

The Human Order of Creation
& Its Political Theology
for the New Creation

Distinguishing God's Integral Way of Life

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Chapter 1

The Journey Ahead

**Thus says the *Word*: “Stand at the crossroads,
and look, and ask....”**

Jeremiah 6:16

The 2020s will be a most historic decade in human history, given the converging interaction of health conditions, the sum of political, economic, social, cultural issues, and climate problems. For Christians, the decade ahead is perhaps the most pivotal period in church history, which inescapably puts us at a crossroads of faith that is more complex than the Reformation and seemingly more complicated than any previous time in the church. It is this crossroads that renders all Christians accountable for their faith, and thereby personally responsible for their everyday way of life.

Who expected to be where you are in 2021? Who would have thought Christians and churches could be so divided in their practice, even though those who are divided often subscribe to a similar theology?

What Christians and churches profess as their theology represents only partially what they believe in everyday life. Underlying their theology and overriding it in their daily practice are beliefs supporting their specific way of life. This urgently brings us to an integral theological issue that encompasses all our practice: our political theology and its way of life for our practice. Political (or public) theology is not a formal belief that most Christians and churches confess in their belief system. Yet, knowingly or not, our political theology is visible in the daily practice of our way of life. In other words, our way of life reflects a political theology, whose theology encompasses daily life and is at the heart of our life's human order. Therefore, the crossroads facing us today centers our attention and directs our decision-making on the basis of political theology; and what unfolds in the near future will be explicitly or implicitly determined by this political theology.

What then is your political theology and its basis for determining your way of life? This study focuses on this integral theological issue and the unavoidable future of our way of life. The decade ahead may be unimaginable in current thinking, yet Christians and churches can have clarity about this future based on what they envision today. Thus, along with health care workers in a pandemic, *essential* needs to be ascribed to our political theology for the wholeness of our well-being, which then makes political theology neither optional nor its integrity negotiable. And the uncertainties of today make it imperative for us to have certainty in our theology and way of life in order to ensure our well-being tomorrow.

Private or Public

Many Christians observe their faith as private, perhaps declaring their faith in public only in a minimal way or a limited context. This can be easily interpreted by the public as simply a nominal faith; is that what millennials see? What must be understood by practitioners of private faith is the reality that they give witness in public of their faith regardless of how privately it's maintained. The responsibility of validating Christian witness does not fall on others who observe us. Rather the burden of responsibility rests on us to have a witness congruent with our faith, and thus to incur the consequences of any incongruities—which includes bearing the label of having nominal faith.

Before his ascension, Jesus gathered his followers together to reinforce his Great Commission (Mt 28:18-20) by placing directly on each of them the essential responsibility that “you are my witnesses in *your daily contexts extending* to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). His witnesses cannot be private because their life is always lived in public, even if contained in a monastery. ‘No person is an island’, as the saying goes. Accordingly, in these days of hope faltering widely in public, Peter makes it essential for us to “Always be prepared to *publicly* give an answer to everyone who asks *or needs* you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Pet 3:15, NIV). Paul made it further imperative for the church: “Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone” (Col 4:5-6). That is, as “the salt of the earth,” our identity and function are neither private nor merely public without “its saltiness,” which Jesus distinguished for all his followers (Mt 5:13).

Contrary to private faith, all Christians and churches are faced with the responsibility of having a public faith that distinguishes the identity and function of not just being Christians but as Jesus' essential witnesses. Facing this responsibility requires an understanding of how publicly our witness should be involved, which directs us to the political theology necessary for defining our identity and determining our function in our public way of life. Since political theology encompasses our everyday way of life in public, the distinction of political theology is also discussed in terms of public theology instead.¹ Whether the distinction is political or public, this theology is essential to distinguish God's integral way of life, which is irreplaceable for our way of life to live in wholeness.

¹ For example, see the discussion by James K.A. Smith in *Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017).

Political Theology or Politicized Theology

Theology is at the heart of the Rule of Faith for God's people. In our current way of life during these historic times, the question emerges and even is begged: Has our theology become politicized to render our political theology without the integral significance of God's way of life? That is to say, does our current witness reflect a political theology that has (1) reduced God's integral way of life, and (2) renegotiated God's terms for life together as God's people—both of which render our persons less than whole and our relationships without wholeness?

Typically in public discourse, we hear statements about the separation between church and state. If you subscribe to the principle of the separation between church and state, you may wonder how theology gets politicized. This principle, however, is held widely more as a notion than a principle, which then is partially, selectively or not even applied in actual practice. That leaves Christians not only vulnerable but susceptible to the politicized influences in their everyday way of life, thus shaping their political theology accordingly. One may assume that if their theology is based on God's Word (as evangelicals assume), then politicized influence would be clarified and corrected. This is a legitimate assumption, because that clarification and correction is certainly fulfilled by the Word. Yet, the Word's clarification and correction of our theology must be qualified by the functional significance of *conviction*. "The Spirit of Truth" not only clarifies and corrects but also convicts in order to "guide you into all the truth" (Jn 16:13). Conviction, however, is not merely a function of reason that will convince our mind of function accordingly.

The whole person created by God is constituted from inner out by the heart, which functions in the qualitative image of God. When Peter addressed our tense surrounding conditions, he implored us: "Do not fear what *others* fear, and do not be intimidated—*rendering you an object* to their influence" (1 Pet 3:14). Peter isn't appealing to our mind to reason clearly but addresses our whole person from inner out; therefore, "in your hearts sanctify [i.e. set apart from common influence] Christ as Lord *of your everyday way of life*" (3:15). The Spirit convicts the heart of the whole person, so that any clarification and correction of our minds by the Word do not get obscured by surrounding influences. Yet, the Spirit doesn't work unilaterally but in reciprocal relationship with us. This requires our hearts to be vulnerable and openly involved in relationship together beyond our mind, regardless of how rigorous our reasoning. Persons notably in the Christian academy need to take this to heart, into their heart.

The influence politicizing our theology involves our hearts more than our minds. Political influence has commonly appealed to our emotions over our reason. This is demonstrated in the recent U.S. election, which Trump unrelentingly claims was a fraud that stole the election from him. In spite of the fact that no evidence of this claim has been found, still millions of Americans (including about 70% to 80% of Republicans)

believe the election was stolen. Many among this crowd must be evangelicals, whose belief reflects politicized influence. How does this happen?

Theology reflects reasoned thought on the one hand. If that theology also includes the whole person, then theology (notably political theology) must involve the heart. Underlying much of the polarized thinking in today's climate is the emotional dimension of people's fear, anxiety, stress, pain, depression, and loss of control in our way of life. Theological reasoning alone is simply inadequate to meet this human condition. In particular, our condition in this human drama of uncertainty has to be addressed at the heart level in order to provide some level of certainty in our way of life. Oddly but not surprisingly, the above fraud narrative provides a false sense of certainty to an otherwise uncertain political condition. Moreover, depicting the opposition as "the enemy" provides a more concrete instigator of bad news than being subject to more arbitrary, unpredictable forces as currently experienced in all the events of today. On the emotional level, these alternatives provide persons with more sense of control in their lives, in spite of the fact that they have no valid basis. Consequently, our way of life is reduced to 'the certainty of uncertainty', which merely reflects our politicized theology composing the way of life for a political theology that is contrary to and in conflict with God's integral way of life.

In whatever way our theology is politicized, our practice is reduced to a fragmentary level lacking the whole person and missing the wholeness of relationships together—both integral to the whole theology and practice distinguishing God's people, Jesus' followers, and his church family in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the Trinity (as the Word constituted, Jn 17:6-26). Until our theology and practice encompass the certainty of the Word's uncommon peace (wholeness, Jn 14:27), our way of life will not be embodied whole and thus will always leave our hearts susceptible to be controlled by the emotions of uncertainty.

What do you think your current way of life communicates to others in public? How salty and illuminated do you think your witness is—that is, on the basis of the public identity and function the Word constitutes for any and all of his followers (Mt 5:13-16)?

What is Our Citizenship?

Since our witness is always on display in public, central to our everyday way of life is the specific identity and function that comes with citizenship. This status and responsibility are governed formally and informally for all those who are part of a group, tribe or nation. The explicit or implicit citizenry of such a collective has distinct identity markers, the function of which is expected to be performed by its members and

associates. Those who reside in the U.S. are distinctly identified as being part of a democracy. Our democracy is formally governed politically, which is designed in theory to represent all citizens and residents. This governing function becomes and has been problematic when it is politicized by partisan politics—as we currently experience, which is making democracy incredulous to those observing our global witness and even reinforcing totalitarianism in the world. Yet, further problematic, and perhaps even more so, our democracy has historically been and is increasingly governed informally by certain segments of its citizenry, who have assumed the freedom and right to justify, assert and impose their biased identity and function on a democratic way of life; this also supports the case for authoritarian control over its people.

Whatever the surrounding context, how do Christians engage *the formative dynamic* of citizenship and, if applicable, of democracy? In everyday life, what does our identity and function bear witness to, intentionally or inadvertently?

As a Jew, Jesus' identity and function were expected to align with the nation of Israel. However, on the one hand, Israel reduced its founding identity and original function to dilute God's Rule of Law in what amounted to a different religion as God's people. On the other hand, Israel's governing way of life had become politicized, so that it distinctly operated in contrast to and in conflict with the Roman Empire. Accordingly, Jesus' citizenship was expected to serve the means of Israel's diluted religion and was further held responsible to fulfill Israel's political end. The Jewish Jesus, however, was atypical in his citizenship because he refused to dilute God's Rule of Law (unequivocally declared in Mt 5:17-19). Furthermore, his citizenship was unapologetically non-conforming because (1) his primary identity is not defined by the limits "of this world" (Jn 18:36), and (2) his function is not determined by the constraints of the norms in the surrounding context (e.g. Lk 5:33-39; 12:51-53).

Obviously, Jesus' atypical and nonconforming citizenship was a source of ongoing contention with Jewish citizenry. In his limited and constrained citizenship, even Peter disputed the identity of his messiah (Mt 16:21-23) and rejected his Lord and Teacher's vulnerable relational function intimately involved with Peter face to face (Jn 13:1-8). Given the politicized way of life these people practiced, this wasn't surprising but to be expected. In the midst of such a climate, there is another dynamic emerging along with the formative dynamic of citizenship: *The essential dynamic* that clearly distinguishes God's kingdom from all others, whereby the primary identity of God's people is defined and their primary function is determined as **integrated citizens**, and thus unmistakably distinguished from surrounding identity and function. Without this essential dynamic directly engaging and chastening the formative dynamic of citizenship, the latter will always prevail to define Christian identity and determine their function, as well as limit and constrain their churches to the norms of a politicized way of life.

In spite of being a Roman citizen, Paul understood that even as a Jew, the primary composition of his citizenship was not limited or constrained by either (Phil 3:20; Eph

2:19). Peter, however, struggled in his formative identity and function, while he tried to navigate a course of dual-citizenship or hybrid citizenship (e.g. Gal 2:11-14). What becomes critical in both the formative dynamic and the essential dynamic of citizenship is the influence of culture on our everyday way of life.

