critical distinction: Paul’s use of *akatastasia* is not merely about being in a fixed or settled condition of *taxis*—for example, order according to a set of guiding principles—but that this condition of *akatastasia* is a function of fragmentation, that is, practice that fragments the whole, even with the presence of ecclesial order; and that God is not a God of reductionism but the God of wholeness, who therefore does not fragment—either persons by distinctions or relationships by stratification—but who makes whole (cf. Jesus’ practice of peace, Mt 10:34). Moreover, what Paul further illuminates for his readers is that any ecclesial order (even with an established framework) without wholeness has no significance to God—as Paul further clarified later for the new creation church (Col 3:15; Eph 4:3).

Paul’s *synesis* of peace, his whole understanding and depth of meaning, emerged with the Spirit in a new *phronema* with a new *phroneo* that deepened his focus. His *synesis* of wholeness included the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction from *tamiym* (cf. Gen 17:1), which helped him to integrally understand God’s relational work establishing the new relationship (*siym*) of wholeness (*shalom*) in God’s definitive blessing of his family (Num 6:24-26), and to relationally receive the wholeness that only Jesus gives (Jn 14:27) to embody the gospel of transformation to wholeness for the human condition (Eph 6:15). What Paul illuminated above about God and peace and extends in relational discourse throughout his letters made definitive this wholeness: the whole ontology and function of God, the whole of God’s thematic relational response to make whole the human condition, the new creation of human ontology and function in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God, and the embodying of the whole ontology and function of the church as God’s new creation family—the relational outcome of wholeness ‘already’ in the midst of reductionism. Therefore, Paul

was not engaged in mere theological discourse for us to consider but rather what is imperative to distinguish who we are and whose we are.

While Paul assumes the new creation ‘already’ and its relational outcome with the Spirit to embody the church’s whole ontology and function as God’s new creation family, he never assumes the church will live whole in its new relational order, and thereby make whole in the surrounding context of reductionism. To live in wholeness is the continuous challenge for the church because its ontology and function are ongoingly challenged by and susceptible to reductionism. The tension and conflict between wholeness and reductionism is ongoing with deep repercussions, which is why Paul settles for nothing less and no substitutes in his completeness (*pleroma*) theology.

In Paul’s transformed ecclesiology, for the church to live in wholeness is for the church to be ongoingly involved relationally with the Spirit for its embodying together “in the bond of wholeness” (Eph 4:3). This bond (*syndesmos*) is the whole relationships binding the church together from inner out as one interdependent body, which Jesus embodied for transformed relationships together both equalized and intimate (Eph 2:14-22). For the church to live in wholeness as God’s new creation family is to be deeply involved together in this new relational order of equalized and intimate relationships. This is what holds together the church in its innermost; and apart from these relationships together with the Spirit, there is just a fragmentary condition of the church—again, even with pervasive ecclesial order. When Paul illuminated “God is not a God of fragmentation but the God of wholeness,” he also made unequivocal that this new church relational order is neither optional nor negotiable. The challenge for Paul’s readers, then, becomes both about his assumption of the new creation ‘already’ and if God’s new creation family is truly the church. Paul’s transformed ecclesiology clearly defines these as inseparable and irreducible. Reductionism would renegotiate church order as sufficient alternative, perhaps even with its reification as the peace of God with irenic identity markers.

In Paul’s ongoing fight for the gospel, wholeness is a theological given for the truth of the gospel, just as Peter, Barnabas and other church leaders experienced this truth from Paul (Gal 2:11-14). They learned a difficult lesson about the experiential truth of the gospel (distinguished from only having a referential or doctrinal truth) that whole relationships together are a theological imperative for the functional significance of the gospel. The polemic Paul framed around the issue between the works of the law and faith is more deeply focused on the underlying conflict between reductionism and wholeness, either reduced ontology and function or whole ontology and function (Gal 2:19-21). Even though some of Paul’s readers may not affirm the relational outcome of the gospel until ‘not yet’ for whole persons and persons together in whole relationship, they still must account for the persons and persons together now in the image and likeness of God. Past, present and future, God is not a God of fragmentation but the God of wholeness. Even now, therefore, human terms and shaping of church life and practice are not sufficient to be of significance to God—despite the certainty of a church’s guiding principles and the long-established tradition of its framework. Reductionism is never an option or substitute for the whole of God and God’s relational whole embodied in the face of Christ, who has “shined on you and been gracious to you...and established the new relationship of wholeness.” This peace—from the God of peace embodied by the *pleroma* of God for the gospel of peace to fulfill the inherent human relational need and resolve the persistent

human problem—must be accounted for by the church now. Doctrine alone is insufficient to account for this peace, tradition has been inadequate, and missional, servant, incarnational, inclusive and postmodern models for church are ambiguous. If the church is not directly dealing with the human shaping of relationships together, then the church is not addressing the human relational condition, both within itself and in the world. In the midst of reductionism, Paul is still exhorting his readers to “*embody whatever is necessary to live the gospel of wholeness*” (Eph 6:15).

For Paul, God indeed is not a God of fragmentation but the God of wholeness, and therefore nothing less and no substitutes of the person and persons together in the new relational order are functionally significant for all of the following: to reciprocally involve the whole of God in distinct relational terms (Eph 2:17-22), to constitute God’s relational whole as family in his relational likeness (Col 3:10-11,15), and to embody the ontological identity and relational belonging that are necessary to fulfill the inherent human relational need and resolve the human problem existing both in the world and even within churches (Eph 3:6,10-12; 4:13-16). In transformed ecclesiology, the church in whole ontology and function signifies only transformed persons *agape*-relationally involved in transformed relationships together integrally equalized and intimate, composing the new relational order for the embodied church alive in wholeness in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole and holy God (Eph 4:23-25)—who is not a God of reductionism promoting ontological simulations and epistemological illusions. The relational messages to churches by Jesus in post-ascension illuminate only this whole of God.

Persons and churches who don’t follow Jesus in relational terms distinct to his intrusive relational path will struggle to have the qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness needed to be new in function and thus to live whole in practice. The path to the new relational order composing his church is indeed a ‘narrow road with a narrow gate’. Yet, its distinct relational terms compose the church in the relationships that respond to, meet and fulfill the innermost desire, need and problem of all human persons since the primordial garden. Paul therefore made conclusive Jesus’ relational work of wholeness to compose his family with any and all persons; and in this relational outcome, the human shaping of persons and relationships are deconstructed, transformed and reconstructed whole in the new relational order that Jesus first embodied.

The Church Reconstructed as Equalizer

When Paul emerged from the Damascus road following Jesus on his intrusive relational path, Paul was transformed by the Spirit so that what Jesus embodied whole unfolded *into* Paul both to constitute the whole of Paul’s person and to compose the wholeness of his theology, which always included composing his practice. Accordingly, what unfolded into Paul directly unfolded into the church to compose the whole of God’s new creation family. Paul therefore made conclusive Jesus’ relational work of wholeness to compose his family with any and all persons; and in this relational outcome, the human shaping of persons and relationships are deconstructed, transformed and reconstructed whole in the new relational order that Jesus first embodied. The church so reconstructed then becomes the only relational outcome that emerges from the gospel of transformation

to wholeness. It is this relational outcome that distinguishes the church on Jesus' intrusive relational path with the qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness both to live whole within itself and to make whole the human relational condition.

And yet this relational outcome in the church is neither readily received from Jesus nor openly embraced by Paul's readers, as if churches have either a better alternative for their condition or are satisfied with the status quo. Jesus into Paul persist to fight for the gospel of wholeness and against any and all reductionism.

The relational outcome and order from the theological dynamics integrated in Paul's completeness theology are distinguished clearly in the church only to the extent of their functional significance in church life and practice (Eph 5:8-14). Yet, functional significance is not as variable as many churches perceive. Paul's transformed ecclesiology should not be confused with an elective-type referendum for local churches to define and determine their own life and practice according to contextualization in their surrounding settings; this would also be contrary to *kathos* in Jesus' defining family prayer. Such construction results in a garden-variety of churches occupied in church building(s), the process of which is both distinct from the growth of God's family and indistinguishable from church by human terms and shaping.

Paul's conjoint fight for the truth of the whole gospel (the theme in Gal) extended to the gospel of wholeness and shifted into the church (the theme in Eph). For Paul's readers to fully understand what Paul fights for and against in Ephesians, we need to understand what he fights for and against in Galatians. The dynamic for both in which Paul is engaged signifies the development of the wholeness in his theology.

Paul's emergence from the Damascus road was the relational outcome of his experiential truth of the gospel—the good news for whole relationship together. The truth of this gospel is clearly illuminated by Paul in Galatians, which is less theological discourse about doctrinal purity and more relational dialogue about function together for wholeness (cf. Gal 2:12-13 and 6:16). The alternative to this gospel is labeled “a different gospel” by Paul (1:6). The subtlety of a different gospel becomes apparent only as the whole gospel is distinguished next to it (Gal 1:7,11-12), and the correct interpretive lens is used to pay attention to this crucial distinction and to ignore other human-shaped distinctions (3:1-3; 5:25-26). The issue of one's interpretive lens is again critical to Paul's polemic for determining what is defined as primary and significant in comparison to what is secondary and insignificant. A church unable to make this distinction becomes aligned to a different gospel by default. Paul identifies unmistakably what the interpretive lens of a different gospel is focused on: “to make a good showing in the flesh” (6:12), “to make a good impression outwardly” (NIV)—for example, for churches to build its reputation and add new members. The term *euprosopeo* (from *euprosopos*, pleasing in appearance) is focused on the person from outer in, whose function may be misleading (even unintentionally or unknowingly), as Peter's and Barnabas' was in their *hypokrisis* (i.e. outward identity inconsistent with inward), or whose function may be specious as was the function of some Christian Jews (6:13).

Paul exposes the use of an outer-in interpretive lens to define the nature and function of a different gospel, the bias of which determines a greater importance of quantitative significance over qualitative significance. Any emphasis on the outer in is problematic for the gospel because its practice can even unknowingly give just the appearance (as in *metaschematizo*) of the gospel without its qualitative relational

significance. Intentional or not, this becomes a reductionist gospel shaped by human terms and engaged by human effort rather than the whole gospel constituted by God's thematic relational response of grace. This is the ongoing conflict between faith (or church) from below and faith (and the church) from above—an antinomy basic to relations between human persons and God (Gal 6:14). The former is focused on human distinctions from outer in with its quantitative interpretive lens, while the latter embraces whole persons from inner out with its qualitative new interpretive lens (5:6; 6:15). Ontology and function in wholeness also encompasses “the Israel of God,” which is not about faith based on human distinction (e.g. the notion of the God of Israel with its identity markers) with its comparative human effort (e.g. observing the torah) but is only God's relational grace constituting the whole of God's new creation family (6:16), as Paul later clarified theologically (Rom 2:28-29).

Paul illuminated in Galatians the experiential truth of this whole gospel that distinguishes it from any ontological simulations and epistemological illusions from reductionism. The qualitative new interpretive lens, which is needed in order to pay close attention to this critical distinction while putting other human-shaped distinctions into deeper focus, is a key for Paul in his fight. This strongly indicates that Galatians needs to be the lens by which to read Paul's letters and his theology in general, and Ephesians and his ecclesiology in particular. As Paul's twofold fight shifted into the church, his readers need to use this qualitative new interpretive lens to understand the functional whole of his ecclesiology for the church to be embodied alive in wholeness as the equalizer from inner out.

When Paul declares that “neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything” (Gal 6:15), the term for “anything” (*tis*) means having significance—which applies to all human distinctions identified earlier (3:28). That is, Paul makes conclusive that all human-shaped distinctions exist (*eimi*, verb of existence) without having significance. Consider this for what composes churches today. For Paul, life and practice in human distinctions is a reduced ontology and function that has no ontologically significant existence, only the new creation exists in the significance of whole ontology and function. Any life and practice shaped by human terms and based on human constructs from human contextualization have no ontological reality and thus no significance, but are only an ontological simulation and epistemological illusion from reductionism. All this needs to be deconstructed in the church in order to emerge transformed.

Paul makes further definitive that the only life and practice with ontological and functional significance is “faith *functioning in reciprocal relational response of trust of one's whole person both to be vulnerably involved with the person of Christ Jesus and to be agape relationally involved in family love with others for whole relationship together*” (5:6). This relational dynamic integrally distinguishes the irreducible value and significance (*ischyo*, “counts for”) of the relationships together of God's new creation family. Paul can be definitive because he was not engaged by Jesus according to Paul's own human-shaped distinction; rather, Jesus intimately embraced Paul in family love and equalized him from inner out to relationally belong in God's family. This was his experiential truth of the whole gospel, the relational outcome of which is now embodied in the whole ontology and function of the church. It is with this lens from Galatians that Paul's transformed ecclesiology emerges to complete the ontological and functional significance of the new creation church as equalizer from the inner out.

The human-shaped distinctions Paul has identified (Gal 3:28; 5:6; 6:15; Col 3:11) always need to be perceived and addressed within the ongoing tension and conflict between wholeness and reductionism. Paul's purpose was not to eliminate all distinctions in the church but to neutralize the influence of such distinctions as primary for defining and determining life and practice. The fact of human differences and the reality of any valid distinctions are only secondary for Paul (1 Cor 12:12-13; Rom 12:3-5), and any meaning and significance given to them beyond being secondary directly fragment human ontology, function and relationships together in the church (e.g. 1 Cor 1:12-13; 3:4-5, 21-23; 4:6-7). Yet, it seems only natural to ascribe value to human differences, which is exactly Paul's polemic addressing the need for redemptive change (1 Cor 3:3-4).

Human differences evoke different responses from persons depending on their interpretive lens. When Paul argues "who sees anything different in you?" (*diakrino*, 1 Cor 4:7), he points to both *who* sees and *what* is seen as different. Who and what are interrelated in a reflexive dynamic: 'what is seen' is determined by a person's interpretive lens, and in reflexive interaction 'who sees' also becomes determined by the nature of what is seen. The issue is between outer in and inner out (as Paul clarified later, 2 Cor 5:12). Whoever sees from outer in perceives outer-in differences as primary by which both others and they are defined and relationships together are determined. Whoever sees from inner out perceives any differences as only secondary, which thus neither define others and themselves nor determine their relationships together. Paul is confident in his polemic that any differences used "to treat persons differently by making distinctions" (*diakrino*) are the terms of human constructs—which either create further value differences from those differences, or boast about differences as their own when in fact they were only given to them by God. By the inescapable nature of a comparative process, these comparative values construct a deficit model (noted earlier), which is used for differential treatment of others who are different as being essentially less (*diakrino*). The critical issue with *diakrino* then is the human shaping of relationships together signifying the human condition—whether reflected, reinforced or sustained by church practice. Paul knows from his own relational involvement with God (Phil 3:4-9) that *diakrino* is of no significance to God and contrary to how God functions, and thus is in conflict with the integral basis determining the church's life and practice (as Peter testified, Acts 15:9).

Therefore, *diakrino* has no place or function in the new creation church embodied in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God. **What is the functional significance of the church without *diakrino*?**

When Paul integrally defined the relational process of equalizing persons, with this new he exposed the human condition of persons in human distinctions valued as less (Eph 2:11-12). This involved the human shaping of relationships together that resulted in relational separation or distance ("far off," *makros*, 2:13, cf. Isa 57:19). Theirs was a relational condition "to be apart" from God's relational whole—that could include those in church gatherings—who were pursued in family love by Christ to be equalized and made whole together in God's family (2:13-22). The contrast between the relational condition "to be apart" and made whole together parallels the relational condition of the temple prior to Jesus' final entry into Jerusalem and after those closing days. God's house had been stratified in the relational condition "to be apart" that denied access to persons of certain distinctions; this relational condition, after Jesus' redemptive cleansing, was

made whole as “a house of prayer for all nations” (Mk 11:15-17; cf. Isa 56:3-8). By his relational process of family love equalizing persons to be made whole together, Jesus shifted the temple from the outer in to its deeper significance inner out (1 Cor 3:16), in which the whole of God is intimately present and relationally involved to embody the church as God’s whole family together (Eph 2:18-22; Rom 8:9,14; cf. Jn 14:23; 17:21-23,26).

There is a direct correlation between treating persons differently by making distinctions (*diakrino*) and who has equal access and intimate involvement in the church. The relational process of family love equalizing persons is an inner-out dynamic incompatible with *diakrino*, because treating persons differently by making distinctions is an outer-in dynamic that limits access and creates barriers to intimate relationships together for those having the distinction of being less. These limits and barriers are compounded by the threat of vulnerability to closer relationships, which is also a major motivation for maintaining such distinctions in church, including the academy. Paul makes unequivocal that these are limits and barriers from which Jesus redeemed persons to be equalized and reconciled together without human-shaped distinctions in order to be made whole in God’s family (Eph 2:14-16). For the church to have limits on accessibility based on distinctions, and barriers to intimate involvement due to distinctions, even unintentionally out of tradition or from the influence of culture, is to fragment God’s relational whole and to be reduced in ontology and function. This often subtle church practice renders Christ’s salvific work of wholeness incomplete and thereby lacking its relational significance to fulfill the inherent human relational need and resolve the human relational problem “to be apart” existing in the church.

Making distinctions and treating persons differently are inseparable because human-shaped distinctions are rooted in a comparative process of more-or-less value, which engages relationships accordingly by treating persons differently (cf. Paul’s polemic, 2 Cor 10-12). The primacy of ‘relationship together involving the whole person’ is replaced by relationships shaped by human distinctions. Intentional or not, this is the dynamic that, for example, church leaders promote by emphasizing roles and gifts, and church members reinforce by treating leadership and themselves based on roles and gifts (e.g. 1 Cor 1:12; 3:5-7). In this dynamic, how well persons measure up to those expectations determines their position and influence in church. This often well-intentioned mutual engagement functionally (not theologically) limits those in a deficit position from full access in a church, which obviously creates vertical barriers to intimate relationships together. Further, since this dynamic is an outer-in process of engagement, there is also ongoing horizontal distance precluding intimate involvement together, for example, even among church leaders. The threat Jesus created with ‘relationship together involving the whole person’ is to this relational condition. This apparently acceptable relational distance in churches makes for a comfortable arrangement with minimal accountability, that is, for a gathering of relational-epistemic orphans, but not for God’s new creation family “in the bond of wholeness” (Eph 4:3). The contrast for Paul is between the counter-relational nature of outer-in function shaped by human terms and the relational nature of inner-out function in likeness of God.

In Paul’s transformed ecclesiology, the bond of wholeness with the Spirit is embodied inner-out function of whole persons who relationally submit to one another in family love to be intimately involved in relationships together without the limits, barriers

or comforts of human-shaped distinctions—signifying relationships without the veil. This relational process of equalizing from inner out needs to be distinguished in the experiential truth of church ontology and function, and not remain in doctrinal truth or as a doctrinal statement of intention, or else its experiential reality will be elusive. When doctrine causes an impasse, its function (not necessarily its theology) must be deconstructed for the relational process to unfold. This experiential truth happens only when the church is made whole by reciprocal relationship with the Spirit in the functional significance of four key dynamics, which reconstruct the church as equalizer. These key dynamics constitute the church to be embodied alive in wholeness in the qualitative image of God and to live ongoingly in whole relationship together in the relational likeness of the whole of God.

Two of these keys for the church necessitate structural and contextual dynamics and the other two involve imperatives for individual and relational dynamics. In each dynamic, redemptive changes are necessary to go from a mere gathering of individuals to the new creation church family—changes that overlap and interact with the other key dynamics.

First Key Dynamic: *the structural dynamic of access.* While access can be perceived from outer in as a static condition of a church structured with merely an “open-door policy,” or with a ‘Welcome’ sign to indicate its good intentions, access from the inner out of God’s relational context and process of family is dynamic and includes relational involvement (not just a “welcome” greeting)—implied, for example, in Jesus’ transformation of the temple for prayer accessible by all. When Paul made Christ’s salvific work of wholeness conclusive for the church, he clarified that all persons without distinctions “have access in one Spirit to the Father” (Eph 2:18) for relational involvement together “in boldness and confidence” (3:12) as persons who have been equalized for intimate relationships together as God’s family (2:19-22; cf. Gal 4:4-7). Access, therefore, is the structural dynamic of the church without the stratifying barriers of *diakrino*, which is congruent with Christ’s relational work of wholeness (Eph 2:14-17) and is in relational likeness to God (Acts 15:9; Col 3:10-11).