The culture composing our way of life is the key determinant shaping our everyday identity and function. In a multi-cultural context, such as a democracy, it may appear that these cultures co-exist for a diversity of identities and functions. Underlying such theory, however, is the human condition fragmenting the human order. The human condition operates by reductionist workings, which measures people in a comparative process with the use of a vertical scale of more-less, better-worse. In other words, the human condition doesn't function on the basis of human equality; rather its actual practice operates on a hierarchical basis with a stratified structure. Those at the top obviously have control in this human condition, and the extent of their status and power allows them to dominate those below on this human scale—with the ongoing lack of human equity. This domination can be direct or indirect, overt or subtle. Either way, the dominant way of life initially composes and then is ongoingly composed by a dominant culture, which operates as the key determinant for shaping all other identities and functions to have any significance in that context. That is, for other peoples lower on the human scale to have any significance, they must assimilate if not conform to the dominant culture—even at the expense of their identity and function of origin, a loss widely experienced.

Consequential to such a system and structure—as prevails in the human condition of all contexts—is the fact that equality is not a reality; nor does such a so-called democracy eliminate inequality or even minimize inequity in its way of life. As long as persons are measured by comparative distinctions—which is the inherent nature of the human condition—persons will be reduced and relationships fragmented from their innate equality of wholeness created by God.

The consequence of a surrounding culture on our way of life can be immeasurable for Christians. Allowing that culture to be the primary determinant for our everyday identity and function renders our citizenship to either (1) living as dual citizens under the assumption of a separate church-state citizenship, which simply gives allegiance to the latter at the expense of the former, and serves the latter by reducing the former. Or (2) operating as hybrid citizens under the assumption that the church and state are compatible, with mutual goals and means, perhaps with the latter being an extension of the former. Consequently, Christians in either citizenship become complicit with the inequities in that culture's way of life for the human order.

Jesus would not affirm his followers as dual citizens, nor would he allow them to operate as hybrid citizens. From his own embodied experience, Jesus understood the explicit and subtle workings of a dominant culture shaping identity and function contrary to his whole person being beyond a Jew. Therefore, he made imperative for any and all of

his followers the essential dynamic countering and neutralizing the normative dynamic formative of citizenship: “My followers do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world” (Jn 17:14); at the same time, he prayed to the Father, “I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them for the *workings of reductionism*...as you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world” (17:15,18)—still in the world yet sent to be distinguished unmistakably from the world.

This discipleship necessitates by his *uncommon* nature for his followers to be “sanctified in truth” (Jn 17:16,18), that is, set apart not merely in propositional truth but in relational involvement with the embodied Truth (Jn 14:6). In likeness of the whole Truth, his followers are made *uncommon* in order to be distinguished from the common of the world, “so that they may all be one, as we are One” (17:21-23). This essential dynamic constitutes his followers to live “in the world” in their primary identity and function as **integrated (whole) citizens**, whose everyday way of life is distinguished by **integrated (whole) culture**. This integrated whole only unfolds from the uncommon peace (wholeness) that Jesus gives in contrast to and even in conflict with the common peace “as the world gives” (Jn 14:27).

The political theology from the Word sends us forth on the path together as nothing less than integrated citizens and with no substitutes for integrated culture—integrating our identity and function in the way of life composed by whole theology and practice. As Paul also made imperative, “Let the *uncommon* peace of Christ rule in your hearts—that is, as the only determinant for your identity and function—since as members of one body you were called to peace” (Col 3:15). Transformed from his formative citizenship, Paul no longer separated peace from wholeness, as evident in the commonized peace of his heritage (see Lk 19:41-42). Past or present, this integrated path of wholeness is the only alternative way of life to the fragmentary path inherent in the human condition, on which God’s people often found themselves. Christians and churches today face this crossroads and are confronted head to head with the determinant culture that distinguishes their primary identity and function as Jesus’ followers, not as citizens primarily of their surrounding contexts.

Common Interests or Uncommon Concerns

Any political theology must explicitly address the interests and concerns of its specific way of life. Accordingly, it has to include an *unequivocal distinction process*, by which these interests and concerns are clearly distinguished and thereby prioritized in its daily life. Problems arise when this distinction process becomes equivocal, subject to negotiation, or simply ignored. These common problems all compromise the integrity of its specific way of life, which is consequential in no longer distinguishing both its uniqueness in the human condition and its significance for the human order.

Creator God, the triune God's way of life, and the Lord God's Rule of Law governing God's people, all have an irreducible and nonnegotiable distinction that distinguishes them incomparably in the human context. On the one hand, this distinction sets them apart from all other gods, ways of life, rules of law, and peoples. Yet, on the other hand, their uniqueness directly involved in the drama of human life provides the hope for change and the alternative for new life in the human condition. What distinction has such significance?

First of all, what are your interests and concerns specific for today? And how do you prioritize those interests and concerns in your everyday way of life?

When Peter finally turned from engaging the formative dynamic of citizenship in his initial determinant culture, he was able to declare the unequivocal distinction of his Lord and Teacher, and the way of life distinguishing Jesus' followers: "Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct" (1 Pet 1:15). *Holy* is a distinction that few Christians would claim to have, that is, if holy is perceived as mere purity or merely in terms of moral perfection. Who rightly can make such a valid claim? Yet, Paul affirms this unequivocal distinction for those reconciled by Christ (Col 1:22, cf. Heb 10:10). So, is this distinction just theological theory to establish an ideal for practice, or does holy really have unequivocal significance for our everyday way of life?

In the daily reality of life, the significance of holy (Heb. *qadash*, Gk. *hagios*) involves being set apart from ordinary usage or common function, which then distinguishes being holy only in its *uncommon* nature. God is uncommon to the human context and to all humanity. In the incarnation, Jesus was present and involved only as holy, whose unequivocal distinction had significance solely when distinguished from the common by the uncommon. Thus, any *common*-ness ascribed to Jesus renders his person and way of life without their full significance—as evidenced in historical Jesus studies—which of course, Peter tried to do in his fragmentary discipleship. Peter's way of life eventually turned from what was common in his surrounding context and culture, whereby he was transformed from the common distinction of his identity and function to being holy in distinctly uncommon terms. Peter then understood that since "he who called you is holy," any and all of Jesus' followers need to be uncommon in his likeness. In contrast to an ideal of discipleship, this necessitates that Christ's followers "do not be conformed to the desires, *interests and concerns* that you formerly had in ignorance" (1 Pet 1:14). Again, Paul affirms this unequivocal distinction with the ongoing imperative for all of us (Rom 12:2).

The Word's call to discipleship is encompassed by the essential dynamic of "not belonging to the common just as I do not belong to the common," yet while "still in the common" and not "out of the common" because "I sent them into the common" (Jn 17:11,14-15,18). This is a nonnegotiable requirement for his followers to be set apart ("sanctified") from the common, in order for uncommon discipleship's primary identity and function to be distinguished with unequivocal distinction in their everyday way of

life. This essential dynamic as the unequivocal distinction process encompasses all their desires, interests, and concerns, which ongoingly requires separating out common ones from uncommon ones and then prioritizing them accordingly. For clarity, the essential dynamic is not an either-or process of simplicity; rather in complexity, this involves an integrating process that establishes his followers unequivocally as integrated citizens with an integrated culture “in the world”—distinguished neither worldly nor otherworldly.

At the center of the Word’s political theology is the discipleship way of life; and at its heart is the significance of being holy and thus uncommon—unlike other political theologies. Therefore, based on the Word, political theology is responsible for composing our public way of life with the unequivocal distinction between *common interests* and *uncommon concerns*. By this distinction our public witness will be established in the primary priority of the latter over the secondary priority for all the former (regardless of importance). Yet, the weighted task of implementing this distinction unequivocally rests on the adherents of the political theology responsible for composing their way of life. Integrating practice into that theology has been a variable challenge for God’s people historically. As Peter learned the hard way, this integration is more challenging and even confronting for Christ’s followers. So, on the basis of his experience and not on theological theory, Peter urges us (1) to publicly witness to the integrated citizenship revolving on the integrated culture distinguished by Christ, and thereby (2) to set ourselves apart from the common’s conflicting desires and interests that reduce the wholeness of our identity and function in everyday life (1 Pet 2:9-12).

In a polarized context such as the U.S., interests commonly become politicized, which then common-ize concerns accordingly. If our identity and function are shaped in a partisan manner, this biases our ability to separate common interests from uncommon concerns. With common-ized concerns, Christians and churches increasingly have declared and acted on common interests, typically under the assumption of having concerns expected, demanded or ordained by God. Whether their practice reflects their political theology, is contrary to it, or simply disregards it, the failure to implement this unequivocal distinction compromises the integrity of their whole identity and function “in the world.” This compromise fragments their way of life by reducing who, what and how they are “just as I am.” This reduced condition then renders their persons and relationships to “belong to the world”—a condition conforming to the common without being set apart, thus no longer distinguished in the wholeness of the uncommon.

If the practice of our public way of life is not to be reduced by the common, then it must be integrally based on the wholeness distinguished unequivocally by the uncommon. If our persons and relationships are not to reflect, reinforce or sustain the fragmentation of the human condition, then our identity and function must be integrally constituted by being set apart from the common and thereby publically lived whole in the uncommon. For our practice to be integral, it must be anteceded by and integrated into the Word’s political theology—that is, into the whole-ly God and God’s whole-ly way of

life. **Whole-ly** is the integration of whole and holy; and only whole-ly is the essential basis necessary for our everyday way of life to have unequivocal distinction in likeness “just as the Trinity is.”

The Whole-ly Way Constrained or Redeemed

In this historic period of the pivotal 2020s, Christians and churches are faced with the critical crossroads of what’s next in their way of life. Their typical status-quo condition is demonstrating its diluting effect on the significance of their faith, which makes this crossroads both challenging of their theology and confronting of their practice. The reality today is that all Christians and churches are challenged in our theology and confronted in our practice, given how our everyday way of life defines our identity and determines our function. Publicly or privately, the critical crossroads looms ahead for what’s next in all our lives.

A major issue for Christians, which is often overlooked, is their citizenship of origin. What’s overlooked is not the citizens of their everyday way of life, but overlooking or even disregarding the integral citizens of God’s way of life. The issue involves what Christians embrace as their heritage. This heritage has political roots, which readily become politicized, notably in a democracy. Yet, while this heritage is certainly instrumental in all Christians’ way of life, it cannot be definitive for Christian citizenship. Our roots go deeper to the heart of God’s way of life for the human order, the depth of which is the definitive source for all the branches of God’s people who belong as integrated citizens in the kingdom of God.

When Christians explicitly subscribe to or implicitly embrace the political heritage of a particular country, then the country they really belong to is rooted in that heritage—in conflicting contrast to belonging to God’s kingdom and family. This limits and/or constrains their way of life to that country’s norms, which then prevents their roots from deepening and precludes the growth of a deeper rooted way of life sown in the depths of its whole (not partial) significance. The far-reaching consequence for Christians is (1) to dilute the quality (not necessarily quantity) of their faith, and (2) to reduce their witness’ level of significance to nothing more or no deeper than others witnessed “in the world.”