The issue of access is deeply rooted in human history. Peter himself struggled with his interpretive framework (*phronema*) and lens (*phroneo*) shaped by his tradition, whose *diakrino* denied access to those of Gentile distinction. Even after Jesus changed his theology (Acts 10:9-16), Peter struggled to change from the practice of his tradition because of his emotional investment and likely perception of losing something related to the privilege, prestige and power of having access. Such loss may not become apparent until placed in a lower position. Human-shaped distinctions signify having advantage in comparative relations, the absence of which precludes that advantage. After the primordial garden, the human relational condition “to be apart” became an intentional goal of human effort to secure advantage and maintain self-preservation—the ‘survival of the fittest’ syndrome masked even by religious faith. The specific resources for this relational advantage may vary from one historical context to another (cf. even the works of the law and justification by faith). Yet, privilege, prestige and power are the basic underlying issues over which these relational struggles of inequality are engaged—whether the context is family, social, economic, political or even within or among churches. Any aspects of privilege, prestige and power are advantages (and benefits) that

many persons are reluctant to share, much less give up, if the perception (unreal or not) means for them to be in a position of *less*. The control of this distribution is threatened by equal access.

The unavoidable reality for churches is that human-shaped distinctions create and maintain advantage, which certainly fragments relationships together. Inescapably then in church practice, by their very nature human distinctions are an outer-in dynamic emerging from reduced ontology and function, which in itself already diminishes, minimalizes and fragments God's relational whole (cf. the disparity in the early church, Acts 6:1). Access, however, is an inner-out dynamic signifying the relational dynamic and qualitative involvement of grace. That is, the functional significance of access is for all persons to be defined from inner out and not to be treated differently from outer in (including church leaders), in order to have the relational opportunity to be involved with God for their redemption from the human struggle of reductionism, and thereby to be equalized and intimately reconciled together to fulfill their inherent human relational need in God's relational whole (as Paul clarifies in his polemic, Gal 3:26-29). Equal access does not threaten personhood and wholeness for the church, but is a necessary key dynamic for their qualitative development whole-ly from inner out. Therefore, for a church to engage the necessary redemptive change that reconstructs its practice and makes functionally significant 'access without *diakrino*' is relationally specific to what whole-ly embodies church life and practice for only this relational purpose: the ongoing relational involvement with persons who are different, in order for them also to receive equally and experience intimately the ontological identity and relational belonging to the whole of God's new creation family.

This structural dynamic flows directly to the contextual dynamic.

Second Key Dynamic: *the contextual dynamic of reconciliation absorbing human differences and valid distinctions.* This is not a contradiction of the church without *diakrino*, but the acknowledgement of the fact of differences in human makeup and the reality of valid distinctions given by God, without the church engaging in *diakrino*. The ancient Mediterranean world of Paul's time was a diversity of both human differences and human-shaped distinctions. Yet, prior to its diaspora due to persecution (Acts 8), the early church community was a mostly homogeneous group who limited others who were different from access to be included in their house churches, table fellowships and community identity (e.g. Acts 6:1). Despite a missional program to the surrounding diversity, church practice had yet to relationally involve the reconciliation dynamic of family love to take in those persons and absorb (not dissolve) their differences, that is, on a secondary level without using any human differences (notably of the dominant group) to determine the primary level of church ontology and function (as Paul made conclusive, Col 3:15). This purposeful relational involvement necessitates a major contextual change in the church, especially for a homogeneous gathering. Paul was pivotal in bringing such redemptive change to the church (e.g. 1 Cor 11:17-22; Gal 2:1-10).

Paul delineates a twofold reconciliation dynamic constituted by God's relational process of family love. On the one hand, family love dissolves human-shaped distinctions and eliminates *diakrino*. Equally important, on the other hand, family love absorbs most human differences into the primacy of relationships together, without dissolving or assimilating those differences into a dominant framework (Rom 12:4-5). The twofold

nature of this reconciliation dynamic of family love is the functional significance of Paul's integrated fight against reductionism and for wholeness (1 Cor 12:12-13). Yet, in order to be God's relational whole, it is not adequate to include persons of difference for the purpose of diversity (e.g. to have a multicultural church). The relational process of family love extends relational involvement to those who are different, takes in and vulnerably embraces them in their difference to relationally belong integrally to the church family. This is the dynamic made essential by Paul for the church's "unity of the Spirit in the bond of wholeness" (Eph 4:3,16).

This reconciliation dynamic signifies the contextual change necessary for the church to be ongoingly involved in the relational process of absorbing human differences into the church without dissolving or assimilating those differences. Churches typically are not constructed with this design. What is needed, therefore, is a church's willingness to change to adjust to differences and even to adopt some differences, all of which are only compatible with God's relational whole and congruent with God's relational terms. Redemptive change also involves the reflexive interaction between these contextual and structural dynamics for the necessary reconstruction of church to become the equalizer in its new relational order.

In addition, just as Peter was chastened by Christ in his interpretive framework and theology, and humbled by Paul, making this contextual change functional in the church may require us to humbly accept the limitations of our current interpretive framework (*phronema*) and lens (*phroneo*) to understand the significance of differences to the whole of God as well as of those in the whole and holy God. It also requires us to honestly account for any outer-in bias necessitating a whole *phronema* and a qualitative *phroneo* (as Paul delineated, Eph 4:22-25). This humility and honesty are essential for the church's contextual dynamic of reconciliation to be of functional significance to absorb human differences into church life and practice as family together (cf. Eph 4:2).

The importance of these structural and contextual dynamics for the church to be whole as the equalizer from inner out also directly involve the other two key dynamics. These are dynamics for the individual person and our relationships. The four dynamics strongly interact together in reflexive relationship that suggests no set order of their development and function. Yet, there is a clear flow to each pair of dynamics—for example, there has to be access before differences can be absorbed—while in crucial and practical ways the latter pair will determine the extent and significance of the former's function.

Third Key Dynamic: *the person's inner-out response of freedom, faith and love to others' differences.* When a person is faced with differences in others, there is invariably some degree of tension for that person, with awareness of it or not. The tension signifies the engagement of our provincial context or 'our little world' we live in—that which is constructed from the limitations of the person's perceptual-interpretive framework and shaped by culture in the surrounding context, which is why humbly accepting its limits and honestly accounting for our bias are needed for the reconciliation dynamic to be whole together. What does a person(s) do with those differences in that relational context? The structural and contextual dynamics can be invoked, yet their functional significance interacts with and will ultimately be determined by the individual person's

response, composed in vulnerable relational terms and not by mere referential terms enhanced even with good intentions.

The person's response will emerge either from outer in or inner out. What differences we pay attention to and ignore from our interpretive lens are critical to understand for the following ongoing interrelated issues: first, what we depend on to define our person and maintain our identity; then, on this basis, how we engage relationships in these diverse conditions; and, thus, based on these two issues what level of relationship we engage in within the church. These are inescapable issues that each person must address as an individual and be accountable for, on the one hand, while the church community must account for these in practice at the same time.

Paul demonstrated the person's inner-out response to others' differences that is necessary both to be a whole person and to be involved in whole relationship together. In his fight for the gospel, Paul is also always fighting against reductionism. One aspect of the relational outcome of the gospel is the freedom that comes from being redeemed. Yet, for Paul the whole of the gospel is not a truncated soteriology but the whole relational outcome of *pleroma* soteriology. He composes Christian freedom in the relational context of God's relational whole so that the relational purpose of Christian freedom and its functional significance would not be diminished, minimalized or abused in reductionism (Gal 5:1,13; 1 Cor 8:9). From this interpretive framework and lens, Paul highlights his own liberty and the nature of his relational response to others' differences (1 Cor 9:19-23). He deeply engaged the relational dynamic of family love in the process of submitting his whole person to those persons, simply declaring "I have become all things to all people" (v.22). Clearly, by his statement Paul is not illustrating what to do with the tension in those situations created by human differences and how to handle those differences. Further clarification is needed, however, since his apparent posture can be perceived in different ways, either negatively or positively.

Given his freedom, Paul was neither obligated nor coerced to function in what appears to be an absence of self-identity. His response also seems to contradict his relational imperative to "Live as children of light" (Eph 5:8). Yet, in terms of the three unavoidable issues for all practice (noted above), the person Paul presented to others of difference was not a variable personality who has no clear sense of his real identity (e.g. as light). Nor was Paul communicating to them a message of assimilating to their terms, and to try to fit into their level of relationship or even masquerade in the context of their differences. Contrary to these reductionist practices, Paul engaged in practices of wholeness. Since Paul did not define his person in quantitative terms from the outer in, he was free to exercise who he was from inner out and to decisively present his whole person to others even in the context of any and all of their differences—which always remained in secondary distinction from the primary. He communicated to them a confidence and trust in the whole person he was from inner out, the integrity of which would not be compromised by involvement with them in their difference and could be counted on by them to be that whole person in his face-to-face involvement with them. His involvement with them went deeper than the level of their differences and freely responded in the relational trust with the Spirit (the relational involvement of triangulation) to submit his whole person to them in their differences for the relational involvement of family love needed for the relational purpose "that I might by all means save some" (v.22). Paul submits his whole person to them in family love not for the mere

outcome of a truncated soteriology of only being saved *from* but for the relational outcome of also being saved *to* gained from “the *whole* gospel so that I may share in its blessings of *whole relationship together as family*” (v.23).

In the face of others’ differences, Paul neither distanced himself from them by remaining in the province of ‘his little world’, nor did he try to control them to assimilate and fit into his world and the comforts of his framework. In contrast, he acted in the relational trust of faith to venture out of his old world and beyond the limitations that any old interpretive framework imposes on personness and relationships in order to illuminate the wholeness of God in the midst of reductionism. In this relational process, he also illuminated the relational need of the person and persons together as church to have contextual sensitivity and responsiveness to others’ differences, without reducing their own ontological identity of who and whose they are. Clearly, Paul demonstrated the necessary response of the whole person from inner out to those differences in order to engage those persons in the reconciliation dynamic of family love for their experience in the relational whole of God’s family. Yet, Paul’s response also demonstrated the needed changes within the individual person involving redemptive change (old “worlds,” frameworks and practices dying and the new rising). This process addresses in oneself any outer-in ontology and function needing to be transformed from inner out (*metamorphoo*, as Paul delineated, Rom 12:2-3). This transformation from outer in to inner out not only frees the relational process for the new creation but directly leads to its embodying in the new relational order. Redemptive change must antecede and prevail in the relational process leading to reconciliation to the whole of God’s new creation family.

In the freedom of the person’s inner-out response to submit one’s whole person to others in family love, the act of submitting becomes a reductionism-issue when it is obligated or coerced apart from freedom. Freedom itself, however, becomes reductionist when it is only the means for self-autonomy, self-determination or self-justification, which are the substitutes from reductionism. Paul clarified that God never redeems us to be free for this end (Gal 5:1,13; cf. 1 Cor 7:35). God frees us from reductionism to be whole (1 Cor 10:23-24). Redemption by Christ and what he saves *from* are inseparable from reconciliation and what he saves *to*. The integral function of redemptive reconciliation is the whole (nonnegotiable) relational process of the whole (untruncated) relational outcome of the whole (unfragmented) gospel. Therefore, it is crucial for our understanding of the inseparable functions of personness and human relationships, both within the church and in the world, to understand that deeply implicit in the wholeness of Christian freedom is being redeemed from those matters causing distance, barriers and separation in relationships—specifically in the relational condition “to be apart” from whole relationship together, which if not responded to from inner out leaves the inherent human relational need unfulfilled even within churches.

In this dynamic for personness, for example, can women or slaves submit their persons without falling into reduced ontology and function? Paul’s prescriptions and directives for them can be taken or applied in the negative if separated from the function of relationships in wholeness together from the inner out (discussed shortly). Personness is an inner-out function of the individual person always in relationship with other persons (different or not), never in isolation regardless of the extent of freedom the individual person has. Therefore, whether women and slaves are those responded to in their difference or are the persons responding without being determined by their difference, the

focus for Paul always centers on wholeness for persons in relationship together in the qualitative image and relational likeness of God.

Paul's exercise of freedom in submitting his whole person to others in family love was constituted by the convergence of the theological dynamics of complete Christology in full soteriology with whole pneumatology for transformed ecclesiology to be involved in the relationships together necessary to embody the church as equalizer from inner out. This is what Paul condenses in the gospel of transformation to wholeness vulnerably embodied in the face of Christ, which has the relational outcome 'already' of only whole persons *agape*-relationally involved in whole relationships together.

The integral function of whole persons and whole relationships together are deeply integrated, and their interaction must by their nature emerge from inner out. For the person and persons together as church to have the functional significance of being equalized in intimate relationships, their ontology and function need to be whole from inner out—nothing less and no substitutes for the person and for relationships together. This inner-out process leads us from the key dynamic for the individual to its interaction with the key dynamic for relationships.

Fourth Key Dynamic: *relationships engaged vulnerably with others (different or not) by deepening involvement from inner out.* The dynamic engaged within individual persons extends to their relationships. What Paul defined as his whole person's inner-out response—"I have become all things to all people"—also defines his relational involvement with them by making his whole person vulnerable from inner out—"I have made my person vulnerable to all human differences in order for the inner-out relational involvement with all persons." This decision to engage relationships vulnerably must be a free choice made with relational trust and in family love because there are risks and consequences for such involvement. On the one hand, the consequences revolve around one's person being rejected or rendered insignificant. The risks, on the other hand, are twofold, which involves either losing something (e.g. the stability of 'our little world', the certainty of our interpretive framework, the reliability of how we do relationships) or being challenged to change (e.g. the state of one's world, the focus of one's interpretive lens and mindset, one's established way of doing relationships). The dynamic of 'losing something-challenged to change' is an ongoing issue in all relationships, and the extent of the risks depends on their perception from outer in or from inner out. For Paul, this is always the tension between reductionism and wholeness, that is, between relationships fragmented by limited involvement from outer in and relationships made whole by deepening involvement from inner out. Regardless of the consequences, Paul took responsibility for living whole in relationships for the inner-out involvement necessary to make relationships whole together, because the twofold risks were not of significance in wholeness but only in reductionism (cf. his personal assessment, Phil 3:7-9; also his challenge to Philemon).

Later, Paul appeared to qualify the extent of his vulnerable involvement in relationships by stating "I try to please everyone in everything" (1 Cor 10:33). The implication of this could be simply to do whatever others want, thereby pleasing all and not offending anyone (10:32)—obviously an unattainable goal that doesn't keep some persons from trying, Paul not among them. Paul would not be vulnerable in relationships

with this kind of involvement. *Aresko* means to please, make one inclined to, or to be content with. This may involve doing either what others *want* or what they *need*. Paul is not trying to look good before others for his own benefit (*symphoros*, 10:33). Rather he vulnerably engages them with the relational involvement from inner out that they need (not necessarily want) for all their benefit “so that they may be saved *to whole relationship together in God’s family*.” In his statement, Paul does not qualify the *extent* of his vulnerable involvement in relationship with others by safely giving them what they want. He qualifies only the *depth* of his vulnerable involvement by lovingly giving them what they need to be whole, even if they reject his whole person or try to render his whole function as insignificant (cf. 2 Cor 12:15).

This deepening relational involvement from inner out to vulnerably engage others in relationship with one’s whole person certainly necessitates redemptive change from our prevailing ways of doing relationships, including from a normative church interpretive lens of what is paid attention to and ignored in church gatherings and relationships together. If the vulnerability of family love is to be engaged, whether by the individual person or persons together as church, the concern cannot be about the issue of losing something—something that has no significance to wholeness. The focus on such risks will be constraining, if not controlling, and render both person and church to reduced ontology and function, hereby exposing the greater risk of being challenged to change and their need for it. Faith as relational trust in ongoing reciprocal relationship with the Spirit is critical for freeing us to determine what is primary to embrace in church life and practice and what we need to relinquish control over “for the unity of the Spirit in the bond of wholeness” (Eph 4:3; Gal 5:16,25). The bond of wholeness by its nature requires change in us: individual, relational, structural and contextual changes. With these redemptive changes for person and church, the integral function of redemptive reconciliation can emerge in family love for vulnerable engagement of others (different or not) in relationships together from inner out. Such reconstruction by design becomes, lives and makes whole in the new relational order.

The dynamic flow of these four key dynamics is the dynamic of wholeness composing the experiential truth of the church’s ontology and function as equalizer from inner out. In ongoing tension and conflict with the church in the bond of wholeness is reductionism seeking to influence every level of the church—individuals, relationships, its structure and context. For Paul, this is the given battle ongoingly extended into the church, against which reductionism must be exposed, confronted and made whole by redemptive change at every level of the church. While Paul presupposes the need for redemptive change given the pervasive influence of reductionism, he never assumes the redemptive-change outcome of the new emerging without the reciprocal relational involvement of the Spirit (2 Cor 3:17-18; Gal 5:16; 6:8; Rom 8:6; Eph 3:16). The reciprocal nature of the Spirit’s relational involvement makes change an open question. These redemptive changes at all levels of the church certainly do not occur smoothly or in linear order, as Paul’s dealings with Peter and Philemon demonstrate. The interaction between the four key dynamics frequently influences how the functional significance of one key dynamic may be contingent on the redemptive change made necessary by another key dynamic. Both Peter and Philemon could not practice church-without-*diakrino* or reconciliation absorbing differences until they were free in their own persons

to be vulnerable from inner out with others, notably in Jew-Gentile relations and with slaves.

The relational outcome ‘already’ of the church as equalizer, however, becomes problematic in Paul’s own corpus if his position on slaves and women is not clarified. Whole understanding of Paul is needed on these matters, which can be gained from discussion of the following questions.

Given Paul’s emphasis on the relational outcome ‘already’ of God’s relational response to the human condition, how is Paul’s discourse on slaves congruent with this relational outcome, and his directives for them compatible with its function in transformed relationships together?

As we discuss slaves in this question, and women in the next question, the issue of freedom and its determinative dynamic of redemption are basic to both. In Paul’s completeness theology, part of the outcome of redemption is to be free, but it cannot end here or the outcome becomes fragmentary and reduced in human ontology and function. The full outcome of redemption is a relational outcome. Redemption in Christ is not about just being set free and Christian freedom is not the freedom to be free—that is, for self-autonomy, self-determination, or even a variation of self-justification. We are redeemed to be made whole in ontology and function for the primacy of relationship together with the whole of God and with God’s whole family, which is the relationship that the Creator originally created in God’s likeness and that the whole of God redemptively reconciles in the new creation.

Paul’s relational discourse on slaves (and women) is from this framework within this context, by which his theological dialogue must be interpreted and understood. Otherwise, his readers are left with only the human contexts of Paul’s situations to frame his dialogue with slaves, and as a result will go no further and deeper into his framework in the context of relationship with God. This is the primary context and only relational purpose into which Paul contextualizes these theological issues and their human shaping.

There are two levels of slavery for Paul:

1. Slavery embedded in social conditions, thus from outer in (cf. 1 Tim 6:1).
2. Slavery embodied in the human condition, thus from inner out (cf. Rom 6:6).

These two levels interact, with the first emerging from the second and the first confirming or reinforcing the second. Paul always contextualizes level one in the workings of level two. Therefore, Paul always gives greater priority to level two over the first, because two underlies one and is necessary to be redeemed in order for level one to have full redemption. Yet, in what appears contrary to his directives for slaves in level one, Paul neither ignores this level nor accepts it due to its underlying condition in the sin of reductionism.

Paul addressed all sin of reductionism (slavery in both levels, cf. Phlm) while he was focused on being whole, God’s relational whole on God’s relational terms. This integral dynamic is critical to Paul’s discourse. Redemption is neither an end in itself for slaves nor sufficient to deal with the sin of reductionism in the human condition involved in slavery. Paul is unequivocal that we are not redeemed just to be free but for whole

relationships together (Gal 5:1, 13-14; cf. 1 Cor 8:9-13). Relationships together necessitate a process of reconciliation to be in conjoint function with redemption for the redemptive reconciliation required for relationships together to be whole on God's qualitative relational terms from inner out, not shaped by human terms from outer in (cf. Rom 14:13-19). Paul neither pursues redemption over reconciliation nor does he sacrifice reconciliation for the sake of redemption since there cannot be wholeness for slaves and their relationships without this reconciliation. These are critical distinctions to make to guide all efforts in helping persons in such defining situations.

When Paul directs slaves in the social conditions of slavery, who are also part of the church, to submit to their masters (Col 3:22-24; Eph 6:5-7; 1 Tim 6:1-2; Tit 2:9-10; cf. for masters, Col 4:1; Eph 6:9), he did not define an obligation (or duty, *opheilo*) or an ethical framework for slaves to conform to. Paul is focused on slaves being whole and the relational outcome of whole relationship together for slaves; this was always primary for Paul. That is, he calls for their congruity from inner out with the ontological identity of both who they are and whose they are, without outer-in distinctions defining their persons. And he takes them further and deeper into their whole function on God's qualitative relational terms to live whole together and even to make whole in the world, without outer-in terms and circumstances in the surrounding context determining their primary life and function. Paul's implied message to slaves is that freedom does not guarantee their whole ontology and function, nor does being a social-level slave preclude it.

Since Paul defines the ontological identity of God's new creation family without outer-in distinctions like "slave or free" (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11), and did not determine its function by situations and circumstances, he did not give those matters priority over being God's relational whole. Therefore, as discussed above about Philemon and Onesimus, Paul's primary focus was not on the social conditions of slavery but on the primacy of a slave's redemptive outcome of relational belonging and ontological identity in God's family, and on the redemptive reconciliation of slavery's human condition necessary for persons like Philemon and Onesimus to be equalized brothers in this new family composed in the new relational order. This process of equalization certainly then will have direct relational implications for the social level of slavery, but even more important for Paul was his intended purpose for social-level slaves in whole ontology and function to plant the seeds, cultivate and even grow whole relationships together, first within the church and then in the surrounding context in order for these whole persons to be further composing the new relational order. It is imperative for all persons, in slave-like situations or not, to not allow (even by default) our situations to define our persons and determine our relationships by these secondary matters, and thereby be reduced in the primacy of whole ontology and function. No doubt this affects and challenges women more than other persons.

Equally important, if not more, how are Paul's new creation view of women and his prescriptions for them in agreement, and how are his directives compatible for the relational outcome of God's new creation family?

The above discussion on slaves extends in direct application to women, who likely occupy the lowest position in any human distinction. I have purposefully placed

this discussion on the church as equalizer for last, but not since women have traditionally occupied last place. Rather because, in my opinion, women signify the most consistent and widespread presence of reduced human ontology and function in the history of human contextualization, this condition is inevitable for all persons to address for our wholeness. Theological discourse and pronouncements have not significantly changed the embodiment of this human condition and its human shaping of relationships, perhaps due to ignoring its enslavement. Paul has been placed at the center of this human divide that fragments the church and renders God's family "to be apart" from being whole in likeness of the relational whole of God—a condition existing knowingly or unknowingly, intentionally or unintentionally, nevertheless an existing condition today still needing to be deconstructed, transformed and reconstructed to be whole together in the new relational order. As long as this condition of reduced human ontology and function continues, the relational outcome 'already' will not be our experiential truth and reality until 'not yet'. Any significant change will require challenging the referentialization of the communicative word from God that Paul was responsible to *pleroo* for the church's wholeness—his family *oikonomia* signifying the *pleroma* of God into Paul (Col 1:25).

Paul would dispute how his relational discourse on women has been interpreted; he would expose and confront the reductionism underlying such interpretation and application for the reduced ontology and function of women—for example, by both complementarians and egalitarians. Yet, his prescriptions and directives for women will have to be clarified in order for Paul to be vindicated, his theological anthropology affirmed and his complete ecclesiology in transformed relationships together to be the experiential truth 'already'.

The issue of Christian freedom continues in Paul's relational discourse, which he always frames, defines and determines by the dynamic of redemption and baptism into Christ. Just as Paul defined for slaves, the importance of women having freedom is never about self-autonomy and self-determination or self-justification, but only to be whole in ontology and function, not yoked to reduced ontology and function (Gal 5:1). This also applies to men, and any other classification of persons. The issues of freedom and of wholeness are critically interrelated for Paul; and, as was discussed earlier for slaves, having freedom is no guarantee of whole ontology and function. The dynamic of redemption and baptism into Christ is the functional bridge between freedom and wholeness. Paul makes this link definitive.

From the interpretive lens of his theological framework, Paul's definitive view of women is that "there is no longer male and female" (Gal 3:28). His perception could be taken as contrary to the reality of creation, yet Paul is not implying that there are no physical and biological differences between the genders, and thus that no distinctions should be seen. Paul's view is this definitive declaration: In the dynamic of baptism into Christ, the redemptive outcome is the human ontology freed from being defined and the human function freed from being determined by the gender differences of any kind shaped or constructed by human terms, whether in the surrounding context or even within churches (certainly from a reduced theological anthropology). These human differences are used to create distinctions that reduce the whole human ontology and function of those baptized into Christ's death and raised with him by the Spirit in the whole image and likeness of creator God (Col 3:10-11; 2 Cor 3:18).

As Paul clearly distinguishes, the person emerging from baptism is a new creation, whose ontology and function from inner out cannot be defined and determined by any differences and distinctions from outer in, not even by one's gifts or role in the church. This transformation from inner out in the redemptive change to whole human ontology and function also integrally involves reconciliation to the whole of God in God's family, which is constituted in the process of redemptive reconciliation to the transformed relationships together both intimate and equalized (Eph 2:14-22). As with slaves, Paul's concern for women is their whole ontology and function and the relational outcome of whole relationship together without both distinctions and the veil, of which women are an integral part and of whose function women are the key in the vulnerable relational process composing the new relational order. Yet, it has been difficult for Paul's readers (both women and men) to reconcile his decisive view of women with his prescriptions and directives for them.

In his relational discourse, Paul continues to integrate Christian freedom with redemption, which is inseparably conjoined with reconciliation. Also in his theological dialogue, Paul integrates the redemptive-reconciliation dynamic with the creation narrative for the redemptive outcome in the image and likeness of God. This convergence features deeply in his main directives for women, and this convergence must be accounted for to understand where Paul is coming from in his relational discourse. Reviewing hermeneutic factors in interpreting Paul, though he speaks *in* a human context involving women and speaks *to* their human context, Paul is not speaking *from* a human context. His prescriptions and directives for women are contextualized beyond those human contexts to his involvement directly in God's relational context and process. These directives emerged *in* human contexts, along with his letters, but were composed *from* the further and deeper context of the whole of God—which is the significance of Paul's convergence I will attempt to account for in this limited discussion.

There are two main directives representative of Paul's relational discourse with women and his theological discourse in relational terms (not referential) for all persons: 1 Corinthians 11:3-16 and 1 Timothy 2:8-15.

1 Corinthians 11:3-16

This section of Paul's letter must be read in the full context of his letter. From the beginning Paul was dealing with the reductionist practices fragmenting this church (1:10-15). While confronting these persons in family love throughout the letter, in fairness to them and for their encouragement Paul puts their context into a larger picture of God's people (10:1-11) and their practices into the deeper process of the dynamic of redemption and baptism into Christ (10:16-17). This exposed the sin of reductionism common not only in Israel's history but the history of humankind ("common to everyone," 10:13). Despite its normative character and structural nature, human contextualization and its common practices are incompatible with God's (10:21); therefore, Christian freedom must function on God's relational terms, not human terms (10:23-24, 31-33).

On this basis, Paul's relational discourse with women continues, with its convergence with the creation narrative. Earlier in his letter, Paul had defined conclusively for this fragmented church: "Nothing beyond what is written,' so that none

of you will be puffed up in favor of one against another” (4:6). The comparative dynamic Paul magnifies here is the natural relational consequence of reduced human ontology and function defined from outer in and determined by human terms, that is, beyond God’s qualitative relational terms revealed in God’s communicative word written in Scripture. In this section on women, Paul restores the focus to what is written in the creation narrative in order to illuminate the relational outcome from the dynamic of redemption and baptism into Christ (1 Cor 10:16-17; 12:13). If the creation narrative does not converge with this dynamic in the intended focus of Paul’s interpretive lens, then the relational outcome will be different for Paul’s readers, and neither compatible with his relational discourse nor congruent with his theological dialogue.

Paul’s focus can be misleading due to the explicit aspects he highlights in the creation narrative, namely, chronological or functional order and quantitative significance. Yet, Paul’s focus remained on God’s communicative action in the words written, without disembodied those relational words in the narrative, which then would be essentially to go beyond what is written, notably by narrowing it down through referentialization and thereby shaping what is written beyond what God communicated..

In chronological and functional order, Christ participated in the creation of all things and its whole, as Paul later made definitive in the cosmology of his theological systemic framework (Col 1:16-17). Thus, “Christ is the head [*kephale*, principal or first] of every *created* man” (1 Cor 11:3). The embodied Christ also became the *kephale* “over all things for the church” (Eph 1:22) and the first to complete the dynamic of redemptive reconciliation as its functional key (Col 1:18). Whether Paul combines the embodied Christ with creator Christ as the *kephale* of man is not clear in 1 Cor 11:3. Conversely, the creator Christ certainly has the qualitative significance of the embodied Christ, yet highlighting the chronological-functional order has a different emphasis in this context. This quantitative difference is confirmed by “the head of Christ” is God. Since the Creator (the Father and the Son with the Spirit) precedes the creation, creator Christ is obviously first in order before Adam. It follows that Adam came first in the creation narrative before Eve, thus this husband (or man, *aner*) was created before his wife (or woman, *gyne*). This is only a quantitative significance Paul is highlighting. If Christ later became God, then there would be a qualitative significance to “God is the head of Christ.” Christ as the embodied *pleroma* of God was neither less than God nor subordinate to God, yet in functional order the Son followed and fulfilled what the Father initiated to love us downward (discussed in chap. 5, cf. Jn 6:38-39; Acts 13:32-33). These functional aspects must be understood in their whole context, or they become fragmentary and thus used to support reducing persons and relationships both within the whole of God and in the church.

The quantitative significance of this chronological-functional order has been misinterpreted by a different lens than Paul’s and misused apart from his intended purpose by concerns for the sake of self-autonomy, self-determination, and even self-justification efforts—which have reduced human ontology and function and fragment relationships together. Paul expands on the quantitative significance with application to prayer and whether the head should have a covering or not (11:4-7). The quantitative significance of head coverings during prayer is connected by Paul to the chronological-functional order in creation. While such practice is actually secondary (11:16), Paul uses it to illustrate an underlying issue. Apparently, for a man to cover his head implied his

independence from the creative order, and was to void or deny that Christ is the head, who created man in the image and glory of God (11:7). For a woman to be uncovered implies her independence from the creative order, implying her self-determination, of which in Paul's view she needed to be purified (11:6; cf. Lev 14:8) because she was created from the qualitative substance of the first human person in the same image and glory of God (11:7). Her glory cannot be reduced to being "the glory of man" but is nothing less and no substitutes of the man's glory, that is, in the same image and glory of God. This differentiation of glory is critical for understanding the basis used for defining gender ontology and, more likely, for determining gender function in reductionism or wholeness. Yet, it would also be helpful for women to have for themselves a clear basis (*exousia*) for distinguishing their whole ontology and function to fully understand their position and purpose in the created order (as angels needed, 11:10), which then would compose their place in the new relational order.

A further differentiation is also critical to Paul's relational discourse. The glory of God tended to be referentialized for a more quantitative focus in Hebrew Scripture and quantitative significance for Israel. The focus and significance of God's glory deepened to its full qualitative and relational depth in the vulnerably revealed face of Christ (2 Cor 4:6). This qualitative and relational depth is the glory Paul experienced from Christ and the full significance of glory he alludes to. It is this glory in Paul's completeness theology that is basic to whole ontology and function, both of God and of human persons. Yet, its qualitative relational significance is fragmented or lost with the referentialization of the embodied Word.

When Paul restates the chronological order of human creation (11:8) and its functional order (11:9; cf. Gen 2:18), he is shifting from its outer-in quantitative significance to point to the inner-out qualitative significance of creation: the primacy of whole relationship together (in contrast, "to be apart" as in creation narrative above) constituted by the whole human ontology and function created in the image and likeness of God (11:11-12; cf. Gen 1:26-27; 2:25). In this shift, Paul also engages the dynamic of redemptive reconciliation to converge with the creation narrative. The other quantitative matters are secondary, even if they appear the natural condition (*physis*, 11:14-15); therefore, they should not define and determine human ontology and function, both for women and men (11:16). To use secondary matters as the basis is to reduce all persons' ontology and function, and thereby to go beyond what is written by substituting outer-in practices of ontological simulation and epistemological illusion from reductionism—that is, ontology and function shaped from outer in by human terms, not God's qualitative relational terms from inner out. The relational consequence is to diminish the primacy of relationships, minimize their function, and fragment relationships together, all of which can only be restored in the process of redemptive reconciliation to the transformed relationships together of the new creation (cf. 2 Cor 5:16-18).

This is the ontological and functional condition Paul addressed and the purpose of his relational discourse with the church at Corinth to fight integrally against their reductionism and for God's relational whole—which Paul addressed conclusively in the remainder of his letter (11:17ff), notably with the summary declaration: "for God is a God not of *fragmentation* but of *wholeness*" (14:33). When Paul adds to this declaration further relational discourse for women, somewhat parenthetically, his only concern is for this wholeness of human and church ontology and function (14:34-35). Paul is not

seeking the conformity of women to a behavioral code of silence but rather their congruity to the whole ontology and function in the image and glory of God. Therefore, what Paul does not give permission to for women in the church is for them to define their persons by what they do (“to speak”) and have (knowledge, position or status) because this would reduce their ontology and function, thereby diminishing the church’s ontology and function. Certainly, this applies to men equally, whom Paul has been addressing throughout this letter. In other words, his prescriptions for women are the same for men, both of whom must not allow secondary matter (including gender distinctions) to reduce their ontology and function.

How persons define themselves is a major issue basic to how persons engage in relationships, and on this basis how these persons in these relationships then constitute church—the three inescapable issues for those in Christ. The whole of Paul and the whole in his theology challenge the assumptions and theological basis persons have in these three crucial issues. In his family communication with Timothy, Paul extends his relational discourse for women to provide further clarity to this process to wholeness.

1 Timothy 2:8-15

As discussed above, the letters to Timothy and Titus have been perceived to depict a less intense, more domesticated Paul, with a more generalized focus of faith and an emphasis on the virtue of “godliness” (*eusebeia*, piety toward God, 1 Tim 2:2; 3:16; 4:7,8; 6:3,5,6,11; 2 Tim 3:5; Ti 1:1; cf. 1 Tim 5:4). This milder image and emphasis not found in his undisputed letters are part of the basis for disputing Paul’s authorship of these letters. His relational discourse for women, I contend, helps “restore” the intensity of Paul in his integral fight, not for having a mere faith and mere virtue, but for wholeness and against reductionism.

In his loving encouragement of Timothy to engage in this fight (1 Tim 1:18), he reminds Timothy that the primary purpose and outcome (*telos*) of his proclamation (*parangelia*) for the church is not purity of doctrine and conformity of belief but is only relational: persons in whole ontology from inner out who are *agape*-relationally involved by the vulnerable relational response of trust (1:3-5). Paul’s intensity of meaning should not be confused with quantitative density, thereby not understanding the quality of Paul’s intensity in the absence of any quantitative density in his words. The faith and love focused on by Paul (v.5) were first Paul’s experiential truth of vulnerable relationship face to face with Christ (1:12-14). Paul’s intensity of meaning is critical for his readers to embrace in order to understand where Paul is coming from. On the basis of his “relational faith and experiential truth” (2:7), Paul’s whole function establishes the context of his communication with Timothy and his relational discourse for women.

Paul’s deep desire and concern for persons are for their whole ontology and function and for their whole relationships together. This outcome can emerge only with these persons transformed from inner out, thus redeemed from life and practice, both individually and collectively as church, that are defined and determined from outer in. He pursues them intensely with family love for their congruence with this wholeness.

Paul begins this section with the practice of worship, with the focus first on men (2:8). Based on where Paul is coming from, his deep desire is for men to move beyond any negativity they have from situations and circumstances—not letting that define and

determine them (cf. Eph 4:26-27)—and to openly participate in worship, not merely observing or being detached (cf. *abad*, work from the creation narrative, also rendered as worship to highlight this relational work). Yet, participation was not about being more demonstrative by lifting up their hands outwardly. “Holy hands” signified an inner out action of personal involvement, not as an end in itself but lifted up in relational response to God. This personal relational involvement with God was Paul’s deep desire for men to engage further and experience deeper, because the only alternative is a reductionist practice even if the hands were lifted. Paul’s focus for men is the focus by which his similar desires for women need to be seen.

Paul’s concern for women’s practice in worship may initially appear to be a reverse emphasis than for men, less visible and more in the background as observers (2:9-10). Paul’s focus, however, went deeper than outward appearance and further than the common church practice of “good works.” This involved the first critical issue in all practice about the integrity of the person presented to others, which is directly integrated with how that person defines herself. In other words, Paul’s concern is about women who focus on the outer in to define themselves by what they have and do. Defined on this basis, women depend on drawing attention to their appearance and other outer-in aspects of themselves.

The issue for Paul was not about dressing modestly and decently, with appropriateness. Again, Paul was not seeking the conformity of women to a behavioral code. While modesty is not the issue, highlighting one’s self to draw attention to what one has and does is only part of the issue. When Paul added “suitable” or “with propriety” (NIV) to the matter of dress and later added “modesty,” “propriety” (NIV) to the matter of teaching and authority over men (2:15), the same term used for these, *sophrosyne*, is more clearly rendered “sound mindset.” That is, Paul was qualifying these matters by pointing to the necessary interpretive lens (*phroneo*) to distinguish reductionist practice from wholeness—the new interpretive framework (*phronema*) and lens (*phroneo*) from the dynamic of redemption and baptism into Christ (Rom 8:5-6). The underlying issue for Paul, therefore, is whole human ontology and function, or the only alternative of reduced human ontology and function. Paul’s initial focus on men clearly indicates that this issue equally applies to men.

How a person defines one’s self interacts with the presentation of self, which further extends in interaction with how the person engages relationships. The person’s interpretive framework with its lens is critical to this process. Paul’s alternative to outer-in function for women is “good works” (2:10), yet this can be perceived still as being defined by what a woman does. With Paul’s lens, however, good works must always be defined by and determined from the primary relational work of relational involvement with God from inner out—the ongoing vulnerable relational response of trust in relationship together. This is also the lens and focus of the process of learning for women. Paul appears to constrain and conform women to keeping quiet (*hesychia*) as objects in the learning process. Rather, *hesychia* signifies ceasing from one’s human effort—specifically engaged in defining one’s self and notably to fill oneself with more referential knowledge to further define one’s self with what one has (cf. 1 Cor 8:1; Gen 3:6)—and, with Paul’s lens, to submit one’s person from inner out for vulnerable involvement in the relational epistemic process with God (further qualifying 1 Cor

14:35). Certainly, this learning process equally applies to men (cf. 1 Cor 2:13; Gal 1:11-12).

His next words to Timothy about women also appear incongruent with God's relational whole created in relational likeness to the whole of God: "no women to teach or to have authority" (1 Tim 2:12). Yet the lens and focus of the relational epistemic process continued to apply in Paul's directive for women. Information and knowledge about God gained from a conventional epistemic process from outer in do not have the depth of significance to teach in the church, that is, teach to the level of God's relational whole on the basis of God's qualitative relational terms. Such referential information and knowledge may have functional significance to define those human persons by what they have but have no relational significance to God and qualitative significance for God's family. The term for authority (*authenteo*) denotes one acting by her own authority or power, which in this context is based on the human effort to define one's self further by the possession of more information and knowledge, even if about God—the same reductionism that emerged from the primordial garden (Gen 3:6). Therefore, Paul will not allow such women of reduced ontology and function to assume leadership in God's family. Moreover, he would not advocate for Christian freedom for women to be the means for their self-autonomy and self-determination, because the consequence, at best, would be some form of ontological simulation and epistemological illusion, that is, only reduced ontology and function. He turns to the creation narrative to support this position (2:13-14).