Furthermore, this consequence extends into churches, whose branches also don’t have the depth of roots planted by the Word as the body of Christ. Many churches appear to flourish and mega-churches are rising in these branches. Yet, their level of qualitative significance is dubious, and the quantity of their fruit is critiqued by the Vine (Jn 15:1-8). Such a church was critiqued by the Word and found to be incomplete (not integrated and whole), in spite of its ministry seemingly resounding alive (Rev 3:1-2). In this prominent process today, the church is being re-envisioned by distinctions rooted “in the world” and

by practices attuned to “belonging to the world.” The COVID-19 pandemic, for example, has illuminated the prominence of the church as central for social gatherings and connections; yet, this sense of community amplifies the reduced distinctions of the re-envisioned church, which only simulates the relationships integrating the body of Christ with similar socially distant relationships as experienced in the pandemic.

In the Word’s assessment, churches like this do not have the significance of life that is constituted *whole*, the wholeness of which cannot be replicated by anything less and any substitutes. Moreover, there are no alternatives “in the world” for Christians and churches to be whole; nothing less and no substitutes for wholeness have their source rooted in only “not of the world.” In other words, wholeness is constituted by roots only in the uncommon, which cannot be found in alternatives “belonging to the common, just as I do not belong to the common.”

Whole and uncommon is the only life the Word constitutes; and whole and uncommon is the only way of life that unequivocally distinguishes the Word’s way of life integrally in his kingdom and as his church family. Again, the integration of whole and uncommon is signified by **whole-ly** (the integration of whole and holy): the whole-ly Trinity, in whose likeness the Word’s followers are constituted in relationship together as family in the whole-ly way of life (as Jesus prayed, Jn 17:20-23).

At the confronting juncture of this pivotal crossroads, all Christians and churches have this inescapable question looming over us: Do we constrain the whole-ly way in our everyday identity and function, or do we redeem it in who, what and how we are, both individually and together as church? And Christians and churches all along the theological and political spectrum, including all conservatives and progressives, stand accountable at this juncture and directly responsible for the way undertaken.

The psalmist took decisive action that demonstrated how we need to address the critical juncture before us: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any *reductionist* way in me, and lead me in the *whole-ly* way” (Ps 139:23-24). We will not act with significance for what’s next in our way of life, until we make our whole person vulnerable to God for the Word’s vital feedback that will clarify and correct any of our reductionist ways, and then convict us of the whole-ly way.

Constrained or redeemed?

Whole Political Theology and Practice

‘To be or not to be’ may merely be a philosophical question. *To be or not to be whole*, however, cannot be merely theological. The purpose of political theology is to integrate our way of life into practice publicly, in order to establish the human order as God created (originally and new). How integral political theology is for practice to be whole depends on if its composition is in the primacy of uncommon terms and not

fragmented by common terms. When political theology is whole, it can integrate our everyday way of life into whole practice. When our way of life deviates from or even counters whole practice, then our way of life has been co-opted by surrounding common influences. The prominence of co-opted practice today increasingly prevails among Christians and churches. In such a condition, political theology must be able to assert its *theological will* over co-opted practice; and only whole political theology has the basis for the valid theological will to assert over co-opted practice, so that our way of life is restored to wholeness and its uncommon roots.

The wholeness constituted by the Word, of course, is nothing less than uncommon; and any substitutes from the common may appear to duplicate this wholeness but, at best, can only mimic it (Jn 14:27). On this whole-ly basis, theological will is asserted foremost over any practice when that theology converges with the Word in the primacy of relationships. Relationships, however, exist in the most variable condition today, which simply defines how fragmentary they are. In contrast, the wholeness of relationships are found rooted in the uncommon, and thus contrary to the common practice of relationships as prevails in the human condition—including our condition commonly existing among Christians and churches. If political theology doesn't converge with the Word in the primacy of whole relationships, its way of life lacks the significance to assert its will over contrary practice. Whether or not recognized and admitted, prevailing relationships in our Christian fellowship have become contrary practice because of being co-opted by surrounding common influence. The fact that this co-opted practice continues to define their identity and determine their function speaks directly to the significance lacking in their political theology.

This theological convergence in relationships has its primacy first and foremost in the life of the Trinity. The relationships in the Trinity are rooted in their uncommon ontology and function that constitutes their persons in wholeness together as One being. The uncommon roots of the Trinity in whole relationship together constitute created persons, persons of faith, and the family of Jesus' followers in the very likeness of the Trinity (Gen 1:26-27; Jn 17:20-23). This relational likeness, however, doesn't become the experiential truth and relational reality until this theology asserts its will to transform our practice (as Paul made definitive, 2 Cor 3:16-18).

The primacy of whole relationships together, first with God and then with each other, renders all else in our practice secondary—secondary, that is, to relationships together in wholeness just like the Trinity. Merely participating together and mere association, however extensive, do not, will not and cannot constitute our relationships in the whole-ly likeness of the whole-ly Trinity. We should not have illusions about such relationships existing among us, because they are merely fragmentary and, at best, can only simulate relationships like the Trinity. Moreover, the simulation of relationships among those gathered in the same space has the illusion of being the body of Christ. This

widespread assumption is made with reference merely to a fragmentary theology that fails to be well integrated with its practice, because such theology is not whole to integrate its practice integrally.

At this point, it would be helpful to ask ourselves if we think theology and practice are mutually exclusive, not in theory but in reality. Deeper examination will reveal that much Christian practice in daily life functions as if it were mutually exclusive from their theology. This assumption will always be implied whenever theology and practice are not integrated integrally and are merely referentially associated at best. Whole-ly political theology will clarify and correct such practice, so that our practice can be whole-ly.

Therefore, political theology is essential only when whole-ly. When our political theology is essential, it will ongoingly challenge and confront our way of life to be whole-ly in likeness. Whole-ly theology integrates practice to make integral our way of life, its human order, and the rule of law necessary to govern the well-being of whole-ly life together. This is the journey ahead for this study, whose essential way is rooted in covenant relationship together (Gen 17:1) that grows into its irreducible branch distinguishing the integral body of Christ (Col 3:15).

As the Word resounds: “Stand at the crossroads, and look, and ask for the *roots* where the *whole-ly* way lies, and walk in it” (Jer 6:16)!

Chapter 2 Knowing Our Roots and Its Branches

God asks “Where are you?”

Genesis 3:9

and later asks “What are you doing here?”

1 Kings 19:9,13

In normal times, there would still be questions about the year ahead and having a basis for what to expect. Yet, in the new-normal times of today, these questions about 2021 are multiplied, with expectations amplified in uncertainty. Antecedent to these questions, including about the decade ahead, is the underlying roots of our way of life and its branches supporting our identity and function. Knowing our roots and its branches will help us answer these questions and find a basis for expectation—answers and expectations of significance in new-normal times.

It is normal for people to rationalize their roots. It is also common for people to politicize their heritage; and all the branches of these roots render the 2020s in uncertainty and biased expectations with a false sense of certainty. These roots and its branches, however, are not the antecedents for God’s people. Nationalized roots is abnormal and politicized heritage is not the unique distinction for the identity and function that integrally distinguish God’s people and their way of life. Thus, all Christians and churches need to examine the roots and branches of their current way of life, in order to know (1) how congruent their roots are and (2) how compatible their branches are to the defining roots and determining branches of God’s whole-ly people. Without the certainty of these roots and branches, there is only uncertainty to expect in our way of life.

Where Do We Start?

The human order has evolved through human history and has certainly devolved in historic moments. If we search for our roots in this evolutionary process, we have to include these historic moments. Christians, for the most part, would use creation as the starting point for the human order. Yet, how well this starting point serves as the root of how they currently enact the human order, as well as forms the branches of their identity and function in everyday life, is an underlying issue. What we subscribe to in our theology does not ensure that it also becomes our practice. Intervening variables always disrupt the direct correlation between theology and practice. Thus, in order to know our

roots and its branches, Christians need to examine what has evolved in the human order since creation, and then see if any evolved and devolved roots have supplanted the roots of creation.

When we have some understanding of this, we will better know if current branches in our way of life correlate to creation or to its evolution. To make these connections correlative and not on mere assumption, we need to understand *who* and *what* were created and how they have evolved. This may require keeping an open theological mind and setting aside biases from our practice, whereby we will wait upon the Word to enhance our understanding of these roots and branches.

It seems obvious that this examination should start from the beginning. What's not obvious is when the beginning emerged. What appears to be the origin of the human species may not be the beginning of the human race. To clarify and correct theological thinking on this vital matter, we need (1) to distinguish creation from evolution, and then (2) to make distinct the process of evolution both in and on creation. The latter is often overlooked in the prevailing theological mindset and cannot be separated from the former. This is indispensable for knowing our roots and its branches, as well as being able to understand the existing roots and branches of our current way of life and its human order.

In the Beginning

Most Christians seem to believe in creation and not in evolution. Yet, the creation narrative (Gen 1-2) is incomplete in its details, so this is an insufficient basis to define our science. That is, in what has been revealed unequivocally about God's creation, there are unknown aspects that leave room for evolution to fill in, either unequivocally or equivocally. For example, DNA of the human species can be traced back to Neanderthals and apes. However, though this evolution of *Homo sapiens* may account for their physical development, this quantitative account does not form the qualitative development of the human person. Quantified terms are insufficient to explain the human person, much less understand the person unique to all life.

In the beginning, the emergence of the physical make-up of *Homo sapiens* appears to have evolved from the earliest cell life. Yet, biological science cannot assume that cell life appeared *ex nihilo* (out of nothing), or perhaps claim these cells were planted by extraterrestrial life alien to the earth. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...*and life therein*," wherein God must have allowed room for evolution to unfold in certain areas of life. One key area of life, however, was not rooted in evolution and cannot be explained on its quantitative basis. This is the life of the human *person*, whose qualitative constitution unequivocally distinguishes the person from the quantitative make-up equivocal to *Homo sapiens* and related species. In other words, as

an unequivocal believer in God's creation, I affirm the following: At some unknown point in the fragmentary evolutionary development of the physical human body, God interjected to create the whole human person from inner out, incomparably in God's qualitative image and relational likeness, which constituted the human person qualitatively above and beyond what neuroscience has discovered about mysteries of the human brain.¹

The human person is not rooted in evolution, since that person could only be fragmented in quantitative terms and thus never be whole. Evolutionists conjecture that the human person emerged along the evolutionary continuum; but bridging the immeasurable gap between the human body and the human person is purely an assumption having no factual supportive basis beyond evolutionary bias (read also as "faith")—a bias or faith evolving from the narrow limits of its quantitative epistemic field. Contrary to this mindset, the reality of who and what emerged only has significance as the whole person created only by God; and the created person's roots and branches are incomparably distinguished in their created wholeness in unequivocal contrast to their evolutionary fragmentation, which at best can only quantify the brain to make the human person distinct from other species. This is the beginning that must be known in order to understand our deepest roots and fundamental branches. This knowledge and understanding then helps us to know our current roots and branches, which then crucially helps us also to understand if and how they may have evolved.

Within the cosmological parameters of creation, God created the human person as the centerpiece. In order to understand the roots of this unique person, we have to know not only *who* God created but also *what* God created. These roots are central to theological anthropology,² which is essential for the branches formed in political theology. So, if our theological anthropology is rooted in creation, then our political theology will have compatible branches in our way of life. However, this is an equivocal "if" that may include *who* in theological anthropology while excluding or overlooking *what* God created. The *who* God created is insufficient to account for the *what* God created to complete the whole person. Moreover, even if our theological anthropology includes the *who* and the *what*, this is often not the person integrated in our everyday way of life, and thus not the identity and function of the whole person created by God. This is consequential for the roots of the human person in the beginning, as we will discuss below.