By repeating the chronological order of creation, Paul was not ascribing functional significance to man to establish male priority in the created order. Paul was affirming the whole significance of the human person created in the image and glory of God, just as he affirmed in his previous directive to women (1 Cor 11:7). Yet, Paul appears to define their function differently by blaming Eve for the dysfunction in the primordial garden, as if Adam did not engage in it also and was an innocent bystander. What Paul highlights was not Eve's person but the effort of Eve's self-autonomy to gain more knowledge for self-determination, perhaps even self-justification—human effort based on outer-in terms in reduced ontology and function—which she certainly engaged first, followed by the willful engagement of Adam (cf. Gen 3:2-7). Paul uses the chronological order in the creation narrative to magnify, on the one hand, the qualitative and relational significance of the human person's ontology and function and, on the other, the functional and relational consequences of engagement in the sin of reductionism with reduced ontology and function.

At this point Paul converges the creation narrative with the dynamic of redemptive reconciliation and integrates them into the relational outcome of baptism into Christ (1 Tim 2:15). In Paul's full soteriology, *sozo* (saved) is conjointly deliverance and being made whole. Curiously, Paul declares that women "will be saved through childbearing," which appears to be a human effort at self-determination and justification, limited to certain women. With Paul's lens, he highlights an aspect from the creation narrative, whose quantitative significance is only a secondary function in God's whole plan (cf. Gen 1:28), to magnify the qualitative significance of the primary function of whole relationship together, both with God and with persons in the image and likeness of God (cf. 2:18)—which childbearing certainly supports in function but does not displace as the primary function. Therefore, with Paul's convergence and in his completeness

theology, women will be saved *from* any reduced ontology and function and saved *to* wholeness and whole relationship together. That is, women are *sozo* while they engage in secondary functions—as identified initially in the creative narrative by childbearing, but not limited solely to this secondary function—based not on the extent of their fulfilling secondary functions but entirely on ongoing involvement in the relational contingency (“if they continue in,” Gk active voice, subjunctive mood) of what is primary: the vulnerable relational response of trust (“faith”) and the vulnerable relational involvement with others in family love (“*agape*”) only on God’s qualitative relational terms from inner out (“holiness”) with a sound mindset (“*sophrosyne*”), the new *phronema*-framework and *phroneo*-lens from the dynamic of baptism into Christ and redemptive reconciliation. Women’s ontology and function pivot on this contingency. Any shift from this primacy to secondary functions reduces their ontology and function, even in childbearing, or without it for single women.

The faith in Paul’s relational contingency is not the generalized faith of what the church has and proclaims but the specific function only of reciprocal relationship. The vulnerable relational response of trust signifies the ongoing primary relational work that constitutes the “good works” of Paul’s alternative to outer-in function for women, and from which all secondary functions need to emerge to be whole from inner out. Moreover, the *agape* in Paul’s relational contingency is also reflexively contingent on faith. To be *agape*-relationally involved with others must be integrated with and emerge from the vulnerable relational response of trust; without this, *agape* becomes a more self-oriented effort at sacrifice, focused on what that person does—for example, about others’ needs, situations or circumstances—without the relational significance of opening one’s person to other persons and focusing on involvement with them in relationship. Paul was decisive that any works without the primacy of relational work are not the outworking of the whole person created in “the image and glory of God” (1 Cor 11:7), therefore cannot be defined as “good works” in relational terms.

Of course, everything that Paul has directed to women is also necessarily directed to men in Paul’s completeness theology, except perhaps for childbearing. Paul sees both of them beyond their situations and circumstances and defines them as persons from inner out. Yet, I wonder if an ‘unexpected difference’ has emerged in the church, which no one has, or perhaps wants to, seriously address. Whole ontology and function for persons of both genders are defined and determined only as transformed persons from inner out relationally involved in transformed relationships together, both intimate and equalized—the relational outcome ‘already’ in Paul’s transformed ecclesiology, which Jesus intrusively embodied with ‘relationship together involving the whole person’ to compose his new relational order. This relational outcome of the experiential truth of the gospel has been problematic in church history as far back as Peter (cf. the churches in Rev 2:2-4; 3:1-2, 15-17), and which continues to grieve the Spirit. What Jesus embodied intrusively underlies, I affirm, the basis for Mary (Martha’s sister) still not being central to the preaching of the gospel and its relational outcome in the church, as Jesus clearly distinguished for their experiential truth (Mk 14:9; Mt 26:13). Just as Paul challenged Philemon to reconstruct the church as equalizer of slaves in the new relational order, churches today are challenged to be reconstructed as equalizer of women, along with equalizing others bearing distinctions of ‘less’ and even ‘more’—the challenge to equalize in order to gain brothers and sisters in new family together. While the situations

and circumstances in the church have certainly varied, the underlying issue of reductionism (and its shaping of relationships) in church ontology and function has remained the common problem—which may be pointing to an emerging solution needing our attention.

Since Paul was focused on fragmentation in churches, I doubt if he had any initial awareness of this ‘unexpected difference’ in his early experience with churches. But if the difference between Jesus’ relationships with women compared with men during his earthly life has any further significance for the church, it supports what I present without apology: Women who are emerging in whole ontology and function are the relational key for the whole function of this relational outcome of wholeness ‘already’ and the persons most likely to be vulnerable from inner out in order to lead other persons in this qualitative relational process to wholeness in church ontology and function. Qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness are integral for the church and indispensable for church leadership, and until demonstrated otherwise, women have certainly assumed the lead in this qualitative relational process. This is a compelling reality that churches need to embrace in their theology and practice.

The Creator made no inner out distinction between male and female, as Adam and Eve experienced in whole relationship together (Gen 2:25), in contrast to their experience in reduced ontology and function (Gen 3:7). The extent of a person’s engagement in reductionism is the key. In Paul’s completeness theology, the righteous are not those who simply possess faith—a common theological notion. The righteous are those in ongoing congruence with their whole ontology and function in relationship with God, whom God can count on to be those persons in their vulnerable relational response of trust. Whom God can count on to be vulnerable in relationship with their whole person is the question at issue. Which persons will step forward to be accountable with God and to act from inner out on the challenge in transformed relationships together, irreplaceably both intimate and equalized, as the new creation church family is the question before us all. No human distinctions in Paul’s lens have any qualitative significance for persons baptized into Christ (Gal 3:27-29), only the primary relational work of trust making persons vulnerable to be *agape*-relationally involved with others in and for God’s new creation family ‘already’ composed in and composing the new relational order (Gal 5:6; 6:15)—nothing less and no substitutes.

Along with acknowledging an ‘unexpected difference’ emerging in the church, there is an even more important acknowledgement that needs to happen both in the church and academy. This involves the understanding that the referentialization of the embodied Word provides a hermeneutical basis to narrow down, disembody, derelationalize and thereby blunt the relational intrusiveness of Jesus embodying vulnerably ‘relationship together involving the whole person’. This then conveniently establishes a rationale, intentionally or unintentionally, for retreating from engaging the Word—not only in his intrusive relational path but also his improbable theological trajectory—and his church family in whole relationship together vulnerably equalized and intimate—without the veil and the distinctions based on what we do (no matter how valued by churches) and have (no matter how esteemed by the academy). All this needs to be deconstructed so that transformation and reconstruction to wholeness in the new relational order can not only emerge but also grow and mature.

The church embodied as equalizer from inner out is the embodied church alive in wholeness. The church in wholeness is the relational outcome only of redemptive change with the Spirit, and this relational outcome is claimed ‘already’. Redemptive change distinguishes the church from reduced ontology and function in a renegotiated ecclesiology. Redemptive change also signifies that the church is different from all that prevails around it or pervades its surrounding context, whether culturally, socially, economically or politically. Therefore, on the basis of its clarity and depth, the church embodies intrusively with Jesus the gospel of transformation to whole relationship together in his new relational order. This is the relational outcome that emerges from the *ek-eis* dynamic of Jesus’ family prayer, engaging the process of reciprocating contextualization with triangulation. Extended with and by Paul, the dynamics of his completeness theology compose the integral relational basis and ongoing relational base for the church to emerge ‘already’ in transformed ecclesiology as the whole of God’s relational whole with the relationships together necessary to fulfill the prevailing inherent human relational need and to solve the pervading human relational problem—that is, if the church is distinguished in function as the equalizer, composed in and composing the new relational order.

Composed In and Composing Holy Communion

The vulnerable presence and intimate involvement of the whole of God have intruded on human life in general and our lives in particular in order to dwell together in the church as God’s new creation family (as Paul made conclusive, Eph 2:14-22). The new wine table fellowship of God’s family is a communion composed by transformed relationships without both distinctions and the veil, in the midst which the whole of God dwells together in reciprocal relationship composing the new relational order. This relational outcome ‘already’ reconstructs the church with the integral relational involvement of holy communion in whole relational terms—uncommon relationship together distinguished from all other gatherings.

The contrast and conflict of the church in whole relationship together necessarily emerge when its communion ‘already’ is distinguished from the human shaping of relationships together. When we are developing our relationships in church contrary to shaping apart from the whole, and thus to be distinguished from relationships in general in the surrounding context, we need to engage a relational process distinguished from the surrounding context’s relational order and process. That is, church relations need to engage the relational process of redemption and reconciliation imperative for these relationships to be the transformed relationships integrated together to be God’s whole family, and which integrally compose the new wine communion. To participate in and have an equalized share in new life together as family in likeness only of the Trinity is likewise the holy communion that—by its nature constituted by Jesus and the Spirit and extended into Paul—is the relational outcome only from the equalization of redemption and the intimacy of reconciliation in family love. For persons to partake of the whole of Jesus’ life and to participate in his church in the relationships together of God’s whole involves the reciprocal relational response of nothing less and no substitutes—the only response compatible and congruent with his relational response of grace, as Peter

experienced in his footwashing. The primacy of this holy communion is the intrusive ‘relationship together involving the whole person’ without defining distinctions and the barrier of the veil—the relational terms defining the only complete basis for how God engages in relationships and therefore for what God seeks from us in relationship together (Jn 4:23-24).

Accordingly and nonnegotiable, the church as equalizer cannot be relationally involved with the human diversity in the surrounding contexts of the world without first absorbing the valid human differences within its own family life—not conforming in a homogeneous unit—by ongoing involvement in transformed relationships (equalized and intimate) together. To extend God’s response of family love to the human relational condition, church function must be whole to make whole. Churches lack wholeness to fulfill its purpose as equalizer as long as its own members remain functionally apart in some aspect of this relational condition—even if unintentional or inadvertent. The equalizing of redemption and the intimacy of reconciliation are intentional relational practices for his church, and on the basis of this qualitative relational process his church dissolves false human distinctions and absorbs legitimate human differences to be the whole of his family in the new relational order.

Yet, the church as equalizer cannot be narrowed down to what to do in the life of the church and developing more ministries for church growth and missions, as made evident by the churches in Jesus’ post-ascension discourse for ecclesiology to be whole. This distinguished communion only involves the primacy of relationships and how to be involved in relationship together by family love. In his function as equalizer, Jesus’ working priorities were not about goals to fulfill in a divine mission because his whole purpose was a function of relationship: its origin, its initiation, its enactment, its fulfillment, its outcome and conclusion. The embodied church who integrally follows Jesus as equalizer has purpose only in relationship and always functions involved in his primacy of relationships: for their condition “to be apart,” their redemption, their healing, their reconciliation, their restoration and transformation. To “listen to my Son” and to be “just as *the Father* sent me” is to be on the same theological trajectory and intrusive relational path.

Just as Jesus made redemptive change the relational imperative for the churches in his post-ascension discourse, the function of church as equalizer requires such change for churches today; otherwise, we will emulate their reductionist practices. While this may not require the theological reform undergone by the church council at Jerusalem, it does indeed call for the functional shift the early church undertook in church practice to transform their relationships together and reconstruct their relational order. This functional shift involves our approach to church life, church growth and missions. The trinitarian relational context of family and relational process of family love establish the working priorities necessary to build the relationships for his church to be whole as family in likeness—not of any type of family or any form of community, including those of the first-century Mediterranean world, though there was secondary association to its patrilineal kinship group.³ His church as family is in likeness only of the Trinity functioning as family. The functional integrity of the trinitarian relational context and process cannot be diminished or minimalized in any aspect of church practice—most

³ Joseph H. Hellerman describes this as a correlation in *The Ancient Church as Family* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001).

notably starting with its gathering at Holy Communion—in order for relationships together to have the ongoing relational outcome to be whole in church life and to live whole in church growth, and on this qualitative relational basis to make whole in church mission. Anything less and any substitutes are irreconcilable to his church as family and incompatible for his church family as equalizer; these alternatives are just rendered by a variation of the human shaping of relationships together.

The defining call and commission to wholeness for his followers—since each of them has been equalized to be God’s new creation family together—compose his qualitative relational terms for function in the new relational order as equalizer. “Just as” (*kathos*) the Son received from the Father, his inseparable call and commission integrally embody the qualitative relational significance of his church to be whole in transformed relationships together in likeness of the Trinity—made definitive in Jesus’ formative prayer for his family (Jn 17:18-23). The experiential truth of the whole of Jesus’ call, commission and relationship was extended into Paul to embody the kingdom’s whole of God’s whole *into* the church’s whole ontology and function for the relationally (not referentially) distinguished significance of his gospel of transformation to make whole the human relational condition.

The new creation church as equalizer by its distinguished nature both vulnerably and intrusively embodies his good news for whole relationship together with the working assumptions of both redemption and reconciliation (Gal 4:4-5). Therefore, its ontology and function integrally embody the complete Christology of the whole of Jesus and the full soteriology of his salvific relational work—the completeness theology and hermeneutic of this gospel that Paul embodied in whole for the church. The whole of who, what and how Jesus embodied, and the whole of whom he saves, what he saves them to and how he saves them, this is the whole of God’s whole that the church as equalizer embodies in its holy communion in the innermost. The distinguished practice of this holy communion in whole relational terms fulfills Jesus’ formative prayer for his family—with the whole of God, within its relationship together, and for the world to believe as the experiential truth in relational terms and to know as the experiential reality only in the relational outcome of wholeness ‘already’.

The already is ‘already’ and the not yet is ‘not yet’. These two converge by the Spirit with the church’s relational progression following the embodied whole of God in his improbable theological trajectory and intrusive relational path. In this ongoing relational process, the human shaping of relationships together waits for the experiential reality of the good news of whole relationship together to be alive in the church ‘already’, just as “the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the *new family* of God” (Rom 8:19).

Therefore, without ambiguity or compromise, “*embody* whatever makes you *relationally significant* to proclaim *whole-ly* the gospel of wholeness” (Eph 6:15).

Chapter 11 Maturing in Difference and Likeness

For building up the body of Christ, until all of us come...to maturity to the measure of the fullness of Christ...put away your former way of life, your old self...and to be *made new* in the *innermost* of your minds, and to *determine* yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Ephesians 4:12-13,22-24

How our persons, relationships and churches unfold at this stage remains an open question, which requires our ongoing attention. Regardless of any earlier clarification and correction to our discipleship and ecclesiology, we cannot make new assumptions about their practice because they are always subjected to reductionism—whose workings should never be underestimated. For example, our focus can shift to what's ahead and raise our concern for the future, perhaps becoming occupied with it. This common concern seems reasonable enough not to require our further attention. Yet, what easily underlies this concern could be the subtle workings of self-determination, which would counter Jesus' second functional key for his followers in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 6:33-34, discussed in chap. 9). Unless the subtle reduction of our ontology and function that composes self-determination is understood and ongoingly addressed, how our persons, relationships and churches unfold easily become subject to reductionism's influence and shaping. And the relational outcome will not be whole, much less mature.

As we consider the vital matter of maturing in our persons, relationships and churches, Paul refocuses our attention and sets the stage for what unfolds. Within the reductionism-wholeness issue is the tension between the already and the not yet, both of which Paul engaged in his relational discourse with the church at Philippi in what is likely one of his last prison letters. Paul raised some interrelated conditional (or factually implied) statements about their experiential truth of relationship with God in the present (Phil 2:1). They evoke reflection on the existence of the following: encouragement being in relationship with Christ, intimately experiencing his family love, having reciprocal relational involvement ongoingly together with the Spirit, and being affected in one's persons from inner out. From Paul's interpretive lens (*phroneo*), if these exist (or since they exist), then this defines their new mindset and interpretive lens (*phroneo* in likeness, 2:2,5) to determine their reciprocal involvement in relationships together, first based on their experiential truth of the whole of God and thereby in relational likeness to this whole of God (2:2-4). This new *phroneo* is not the result of human effort but emerges from a transformed *phronema* constituted by the experiential reality of relationship together with the whole of God, notably with the Spirit (Rom 8:5-6).

The dynamic presence and involvement of the whole person of the Spirit functions while inseparably on an eschatological trajectory. Yet for Paul, this does not

and must not take away from the primary focus on the Spirit's presence and involvement for the present, just as Paul addressed the Thessalonians' eschatological anxiety with the relational imperative not to quench the Spirit's present relational involvement (1 Thes 5:19). The Spirit's present concern and function is relational involvement for constituting whole ontology and function, for making functional the primacy of wholeness together, and for the embodying of the whole of God's new creation family in whole relationship together as the church, the *pleroma* of Christ—which is why the person of the Spirit is deeply affected, grieving over any reductionism in reciprocal relational involvement together. With this new interpretive lens functioning in reciprocal relationship with the Spirit, the person perceives oneself whole-ly from the inner out and others in the same way, and is involved in relationships together on this basis (involving the first two inescapable issues), which is congruent with their experience of relational involvement from God and in likeness of how God engages relationships.

The *agape* relational involvement Paul defines is not about sacrificial love but family love, which submits one's whole person from inner out to one another in equalized and intimate relationships signifying whole relationship together—in likeness of how the whole of God functions together and is relationally involved with us. Paul defines conclusively that in the midst of reductionism, this is the church order in which “the wholeness of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard *your persons from inner out* in Christ *from reductionism*” (Phil 4:7) and by which “the God of wholeness will be *relationally involved* with you” (4:9).

The likeness that Paul points to also includes a significant difference, both of which set the stage for maturity in our persons, relationships and churches to unfold. Yet, like Paul, the workings of reductionism should never be lost in our attention; and our sensitivity to the qualitative and awareness of the relational are always contingent on our current interpretive framework and lens.

In Reverse Likeness

Maturity is an elusive quality when measured in quantitative terms. Specifically, when maturity is defined by the level of what we do over being established in who, what and how we are as person (the significance of righteousness in Eph 4:24), maturity becomes a variable measure that is always subject to comparison with others. Who is mature on this basis becomes relative both to self-assessment and the eye of the beholder (cf. to beauty). In social terms in the United States, for example, recent generations are perceived as less mature than previous generations at the same age, and taking longer to mature. Yet, ontological simulation of maturity in previous generations may not be significantly different than the virtual maturity cultivated in the tech-savvy generations of today. Maturity is an elusive quality indeed, especially among Christians of whatever generation.

By the time of Jesus' ascension, can we say that Peter was mature? Their interaction in John 21 reveals in Peter's discipleship that he still needed significant growth in “Follow me” (Jn 21:22). Maturity in discipleship foremost involves knowing the person Jesus (as Jesus lamented, Jn 14:9)—over merely knowing his teachings and example—by being vulnerably involved with him on his intrusive relational path (“where

I am, there will *my followers be involved together with me*” (Jn 12:26). Therefore, maturity in discipleship requires the depth of relationship directly with Jesus that Mary engaged in her discipleship (discussed later), not indirectly in the amount of service and sacrifice made in his name (cf. Mt 7:22-23). Any other measure of maturity puts us on a contrary path in our discipleship, and it engages in a reverse dynamic to what God distinguished as most important in the primacy of relationship together over any secondary area we can feel proud of accomplishing or possessing (Jer 9:23-24).

Likewise, maturity for the church is not measured by the purity of its doctrine and uncompromising dedication to the church (cf. the church at Ephesus, Rev 2:2-4), nor measured by the quantity of its ministry and earned reputation (cf. the church at Sardis, Rev 3:1-2), and by its increasing service in the world (cf. the church at Thyatira, Rev 2:19-20). The simulations and illusions of these churches led them to think that they were mature churches, doing what the church should and doing it consistently, rigorously and increasingly. How do you measure church maturity today? Jesus, however, did not share their perception (and perhaps ours) and exposed such churches in the existing reality of their lack of maturity: the Thyatira church in not being distinguished in the world, the church in Sardis for not being complete, whole in their practice and thus in their ontology and function, and the Ephesian church in not being vulnerably involved in the primacy of relationship together, which would make church practice complete and function in the world distinguished. These were churches engaged in a reverse dynamic, which does not have the relational outcome of maturing in wholeness.

Engaging in a reverse dynamic by persons and churches is not the exception but the prevailing mode, both in the past and the present—which a focus on the future makes convenient to ignore. In the primordial garden, it was established that by self-determination (“If you...”) human persons “will be like God” (Gen 3:5). On the one hand, this set in motion the self-autonomy of human persons not only to be like God but also to either displace God’s position and be God’s equal, or make God unnecessary (the unspoken goal of much scientific enterprise). On the other hand, human persons in self-determination emerged to shape their own person and relationships, that is, their ontology and function to be like God. Rather than God creating persons and relationships in his image and likeness, humans would shape their person and relationship to be like God in a reverse dynamic. What resulted and reverberates through human history is the following: Persons and relationships in reverse likeness not only emerged in self-determination but such efforts inevitably required self-justification—“the woman saw that...and they knew that...and they *acted*...for themselves” (Gen 3:6-7), and thus “the woman you gave to be with me, she gave me...” (3:12). From then on, whether in self-determination and/or with self-justification, persons and relationships were composed in reverse likeness of God.

Paul intrusively addressed this reverse dynamic in the church that was fragmented by it (1 Cor 4:6-7; 2 Cor 10:12, cf. Jn 3:3,7); and he fought for the church’s maturing in wholeness in likeness of God. Yet, even among Jesus’ followers and in churches today, persons and relationships are still composed in reverse likeness. We need to double-check with the Spirit our interpretive framework and lens, because the likeness that Paul illuminates also includes the significant difference that is crucial to understand for maturing in our persons, relationships and churches.

The Difference that Makes the Difference

To understand the difference that makes the difference, we need to build on our discussion from the last chapter on holy communion. This difference is composed by the true holiness that is in likeness of the whole and holy God, which Paul made conclusive for our maturity (Eph 4:13,24).

When Paul illuminated theological clarity for the gospel of God's relational whole without human distinctions, he integrated Israel's relational position with the Gentiles' relational position in God's thematic relational response of grace to the human condition (Rom 11:11-24). God's salvific action was initiated through Israel on the collective level ("firstfruits," v.16) and now extends to Gentiles—the relational dynamic also involving Jesus *into* Paul. The deeply interrelated relational position of Jews and of Gentiles is in complex interaction to render them without distinction in their relational condition, which signifies undeniably the whole of God's thematic response of grace. What Paul makes definitive is that in terms of each other's relational position, one is not the cause of the other's; neither is one at the exclusion of the other, nor marginalizes or is better than the other. These theological dynamics emerge in the relational context and process of God's relational involvement of grace, the relational source and relational outcome of which Paul illuminated conclusively as holy: "if the root is holy, then the branches also are holy" (v.16). This is no mere theological proposition or doctrinal truth Paul makes for the church's heritage and pronouncement. This ontological likeness unfolds and matures in functional likeness, which together integrally compose church ontology and function.

There is a dynamic functional interaction illuminated by Paul that as a whole both deconstructs human-shaped distinctions and differences in God's relational whole, and constitutes also the *difference* distinguishing God's relational whole. Paul identifies this dynamic for the church as the functional significance of "holy" (Col 1:22; Eph 2:21; Rom 12:1; 2 Tim 2:21). The ontological identity of the church is rooted in the relational source of who the church is and whose the church is (cf. Joshua's confusion about Israel's identity, Josh 7:10-13). This integrated identity emerges with the embodying of the church's whole ontology and function, whose relational outcome to be whole is also distinguished by its relational source clearly as holy. In Paul's completeness theology, the embodied church alive in wholeness with the new relational order is functionally significant only when distinguished as holy in likeness of the whole and holy God. The dynamic of being holy engages a reciprocal process of deep relational involvement in the whole of God's relational context and process (2 Cor 6:17-18)—which involves the ongoing process of reciprocating contextualization and triangulation with the Spirit. It is unattainable for the church to be distinguished whole from inner out apart from this ongoing reciprocal involvement, as Paul prayed for the church in transformed ecclesiology (Eph 1:17-23; 3:14-19) and as Jesus prayed for his whole and holy family (Jn 17:17-23).

Forming and maintaining clearly distinguished church identity is not the outcome of identity markers from outer-in theological propositions but from inner-out theological function, not with possessing doctrinal truth but with the experiential truth of the whole gospel, and thus not with the limited significance of what the church is saved *from* but with the full significance of what it also is saved *to*. What distinguishes the church's identity, therefore, is not what it has and/or does from outer in but only its wholeness

from inner out—its imperative determinant (*brabeuo*, Col 3:15). Yet, wholeness from inner out must be further distinguished uniquely (and likely impractically) from the competing source of outer in. This contrast emerges when the church's whole ontology and function is distinguished solely in the qualitative image and relational likeness (outcome for the church) of the whole and holy God (the church's relational source).

The church's relational outcome in wholeness matures only with whole persons *agape*-relationally involved vulnerably in whole relationships together, which are both equalized and intimate. This relational outcome is defined and determined by the church's relational source, which Paul illuminated with the church's "call to be holy" (1 Cor 1:2; 2 Tim 1:9; Eph 1:4). The term for holy (*hagios*; cf. sanctify, *hagiazō*) means to be separated from ordinary or common usage and devoted to God; this is the functional significance that Paul makes a contingency for the church to be whole in likeness of its relational source. Paul's call (echoing Jesus' prayer) signifies 'already' for the church to be different from the surrounding context, that is, clearly distinguished from the sin of reductionism in human contextualization (Rom 11:16; 12:1-2; Eph 5:3; Col 1:22)—most notably distinguished from the human shaping of relationships together. This difference is not distinguished by mere moral purity and ethical perfection but to be whole in relationship together (Eph 1:4; 2:21; Ti 1:8). Therefore, Paul's call to be holy is inseparable from the call to be different, a difference which is irreducibly integrated with being distinguished whole from inner out and nonnegotiable in the shape of its relationship together (as he clarified in Rom 12:1-5). In other words, for the church being in ontological likeness to the whole and holy God constitutes church function in the difference that by its nature distinguishes church practice from prevailing practice in the surrounding context—the most notable difference distinguishing the church's new relational order.

For the church to mature clearly distinguished in its wholeness, the functional significance of its life and practice must be distinct from reductionism; accordingly in its wholeness the church must ongoingly expose the ontological simulation and epistemological illusion from reductionism and reconcile reductionism's counter-relational work. While the church can absorb valid human differences, its ontology and function cannot mirror any differences that diminish its own difference. In its vulnerable engagement in the reconciling dynamic of family love, the church embodies the new relational order that equalizes all persons intimately from inner out to be whole in relationship together, to live this whole as God's new creation family and thereby to make whole the human relational condition "to be apart" resulting from its human shaping of relationships. In unequivocal relational terms, the church in wholeness cannot mirror existing relational orders of human shaping or it would no longer be or live whole, and consequently render itself functionally insignificant to make whole, both within itself and in the world. A church, for example, may have multicultural aspects in its life and practice, but the church in wholeness cannot be defined or determined by them or it becomes shaped from outer in by human terms from human contextualization, that is, by reductionism. As Paul made unmistakable as well as unequivocal, the new creation church is distinguished by its difference from the common in the common's sociocultural and racial-ethnic categories, socioeconomic emphases and gender characteristics, whose comparative values are all embedded in human contextualization signifying the

reductionism of the common and its human shaping of relationships together (1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:27-28; 6:15; Col 3:10-11).

Paul's call for the church to be holy, therefore, is for the church to live in its own difference from the sin of reductionism in all its forms. The church embodied in its own difference is not in a separatist, exclusionary life and practice, but is to be distinguished as whole in the midst of reductionism, and on this integral basis to expose, confront and make whole all reductionism—in unmistakable likeness to the embodied whole and holy God. This necessitates for the church both a further understanding of sin and a deeper means to deal with it.

Being holy and sanctified is a relational process with the Spirit (Rom 15:16) that engages an inner-out dynamic. This inner-out dynamic to be holy does not stay 'inner' (or "spiritual") because the Spirit's involvement always integrates *pneuma* and *soma*, inner and out, for wholeness of the persons and persons together (1 Thes 4:3-4; 5:19,23). This inner-out relational process with the Spirit to be holy and thus whole also composes the inner-out lens necessary to further understand the sin of reductionism (as *phroneo* and *phronema* in Rom 8:5-6).

Sin of reductionism also does not stay 'inner' of the person and is not limited to the individual. Nor is the 'outer' of sin limited to individuals in relationships, though these are the main aspects of sin Paul addresses in the situations in his letters. With Philemon as a slave owner, Paul points to the further presence and influence of the sin of reductionism that even this church leader and church needed to address. Paul understood that paying attention to or ignoring reductionism, its counter-relational work and its substitutes is directly correlated to our lens (*phroneo*) and its perception of sin. Our lens reveals assumptions we make about the human person and the collective order of persons together. This involves our view of the nature of humanity and the nature of the social order (or society). For example, if we assume the goodness of humankind and/or the existing order of life, there is no need for redemptive change—which was a question Philemon and Peter (as noted in Acts 10) needed to answer. Yet, even assuming these levels of sinfulness assures neither a need for redemptive change nor the extent of such change, a lack which Peter later demonstrated and Paul exposed (noted in Gal 2). The change perceived to be needed is contingent on the strength and adequacy of our view of sin.

Paul's fight for the gospel of wholeness, now extended into the church, is ongoingly also fighting against reductionism. This was an assumed inseparable fight for Paul because any reductionism of God's relational whole on God's qualitative relational terms to human terms and shaping from human contextualization engages the dynamic process of sin. Paul never assumes the absence of reductionism, even when its presence is not always clear, because its absence would not be reality. Nor does he ignore any form of reductionism, since reductionism as sin is incompatible with being holy and thus incongruent with being whole. All sin as reductionism needs to be redeemed, which is why Paul appealed to Philemon and confronted Peter with family love. Paul demonstrates in relational dialogue, not theological discourse in referential terms, the strength and adequacy of his view of sin, and this is nonnegotiable in order for the embodied church to live in its difference and to mature in wholeness.

Even at the early stages of the church, Paul was at the heart of this fight against reductionism, calling for redemptive change to distinguish the church as integrally holy

and whole. This distinguishing process is essential for the structural dynamic of the church to be accessible for all persons without *diakrino* (differential treatment) and the church's contextual dynamic of reconciliation to absorb valid human differences in whole relationship together both equalized and intimate (dynamics discussed in the last chap.). Moreover, this fight against reductionism was not Paul's human effort but the relational means to deal with sin as reductionism that he received in reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit (Gal 5:16-17,25; Rom 8:5-6; Eph 4:3).

In transformed ecclesiology, the Spirit constitutes access and ongoing involvement with the Father as Jesus' relational replacement for relationship together as family—the integral relational basis and ongoing relational base for the church (Eph 2:18,22). Reciprocal relationship with the Spirit embodies the church's life and practice in the whole of God's relational context and process from the already to the not yet (Eph 1:17; 3:16-17; Rom 8:25-27), which is necessary to embody the church alive in “the bond of wholeness” (Eph 4:3). Given the ongoing tension and conflict between wholeness and reductionism, the Spirit's reciprocal involvement is indispensable for the church to decisively deal with sin as reductionism in all its forms, and on this basis be clearly distinguished in its difference as holy and whole in the midst of reductionism (Gal 5:16-18, 22-26). How is this relational process made functionally significant for the church, notably given the normative character and collective nature of reductionism?

When Paul addressed Philemon about his slave, Onesimus, he appealed to him on the basis of the family love experienced by both of them (Phlm 9). This family love centered Philemon's focus on the whole of God's relational context and process, in which he experienced God's involvement in whole relationship together. While Paul centered Philemon's focus on God in the relational process of family love, on the one hand, he also widens Philemon's focus to include Onesimus on the other hand (v.10). These separate but interrelated relational connections formed for Philemon what has been defined previously as the triangulation process (cf. to navigation). Faced with each on corresponding sides of him, Philemon needed to decide what would determine his response: the wholeness of God in family love or the reductionism surrounding the status of Onesimus.

Paul's relational imperative for the church to “Live by the Spirit” (Gal 5:16) is vital both to be whole together (Eph 4:3) and to ongoingly live whole in the midst of reductionism (Gal 5:25; Rom 8:6). And Paul understood deeply that pressure and conflict from reductionism always intensify in the presence and function of the whole. The Spirit involves us with the whole of God in the triangulation process for God to define and determine the specific relational response needed to engage a person, situation or issue embedded in reductionism, and be clearly distinguished as different and whole. Triangulation with reciprocating contextualization serves to give clarity to the ontological identity and function of both person and church in order to live whole and thereby make whole all encounters with reductionism. Without involvement in the triangulation process with the Spirit, the influence of the normative character and collective nature of reductionism subtly diminishes, minimalizes and fragments persons, relationships and church, and often renders them to ontological simulations and epistemological illusions.

In Paul's transformed ecclesiology, the church as the *pleroma* of Christ embodies in likeness what Jesus, the *pleroma* of God, vulnerably embodied in the context of the common without being contextualized by reductionism. The embodied church maturing

in wholeness is contextualized only in the whole of God’s relational context and process embodied by Jesus. To follow in his likeness, for example, necessitates embodying the reality that Jesus engaged various aspects (e.g. culture, institutions, social order) of human contextualization without being reduced by them (as Paul delineated, Phil 2:6-8; 2 Cor 8:9); and he intrusively also contextualized those aspects in his primary context of the whole of God and in his context’s relational process of family love. In this contextualizing process—a process involving deconstruction, transformation and reconstruction—Jesus unequivocally distinguished his wholeness from the common in order to make them whole (Eph 2:14-16). This dynamic interaction with human contextualization by the whole of God’s relational context and process composes what further distinguishes the church in likeness by the process of reciprocating contextualization. Engaging in reciprocating contextualization helps person and church maintain the focus on the relational source of their ontological identity, and this is irreplaceable for distinguishing what and who defines them in the midst of reductionism, particularly in its normative character and collective nature. This dynamic was clearly demonstrated by Jesus when he was tempted by reductionism (Lk 4:1-13), and that had emerged even as a boy of twelve (Lk 2:49). Moreover, this dynamic was implicit in Jesus’ teaching, which in function prevents his teachings and examples from being disembodied from his whole person and derelationalized from the whole of God. Paul also learned to distinguish what and who defines him while dealing with reductionism as it influenced his own life (Phil 3:4-8; 2 Cor 11:21-12:1,7-9). Without engagement in reciprocating contextualization, persons, relationships and church are more susceptible to reductionism, thus often unknowingly rendered to reduced ontology and function and determined in a renegotiated ecclesiology—and thereby no longer composing the difference that makes them distinguished.

This process of reciprocating contextualization is what Paul also illuminated for Philemon to engage in order for his person and house church to be redeemed from the influence of human contextualization, with the relational outcome to be distinguished in their difference as holy and whole in relationship together, that is, in likeness of the whole and holy God. As Paul implied for Philemon, it is vital for person and church to engage with the Spirit in the dynamic of reciprocating contextualization, and to understand this involvement as a relational process in necessary integral function with triangulation. The urgency was twofold for Paul. This integrated relational process is necessary to be qualitatively distinguished from inner out in the common’s surrounding context of reductionism in order not to be defined or determined by the common’s function from outer in. In reciprocal involvement with the Spirit, triangulation and reciprocal contextualization function integrally in relational interaction to compose church life and practice to be “sanctified whole” (*holotelos*) and ongoingly “*maintain your whole [holokleros] person blameless*” (*amemptos*, i.e. whole, cf. *tamiym*) before and with “the God of wholeness” (1 Thes 5:23; cf. Gen 17:1). In this reciprocal relational process, the church is ongoingly engaged in its own difference as holy, and therefore ongoingly involved, in its own difference as whole—both ongoingly maturing in likeness of the triune God.

Since Paul’s emphasis throughout his letters was on function more than theology, he engaged in direct relational dialogue over conventional theological discourse (i.e. in

referential terms) in order for his readers to understand in relational terms (not referential) the experiential truth of God's thematic relational response to the human condition. All his theology converged for this thematic relational purpose and emerged in just this integral relational outcome. For the whole of Paul and the whole in his theology, this is the definitive relational outcome 'already' that clearly embodies the church alive in wholeness to fulfill its uncommon relational purpose in the midst of the common, just as Christ embodied (and prayed for this family, Jn 17:15-23). With whole ontology and function clearly distinguished from inner out, person and church together live in "the bond of wholeness" (Eph 4:3) ongoingly in the relational imperative for God's family, "let the wholeness of Christ *be the primary determinant* in your hearts...in the one body" (Col 3:15). On this relational basis alone, they submit their whole person to "*embody* what will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of wholeness" (Eph 6:15), and thereby be vulnerably involved in the midst of reductionism to relationally engage persons in the human relational condition without differential treatment in family love, and to reconcile them to equalized and intimate relationships together in the whole of God's new creation family (Gal 5:6; 6:15; Col 3:11; cf. Eph 2:15-16). Nothing less and no substitutes for Paul constitute and distinguish person and church together to be holy and whole; anything less and any substitutes do not have functional significance from inner out. This is the difference that makes the difference. Therefore, the church as the fullness of Christ must by the very nature of its relational source embody this difference 'already' in the image and likeness of the complete whole and holy God (Eph 1:23; 4:24; Col 2:10; 3:10-11).

Only the convergence, interaction and completeness of these theological, relational and functional dynamics "will make you ready to *live* the gospel of wholeness" (Eph 6:15) in the relational outcome 'already' of what the whole of God saves us *to*: God's new creation family embodying the church alive and maturing integrally both in whole relationship together to fulfill the inherent human relational need and in the new relational order to redemptively reconcile the pervasive human relational problem. Nothing less composes the depth of the gospel necessary to respond without substitutes to the breadth of the human condition.

This is the completeness theology of Paul, which signified his whole understanding from the Spirit and constituted his relationally-specific family responsibility with the Spirit to complete the communicative word from God for the whole ontology and function of the church in likeness of the whole of God, the holy Trinity. With the whole in his theology, Paul challenged the theological assumptions of his readers, even their theological cognition. In this relational process, the whole of Paul continues to challenge his readers for the functional significance of this whole relational outcome—ongoingly holding us accountable for maturing in the already while encouraging us to the not yet without letting the future become our primary focus.

In his recent address to the contemporary church that mandates difference, Walter Brueggemann proposes:

One of the great and crucial tasks of ministry is to name and exposit the deep ambiguity that besets us, and to create a venue for waiting for God's newness among us. This work is not to put people in crisis. The work is to name the crisis that people

are already in, the very crisis that evokes resistance and hostility when it is surfaced and named....

The church and its pastors await the gift of newness from the spirit. One of the ways in which the church and its pastors do that is that they consistently give voice and visibility to our common ambivalence whereby we are in a place for re-choosing, for re-choosing beyond all of our old, jaded options....Ministry is for truth-telling about the shape we are in, all of us together. And that truth-telling makes us free.¹

Maturing in the Discipleship Distinguishing the Church

The church does not mature in its distinct difference of relationships together unless persons are maturing in discipleship. This brings us back unavoidably to Mary since she provides us with the most complete picture of maturing in discipleship. As a woman nudging past the original disciples, contrary to cultural norm she sits at Jesus' feet to establish the relational connection needed to follow Jesus, thereby distinguishing her minority identity as his disciple. Further contrary to prevailing practice, her discipleship matures as she not only sits at Jesus' feet but goes deeper into reciprocal relationship together, both vulnerably and intimately, to wash his feet and share in the steps ahead for him. Her reciprocal relational response (not referential duty) distinguished the maturing of her discipleship in the deep involvement of the primacy of following his whole person in reciprocal relationship together on his intrusive relational path.

Since discipleship is composed by following Jesus in the primacy of relationship together above all other action (Jn 12:26), maturing in discipleship is going deeper "where I am" in relationship together with the whole of God. Maturing is not about extensive service or dedication to his work, even to help the poor. The difference is the discipleship that Mary embodied in her person from inner out; and the discipleship that Jesus made unavoidable for all of his followers by highlighting her vulnerable and intimate relational involvement to distinguish the gospel of transformation and its relational outcome of wholeness. Our maturing in discipleship, by its relational nature, must follow vulnerably and intimately in her primary steps on his intrusive relational path—the growth of which is easily stunted or misperceived by preoccupation in secondary matters (like the churches in Jesus' post-ascension discourse). The lack or slowness of maturity in the original disciples (notably Peter) was due to their preoccupation with secondary matters—for example, the disciples wanting to give Mary's perfume-money to serve the poor, and Peter being distracted from the primary and asking Jesus "what about him?" (Jn 21:21)—which exposed their relational distance with Jesus, resulting in not knowing him in relational terms (Jn 14:9) and needing to return to the primacy of relationship together (Jn 21:22). This also explains why they had difficulty fully understanding what Jesus saved them to and how the church was to be composed only by wholeness of persons and relationships together.