¹ Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio finds qualitative feelings in function integral to the human brain; but for Damasio this notion of the qualitative is determined by the limits of the quantitative, which is certainly insufficient to define the whole person's primary roots. See Antonio Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010).

² For an expanded study on theological anthropology, see my study *The Person in Complete Context: The Whole of Theological Anthropology Distinguished* (Theological Anthropology Study, 2014). Online at <http://www.4X12.org>.

The human person's beginning was created in God's image and likeness (Gen 1:26-27; 5:1-2). God's image becomes ambiguous in human perception when considered in quantitative terms (Isa 40:18; Acts 17:28-29). Here again, evolutionary roots cannot be confused for creation roots. God's image is rooted in God's ontology, whose being is constituted qualitatively ("God is spirit," Jn 4:24)—although God's qualitative function includes quantitative acts but cannot be reduced to those secondary limits. The *what* of the human person, therefore, is created in the qualitative image of God, first and foremost, which is rooted in the heart of the person distinguished from inner out at the innermost. Thus, as constituted according to God's qualitative ontology and function, any quantitative terms describes the person just from outer in, using distinctions that are always secondary to the person's primary identity and function rooted in God's qualitative image—distinguished only in the innermost.

On the essential basis of God's qualitative image, the human person emerged in the beginning as the centerpiece of God's creation when in ongoing function by the heart. 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. In other words, the qualitative heart is the foundational root for the human person in the qualitative image of God. On this qualitative basis alone the human person emerged as the highlight of God's creation.

Yet, this focal point of creation appeared to be incomplete. The who was certainly there, but the what seemed still to be missing something. When God said "It is not good that the *person* should be alone" (Gen 2:18), did the Creator forget that something and thus created another person to be his partner? It is commonly thought that two initial responses are what clarify and correct what God unfolds in creation. First, the other person was of female gender, the who of whom appears to be an *add-on* to help the male person and keep him company—notably as "a helper to be his partner" is commonly interpreted, thus making her subordinate in the human order of creation. Second, the what of each person appears to be highlighted as partners in marriage to form the pinnacle of creation, while still in the same human order. Both of these responses are prominent for

composing Christian thinking and way of life. But they both in reality reduce the who and the what of God's created persons, as well as compromise the integrity of their persons in the image and likeness of God. Thus, it is critical to understand our responses to creation in order to make the distinction necessary to know the person's basic roots of *who* and *what* God created.

Gender is the key quantitative characteristic that has defined the person's identity and determined their function. Marriage has remained as the ultimate relationship ordained by God. Neither of these, however, accounts for the who and what God created as whole persons, nor speaks for the words that God said above. This is not to say that in the creation narrative both gender and marriage are "not good"; rather it corrects how we see what is "not good" and attribute as *good* on the basis of creation. Once again, this is a crucial difference to understand, in order to know what is vital for that roots and branches in our way of life as both the person and persons together created by God.

God created the who and the what of the human person to be clearly *distinguished* in creation (Ps 139:13-14). To be distinguished (*pala*)³ signifies to separate, to be wonderful, that is to say, to distinguish beyond what exists in the human context and thus cannot be defined by its comparative terms, or the person is no longer distinguished (as Job learned, Job 42:3). Therefore, the unique who and what of the person and persons together are distinguished only when in the image and likeness of God.

In the qualitative function of the heart, the whole person from inner out has the unique opportunity of creation not merely "to be alone" but most important "not to be apart." When the Creator declared this pivotal statement about the human person (just from inner out), the creation dynamic unfolds to integrate the image and the likeness of God—that is, the integral qualitative image and the integral relational likeness constituted solely by and thus of the Trinity, the whole of God. This pivotal point of creation constitutes the person with other human persons in unparalleled relationships together. Yet, what is "not good" has to be understood in order to distinguish the *good* of creation.

"Good" (*tob*) can be situational, a moral condition, about happiness or being righteous; compare how good is perceived from human observation (Gen 3:6). When attached to "to be alone," "not good" can easily be interpreted with all of the above,

³ Hebrew and Greek 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).

perhaps with difficulty about being righteous. Yet, in this creation context the Creator constituted the foundational human order, whose design, meaning and purpose are both definitive and conclusive for the narrative of human being and being human. Though the creation narrative is usually rendered “to be alone,” the Hebrew term (*bad*) can also be rendered “to be apart.” The latter interpretation composes a deeper sense of relationship and not being connected to someone else, that is, not merely an individual having someone to associate with. This nuance is significant to pay attention to because it takes the human narrative beyond situations and deeper than the heterosexual relations of marriage. “To be apart” is not just a situational condition but most definitively a relational condition distinguished only by the primacy of the created human order. In the human narrative, a person may be alone in a situation but indeed also feel lonely (pointing to the inner out) in the company of others, at church, even in a family or marriage because of relational distance, that is, “being apart,” which the Creator defines as “not good.”

In the design, meaning and purpose of the created human order, the human narrative is composed conjointly (1) for human being “to be *part*” of the interrelated structural condition and contextual process with the Creator, and (2) for the function of being human “to be *part*” of the relationship together necessary to be whole as constituted by and thus in the whole ontology and function of their Creator. “Good” (*tob*), then, in the creation context is only about being righteous (not about a moral condition but the function of an ontological condition); that is, good signifies the Creator’s whole ontology and function constituting the righteousness of God (the whole of who, what and how God is). In whole terms (not reduced), only creator God is good—the difficult lesson Jesus illuminated for the rich young ruler about the primacy distinguishing human being and being human as his followers (Mk 10:18). And human beings are constituted in this “good,” in whole ontology and function in likeness of the righteous whole of who, what and how God is. Nothing less and no substitutes can constitute human beings as good, and any diminishment can only be “not good.” Therefore, anything less and any substitute is “to be apart” from this distinguished whole, rendering human being reduced and being human fragmentary.

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 qualitative-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 defined only as hearts opening to each other and bonding. 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; Jn 4:24).

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")—inseparably integrated with the qualitative—to fully distinguish the human person integrally as **whole** according to both the qualitative image of God and the relational likeness of the whole of God (namely the Trinity's relational ontology and function). The primordial garden illuminates the integral dynamic of the qualitative and relational in its wholeness as well as its reduction into fragmentary parts—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 the human person but the integrated perspective (framework and lens) necessary to define and determine the whole person, as well as the evolving reductionism of the human condition that emerged soon after. Therefore, these contexts, expanding parameters, limits and constraints are critical for theological anthropology to distinguish the what and the who of the created person from who and what evolved. The latter may not have a clear distinction from other animal life, but the former cannot be equated with them when distinguished.

In our way of life, "not good to be alone" can be addressed in various ways of association, with measures of variable social distance and relational distance. These measures are certainly being tested as loneliness accelerates in the COVID-19 pandemic, with students suffering increasing emotional distress from suspended in-person learning. While removing social distance can help in loneliness, it cannot satisfy the underlying need of this condition. Persons can and do experience feeling alone often in the midst of any kind of social gathering; even students occupying in-person classrooms often feel disconnected from teachers and other students right next to them. This points to the roots used for the person and the normative branches found in everyday way of life. For example, interrelated to a person's qualitative function (in terms of feelings, as noted above) is a social function (about relationships) that appears also to be integral to the human brain. In conjoint function with the qualitative (as noted by Damasio), there is this relational dimension that emerges for neuroscience to explain what it means to be human.⁴ Despite the limits built into this science-based explanation, these qualitative and

⁴ For a discussion on the social function of the brain, see neuroscientist John Cacioppo's research on loneliness in *loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008).

relational aspects observed by neuroscience help draw attention, if not point us, to the deeper roots of the who and what that are primary to the human person(s).

God created the human person in the qualitative image “not to be apart,” the whole of which is integrally complete only when in God’s relational likeness. Inseparable from the person’s qualitative function is the primacy of the person’s relational function in likeness of the *whole* (not merely some part) of God, whose wholeness constitutes the Trinity in relationship together as One—just as the Word later made definitive to constitute his family (Jn 17:20-26). Therefore, the human person was created “not to be apart” from God’s wholeness, who constitutes the whole human person in the irreducible and nonnegotiable primacy of relationships with other whole human persons (not based on gender) for their wholeness together (not based in marriage) in relational likeness of the Trinity.

“Not to be apart” from the integral qualitative and relational wholeness of the Trinity is immeasurable for the roots of who and what the human person is, and thus is irreplaceable for the branches of the human order developed in the public life of all persons created by God. “All persons created by God” is a declaration found in human history, notably in U.S. history, which has been used more as a notion than an axiom. Since the incomparable beginning of creation, who and what God distinguished have evolved in the not good condition “to be apart.” This condition also emerged from the beginning as it evolved in the primordial garden after creation. We need to know these evolved roots just as much as the created roots, in order to understand *what* happened to the who and what of the human person, as well as *how* persons evolved and *where* we have evolved to.

From the Beginning: the Evolution of Human Progress

The issue of human progress has not lacked controversy. What has been most contentious rightly questions, challenges and confronts what is considered *progress*. This needs to be a basic issue in political theology that directly involves the public way of life of any person and all peoples. To know our roots we have to understand how they evolved in the framework of human progress, whose subtle workings have altered the growth of human life with dubious branches.

The issue of human progress emerged in the beginning with human persons and evolved from their public engagement in the primordial garden. After the historic creation of the human person, what unravels in the primordial garden is history (Gen 3:1-10). Some consider this narrative as allegory rather than historical; yet, either account simply elucidates the reality that has entrenched human life at its core. This reality must

be neither oversimplified nor minimized, in order to understand both how this reality evolved and how political theology needs to address it in the everyday way of life of all persons, peoples, tribes and nations.

First, what is this reality and how did it evolve from the beginning? In this discussion, you will be able to learn if you've oversimplified or minimized this reality in your way of life.

The initial persons stepped forward in the primordial garden according to the created way of life constituted in wholeness, which was demonstrated in how they each defined their person from inner out and functioned in relationship together on this primary basis (Gen 2:25). Along the way created by God, they were then encouraged to make human progress by taking a byway. Encouragement to progress sounds good, but this so-called good is the subtle workings of the source of this encouragement. The source of this reality is usually oversimplified in Christian theology and often minimized in Christian practice. That's why political theology must ongoingly account consciously for the ongoing presence of Satan and his ongoing involvement in subtle counter-workings against God's wholeness. His subtlety emerges notably by cultivating human desires for progress with attractive byways that in reality fragment wholeness.

The counter-measures of Satan revolve around the condition "to be apart," which counters (1) how the whole person is defined from inner out and (2) how persons together are determined by the primacy of their integral qualitative-relational function. This person and their relationships together (both with God and with each other) start to evolve when Satan raises a seemingly innocent question: "Did God say to you...?" (Gen 3:1). What appears as an innocent request for information must always be understood in Satan's counter-relational workings. At the most basic level of relationship, Satan addresses the communication taking place from God and seeks to confuse the relationship with God with alternate interpretations that misinform the recipient of the original message (3:4-5). Alternative interpretations of God's messages should not be oversimplified, nor should resulting misinformation be minimized, because they both have relational consequences in the quality of life together created by God. Satan's purpose, of course, always works to counter God by reducing the quality and fragmenting that wholeness—again, by the quantity of human progress available on the byways that enhance human identity and function.