Human persons have had a pervasive difficulty affirming the primacy of relationship, whether with God or with others, ever since the primordial garden. Though

¹ Walter Brueggemann, *Mandate to Difference: An Invitation to the Contemporary Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 202.

many may acknowledge this primacy, self-determination redirects their focus to other urgent and secondary matters; some may admit that their efforts get redirected despite starting out with good intentions, or even when they know better. Even our brains tells us of the primary need for relationships in our development, as neuroscience has confirmed (noted previously); nevertheless, our reason overrides this primary need and focuses us instead on what would be “good for...” this or that matter in self-determination (disguised also as the common good). In the process of human development, what so-called progress has resulted has had benefits, but these benefits—and who has benefitted the most?—have come at the expense of reducing the primacy of relationship and even the quality of life (e.g. as experienced in globalization and even in medical intervention). This purported progress in human development continues to shape persons and relationships in the secondary over the primary, the quantitative over the qualitative, in a reverse likeness that at best only simulates maturing and at worst embeds us in its illusion—“you will not *be reduced*...you will be like God.”

Maturing in discipleship both affirms the primacy of relationship and grows deeper in its function, conjointly with the whole of God and with other persons *in* their wholeness and *for* their wholeness. We cannot continue to assume that our maturity unfolds on any other relational path; or we can expect the relational consequence with Jesus of “and you still do not know me?” (Jn 14:9)—a different relational path that Jesus clarified and corrected for them (e.g. Mk 8:17-21), yet still resulted in his frustration and anguish. We need to return Mary to her rightful place wherever the gospel is proclaimed. That is, we need to claim and embody with our whole person in likeness, the gospel that Mary claimed and embodied in her maturing discipleship.

Discipleship based on the primacy of relationship together with Jesus on his intrusive relational path involves irreplaceably our whole person, who ongoingly chooses to be vulnerable and intimate with others, thus intrusive. Such choices are the agency of the subject-person—which should not be confused with self-determination conforming to expectations—the ‘who, what and how’ God holds us accountable to be as the person in his qualitative image and to function in likeness of the whole of God. The ongoing relational outcome ‘already’—not to be diminished by ‘not yet’—of each subject-choice to be so involved is the wholeness that distinguishes becoming complete and thereby maturing (the *teleios* of Eph 4:13) in the primacy of the following: what’s important to God, what’s necessary to Jesus, and what’s vital for life together in his church family. On this relational basis alone, discipleship matures in integrally claiming and proclaiming the gospel of transformation to wholeness in likeness of the vulnerably present and intimately involved Trinity (the whole of God for the monotheist Paul).

The model that we have in Mary for maturing in our discipleship is simple but not easy, just as Jesus demonstrated and Peter experienced at his footwashing. Since it requires being vulnerable and intimate in relationships, and calls for being intrusive, there are easier paths to take for our development. What emerged from the primordial garden continues to challenge the person in our theological anthropology and our view of sin. Though we are always subjected to what emerged, we cannot allow becoming subject to its influence, whereby our view of sin ignores reductionism and our person and relationships become preoccupied with secondary matter that shapes us in reverse likeness—“you will not be reduced...you will become like...” Easier paths to development signify the presence and influence of reductionism, which when engaged

even with good intentions (“good to make one wiser”) locate us on following a different path from Jesus (“Where are you?”).

Not surprisingly, any different path from Jesus’ intrusive relational path takes us away from his intrusive cross to a derelationalized cross, a cross enhanced by traditional doctrines. If we affirm the atonement of Jesus Christ, it is inadequate to merely claim that Jesus saved us from our sin and not include sin as reductionism. This atonement can leave us in a worse condition than before we claimed it (cf. Lk 11:24-26). Furthermore, it is insufficient to claim we are ‘justified by faith’ and not live in the primacy of relationship that is both vulnerable and intimate. Such re-formed doctrines take Paul out of the context of his whole theology (Rom 3:21-31). Christ’s sacrifice was enacted only on Jesus’ intrusive relational path, which cannot fragment the primacy of his relational work from his only relational purpose and outcome of relationship together in wholeness. Faith is the reciprocal relational response that both affirms the primacy of relationship over any self-determination and secondary preoccupation. Faith is also the reciprocal relational response that claims the sacrifice of Jesus, in which the curtain was torn away and the barrier of the veil removed for vulnerable, intimate, face-to-face relationship together in the wholeness of these persons (God and those in faith), that is, the righteousness of who, what and how they are. In other words, the righteous Jesus saved us from reduced ontology and function and saved us to be whole in who, what and how we are in the primacy of relationship together without the veil and thus in transformed relationships vulnerably both equalized and intimate.

Anything less and any substitutes take us away from his intrusive cross and derelationalize his sacrifice, whereby ironically those who claim to be justified by faith live in efforts shaped by self-determination that make secondary the primacy of relationship—contrary to what Jesus saved us from and saved us to. What results is not the relational outcome of wholeness that matures persons in discipleship and relationships together in church, but rather shapes those persons, relationships and churches in reverse likeness of the whole of God.

The Likeness that Makes the Difference

As we extend our previous discussion of living in God’s likeness (review in chap. 5), maturing in likeness of the whole of God is not complex and yet it is also not easy given its intrusive demands. Whether we are talking about the whole of God, the triune God or the Trinity, there are two important questions to keep in mind and to answer for ourselves during the course of this discussion: (1) *Who* is present and involved with us, and (2) on this relational basis, *what* is revealed to us in relational terms that defines the likeness that necessarily determines our likeness? This who and what are crucial to distinguish the likeness that makes the difference.

The extent to which trinitarian theology distinguishes the church in likeness of the Trinity—that is, the likeness that makes the difference—is arguable. This likeness is contingent on how complete the Christology is and how integrally the Trinity is based on this Christology. Paul was certainly no trinitarian but as a monotheist he fully understood the whole of God from the whole of Jesus’ person, who embodied with the Spirit the *pleroma* of God. Therefore, Jesus *into* Paul, also with the Spirit, embodied for the church

the likeness of the whole of God that makes the difference. We need to receive the who and understand the what that they present to us.

To claim the gospel of transformation and the experiential truth of its relational outcome of wholeness in relationship together, and to proclaim this gospel of wholeness and live its whole relationship together in the world, necessitate integral understanding of *who* came and *what* has come that embody the gospel. The whole ontology and function of the who is inseparable from the what (saved *to*); and the experiential truth of salvation's good news for relationship is contingent both on *the integral relational basis* constituted in the whole ontology and function of God and on *the ongoing relational base* composed by the presence and involvement of the whole of God. This contingency needs to be met in relational terms in order for our ontology and function to be in likeness to embody the relational outcome of the gospel. This integral relational basis and ongoing relational base are illuminated in Jesus' defining prayer that clearly distinguished the whole ontology and function of his family in whole relationship together with and in likeness of the whole of God, the Trinity (Jn 17).

In his formative family prayer, Jesus summarized his relational purpose to disclose (*phaneroo*, not merely *apokalypto*) his Father to us to fulfill the whole of God's thematic relational response for intimate relationship together in the very likeness of their relationship in the ontological One and relational Whole (17:6,21-23,26). His prayer defines for his family this integral relational basis that both (1) distinguishes the experiential truth of the embodied whole of God (for Paul, the *pleroma* of God), "as you have sent me into the world" (v.18, "as," *kathos*, in accordance with, like), disclosing the congruence between the Father and the Son, and, conjointly, that (2) illuminates their whole ontology ("as we are one," v.11,22) and function ("as you, Father, are in me and I am in you," v.21, "as you have loved me," v.23). The who and what of God disclosed by Jesus is nothing less than the whole of God; and on this integral relational basis, the ontology and function of his family are defined and determined in likeness ("be one as we," "as you...in me and I am in you, may they also be," "as you have sent me...I have sent them"). This is more than a mere analogy that Jesus is praying for, but rather the dynamic outworking of the vulnerable presence of the relationship of God that distinguishes the innermost whole ("the glory," v.5, "my glory," v.24) of the triune God. So, who is present and involved with you?

The church's ontology and function are distinguished on the relational basis and ongoing relational base of only the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God, the Trinity. As Jesus continued to pray to the Father, this whole relationship together (defined as eternal life, 17:3), theirs and ours together, cannot function while under the influence of the surrounding context "*of* the world" (*ek*, preposition signifying out of which one is derived or belongs, 17:14,16); that is to say, relationship determined by our terms (even with good intentions) or by reductionist substitutes from the surrounding context, including alternative shaping of relationship together. Jesus made evident the ongoing conflict with reductionism this relationship encounters and pointed to the relational dynamic necessary to live in the whole of relationship together, which Jesus vulnerably embodied in whole-ly distinguished life and practice to be intimately involved with his followers for their integrally distinguished life and practice—to be "sanctified" (17:19) in the difference that makes the difference in order to be in the likeness that makes the difference.

To reiterate our previous discussion (in chap. 9) on his prayer, Jesus commissioned (*apostello*) his followers for the specific mission “just as” (*kathos*) his Father commissioned him: “As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world” (17:18, cf. 20:21). For the Son’s purpose and function from his Father to be transferred to his followers, the enactment of the commission has to be both sanctified and whole to be compatible (“just as,” *kathos*) with the Father-Son relationship and then the Father-Son-disciples relationship. When there is congruence in intimate relationship together and compatibility of function in the trinitarian relational context of family and relational process of family love, his followers together (the church as God’s new creation family) are not statically “still in the world” (*en*, remaining in it, 17:11) but now dynamically sent “into the world” (*eis*, motion into) to function whole in likeness of the Father and the Son with the Spirit in further response to make whole the human condition. What is revealed to us in relational terms to define the likeness that makes the difference intrusively embodies the good news of whole relationship together, which is integrated by the ongoing relational base of the Trinity’s ontology and function. Therefore, his followers’ call to be whole is conjointly his followers *sent to be whole*. This composes the significance of *what* to send out and integrally signifies the importance of *whom* to send out and defines more deeply *why* to send out (with the full soteriology), while providing the relational basis for *how* to function in his commission. Only this likeness will make the difference that distinguishes the whole gospel.

Jesus prayed using the prepositions “in” (*en*, 17:11,13), “of” (*ek*, vv.14,16), “out of” (*ek*, v.15) and “into” (*eis*, v.18). He gave his followers no option but to remain (*en*) and to be relationally involved—not the spatial and relational separation of *ek*, “out of the world”—vulnerably and intrusively in the surrounding contexts of the world in likeness (“as,” *kathos*) of his whole ontology and function. Therefore, he distinctly qualified what (who) is to define them and determine how they function in those contexts—*en* is governed by the first *ek*, out from within its influence—with the ongoing relational base for their ontology and function to be in his likeness to embody the relational outcome of the gospel. This composes both the difference and the likeness that make the difference, both for which we are accountable to determine our ontology and function as persons in discipleship and as church family.

The reciprocating process revealed in relational terms in Jesus’ prayer makes imperative his call and his commission in conjoint function. We cannot separate them or fragment them into various parts for us to follow and expect to be in the likeness (*kathos*) of Jesus as one with the Father, who sent him along with the Spirit in their whole ontology and function. Moreover, we cannot expect to mature in our person, relationships and churches without the full likeness revealed to us. Who came and continues to be vulnerably present and intimately involved with us for relationship together, and who communicates with us in relational terms, either will be relationally responded to reciprocally in likeness, or will be engaged in referential terms as the object of faith rendered to doctrines, codes of conduct and elements of mission. We are accountable for the difference and the likeness.

What Jesus reveals to us in his prayer is that his followers in discipleship and his followers together as church will not mature in his likeness unless they also mature in his difference. Jesus clearly distinguished that he and his church family “do not belong to the world” (first *ek*, Jn 17:14), yet they are sent “into the world” (*eis*) composed by his

difference so that they will be in his likeness (17:18-19). The dynamic of *ek* composes the difference necessary in his call to be whole in order for his commission sending them to be whole will compose them in his likeness to fulfill the transfer of the Son's purpose and function *into* his family. This *ek-eis* relational dynamic (not dialectic) is an ongoing integral reflexive process, in triangulation and reciprocating contextualization with the Spirit, for his followers to mature further and deeper in their integrated call and commission composed by his difference and likeness. Therefore, Jesus made definitive: salvific life and practice to make whole emerges from sanctified life and practice to be whole in order to join together in likeness with God's thematic relational response to the human condition "in the world"—the experiential truth of the gospel of transformation to whole relationship together.

Whole relationship together is the defining relational outcome for which Jesus asks his Father to embody his followers together as the distinguished family in their likeness (Jn 17:20-23). Their likeness is the righteousness of the whole of God in relationship that Jesus earlier made the primacy for his whole followers in God's kingdom-family to distinguish them from any and all reductionism (Mt 6:33), and the true righteousness that Paul made definitive for the new creation church family in likeness (Eph 4:24). Anything less and any substitutes for the church do not distinguish it from the human shaping of relationships together, and consequently cannot be counted on to be of significance both as God's family and for the human relational condition. Whatever other likeness the church functions in will not make a difference. So, what is revealed to you to determine your likeness?

Embodying this relational outcome of the gospel of transformation was integral to the relational dynamic of Jesus *into* Paul. The image of the whole of God in the face of Christ was innermost for the whole of Paul (Col 3:10) and integrated the whole in his theology (2 Cor 3:18). To be transformed to the qualitative image of the ontological One and to live in the relational likeness of the relational Whole defined the ontology and determined the function of the church for Paul. Therefore, churches must make the critical decision how their practice is to be: either shaped by a framework with the temple curtain still between them and God, or distinguished by the relational context and process in likeness of the Trinity with the veil removed. The church only matures in the difference of the holy God and the likeness of the whole Trinity.

The ontology and function of the church in likeness of the Trinity is neither a paradigm (though the trinitarian example does serve as that) nor a limited analogy, that is, if Jesus' defining family prayer is taken seriously, not to mention Paul in whole. But more significantly this reality-in-likeness is the relational outcome of directly experiencing the Trinity (for Paul, the whole of God) in relationship only on God's qualitative relational terms. This ongoing relational process is integral to the ongoing relational base of the Trinity's vulnerable presence and involvement in the function of church as family, particularly as revealed vulnerably by Jesus in the relational progression of following him to the Father and in the reciprocal relational work of the Spirit illuminated by Paul (e.g. Eph 2:22).

We cannot adequately "observe" the Trinity without being relationally addressed by the Trinity at the same time. Keep in focus that God's self-revelation is *how* God does relationship. How the Trinity is revealed, therefore, is how the Trinity relates to us, which

is how the trinitarian persons do relationship with each other (though in horizontal relational process discussed earlier). This involvement in the primacy of relationship together may appear limited to the God of revelation, yet we cannot limit the righteousness of God only to revelation without righteousness becoming the totality of who, what and how God is—though by definition righteousness defines for us the whole of who, what and how God is in relationship. God in righteousness and holiness is who is present and involved with us; and on this relational basis, Paul makes definitive the likeness that determines the new creation church family’s likeness in distinct relational terms (Eph 4:24ff).

We cannot epistemologically know and ontologically understand the Trinity without engaging the Trinity in how the trinitarian persons do relationship in their context and are doing relationship with us specifically in our context, yet still by their context. It is within their relational context and process that God’s self-disclosure is vulnerably given in relational terms and needs to be received in likeness—and not narrowed down to referential terms and acknowledged indirectly—thereby directly experienced as an outcome of this relational connection. To narrow this down to referential terms disconnects what is revealed from the relational context and process of its source. Thus, this consistency with the trinitarian relational context and compatibility with the trinitarian relational process cannot be engaged from the detached observation, for example, of a scientific paradigm, or with the measured involvement and relational distance of a quantitative-analytic framework (even exegetically rigorous). Rather this whole context and process can only be engaged from the qualitative function of relationship—in the relational epistemic process with the Spirit as demonstrated by Paul (e.g. 1 Cor 2:10-13). Similarly, J. I. Packer defined the process of knowing God as a relationship with emotional involvement, and he challenged as invalid the assumption that the theological task can be engaged meaningfully with relational detachment.² Earlier, Helmut Thielicke made the critical distinction of no longer reading Scripture as a relational “word to me but only as the object of exegetical endeavors.”³

This is the relational significance of the deeper epistemology that Jesus made a necessity for Philip and Thomas in order to truly know him and whereby also know the Father (Jn 14:1-9, as discussed earlier)—that is, relationally knowing the Trinity, which is definitive of eternal life (Jn 17:3). This is the relationally-specific process that does not merely see (or observe) but rather is deeply focused on the Subject (as in *theaomai*, Jn 1:14), that does not reduce the person merely to attributes and categories but rather puts the parts of revelation together to comprehend the whole of God (as in *syniemi*, Mk 8:17, which the early disciples lacked, and *synesis*, Col 2:2, that Paul gained).

This relational epistemic process is the outworking of the Trinity’s relational involvement with us. Therefore, to come to know the triune God is neither possible by individual effort nor is the individual’s relationship with God alone sufficient. This process involves the practice of relationship as signified by the Trinity that, when experienced, results in the relational outcome of whole relationship together as the family of God constituted in the Trinity. Thus this integral relational process involves the integration of both the primacy of the qualitative (heart function in intimate relationship

² As noted by Alister E. McGrath, “Evangelical Theological Method” in *Evangelical Futures*, ed. John G. Stackhouse (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 23.

³ Helmut Thielicke, *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 33.

with the Trinity) and the primacy of the relational (involvement together in the family relationships of the Trinity). Whole knowledge and understanding of the Trinity as revealed—present and involved with us—is never merely for us to be informed about God but always directly intrudes on our whole person and relationships in the innermost, thereby transforming how we define our person, how we engage relationships and practice church to be whole in likeness (2 Cor 3:16-18; Col 3:10-11). Maturing goes deeper in this difference and likeness, just as Mary embodied.

Consequently the ontology and function of the Trinity cannot be understood in referential formulations of trinitarian theology nor experienced in church doctrine. Along with reducing the whole of God to attributes and the trinitarian persons to categories or roles, these reflect how our understanding (“a reputation of being alive,” Rev 3:1, NIV) and our practice (“have abandoned the love you had at first,” Rev 2:4) become *decontextualized* or disconnected. That is, they are relationally detached or distant from the relational context and process of the Trinity, and they need to be recontextualized in the relational nature of the Trinity in order to be reconnected to the Trinity’s presence and involvement—which may also require deconstruction, transformation and reconstruction in our discipleship and churches.

The church is the ultimate practice that must (*dei* by its nature, not from obligation or compulsion) be contextualized in the Trinity’s relational presence and composed by the Trinity’s intimate involvement, which Jesus’ defining family prayer and salvific discourse on the cross illuminate as who and what distinguishing the church. Otherwise, the church is susceptible to redefinition. For example, an overemphasis on the notion of “the body of Christ” for the church—that is, focused on organizational structure, not relational function—can inadvertently decontextualize the church as the family of God constituted in and by the Trinity. Moreover, in another sense, with an incomplete Christology and truncated soteriology a church can unknowingly become too Christocentric, and subsequently not practice the relational progression to the Father vulnerably enacted by the Son and continued by the Spirit in the function of the Trinity constituting the whole of God as family, thereby disconnecting the church from the Trinity’s presence and involvement. These are consequences of the church becoming shaped by human contextualization, the variable shapes of which Jesus challenged in his post-ascension discourse. These are not the likeness that makes the difference.

The life of the Trinity transforms the church’s life and function in its likeness. This whole life as the family of God defines the church’s existence and composes its practice by, with and in the likeness of the Trinity. However, who is present and involved, and what is revealed, can only be received and understood in relational terms. Miroslav Volf also contends in apparent referential terms that “the church must speak of the Trinity as its determining reality,” and thereby acknowledges the limits of this church-Trinity analogy.⁴ We need to ask then on what basis does he perceive such church determination. Perceived and understood only in referential terms render both the Trinity and the church to reduced ontology and function, without the integral qualitative and relational significance to be whole. Additionally, the church’s witness is rendered to a gospel without the depth to respond to the breadth of the human relational condition.

⁴ Miroslav Volf, “Community Formation as an Image of the Triune God: A Congregational Model of Church Order and Life,” in Richard N. Longenecker, ed. *Community Formation in the Early Church and in the Church Today* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 223-225.

As discussed in chapter five, the different roles and functions expressed in the Trinity do not define their persons, though these reflect the unique (but secondary) distinctions each person exercises to extend family love to us. Each of the trinitarian persons is defined by the same qualitative substance (*homoousios*) that not only defines the equality of their persons (*hypostases*) but is also fundamental to their relationships (*perichoresis*). Thus these unique distinctions also do not determine the primacy of their relationships and how they are involved with each other. They are not involved with each other primarily on the basis of role differences but rather with the essential qualitative significance of their whole persons expressed in the relational involvement of love (both *agape*, Jn 14:31, and *phileo*, Jn 5:20).

This qualitative substance and these intimate relationships of love distinguishing the Trinity are what the churches in Sardis and Ephesus got away from. This issue is not merely a matter of priorities but about the primacy of whole relationship together, without which all other effort (even with good intentions) is insignificant to God and qualitatively meaningless. Given the high activity level of these churches, they likely had well-organized roles to operate so efficiently. This implies how they substituted for what is primary and matters most to God. The Trinity, holy and whole, is the only source that distinguishes the church in the difference and likeness that makes the difference embodied by Jesus for the human relational condition to be made whole. Who else is present and involved, and what else has been revealed, that will make this difference?

The corporate life of a church can be undertaken in either of two contrasting approaches. One approach is from an institutional framework or organizational paradigm. Institutions and most organizations are a function of structure and systemic processes. While the church has organizational properties of structure (namely interdependence) and systems (specifically covariation), the church in wholeness cannot be a function of organizational aspects. Such a framework and mindset tend to predispose or bias us to see and practice church in a limited way—with the substitutes of reductionism. This limitation is particularly critical in the information age and the broad influences of information technology, which Quentin Schultze contends shift our perceptions of the world increasingly through the lenses of measurable norms, means, causes, and effects—that is, a systemic concept (closed systems) of human culture, our image of ourselves and society that persons can objectively observe, measure, manipulate, and eventually control.⁵ This leaves us susceptible to practice what Schultze calls “*informational promiscuity*: impersonal relationships based on feigned intimacies and lacking moral integrity.”⁶ Does this pervade Western church practice today? In contrast and conflict, what is revealed to us to determine church likeness?

The apostolic church was not based on an organizational paradigm even though it reflected organization. At the innermost of the church is *relationship*: a covenant relationship (from the OT) in relational progression to new covenant relationship together (in the NT) constituted in and by the Trinity as the family of God. The church is a function only of these relationships in likeness of the Trinity that hold it together in its innermost, and any structure, system or roles serve only as support functions of the primacy of these transformed relationships. This contrasting and conflicting approach to

⁵ Quentin J. Schultze, *Habits of the High-Tech Heart: Living Virtuously in the Information Age* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 37-42.

⁶ Schultze, 35.

the corporate life of the church is from the relational dynamic emerging from the relational outcome of direct experience with the Trinity—which referential terms fragment or prevent.

The church's ontology and function in likeness of the Trinity is the outworking of the family relationships distinguished between the Son and the Father and illuminated by the Spirit. The function of these relationships only becomes relationally significant to God and to each other when it involves the qualitative substance of the whole person (signified by the heart) opened to one another and coming together in the primacy of relationships (constituted by intimacy). The relational significance in likeness to the Trinity emerges when our whole persons function together in the intimate interdependent relationships as God's family in the relational process of God's family love, not relating through roles or other indirect means. In practice this is the integration of primacy given to the heart and relationship together without the veil, which are defined and determined by God on the relational terms (not referential) self-disclosed in the Trinity for the church's integral relational basis and ongoing relational base. Can we ignore who is present and involved with us and avoid what is revealed?

Reductionism has been the critical issue for the relational condition "to be apart" since Adam and Eve "knew that they were naked...and made loincloths" to hide their whole persons in the primordial garden (Gen 3:7-8). In likeness, variations of this relational dynamic have shaped the church since its beginning to reinforce or sustain the human relational condition, not to make it whole. Reductionism of and in the church is not a phenomenon unique to modernity, as demonstrated by the early churches in Corinth and likely Galatia (exposed by Paul), and in Ephesus, Thyatira, Sardis and Laodicea (exposed by Jesus in post-ascension). Moreover, reductionism in the epistemic process of understanding and truly knowing God has been most problematic—even a crisis today—that Thomas, Philip and the other disciples experienced (Jn 14:1-10), as discussed earlier. Yet directly in contention with the ongoing issue of reductionism, Jesus vulnerably declared in relational terms that he would not leave his followers as relational or emotional orphans, ontological or epistemological orphans apart experientially from the whole of the Trinity but as whole-intimate members together relationally belonging to God's family. Given Jesus' undeniable declaration and defining prayer for his family 'already', we need to ongoingly account for this in our practice of church. The integral relational basis and ongoing relational base for the whole ontology and function of the church are unavoidable.

As Christ's followers gather (*ekklesia*), it is the gathering of those who have been called out and together (*ekkletoi*). How the church is to *come together* cannot be shaped in the likeness of individualism, fragmentary relationships of any shape, and thus not even in the likeness of a voluntary association. It must (by its nature, not obligation or compulsion) be in the relational context and process with and in likeness of the Trinity. This relational dynamic is the critical basis by which we need to (re)construct a functionally whole ecclesiology—the transformed ecclesiology that Paul clearly distinguished of the whole and that Jesus illuminated clearly in post-ascension to be whole, which is contrary to the substitutes of reductionism and thus in conflict with their practice. What distinguishes the church in likeness that makes the difference must then be composed by Jesus' difference that distinguished the Trinity.

Consider what determines your church's likeness. The trinitarian relational context and process never allow the relationships in the church to be reduced and become fragmentary by remaining distant, shallow, independent, or selectively involved. The integrity of the Trinity's righteousness is at issue here. The Trinity never does relationships on these terms—terms that reflect and thus reinforce the human relational condition—nor does God accept such relationships from us. In contrast and conflict indeed, the whole of the relationship of God is both relationship specific and relationally significant to the Trinity's interdependent relationships intimately involved in family love; and the gathering of Christ's followers when whole is in this likeness, beyond a paradigm or analogy. The church's ontology and practice must have this relational clarity or the veil has not been removed to illuminate its primacy in whole relationship together, and thereby its depth of the gospel for the breadth of the human relational condition.

The church functions as God's family because of the relational outcome of directly experiencing the Trinity in relationship. The relational work of the whole of the Trinity in each trinitarian person's function to extend family love to us brings us together in the church as the new creation family of God. The Father is able to build transformed relationships with his adopted children as family together because of the Son's vulnerable relational work of redemptive reconciliation. While his relational replacement, the Spirit, lives within each individual daughter or son, the Spirit does not work for the individual's self-autonomy or self-determination but for the whole of God functioning as family in the likeness of the Trinity (cf. 1 Cor 12:7). This is the only relational outcome covenanted by the Father and embodied in whole by the Son in the relational progression of God's family love, which the Spirit brings to complete wholeness in God's eschatological plan for all creation (Col 1:19-20; Rom 8:19-21; Rev 21:1-5)—the integral relational basis and ongoing relational base for the church.

The sum of the Trinity's relational work in family love constitutes the church and its function as God's family. The body of Christ comes together with him and is integrated only for these relationships—to be the whole of God's family (1 Cor 12:12-13; Eph 2:17-22). The church in wholeness cannot be a function of anything less than the primacy of relationships, family relationships, living together by his family love in likeness of the Trinity. Though the Son and Father define and demonstrate what it means to be God's family, the Spirit's relational work is the critical relational means to experiencing this relational reality and whose ongoing reciprocal relational work is indispensable to be whole, live whole and make whole the human condition.

It is these family relationships and family process in which our response both as individuals and together as church needs to be rooted and functionally involved. Yet, any association of the church to the function of the Trinity—most notably beyond a paradigm and an analogy—likely will challenge most ecclesiologies formulated today. The whole of God's theological trajectory is improbable and relational path is intrusive.

Moreover, this perception of the church raises various related issues involving theological anthropology and eschatology, in addition to the pneumatology discussed above, while addressing an incomplete Christology (without the complete self-disclosure of God in the face of Christ) and truncated soteriology (without the whole gospel of what Christ also saved us *to*). For these to come together in the church as Trinity, we must consider that this conversation is engaged further within a context in which the reductionist influences of modernity are challenged, and that the relativistic challenges of

postmodernity have created a climate that opens further opportunity for Christ's followers, as Jesus prayed, to live together just as the Trinity lives "so that the world may believe" (Jn 17:21) and "so that the world may know" (17:23). Specifically then for our immediate concern, the compatibility of our response involves two issues of church practice (among others) needing resolve: the place of the individual and the voluntary association of church membership.

Is the individual a secondary part of the church and does the church function in priority over its individuals? Or is the church a voluntary association of individuals and is the collective of individuals the church? Generally, an Eastern interpretive framework would answer the first set of questions affirmatively while a Western interpretive framework would be in the affirmative to the second set. The Western framework assumes that what underlie the individual are the common notions of freedom and independence. This is assuming that the position of self-autonomy and self-determination is not an option in an Eastern framework, but is the only viable one in most Western perceptions. These positions coincide with the differences in human thought between the ancient Chinese philosophers and ancient Greek philosophers.⁷

Yet when either perceptual framework of the individual is applied to the biological family (extended or nuclear), there are consequences for the individual and the family whole in both Eastern and Western families. Since the individual is commonly sacrificed in the East, the person tends to be lost in the family without a sense of the deeper identity of *who* one is as a person within the whole. With the aggrandized (idolized) individual in the West, the person also tends to become lost, that is, lost in oneself without a sense of the deeper identity of *what* one is as a person in the primacy of the whole. As a result of the ambiguity or shallowness of who and what the person is, both families experience a less significant family and less complete persons. These reflect the human shaping of persons and relationships that unfold in the church, which reinforce or sustain what emerged from the primordial garden.

Returning to the church as family, we cannot expect different results from church practice unless the whole person becomes defined and engages the relationships to be whole together, both of which are signified in the Trinity. This requires a new person who is not sacrificed for the economy of the whole (as in Eastern families) nor who is given primacy at the expense of the whole (seen in Western families). The whole person is distinguished in the theological anthropology that includes the deeper understanding of the image and likeness of God (*imago Dei*) that is relationally integrated with Christ as the image of God (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15).

This understanding is gained from God's self-disclosure in Christ as the image of God, who constitutes the *imago Dei* and the person in the whole of the Trinity. For Paul, the image of God in the face of Christ was not a theological construct but the experiential truth of the gospel who illuminated the whole of God in direct relationship Face to face (2 Cor 4:4,6)—whom Paul experienced in whole relationship together. The vulnerable presence and relational involvement Paul experienced was nothing less and no substitutes of the *pleroma* of God. Therefore, complete Christology was not optional for Paul but the

⁷ For an expanded discussion on the origins of cultural differences in human thought see Richard E. Nisbet, *The Geography of Thought: How Asians and Westerners Think Differently . . . and Why* (New York: Free Press, 2003).

necessary key to the whole of God, the whole of whom constituted the church's ontology and function in likeness (Col 2:9-10; 3:10).

Just as Paul experienced the whole of God, the principle of nothing less and no substitutes also defines *by what* God does relationship and *how* God does relationships. Since the incarnation is the fulfillment of God's thematic relational response to our relational condition, the nothing-less-and-no-substitutes relational response of the life of Jesus communicates two vital relational messages directly to us. First, the whole of God vulnerably extends the innermost of God to us and is whole-ly involved with us relationally (the meaning of *agape* love) because of the importance to God of our whole person created in the image of the Trinity. Secondly, the whole of God responds to us intimately with family love not only so we would no longer function relationally "to be apart" and remain as relational orphans, but so that we can integrally understand and experience the relationships necessary to be whole together in the family of God as signified by the whole of the Trinity (not solely Christ). For these family relationships and family process of family love, we were created and are re-created in the image and likeness of the Trinity, just as Jesus distinguished for his family (Jn 17:23) and Paul illuminated for the church (Col 3:10-11; Eph 3:16-19).

Some theologians are now formulating theological anthropology by narrowly focusing on the image of God for humans only as the fulfillment of the new humanity/creation at the eschaton.⁸ While this may extend the practice of the church, it lacks functional clarity to be of relational significance to the whole of God, thus is susceptible to reductionism. From the textual convergence of God's self-disclosures, I emphasize that "Christ as the image of God" is what we need to whole-ly conform to (cf. Rom 8:29) to be the image of God. Complete Christology is irreplaceable for theological anthropology and ecclesiology to be whole. And Christ clearly defined and vulnerably demonstrated to us: (1) how to define the person, and on this basis (2) how to be involved in relationships, and thereby (3) how to function in relationships together as the church, the new creation, the family of God. The image of God involves all three to be whole with the whole of God—whole persons in the relationships necessary to be whole as constituted in the Trinity. The function of the direct revelation of the image of God in the face of Christ is only for relationship—not for the transmission of referential information about God—the relational reality of which we are accountable now to practice and experience. Who is present and involved cannot rightfully be disconnected from what is revealed. Accordingly, we cannot disregard what is revealed and not disregard who is involved; nor can we affirm who is present and not embrace what is revealed. Therefore, what is revealed to us is neither optional nor negotiable to determine the likeness of our person, relationships and churches. The question then shifts from 'what is revealed' to what are we doing with it and with *who*? Of course, we can always interject the question from the primordial garden to avoid both the what and the who: "Did God really say that?"

In God's nothing-less-and-no-substitutes relational response, God communicates directly with us both by what God engages relationships and how God is involved in relationships. Furthermore, as Jesus consistently demonstrated in his interactions with others, this is the only way God does relationships, indicating the righteousness of God

⁸ For a discussion of this project see Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 141-264.

that can be expected in relationship, and that cannot be negotiated. Given the relational reality of who is present and how God is involved, therefore, our response needs to be compatible with God's way of doing relationships, which is the primacy of God's righteousness made imperative by Jesus for his followers to pursue (Mt 6:33) and made definitive by Paul for the likeness of the new creation church (Eph 4:24). The what and the who are undeniable relational realities waiting to be embodied in how we respond. This necessitates also functioning compatibly with nothing less and no substitutes. Anything other or anything less would not engage the qualitative image and relational likeness of God, the whole of whom Christ reveals fully to us when his image is not reduced by a substitute.⁹ Only the whole of who is present and involved, therefore, reveals the whole of what determines and thereby distinguishes our likeness as person, relationships and church.

When our Christology is complete, the whole of Christ as the image of the whole of God emerges. When our soteriology is not truncated, Christ as the image of God functions to create the new persons with the veil removed for intimate relationship together as God's family in the likeness of the Trinity—as God planned even before creation (Rom 8:29), prayed for its relational outcome 'already' (Jn 17:20-23), and brings to completion at the eschatological conclusion (1 Cor 15:49) through the ongoing process of transformation 'already' by the Spirit (2 Cor 3:18). This new person is made whole by being transformed (*metamorphoo*) qualitatively from the inner out, which is a substantive change ontologically distinguished from mere outer changes (*metaschematizo*) having perceptually similar form (for example, "apostles of Christ," "angel of light" and "servants of righteousness" in 2 Cor 11:13-15). And the significance of the individual—which is often misplaced to individualism—in the process of completing this new creation is a person neither sacrificed nor aggrandized, neither reduced nor lost.

Accordingly, on the basis of *by what* and *how* God engages all relationships, the compatible reciprocal response of our whole person functions in the primacy of the intimate relationships of the whole of God as family—for the purpose not "to be alone," not "to be apart," not to be relational orphans, and even more significantly to function in the new creation image and likeness of God. Moreover, the response of these whole persons as the image of God in the new creation determines the relational involvement of whole church ontology and function beyond the limits of church as a voluntary association to be in the likeness that makes the difference by the new relational order. We need to understand this more deeply.

Some may perceive 'the church as Trinity' as a metaphor by which to envision the church. For others, 'the church as Trinity' may serve as an organizational paradigm to structure the church and its operation. Either would be an error of reductionism that would result in a reductionist substitute of twofold consequence. The first part of the consequence diminishes the reality of relational involvement by the Trinity, who experientially constitutes the church in the trinitarian persons' ongoing relational work (the church's ongoing relational base). The second part of the relational consequence from a reductionist substitute also separates (or distances) the church from functioning in

⁹ Consider Peter's image of Christ when he in effect would not let Jesus go to the cross (Mt 16:21, 22) and when he refused to let Jesus wash his feet (Jn 13:6-8). His reductionist images of Christ both prevented him from embracing the whole of God's response and also allowed his whole person to remain in a comfort zone of relational distance.

its reciprocal relational work cooperatively with the Trinity to fulfill its purpose of embodying the relational extension of the whole of God's family in likeness of Jesus sent by the Father (the church's integral relational basis). The twofold consequence renders the church to a reverse likeness.

Just as the whole of God vulnerably responded to our relational condition "to be apart" from the whole and the relationships necessary to be whole, our compatible response back to God can only be the whole of our persons in transformed relationship together composing the new relational order of his church as family, which are ongoingly composed by and constituted in the Trinity. In the trinitarian relational context of family and the trinitarian relational process of family love, the persons together as the church become whole in the image and likeness of the whole of God. Without this relational context and process for defining who and what persons are and determining how persons together function in the innermost, there are only individuals in voluntary association—individually and collectively incomplete. Theological anthropology and ecclesiology without the Trinity are incomplete; both of these apart from the qualitative relational significance of the whole of the new creation in likeness 'already' of the Trinity lack full integration with God's desires, design, purpose and thematic relational action. All these theological dynamics converge in the whole of God's thematic relational response to our condition in order for us to be whole in the primacy of relationship together in the new relational order, which is composed entirely by the Trinity and thus deconstructed, transformed and reconstructed from any human shaping of persons, relationships and the church.

The wholeness that holds together human persons and the church in their innermost has qualitative meaning and substance solely in relational significance to the whole of God, and therefore to be whole is the experiential reality only in relationship-specific involvement with the Trinity. The theological anthropology and ecclesiology necessary to be whole emerge from this integral trinitarian theology, whose antecedent is the complete Christology. The substitutes of reductionism are the only alternative for both the person and the church—the alternative from which the "successful" churches at Ephesus and Sardis still needed to be redeemed, as do many churches and persons since.

The complete whole and holy God embodied his-their theological trajectory and relational path with the primacy of the qualitative and the relational in order to integrally distinguish the *pleroma* of Christ, God's new church family, in the primacy of whole relationship together in their likeness. His church only emerges distinguished in their irreducible theological trajectory and nonnegotiable relational path, however improbable and intrusive. And his church matures only in their difference and likeness.

The perception of who is present and involved with us and understanding what is revealed to us are always contingent on our perceptual-interpretive framework and lens. Paul makes this framework (*phronema*) and lens (*phroneo*) imperative to be transformed by the Spirit in order for the qualitative wholeness (*zōē* and peace, Rom 8:5-6) necessary for perceiving who and understanding what in their whole. Since Jesus embodied the whole of God in relational terms, who always communicated in relational language, their who cannot be fully perceived in referential terms and their what cannot be whole-ly understood in referential language. Without the new framework and lens from the Spirit,

their relational language and terms are a hermeneutical problem for theological cognition that is commonly addressed by narrowing down who and what to referential terms and language to get around any hermeneutical impasse. This recourse is identified by the writer of Hebrews as a lack of development of hermeneutical means (*aistheterion*), which characterized those lacking in maturity and thus who narrowed down who and what (Heb 5:13-6:1)—which also identified the disciples lack of development (*aisthanomai*) and maturity (Lk 9:44-45).

The new *phronema* and *phroneo* were an experiential reality that emerged for Paul with the Spirit and matured in his theology and practice. So, on the relational basis of who was present and involved with Paul, and what was revealed to him and through him by the Spirit, Paul continues to declare to churches today: “For building up the body of Christ to maturity to the fullness of Christ, *determine* yourselves with the new *creation*, recreated according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness”—that is, in the distinguished *difference* of the whole of who, what and how we are in likeness of the whole of who, what and how God is in relationship, so that we will indeed mature distinguished ‘already’ in the relational outcome of wholeness that Jesus saved us to, and therefore will make the difference needed for the human relational condition existing both in churches and in the world.