After Satan's alternate interpretation of God's message, the human persons embraced that misinformation to pursue their human progress with the expectation that their identity and function would be enhanced—perhaps beyond what their persons ever dreamed. The human brain is also at work here and being rewired accordingly—for example, to recondition the perceptual lens and its priorities—to supplant the primacy of the whole person's heart in qualitative-relational function. What's happening in Eve's brain when she "saw that the tree was good for *progress* and that it was a delight to the eyes" (Gen 3:6)? And how has her thinking superseded her heart when "the tree was to be

desired to make one wise”—all likewise affirmed by Adam? Moreover, what made them think that their identity and function would progress to the presumed level that “your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil,” disinformation contrary to the relational communication of God’s message in clear relational terms composed for their wholeness?

Their brains were certainly rewired to reduce their perceptual lens from the depths of inner out to the narrow limits and constraints of outer in: “Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked” (3:7). Contrary to and in conflict with their whole persons without shame from inner out (Gen 2:25), the so-called progress they expected reduced their identity and function to the fragmented human condition resulting from **sin as reductionism**.

Sin from the beginning must not be oversimplified or minimized merely to disobedience of God’s message. When sin is limited as such, then the reality that has evolved from the beginning is not understood much less addressed. Without knowing the roots of sin, the subtle counter-workings of Satan are not adequately perceived by the lens used by our brains. That, of course, allows branches of reductionism to evolve and devolve in human life, which take root in our everyday identity and function to prevail (subtly or not) in our public way of life. Certainly then, the lack of knowing and understanding these roots and branches encompassing sin as reductionism makes us susceptible in our persons and relationships to inescapably reflect, unavoidably reinforce, and inevitably sustain the fragmentary human relational condition. In this pervading and prevailing process, our human condition becomes reduced of its integral qualitative-relational function in wholeness created in the image and likeness of the Trinity.

From the beginning, God asks the human person “Where are you?” (Gen 3:9), in order for persons to face up to the evolution of their created identity and function in the sin of reductionism. We can either react to God and hide behind masks shielding the person from inner out (as demonstrated by the initial persons, 3:8-13); or we can remove our veils and respond to God to be transformed to wholeness in God’s likeness (as in 2 Cor 3:16-18). Yet, to be vulnerable to account for how we have evolved (personally and collectively) requires the willingness to take responsibility for any and all evolved roots and branches that are contrary to and in conflict with our created roots and branches. To answer “Where are you?” therefore, will encompass much further understanding to know where we really are. And underlying all of this throughout our theology and practice is the view of sin that we have, and thus use in our way of life. Nothing less and no substitutes for sin as reductionism emerged from the beginning. Nevertheless, anything less and any substitutes for this fundamental root have weakened this view of sin, and thus have rendered many branches with the appearance of “good and not evil” when in reality they are rooted in reductionism.

The view of sin that political theology brings to our way of life must have its roots from the beginning (1) in order to account for the breadth and depth of sin as reductionism that entrenches the human condition, (2) so that responsibility will be taken by us to redeem this evolving condition for its transformation in our way of life. Political theology of anything less and any substitutes has itself evolved, making it insignificant for the human condition, and thus useful only for human progress. For political theology to be of significance, it not only has to encompass sin as reductionism, but it also must understand the primary adversary in life as Satan and (3) thereby fight against and neutralize Satan's influence, (4) in order to change and make whole his counter-relational workings of reductionism in persons, relationships, and their human order in everyday life, (5) for nothing less than the qualitative-relational outcome to transform what's evolved into the new creation.

As the author of reductionism, Satan's only purpose and goal is both to reduce the whole of God (Father, Son, Spirit in the primacy of whole relationship together)—for example, as the Son experienced progressively in Satan's temptations (Lk 4:1-13)—and fragment God's created wholeness. Therefore, "Where are you?" exposes the root of the condition and gets to the heart of what's evolved.

The Evolutionary Shift

Indeed, when God asks "Where are you?" it brings to the forefront the person's created nature of *who* and *what*. It also points to the critical juncture when the created who and what make an evolutionary shift in the person and their relationship together. Human *being* and *being* human necessitate the created nature of **being**. To *be* or not to *be*, therefore, is the ongoing tension experienced by all persons in all relationships, the conflict of which emerged from the beginning to shift how the who and what of all of us would evolve from our created nature.

The condition of "not good to *be* apart—from wholeness" that constituted human persons' created *being* was either set aside or ignored in the subtle process desiring human progress. This pivotal shift required fundamental changes in the who and what that defined human identity and determined human function. Satan's encouragement of human persons to progress engaged them in a subtle alternate process contrary to creation. God constituted human persons in their innermost—deeper than the brain to illuminate the heart—to be distinguished whole totally from inner out. When the process of inner out defines human identity and determines human function, their who and what unfold in their created qualitative image and relational likeness, invested by God for human persons to *be* vested with God's whole ontology and function.

To engage the alternate process for their human progress, their persons had to shift from inner out—which reduced their qualitative-relational nature—in order for their identity and function to become quantified by **the outer in**. The pivoting shift to outer in based on quantitative terms made it easier for their persons to progress on the quantified basis of what they were able to do as well as the abilities and resources they had. The more persons could quantify, the more they would progress. And these outer-in distinctions defined their identity and determined their function in this evolutionary shift contrary to creation.

From the beginning, Satan appealed to the level of knowledge for these persons, so that they could progress to “be like God, knowing good and evil.” If persons could advance to heights measured on this outer-in basis, why wouldn’t this be appealing to most any person? Whether it’s about knowledge or the ability to do more, who wouldn’t want to have the distinction of *more* and thereby be considered advanced in what they have and better in what they do? The subtlety of this shift is the genius of Satan, who generates sin as reductionism far beyond sin’s oversimplified or minimized perception merely as disobedience. Not surprisingly then, the shift to outer in has become normative for human identity and function. Moreover, this has evolved into quantified levels exceeding human expectations, such as devolving in the expansion of globalization⁵ and perhaps evolving beyond imagination of the human brain, which artificial intelligence (AI) demonstrates in human progress today⁶; all this has progressed for the presumed development for human identity and function. Examine the progress humanity has made since the Industrial Revolution; then explain the evolvement of human desires into insatiable appetites to possess more in order for their identity and function to be considered as *more*, notably by others (not including God) in comparison with others (likely including God). The genius of Satan is active and productive today in advancing the virtual and artificial!

Meanwhile, our theological anthropology and view of sin are challenged to the level of being confronted unavoidably. Given the normative system structuring human life to compose an evolving *new normal*, the repercussions from this evolutionary shift are often overlooked or ignored because they are not understood. Yet, what’s evolved from the beginning has crucial qualitative-relational consequences, which reverberate in human persons, their relationships, their human order, and throughout humanity to shape and dominate them, whereby they prevail over the human way of life both public and private. These consequences are inescapable for any and all Christians and churches.

⁵ For a discussion on this development, see David Held, Anthony McGrew, David Goldblatt & Jonathan Perraton, eds., *Global Transitions: Politics, Economics and Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 19991); and also Vinoth Ramachandra, *Subverting Global Myths: Theology and the Public Issues Shaping Our World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008).

⁶ For this discussion on AI, see John C. Lennox, *2084: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Humanity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Reflective, 2020).

Examine more specifically, for example, how the appetite for more among Christians underlies the popularity of the prosperity gospel (in all variants), and how this appetite is the basis for the consumer church. Satan would not oppose this development among Christians and churches but encourage it, since it counters God's wholeness.

Evolutionary Repercussions and the Qualitative-Relational Consequences:

When the reality of what evolved from the beginning is oversimplified or minimized, this reality spreads like a virus infection and reaches pandemic proportions to become endemic in the human condition. The created human condition was infected by reductionism, and this reality has evolved to reconstitute the human condition for all persons and their relationships. The repercussions on *our* human condition have been and continue to be evolving, which challenges us not to oversimplify while confronting us not to minimize—or else incur the consequences in our human condition as Christians and churches.

The dynamics of reductionism initiated by Satan in the primordial garden converge with, if not are duplicated in, the dynamics of biological evolution. This convergence indicates how Satan counters God's creation with what seems to be natural for the human way of life. The roots of these dynamics and their evolving branches all appear to be advancing human progress. This requires closer examination. The basic dynamic in biological evolution is 'natural selection', otherwise known as "survival of the fittest." This basic dynamic has evolved into the forceful dynamic generating the mutations of social Darwinism throughout humanity, notably mutating the human order of creation. What characterizes this basic dynamic in the human species is a self-centered process engaged almost entirely for survival, which prevails for those who are the "fittest." Biologist Richard Dawkins rightly describes those good at surviving as possessing and thereby propagating *the selfish gene* that is needed to survive successfully.⁷

With the evolutionary shift to outer in, the dynamic of reductionism increasingly causes human persons to be conscious of their outer self—duplicating the self-centered process for survival. "Then the eyes of both *focused on the outer*, and they knew that they were naked" (Gen 3:7). What evolved is the reduction of the inner-out person to the outer-in self revolving in the prominence of **self-consciousness**: the self-focused survival of self's identity and function by the dominance of a self-centered process.

Human persons were created naked in the beginning, which didn't reduce them from their whole persons from inner out rooted in the qualitative. The identity and function of created persons emerged in the inner-out process of **person-consciousness**: the ongoing involvement of the person's identity and function by their essence in the qualitative image and relational likeness of their Creator. In person-consciousness, "the

⁷ Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

man and the woman were both naked, and were not ashamed” (Gen 2:25). For this male and female to be naked and without shame involved a composition of the human narrative beyond the fragmenting terms of the body and marital sex between husband and wife. The Hebrew term for shame (*bosh*) involves confusion, disappointment, embarrassment or even dismay when things do not turn out as expected. What did they expect and what was their experience?

Think about this male and female meeting on these terms for the first time and examining each other from the outer in. Obviously, our lens for beauty, femininity as well as masculinity shaped by culture would occupy our thoughts; likewise, the competitive and survival needs from evolution could have shaped their lens. On what basis would there be no shame, confusion, disappointment, embarrassment or dismay? If what they saw of themselves from outer in were all there was and all they would get, it would not be difficult to imagine such feelings emerging.

In deeper yet interrelated function, however, the lens of this male and female was not constrained to the outer in, and thus was not even limited to gender. The depth of their connection emerged from the deep consciousness of human *being* from the inner out, the innermost of which can neither be adequately explained in physical terms nor even be sufficiently distinguished on the spiritual level (e.g. fragmenting the soul from the body). What we need to pay close attention to is the emergence of this essential human consciousness to compose the integral narrative for the integrated whole of human being and being human. Most notably, the process of person-consciousness emerged to present the whole of human being without any masks or barriers (e.g. even the distinction of gender) in order to be involved with each other at the depth level necessary to distinguish their being human. In other words, the context of person-consciousness composes the human narrative in ‘naked and without shame’—the whole ontology and function necessary to distinguish the human person.

What evolved at this pivotal juncture cannot be oversimplified or minimized. These whole persons were indeed naked, but not simply without any outer clothes as the Hebrew term (*‘arom*) denotes. A quantitative lens (e.g. of a physicalist-materialist) pays attention to human being from outer-in and likely limits this male and female coming together in natural sex without shame. What such a lens (including some non-materialists and dualists) overlooks or even ignores is human being from inner out and the presence, for example, of human masks worn both to shield the whole of human being and to prevent being human from the depth level of connection necessary to distinguish their wholeness in relationship together. The innermost of human *being* is indispensable and irreplaceable to distinguish the person and persons together whole-ly from inner out. Evolutionary changes, however, have repercussions that incur qualitative-relational consequences.