Chapter 12

Reclaiming the Gospel

If indeed you continue in *your relational response of faith, maturing and steadfast, not shifting from the relational outcome of the gospel that you received.*

Colossians 1:23, ESV

The above faith, which Paul makes a contingency for experiencing the relational outcome of wholeness composed by the whole of Jesus (Col 1:19-22), has its own contingency that must be met for the experiential reality of the gospel of transformation's relational outcome to unfold whole-ly. If anyone affirms or associates with the gospel, then whatever they claim has to include involvement in discipleship—the ongoing reciprocal relational response of faith to the relational work of Jesus, which continues and even extends beyond the relational work Jesus began (Jn 14:12). The gospel does not end with the resurrection of Jesus, nor does it conclude with proclaiming its truth.

Morna Hooker illuminated in biblical studies that the narrative endings in the Gospels and Acts return to their beginning in order to continue and complete Jesus' story:

One might perhaps have expected that the way in which the evangelists brought their books to an end would be far removed from the way in which they began. In fact, as we have seen, this is not so....Taken together, we find that the beginning and end of each of our narratives form a neat *inclusion*, so that the final words of each book invite us to look back to the beginning of the story and to start reading it once more, with new insights into its meaning.

In none of these books, however, does the *inclusion* give us closure. On the contrary, our 'endings' all look forward to what comes next....For it may be that the ending which is in fact a new beginning is the inevitable way to express a gospel which is about death and resurrection. To the disciples, what seemed like an ending proved to be the beginning of a new life.¹

Yet, the discipleship that extends Jesus' story can only be in relational terms on his intrusive relational path. That further makes the ending with discipleship an open question for us today, which needs to be distinguished in the wholeness that Jesus saved us to. Those claiming the gospel cannot avoid both discipleship and living in the relational outcome that the gospel transforms them to (as John clarified, 1 Jn 1:6-7; 2:6), and thus not act on their new family responsibility (as adopted daughters and sons) to live out this relational outcome in wholeness so that Jesus' relational work is extended beyond what he began. In other words (relational not referential), those claiming the gospel are not only 'justified by faith', but they have to *justify* their response of faith in compatibility to God's relational response to them and in congruence with the relational terms composing the outcome of God's response and ongoing involvement (cf. Jam 2:14,14). Justifying our faith is not composed by being justified by faith but the latter

¹ Morna D. Hooker, *Endings: Invitations to Discipleship* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 82,84.

frees us to have the opportunity for our response to be in reciprocal relational terms without the veil rather than with self-determination. The ending in discipleship is accountable for this response.

In a similar way to the Gospels and Acts, we are faced in this study with ending where it began. Thus, our reintroduction to the gospel now brings us to the urgent and compelling need to reclaim this whole gospel and be transformed to wholeness in our person, relationships and churches. The twelfth chapter of God's people and Jesus' followers is an open chapter, yet to be complete both in how we live 'already' in our discipleship and churches, and in what we will be 'not yet'. To be complete in the relational outcome of wholeness today requires the integration of the Spirit's direct relational involvement and our ongoing reciprocal involvement in relationship together (our relational response of faith). How we engage as persons in the relationships necessary to complete this relational work distinguishing our discipleship and churches is an open question that not only challenges us today but also confronts us Face to face ("What are you doing here?") and demands our response now.

Disclaiming the Lack of Clarity

This study opened with a reintroduction to the gospel—holding us accountable for our model and assumptions of the gospel, making insufficient even its re-forms, in order that any reductionism is transformed to wholeness. This twelfth chapter involves God's people and Jesus' followers necessarily reclaiming the gospel. Our study remains open in this closing chapter for us to complete: that is, for our person and relationships to be ongoingly transformed to wholeness so that we will mature living whole in our discipleship and churches, such that we will clearly be distinguished in whole ontology and function with whole theology and practice, in order to complete our relational purpose to make whole both within churches and in the world—for the experiential truth of the gospel of transformation's relational outcome to be the experiential reality for our and the human condition.

The whole of God's relational response of grace to our human condition is the gospel. What composes the gospel as good news inseparably depends on the human condition that God responds to. That is to say, if the human condition is not inclusive of the reductionism that emerged from the primordial garden and has since unfolded enhanced in our midst, then this not only diminishes the whole of God who is present and involved but it also minimalizes the Trinity's response to our condition. This gap qualifies the good news relative to the extent of what is perceived as the human condition—the condition clouded by a narrowed-down interpretive framework and lens, whereby our condition is re-formed using a reduced theological anthropology and weak view of sin. If our view of the human condition does not coincide with what emerged from the primordial garden, any gospel will be sufficient to meet this condition.

As we have discussed throughout this study (notably in chap. 5), the human condition involves the human shaping of relationships defined by an ontological deficit of the person and determined by the reduced function of persons. The lack of whole ontology and function is the heart of the human relational condition and need; and the

absence of this wholeness prevents their fulfillment and what holds persons together in their innermost.

Consider the analysis of Sherry Turkle, the leading expert on how computers affect us as humans:

The narrative of *Alone Together* describes an arc: we expect more from technology and less from each other. This puts us at the still center of a perfect storm. Overwhelmed, we have been drawn to connections that seem low risk and always at hand: Facebook friends, avatars, IRC chat partners [a channel where you chat with others about a common interest]. If convenience and control continue to be our priorities, we shall be tempted by sociable robots.... At the robotic moment [when the performance of connection seems connection enough], we have to be concerned that the simplification and reduction of relationships is no longer something we complain about. It may become what we expect, even desire.²

Turkle describes and forecasts the human shaping of the modern self that has been increasingly embedding the modern person in a condition of qualitative insensitivity and relational unawareness. This loss of both the qualitative and relational signifies neither just a modern condition nor a recent phenomenon of technology. Reduced ontology and function, of course, have embedded and enslaved human persons from the beginning. Yet, virtual relationships can be considered a modern condition and recent phenomenon that compounds our condition down to critical levels of qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness, even in church and the academy. This modern shaping has enhanced its practice to the extent that our practice is increasingly rendered by default to reinforcing or sustaining the human relational condition.

Whether we also reinforce or sustain the sweeping assumption that we have not been, are not now and will not be reduced, or whether we simply question “Did God really say and do all that?” we are accountable for our condition, both individually and collectively. We cannot avoid the realities existing in and around us, though we certainly can deny the depth of our condition if not also its breadth. That points to the presence of fog.

It is difficult to see things clearly in the midst of a fog, sometimes to see most anything. Fog creates a lack of clarity. Sometimes, however, a lack of clarity creates a fog—often intentionally yet even unintentionally or with good intentions—clouding the explanation of something with ambiguity or distortion, perhaps with falseness. For example, this apparently happened about U.S. involvement in Vietnam with ‘the fog of war’, and currently may also be happening in a lack of clarity creating a fog about globalization and its benefits for the human condition. We as well need to ask ourselves if we, Christians and the church, are either in a period of fog from the surrounding context making it difficult to see the gospel, salvation, discipleship and the church clearly distinguished. Or has a lack of clarity of these, along with the person and relationships, created a fog that makes explaining and living them ambiguous, distorted or even false, thereby rendering them to our simulations and illusions? Either fog emerges from and

² Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 295.

operates under the sweeping assumption “You will not be *reduced*,” which causes us to be in a critical condition needing urgent attention.

When Jesus warned his followers to “Pay careful attention to what you hear *from me*; the measure you *use* will be the measure you get” (Mk 4:24), this measure encompassed what gospel, salvation, discipleship, church, person and relationships we will get as a result. Jesus’ relational imperative for us is not just paradigmatic and axiomatic but the experiential truth and reality of our interpretive framework and lens, along with our theological anthropology and view of sin. Any measure using a narrowed-down framework and lens, a reduced theological anthropology of persons and relationships, and a weak view of sin lacking reductionism, then determines the following: either becoming subject to a fog of reductionism that creates our lack of clarity, or being undistinguished by our lack of clarity that leads to creating a fog, all while working under the assumption of not being reduced. The result of either is being in a fog, unknowingly or intentionally, that only reduces and renders us fragmentary, unable to be whole because of being limited down to the measure we use—the fog of the person, relationships, the gospel, discipleship or of the church, keeping us from clearly being distinguished in what we claim and proclaim.

As we are faced with the measure we use, we need to further understand that our lack of clarity and subsequent fog also predispose us in what we pay attention to and ignore—notably in “what you hear *from me*.” This predisposition creates a bias influencing the way we think about something—e.g. our person, relationships, discipleship, church, gospel and salvation—called ‘confirmation bias’. Caryl Rivers explains confirmation bias in an op-ed on the current tension that divides races in the U.S.: “This bias is the tendency to interpret or remember information in a way that confirms what we already believe, and helps us to ignore new data.”³ When we think about what we believe and why we believe as such, we need to examine for any confirmation bias because that could be a major reason for how we believe what we do and why. The consequence of confirmation bias limits, if not eliminates, change in our thinking, theology and practice—specifically when the redemptive change for transformation is called for, which Jesus’ call to his followers to be whole necessitates. Any lack of clarity and fog over Jesus’ relational words and work are maintained in a process of confirmation bias mainly from information and explanations based on the referentialization of the Word, which disembodies his whole person and derelationalizes his person as the source for the whole of God’s involvement in relational response to the human condition. Urgently then, confirmation bias is a critical condition that we need to disclaim in our lack of clarity and fog in order to go beyond what we currently believe and practice, so that we then can reclaim the relational words and work of Jesus—who vulnerably disclosed the whole of God only for the integral purpose and outcome of new relationship together in wholeness to compose God’s family, whereby God’s definitive blessing is completed (Num 6:24-26).

“Wake up,” therefore, Jesus confronts intrusively, “for I have not found your works *complete*” (*pleroo*, Rev 3:2). You have *diminished your involvement* in the love you had at first *in the primacy of relationship together*” (2:4), and “you tolerate *reductionism and its counter-relational work in your midst to shape your church*” (3:16). All these critiques by Jesus in post-ascension continue to confront churches today for the

³ Caryl Rivers, “The real bias that divides us,” OP-ED, *Los Angeles Times*, December 12, 2014, A27.

lack of clarity in our fog. The measure we've used is neither acceptable for the existing lack of clarity we've gotten into, nor are our narrow interpretive framework and lens, reduced theological anthropology and weak view of sin adequate to clarify and correct our lack of clarity. Accordingly, the lack of clarity of our person, relationships, discipleship, churches, gospel and salvation should no longer be acceptable as the measure we use, because it is simply inadequate. At the same time with disclaiming these measures, it's time to pay close attention, vulnerably and intimately, to the relational words Jesus communicates and *reclaim* the good news that he embodied to transform our person, relationships and churches to wholeness in likeness of the whole of God—the only relational outcome that distinguishes the Trinity's relational response to our human condition. And out from the fog, we thereby can reclaim the relational outcome 'already' of transformed persons in transformed relationships together as the church family in the new relational order in likeness of the trinitarian persons' ontological Oneness (not tritheism) and their relational Whole—no one less and no human enhancements of their whole.

Reclaiming the Whole Distinguished

A major part of Paul's joint fight for the whole gospel and against reductionism was directly dealing with variations of the gospel that influenced Christians and shaped their discipleship and churches (e.g. Gal 1:6-7; 1 Cor 1:12-17; Col 2:1-4). This included confronting Peter (along with Barnabas and others) for his shaping of discipleship and his inconsistent gospel, both of which shifted from the relational outcome of wholeness transformed by the gospel (Gal 2:11-16). The urgent issue facing us today continues to be this gospel of transformation and its relational outcome of wholeness. Is this the gospel we claim and proclaim, or have we shifted to its variation, which has shaped our discipleship and churches such that they do not distinguish what Jesus saved us to?

Some variations of the gospel can in fact incorporate the basic elements of God's revelation and the basic teachings of Christ (the *arche* in Heb 5:12-6:1), thus giving the appearance of the gospel; but they remain diminished (immature) in a truncated soteriology that focuses with a minimalized hermeneutic means (*aistheterion*, 5:14) only on what Jesus saved us from, yet without including reductionism in a weak view of "good and evil." Not going deeper into what Jesus saves us to, then essentially shifts from the relational outcome of the gospel of transformation to a variation of it. This shift and immaturity compelled the writer of Hebrews to critique such theology and practice with the clarification and correction needed to develop our hermeneutic means (*aistheterion*, related to *aisthanomai* lacking in the disciples, Lk 9:44-45) in order to remove the veil for the new relationship together in wholeness that Jesus saved us to (Heb 10:19-25). To extend this writer's (perhaps it was Paul) concern, I think it is accurate to say that our default gospel is to shift to a less demanding truncated soteriology, whereby we can shape our discipleship and churches without being accountable for wholeness of our person, relationships and churches. A default gospel allows feeding off the milk of the gospel without becoming mature, rather than the whole gospel's solid food to grow in maturity in order "to distinguish good from evil" (5:14) as those distinguished in whole ontology and function, in contrast and conflict with "knowing good and evil" from

reduced ontology and function as emerged from self-determination in the primordial garden (Gen 3:4-5). In God's family, however, the writer reminds us that the sin of reductionism is never overlooked or unattended to because the whole of God is present and involved to respond accordingly (Heb 12:4-6).

In Paul's completeness theology composed in his Colossians letter, the faith he made contingent for the gospel's outcome of wholeness is ongoingly "*maturing* and steadfast," that is, consistent in vulnerably responding and being intimately involved in the reciprocal relationship together distinguishing following the whole of Jesus as his church family. Paul cultivates and nurtures this faith in wholeness, "so that *who and what we are* may be presented mature in Christ" (Col 1:28). Any shift from this vulnerable response of faith in inner-out involvement in the primacy of relationship claims a different gospel, whereby our faith becomes engaged in secondary matters—even in referential forms of the basic elements of God's revelation and the basic teachings of Christ (their *arche*). Such a shift of our faith creates ambiguity or distortion in our discipleship and creates a lack of clarity for our gospel, in which our gospel, our discipleship and churches are rendered to a fog. This condition is susceptible to confirmation bias and thus continues unchanged unless the whole gospel is reclaimed.

Variations of the gospel use a reduced model or convergence model of the gospel (as discussed in the Reintroduction) that many claim by an aspect of faith (even unknowingly). But they are not claiming the whole gospel by the relational response of faith that involves the whole person—only claiming a fragmented gospel by a fragmentary faith, which likely have been narrowed down and shaped by referential terms. Any critical shift is challenged by "Where are you *in faith*?" and "What are you doing *in your discipleship and churches*?" in order to turn us around to reclaim the gospel of transformation to wholeness, without reductions and variations. These challenges, therefore, by the whole of God are not merely about the *arche* of the Trinity's revelations and teachings; rather they illuminate: who is present and involved with us, and on what basis they have revealed themselves to us, for what purpose, and thus what response they expect, indeed require and demand, from us—not conforming as objects but in reciprocal response as subjects—in order to distinguish the difference of who we are in likeness of whose we are—that is, the difference and likeness transforming our person, relationships and churches to the wholeness that makes the difference for our human relational condition both within the church and in the world.

So, Paul would have us reclaim this whole gospel—reclaim, that is, "if indeed you continue in *your reciprocal relational response of faith that is based on only relational terms* ['the foundation', *themelios*] and *remain vulnerably involved* ['steadfast', *hedraios*], and not shifting from the *only relational outcome* of the gospel that you *intimately received in face-to-face relationship without the veil*." For Paul, furthermore, reclaiming the gospel is not a singular response but the ongoing reclaiming in our discipleship, which he personally continued reclaiming: "I want to *relationally* know Christ *even deeper* and the *transforming* power of his resurrection, and sharing *more intimately* in the fellowship of his *whole person* by becoming like him in *the depth of relational involvement distinguishing* his death, *so that* I may attain *ongoingly* the *transformation to wholeness rising from reductionism*" (Phil 3:10-11). Accordingly, by ongoingly reclaiming the gospel of transformation to wholeness we become distinguished intrusively in the discipleship and the ecclesiology (church theology and practice,

ontology and function) of what Jesus saved us to, so that our proclaiming this gospel will make the difference to make whole the human condition, first still existing in our churches and then for others to experience in the world—thereby embodying Jesus’ prayer *into* his church family in their likeness of the ontological One and the relational Whole, hereby distinguished with the Spirit as the Trinity.

Yet, there is more to embrace in reclaiming the gospel. To become distinguished intrusively in our discipleship as a clear indicator of reclaiming the gospel, then further involves us unavoidably in a vital matter that we’ve likely ignored. To reclaim the gospel by necessity includes reclaiming Mary (Martha’s sister), reclaiming her whole person vulnerably and intimately involved with Jesus to distinguish her discipleship deeply and whole-ly in reciprocal relationship together. Her integral relational response of faith claimed the whole gospel and embodied its relational outcome of wholeness in her distinguished discipleship, which she enacted in distinct difference from her surrounding context and even from those immediately surrounding her and thereby transformed those relationships to be both equalized and intimate in the new relational order. On this qualitative relational basis, Jesus declared that Mary is unequivocally integrated in “wherever *my* gospel is *claimed and* proclaimed” (Mk 14:9). Claiming a variation of the gospel may ignore Mary but reclaiming his gospel of transformation to wholeness also reclaims Mary. Thus, Mary cannot continue to be ignored in our discipleship and churches without exposing our confirmation bias. And our discipleship and churches will not be distinguished in what Jesus saves us to unless they also reclaim Mary.

Who, what and how Jesus embodied in relational terms in both his whole person and his relationships of wholeness extended *into* Mary, thereby embodying the gospel of transformation to wholeness that is the only gospel Jesus proclaimed. This gospel and its holy communion “in remembrance of me and of her” is the gospel that needs to be reclaimed in its wholeness today in order to distinguish the discipleship and church family necessary to proclaim the gospel having the integral significance of Jesus *into* Mary, and then *into* Paul. Now the gospel in their remembrance embodied *into* ‘who, what and how’ of today remains an open question.

Persons, relationships and churches in default mode with a default gospel do not, will not and cannot distinguish the discipleship and relationships together of God’s whole new family. These distinguished persons, relationships and churches only emerge, grow and mature in the relational outcome ‘already’ of what Jesus saves us to—transforming us from any default practice of discipleship and church to our new identity of relational belonging to his whole family with the new relational order in likeness of the Trinity. Yet, even our default practice will not be deconstructed, transformed and reconstructed to wholeness as long as two defining assumptions continue to be the underlying measures we use for our theology and practice: (1) a theological anthropology of reduced ontology and function for persons, relationships and thereby church, and (2) a weak view of sin that does not address, confront and redeem sin as reductionism. Without this whole theological anthropology and complete view of sin, default practice and the status quo are unaccounted for in a lack of clarity and fog. Jesus continues to knock on our doors for his family prayer to become the experiential reality of his followers together.

Nothing less and no substitutes can complete this chapter. Anything less and any substitutes in our midst remain to be transformed in order to complete it. How will we respond to the relational intrusion of the whole of God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement? The face of God shines through any fog to pursue us Face to face. Compatibility to the Trinity's improbable theological trajectory requires us to go beyond the epistemological, theological, ontological and relational limits that define and determine us. Congruence with the trinitarian persons' intrusive relational path demands for us to be vulnerable in our person and relationships. In other words, if our response will complete this chapter in our discipleship and churches, we need to go beyond (disclaim) our current assumptions and expose from inner out both our person and relationships (cf. the first beatitudes) to clarification and correction in order for our churches to be transformed and not merely re-formed. There is neither negotiation nor compromise available to complete our discipleship and churches, and such attempts will only keep this chapter suspended with incomplete theology and practice.

Again, "Where are you *in your discipleship*?" "What are you doing *in your church*?" "I have brought you good news!" "Pay *vulnerable and intimate* attention to the *relational* words you hear *from me*." Does this good news truly make the difference in your person, relationships and churches that distinguishes them on his intrusive relational path in his-their likeness? We are accountable to the whole of God's presence and involvement to answer these questions in face-to-face relationship without the veil.

Yes, God indeed did say and do all that—and the whole of God dwells vulnerably and intimately with us to say and do more in relational terms! Therefore, rise above the influence of modern technology, go beyond the limits of social media, and pay vulnerable and intimate attention. Then reclaim to be whole, and continue to reclaim to live whole, and further reclaim to make whole our human relational condition.

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