In the shift to outer in, the qualitative constituting created human life is reduced and diminished in priority to redefine what the quality of life signifies. Not only does the quantitative prevail over the qualitative, however, in this self-centered process of self-consciousness; equally important, relationships also shift on this basis. As these persons shifted away from the qualitative to progress in the quantitative, consider the repercussions evolving in their relationships. First, in their relationship with God they “hid their persons from the presence of God” (Gen 3:8). When God asked “Where are you?” God certainly didn’t want to know their location but the condition of their persons. It became obvious that their self-consciousness was heightened, so they took self-centered action to survive in God’s presence. That required submerging their whole inner out persons and then presenting an outer-in self in the survival mode of having relational distance in the connections and associations of their way of life. This self-conscious relational distance is maintained in order for relationships to advance according to the terms defined by the self. These often subtle terms were presumed by these persons to be applicable to relationship with God—a common assumption in the shift to outer in. The subtlety of shifting to self for defining the relationship in contrary terms, whether intentional or inadvertent, always reduces and renegotiates God’s irreducible and nonnegotiable terms for relationship together. This sin of reductionism is oversimplified when perceived simply as disobedience, which also minimizes the relational consequences generated by the evolution of who and what in subtle variants.

More obvious, secondly, this self-oriented relational distance was engaged in their human relationship; and their self-conscious workings reduced the depth of relational involvement to void their intimacy in relationship together. Though they certainly had sex together, this outer-in engagement must not be confused with the inner-out relational involvement of intimacy—as the confused quantified terms of intimacy have pervasively evolved in human interaction. Any relationship revolving on the self-consciousness of outer in effectively prevents intimacy, defined as hearts open to each other and involved vulnerably in relationship together. Intimacy is prevented when the self has to be its presumed fittest to survive in the relationship.

The evolutionary repercussions of these qualitative-relational consequences have mutated in the cyber world today. Self-conscious identity has amplified in illusions of fitness, the virtual reality of which has propagated self-centered relationships that only simulate relational connections at best. In other words, social media has evolved into the primary means for defining human identity and determining human function; and the qualitative-relational consequences have enveloped human life as never before—all under the seductive assumption of human progress. And make no mistake, regardless of where we are in the stages of human progress, self-consciousness is the default mode for all persons and their relationships. All this evolvement makes evident the reality that self-consciousness has mutated into the **collective consciousness** infecting all of humanity.

More than considering how relationships have evolved, we have to examine “Where are you?” in our identity and function, and then confront what has evolved. This is critical and urgent, because (1) the infection of reductionism is pandemic in our human condition and (2) its branches have mutated in the evolutionary shift from the beginning to make endemic their qualitative-relational consequences in our everyday way of life. Like the COVID-19 pandemic, this reality cannot be dismissed with misinformation, nor can it be overcome with limited measures. If we oversimplify and minimize these roots and branches, we will ongoingly reflect, reinforce, and sustain our human relational condition in the quantitative limits and constraints embedded in reductionism—just as Satan falsely encouraged and subtly seduced human persons from the beginning. When misled and misguided, all persons are reduced and their relationships fragmented from their created wholeness; accordingly, their way of life, the human order and the quality of life for all humanity labor in the qualitative-relational consequences from evolving and mutating repercussions of reductionism prevailing today. Therefore, included in the critical need for sin not be oversimplified and minimized, its counter-relational workings of reductionism must never be underestimated. The genius of Satan always manipulates naiveté in our theology and practice.

“Where are you today?” Does the Word’s feedback describe where? “My people have *reduced* me, they *focus on the outer in*; they have stumbled in their ways, in the *created way*, and have *progressed* into bypaths, not *my whole-ly way*” (Jer 18:15).

The byways persons and relationships turn to from God’s created way of life need to be explicitly addressed in political theology. To address this endemic condition, political theology must have significant understanding of these byways and the roots that systemically and structurally compose the human order for humanity’s way of life. This understanding takes persons and relationships beyond the primordial garden, yet never separated from the formative roots evolved from the beginning. Anything less and any substitutes in political theology render it insignificant to define our identity and determine our function in our way of life.

At this point, reconsider Satan’s progressive pursuit of the Son to reduce his ontology and function, and how the Son countered Satan’s subtle temptations with nothing less and no substitutes of his whole ontology and function (as noted above in Lk 4:1-10). What would have happened to the integrity of the Trinity and the wholeness of the trinitarian persons’ relationship together as One, if the Son had not responded with nothing less and no substitutes of the who and the what of the Trinity? And honestly examine if your heart would be satisfied as a person (like “naked and without shame”) in the compromised image and likeness of anything less and any substitutes. This is the crossroads facing us today.

Evolutionary Self-ism and the Recourse

The who and the what of the created person have evolved into stereotypes converging in the composition of **self-ism** that underlies human life. Self-ism has infected all aspects of humanity and propagated the systems and structures of the human order on the basis of quantitative distinctions. These outer-in distinctions have stereotyped who and what human persons are and how they can function. The evolved quantitative distinctions of self-ism have become basic for defining human identity and determining human function, such that human persons are now limited to and constrained in the particular stereotype depicting their self.

When the self displaced the person, fragmentary outer-in distinctions assumed the prominence and priority over the inner out distinguishing the whole person. Rooted in the outer in, the self is composed by what it does and has (including its abilities, resources, roles and titles). The self revolves on these distinctions of what it does and has, which then renders each self to those stereotypes. Self-ism emerges when these stereotypes are formalized to establish the human order. Stereotypes are formalized in a comparative process, in which the self competes with other selves to be the “fittest,” thereby forming a vertical scale for measuring the self as better or less, good or bad, etc. Outer-in distinctions are always measured on this inevitable comparative basis, which forms the underlying system and structure of self-ism. How has self-ism evolved into the present?

Racism, classism, sexism, and any other isms depicting stereotyped distinctions in humanity are all subsumed under self-ism. Moreover, these isms will all continue to be sustained as long as self-ism prevails in the public and private way of life; and this human condition has become endemic.

The reality of self-ism in everyday life parallels the current reality of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many today minimize the infection threat of the novel coronavirus, while some even deny its reality and call it a hoax or a conspiracy to control human freedom and the quality of life—all consequential for accelerating this pandemic’s infection globally and increasing spread locally. The same can, should and must be said about self-ism, whose infection symptoms are ongoingly explicit in undeniable outer-in distinctions. Yet, the convergence of these two realities is no coincidence. The genius of Satan is using the COVID-19 reality to diminish the perception of self-ism’s reality, so that its reductionism infection will continue to evolve and mutate in our way of life, our human order, and the basis for governing life together.

A major difference in these converging realities is that the infection of self-ism is set apart from the coronavirus infection. That is, in the COVID-19 pandemic, quarantine efforts help stop the infection, whereas isolation of any kind neither prevents the self-ism pandemic nor reduces its infection in human life. Once the evolutionary shift to outer in

established the self in stereotyped distinctions, these distinctions are embedded deeply as the defining determinant for human identity and function wherever this self exists, publicly or privately, collectively or individually.

The self in reduced identity and function persists in the stereotype of what it does and has. When systematically measured by this comparative basis, the self has little freedom and opportunity to significantly change its status on the human scale, though efforts beyond survival to become the fittest may be an ongoing hope—an uncertainty, for example, demonstrated in the presumed hope of the American Dream. In other words, what any self can do and have has limits, to which the self is constrained as long as based on outer in. The most predominant consequence of this pandemic infection is the endemic condition of **human inequality**. Contrary to and in conflict with the human equality of all persons created in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God, human inequality evolved from the beginning and has mutated to become the norm for the human order, as well as the variable new normal for the human way of life.

Human inequality is the standard-bearer for self-ism that relegates all persons, peoples, tribes and nations to its stereotypes. These outer-in distinctions have become nearly indelible in the human order, and they have become the justification for human inequity in this self-centered way of life. Human inequality can only emerge from the evolutionary shift to outer in, and human inequity has no basis without the prominence of outer-in distinctions. Without understanding these roots, human life keeps evolving and mutating in the branches of human inequality and inequity. Will we recognize that this has become the endemic condition of our way of life, or will we focus only on the COVID-19 pandemic to determine the defining reality existing today?

Any political theology of significance must address self-ism at its roots. For political theology to be essential, it has to also provide recourse to stop the infection of this prevailing pandemic and to heal its mutated branches. Such viable recourse once again parallels the COVID-19 pandemic. The two main forms of recourse to fight the novel coronavirus center on the notion of **herd immunity**, for which these two forms are contrary if not opposing recourse. In order to attain herd immunity, where the majority of the population has antibodies to resist infection, one side proposes that no measures be taken to protect people from infection, thereby allowing them to contract the virus that will build antibodies for the majority to become immune. This is the recourse embraced by those who minimize the pandemic's threat or don't take it seriously. The other recourse for herd immunity depends on the efficacy of a vaccine to generate antibodies for immunity, with herd immunity possible if about 90% of the population is vaccinated—which is a huge goal given so much doubt about the vaccine. Whether herd immunity will be attained in the COVID-19 pandemic is an open question, which increasingly will remain unanswered as the virus keeps mutating.

Recourse for the self-ism pandemic is also faced with the issue of herd immunity. This is a critical issue when such recourse is applied to reductionism's infection of self-ism. Since self-ism is rooted in reductionism, human inequality is the inevitable qualitative-relational consequence of this reduced condition—a consequence intrinsic to self-ism. Christians approach this reduced condition with an oversimplified or minimalized view of sin. With such a weak view of sin that doesn't encompass sin as reductionism, Christians knowingly or inadvertently presume that a notion like herd immunity will prevent human inequality and keep human inequity in check. One segment of Christians believes that ongoing exposure to this reduced condition will build an aversion to it for the majority, whereby the condition will be shut down or at the very least kept from spreading. This mindset prevails in a democracy; and Christians in the U.S. notably presume a herd immunity exists in the majority to preclude human inequality—especially since the declaration etched in U.S. history is affirmed that “all men are created equal.” Little if any attention is given to what has evolved since creation, which has shaped the U.S. in spite of any revisionist history.

The other segment of Christians is not so presumptuous about herd immunity to self-ism, but they depend on a vaccine-like recourse to stop this infection and prevent its spread. What they depend on, however, is some external cure that can be injected into this condition, while oversimplifying, minimizing or even overlooking the inner-out changes in persons and their relationships needed to turn around, redeem and transform human inequality and inequity, in order to restore the created equality of all persons from inner out. For example, Christians promoting civil rights and social justice have presumed with good intentions that this mindset will turn this condition around, which certainly hasn't become a reality. The reality of self-ism is the root of *individualism* that generates self-concerns, which evolve into self-interests that mutate into vested interests—all of which are subtly self-serving, even notably practiced in the name of Christ (cf. Mt 7:22-23). Such practice reflects, reinforces and sustains the inequality existing among Christians and churches, while at the very least being complicit with the human inequity of their surrounding contexts. Moreover, all these repercussions of self-ism are underlying in a collective context, which thus has no immunity to self-ism's infection.

Both of the above segments presume some certainty of hope in the uncertainty of their recourse. Satan would want us to think that herd immunity is the recourse for reductionism's infection at the innermost of the human condition. Indeed, the issue of herd immunity is unavoidable for all Christians and churches; and political theology is essential to resolve it at the heart of this evolved and mutated condition.

In either of the above courses, the recourse of herd immunity cannot have certainty, because (1) these recourses do not get to the innermost of the infection unique to self-ism, and (2) the source of this infection keeps mutating. Therefore, such recourse

is ineffective and simply misleads and misguides on byways that effectively serves as a virtual reality. So much recourse in life today is misled and misguided on the byways of virtual reality, which subtly direct us off course from the substantively essential reality of God's way of life. Consequently, because of the reality rooted in the pivotal shift to self-ism, the human way of life is reduced to a virtual reality—whose parameters in everyday life have become so enhanced to make it nearly impossible to distinguish the real from the virtual.

In modern culture, for example, technology has compounded the issue of who and what emerge. Ironically, this evolved reality is illuminated by Jaron Lanier, a computer scientist known as the father of virtual reality technology.

Something started to go wrong with the digital revolution around the turn of the twenty-first century. The World Wide Web was flooded by a torrent of petty designs sometimes called web 2.0....

Communication is now often experienced as a superhuman phenomenon that towers above individuals. A new generation has come of age with a reduced expectation of what a person can be, and of who each person might become.... We make up extensions of your being, like remote eyes and ears (webcams and mobile phones) and expanded memory (the world of details you can search for online). These become the structures by which you connect to the world and other people. These structures in turn can change how you conceive of yourself and the world.

How so?

The central mistake of recent digital culture is to chop up a network of individuals so finely that you end up with mush. You then start to care about the abstraction of the network more than the real people who are networked, even though the network by itself is meaningless. Only the people were ever meaningful....

The new designs on the verge of being locked in, the web 2.0 designs, actively demand that people define themselves downward.... The deep meaning of personhood is being reduced by illusions of bits [b(inary) (dig)its].⁸

Given the facts from someone at the center of this human development, we cannot deny how human life has progressed. The reality controlling the way of life for the herd has become obscure from the perception of the majority, including of Christians and churches. Furthermore, the phenomenon of virtual reality keeps evolving, so we should have urgent concerns of how AI is guiding us and where it is leading us. In the meantime, human inequality and inequity keep evolving beneath the illusions of progress, as the fittest emerge from the variants mutated by virtual reality.

⁸ Jaron Lanier, *You Are Not a Gadget: A Manifesto* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 3-20.

The irrefutable facts of reductionism's infection in the reality of self-ism render all human recourse to the virtual realm. In the reality of everyday life, human recourse for self-ism is nonexistent. Nevertheless, this does not leave human persons and their relationships without hope. In whatever uncertainties surround life today, however, that hope must be based on certainty to have **the uncertainty of certainty** in contrast to *the certainty of uncertainty* for hope noted above. The counter-relational workings of reductionism subtly misguide us in the virtual reality of certainty, while misleading us on the byways of uncertainty. The certainty of hope is found only on the whole-ly way of the whole-ly God, whose way of life is irreducible and nonnegotiable and thus not subject to any terms composed by self-ism—though it certainly is ongoingly subjected to self-ism's terms, as encouraged relentlessly by Satan. The latter's ongoing conflict continues even for Christians and churches until it is turned around from its evolutionary shift, redeemed from its limits and constraints, and transformed into its original and new created condition—which Christians and churches may claim in their theology but experience only virtually in their practice. This irreplaceable process involves self-ism returning to its created roots, so that its evolutionary roots will be uprooted and replaced in order for persons and relationships to grow into their qualitative-relational branches constituted by creation.

If we don't know our roots and its branches, and understand what emerges from them and how they unfold, then what recourse do we have for our human condition and what hope can we claim with certainty that our whole persons and relationships together will grow in their created qualitative-relational condition?

The reality facing us is unavoidable. When we don't know the roots of what defines our identity and determines our function in everyday life, we don't know if they have evolved or not, and how they evolve. Even when Christians have some knowledge of their roots, if they don't understand the who and the what of their persons and relationships, then they don't know the real condition of "Where are you?"—as Adam evidenced (Gen 3:10-12). This subjects us more deeply to the counter-relational workings of reductionism and its qualitative-relational consequences, whereby human inequality and inequity become more entrenched in the human order that evolves in our way of life—evolving explicitly, implicitly and complicitly. Therefore, the undeniable crossroads before us is unavoidable in "Where are you?": either progressing survival in self-consciousness or growing wholeness in person-consciousness.

Progressing Survival or Growing Wholeness

Theological anthropology and the view of sin are critical to political theology, yet they all become insignificant when their roots shift from creation to evolution. The branches from our existing roots then emerge either in progressing survival or growing

wholeness, either in the fitness of self-consciousness or the well-being of person-consciousness. Thus, theological anthropology and the view of sin are integral for political theology and their significance.

Human fitness has been conflated with human well-being, which renders the latter fragmented as the former evolves in inequality and with inequity. That's the nature of survival progressing in self-ism infected by reductionism. These evolutionary repercussions and qualitative-relational consequences are not discerned by a reduced theological anthropology defining persons and determining relationships composed by a weak view of sin without reductionism. This makes it essential for all Christians to account for their theological anthropology and view of sin in order to know the real condition of "Where are you?"

The subtle counter-relational workings of reductionism among Christians and churches has evolved in notions of advancing in their faith and progressing in their ministry and mission. Pursuing these goals converges with the innate need to survive and the competitive desire to succeed: the **progressing survival** in an explicit or implicit comparative system engaged with complicity by Christians and churches, which even the early disciples openly engaged (Mt 18:1; Mk 9:33-34; Lk 9:46). This survival-succeed dynamic competing in a comparative system between us has become the norm among us, which has rendered the church fragmentary and reduced its persons and relationships to a new normal in their way of life (also depicted in their fellowship). This underlying progressing survival has shifted the reality of creation into a virtual reality, which at best only simulates the created who and what of persons and their relationships, while revising their human order. We must never underestimate the genius of Satan to infect us with reductionism and to mutate its presence and shaping impact on us. That's why God always asks "What are you doing here?"

In the competitive ancient world of Israel, Elijah flourished as the person God created, growing in the created who and what of his person (1 Kgs 17-18). Then, Elijah shifted from his distinguishing person-consciousness to a redefining self-consciousness, when the competition intensified to reduce his success and threaten his survival (1 Kgs 19:1-2). Now refocused in comparative terms rather than on how his person flourished earlier to constitute his well-being, Elijah entered into the byway of survival mode (19:3-4, 10, 13-14). Elijah lost the certainty of hope and was giving up at this critical juncture. Unlike self-conscious Elijah, however, many of God's people engage the survival mode in order to progress, assuming that success is the source of their well-being in spite of their self-consciousness prevailing over person-consciousness. God asks "What are you doing here?" and will pursue us as he did Elijah until we turn around from our byways.

In a competitive world, the byway of survival is a compelling alternate for our way of life when our persons and relationships are measured in comparative terms. On

this prevailing comparative basis, who wouldn't want to be the fittest, as the early disciples argued? Having the best distinctions is simply desirable, even if not explicitly measured in comparison with others. This appealing choice or dilemma is currently more ambiguous in the progress provided by genetic engineering; this sophisticated reshaping quantitative effort to advance the quality of humanity raises more questions than it has answers for.

“What are you doing here?” is inseparable from “Where are you?” As long as we don't acknowledge the defining roots of our identity and function, nor recognize their determining branches composing the way of life for our persons and relationships, including its order and quality, than by default we undertake the byway of progressing survival. This is **the default mode** of the human relational condition, which pervades the life of Christians and churches to prevail as our human relational condition; and our condition prevails even by default until redeemed at the roots and transformed in the innermost solely from inner out. This is the door that the Word keeps knocking (even banging) on for us the open, so that the church and all its persons and relationships will grow in wholeness together (Rev 3:19-20).

The door remains open at this juncture of human history. Whether Christians and churches walk through it depends on the perception (1) of the crossroads before us, and (2) of the reality composing existing byways among us. The first perception requires knowing our roots and understanding how they've evolved. The second perception involves both humility and honesty to admit the existence of byways, and then to correct the course we are on without any evolutionary recourse. These perceptions are made integral by the whole theological anthropology and the strong view of sin encompassing reductionism, which provide the qualitative-relational basis for us to walk through the open door (3) for redemptive change to unite with the Word and (4) be transformed in the integrally equalized and intimate relationships together of wholeness—the wholeness distinguished incomparably in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God that constitutes God's whole-ly (whole & uncommon) way of life.

These essential steps remove us from the byways of progressing survival to embark on the road of **growing wholeness**. Yet, before our hope is raised in certainty, we have to understand the nature of both the *door* to and the *road* for growing wholeness. First of all, this integral door and road are *narrow* in contrast to the wide door leading to the broad byways of progressing survival. If that is not an issue for taking these essential steps, the second part of their nature is the discomfoting reality that this integral way is also difficult compared to how easy the byways are—as Jesus made definitive for all his followers (Mt 7:13-14). In other words, these essential steps turn us away from the majority in our surrounding contexts, remove us from what has been the norm, and take us out of our comfort zone—all necessary for our person from inner out to be vulnerably involved in the relational purpose and outcome of growing wholeness in our persons, relationships, their human order, and everyday way of life integrally personal and

collective, private and public. Certainly, growing wholeness sounds good in our theology and practice, and it is an ideal notion to proclaim in our way of life. To make growing wholeness functional as the experiential truth and relational reality, however, requires nothing less and no substitutes of these essential steps to take us through the narrow door and involve us directly on the difficult road of growing wholeness. Political theology must integrally clarify and correct this process in our way of life to enable this journey to unfold to its relational outcome.

Even though the door to and road for growing wholeness are narrow and difficult as opposed to wide and easy, it is not the fit or fittest who are able to become whole and grow wholeness. The journey to be whole and grow wholeness is enabled solely on the basis of its roots in *covenant*, which is not about a mere contract, nor about the parameters for engagement in *quid pro quo*. Political theology has to be composed with the clarity of the roots of covenant in order to have the significance for our way of life to *be* on this journey as a relational reality, which is never virtual.

The Roots of Covenant

Central to political theology and its practice is discipleship, which is neither a notion nor an intention but the life-giving heart to the way of life for those following the Word. Because the Word made definitive the narrow door and difficult road to distinguish his followers, political theology has the critical responsibility to clarify and correct the way of life for those following a wider and easier road. The Word is irreducible for discipleship and thus nonnegotiable for his followers (as clarified in Mt 7:21-23). Therefore, political theology must clear away any theological fog that makes ambiguous the crossroads facing all Christians and churches.

In order to journey in the discipleship constituted on the road for growing wholeness, the narrow door must be distinguished from the wider ones in a theological fog. Thus, before we can enter the door to growing wholeness, our theological anthropology and view of sin have to be checked at the door. Why? Because no reduced theological anthropology and weak view of sin can enter through it and expect to journey to wholeness on these easier byways. Persons defined and relationships determined by a reduced theological anthropology and weak view of sin do not become whole and grow wholeness; rather they are relegated by reductionism to the limits and constraints of what persons do and have from outer in, whereby their fragmentary condition relegates relationships to inequality. For example, who in the body of Christ has the gift to grow wholeness? Yet, any distinctions used to answer this question are the norm for how we define each other and determine our relationships together in the church. Only whole theological anthropology and the strong view of sin encompassing reductionism enter through the door to the road for growing wholeness.

The journey of persons from inner out becoming whole and growing wholeness is rooted in covenant, which is the only basis that enables us on this narrow difficult road. The issue with covenant emerges when covenant is considered merely a contract; this constrains participants to its stipulations and thereby limits their expectations from the contract to its quantified terms. The problem with covenant unfolds when covenant is observed as a quid pro quo; this constrains participants to engaging in an exchange dynamic and limits the outcome to the quantitative parity of exchange. Both the issue and problem of covenant widen and make easier the road presumed for wholeness; furthermore, their assumed objectivity is compromised by the limits and constraints of their outer-in bias. Consequently, they both mistakenly assume to be enabled for this journey, when in fact they (1) have reduced and renegotiated the Word's enabling covenant, and thus (2) have rendered its relational reality to a virtual reality that, at best, can merely simulate participating in this journey. Neither know the roots of covenant, nor do they understand what the Word's covenant constitutes and how it functions.

The perceptual lens and interpretive framework used for covenant gain clarity only when its roots are known; and our perceptual lens and interpretive framework can be corrected from any refracted vision when covenant roots are understood. When what evolved from the beginning kept evolving and mutating in human life, God intervened as never before or since to establish the Noahic covenant (Gen 6-9:17). This historic covenant and its iconic sign shining hope through human history, however, is not the covenant central to political theology.⁹ The Noahic covenant certainly is one of the roots of covenant, yet it functions only as the prelude secondary to the forthcoming primary covenant; and as such it is unable to lead us on the journey to wholeness. Here again, theological anthropology and the view of sin are critical to discern what is primary and what is only secondary.

The primal root of covenant emerged when God not only intervened on the human condition but most importantly constituted the journey to wholeness (cf. Num 6:24-26). This was established by the primary covenant God made with Abram (Gen 15:1-6; 17:1-2). This is the primal root for the primary covenant: “walk before me, and be blameless,” which Abram fulfilled to determine his new function “as righteousness” (Gen 15:6) and to define his new identity as “Abraham” (a leader on the journey to wholeness, Gen 17:4-7). What's primary, however, should not be confused with what's secondary, which again requires whole theological anthropology and the strong view of sin encompassing reductionism—nothing less and no substitutes.

⁹ In contrast, David VanDrunen makes the Noahic covenant central and foundational for political theology in *Politics after Christendom: Political Theology in a Fractured World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020).

In the Word's covenant, the heart signifies the unmistakable function of what God seeks: the whole person, nothing less and no substitutes. When God made conclusive to Abram the terms for covenant relationship together, the LORD appeared to him directly and said clearly in order to constitute Abraham's relational response: "Walk before me, and be blameless" (Gen 17:1). That is, "be involved with me in relationship together by being blameless (*tamiym*)."

The tendency is to render "blameless" as moral purity and/or ethical perfection (cf. Gen 6:9), notably in Judaism by observance of the law (cf. 2 Sam 22:23-24). With this lens, even Paul perceived his righteousness as "blameless" (Phil 3:6). Yet *tamiym* denotes to be complete, whole, and is not about mere moral and ethical purity. Beyond this limited perception, *tamiym* involves the ontology of being whole, namely the whole person from inner out involved in the primacy of relationship together. Integrated with righteousness, *tamiym* completes the relational function to involve jointly the true and whole identity of the person.

Abraham's relational response and involvement in reciprocal relationship together constituted the primacy of his new function (integral with his new identity) "as righteousness." Abraham, contrary to a reduced theological anthropology and weak view of sin, was distinguished then only as follows: Righteousness (*ṣĕdāqâh*) needs to be understood as a relational term in relational language (notably in a juridical process about a covenant), which involves the relational dynamic of the whole of who, what and how a person is that others can count on to be this whole person in relationship together—a trust essential to significant relationships, without which render relationships tentative, shallow or broken. Righteousness in referential terms becomes an attribute merely describing information about someone, which is insufficient to account for the dynamic function of the whole person's relational involvement. For God, the ancient poet declares, righteousness is the ongoing determinant that establishes God's relational path—the whole of who, what and how God is that can be counted on in relationship (Ps 85:13). In relational terms, righteousness (both for God and others) confirms that the person presented to others in relationship is truly the person one says one is, therefore who can be counted to *be* nothing less and to function with no substitutes of the primary.

In God's relational nature, the only way God engages in covenant relationship is by reciprocal relationship and never by unilateral relationship. The relational terms of reciprocal relationship together require the whole person's involvement, which then requires the human agency of a person's will to fulfill the terms for reciprocal relationship with righteousness and being whole. God holds human persons responsible for their human agency created for reciprocal relationship and holds accountable their choices of will in relationship together both in God's context and the human context—"Where are you?" and "what are you doing here?"

Therefore, the journey to be whole and grow wholeness is enabled initially by this primary covenant: the covenant of reciprocal relationship together between the whole of God (not parts of God) and whole persons from inner out, who are relationally involved first and foremost in the primacy of this covenant relationship, whereby they can be counted on in the relationship to *be* the whole of who, what and how they are—always with nothing less and never with any substitutes. Reciprocal may appear to be an exchange dynamic of *quid pro quo*, but the qualitative-relational terms composing this covenant from God preclude any such reduced observance. In order not to undertake such a wider, easier relationship, the Word enables persons for this journey with the supplemental covenant integral with the primary covenant, and thus inseparable from it.

The qualitative-relational terms for covenant relationship together were distinguished further to Moses—notably in face-to-face relationship together (Num 12:6-8)—in “the book of the covenant” (Mosaic covenant, Ex 24:7; 34:27-29; Dt 4:13). These distinguished qualitative-relational terms compose God’s Rule of Law, which commonly are reduced to a moral-ethical code of behavior to observe (perhaps to be perfect and blameless). Such observance, however, does not enable persons on the journey to be whole and grow wholeness, no matter how blameless they feel; in reality, a moral-ethical code reduces persons and fragments relationships—as the Word clarified and corrected of such observance (e.g. Mt 5:21-47). Contrary to the prominent perception of the book of Deuteronomy as the Book of Law, the fact of the matter is that Deuteronomy is *the love story* of God’s vulnerable relational involvement directly with his people (Dt, as the Book of Love, 4:37; 7:8; 10:15; 23:5; 33:3). Rather than detailing the law in referential terms, these qualitative-relational terms enable persons to journey to wholeness (e.g. Dt 18:9,13). In the words of the Word, covenant relationship is not established on the basis of quantitative terms but on the qualitative-relational terms of *love* in “**God’s covenant of love**” (Dt 7:7-9, NIV); and following God’s Rule of Law is significant only with our qualitative-relational involvement in “his covenant of love” (Dt 7:12-13, NIV).

These roots of covenant are irreducible and nonnegotiable, and the branches sown from them need to grow this distinguished practice of faith in our everyday way of life. These roots are not mere historic *moments* but grow the branches of a non-revisionary historical *movement*. The responsibility of political theology is to clarify when, where and how they are reduced or renegotiated, and correct them accordingly. The convergence of covenant roots and branches into the primacy of God’s covenant of love challenges what defines persons and how persons engage in relationships, both with God and each other. This challenge also becomes confronting face to face, that is, when the covenant of love reaches its culmination in the new covenant embodied by the Word—who is partaken of to fully enable those journeying together to be whole and grow wholeness (Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25; Heb 8:6; 9:15; 2 Cor 3:6).

As the new covenant emerged and unfolded face to face to embody God's covenant of love, its experiential truth and relational reality also sow the roots of the gospel in the primal roots of covenant relationship.

The Gospel's Roots and Branches

A discussion on the gospel may seem redundant to you, and it may seem unnecessary for political theology. Yet, we need to know the roots of the gospel to understand both what the Word embodied and the new covenant he brought. Not knowing the gospel's roots opens the door widely to what are easily assumed to be branches of the gospel. Christians and churches operate with various assumptions about the gospel, all of which render their way of life through a wider door to an easier road. The way of life composed by political theology is responsible to clarify and correct such theology and practice. Thus, knowing the gospel's roots and understanding its branches are essential for political theology to have this significance, both to God and to all of us.

What God created in the beginning was enacted by the Word (Jn 1:1-3). From the beginning, the human condition "to be apart" evolved, to which only the integral relational presence and response of the Word emerged to change the human condition (Jn 1:4-5). The primal roots of the Word's relational presence and response unfolded in the primacy of covenant relationship (starting with Abraham) to enact the gospel's relational purpose and outcome; this distinguished the *news* of the gospel. The news of the gospel is widely assumed to be good. Yet, what is presumed easily to be good does not distinguish the news of the *whole* gospel, and in fact could be contrary to it. The good news of the gospel has been reported in various ways, with selective facts, and with nuances of its truth. In this historical process, the gospel has even become variable good news composed by alternative facts and virtual news that have augmented the gospel outside the boundaries of its theological trajectory and relational path (as in Mt 7:13-14).

The news embodied by the Word's presence and enacted by the Word's involvement needs to be qualified by two interrelated proclamations of the gospel brought by the Word: (1) "He will proclaim justice to *all persons, peoples, tribes and nations...*until he brings justice to victory" (Mt 12:18,20); and (2) "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring *common* peace, but a sword..." (Mt 10:34-36, cf. Lk 2:34-35). Both of these inseparable proclamations qualify the news of the gospel by first making what we can claim from the gospel *narrow*, and secondly making what we can proclaim of the gospel *difficult*. There are qualifiers of these qualifiers, however, that need to be understood: (1a) the justice of the Word goes further and deeper than social justice and its related workings for the common good; and (2a) the Word doesn't bring the peace commonly perceived by the human lens, but he

does give the uncommon peace that constitutes human well-being only in wholeness (Jn 14:27). Anything less of the Word's justice is just an premature justice, and anything less of the Word's uncommon peace is an immature peace—which grieves the Word when God's people don't know the difference (Lk 19:41-42, cf. Eph 4:30).

These qualifiers narrow down what can be claimed from the Word's gospel, and also make difficult what can be proclaimed from his whole gospel. Thus, the gospel we use in our political theology is the justice and peace we get in our way of life. This further qualifies whether the new covenant of the gospel we claim indeed enables us on the journey to be whole and grow wholeness, or it doesn't.

The Word in the beginning composed the good news only in relational language, the relational terms of which need to be understood in order to embrace the gospel as good news for all human life. When the Word was embodied, Jesus enacted the relational terms that clarified the gospel and also corrected any misinformed news and fake news by exposing them with *bad news*—the bad news of the gospel.

In the manifesto summarizing the Word's teaching that distinguishes his followers (Mt 5-7), Jesus clarifies his relational language and corrects the referentialization of God's Rule of Law (5:17-48) and the *object*-ifying of their Rule of Faith (Mt 6-7). His teaching in relational language and his face-to-face interactions enacted the gospel also in this bad news. For the Word's gospel, the good news emerges with the bad news, and the good doesn't unfold without taking to heart the bad—the irreducible and nonnegotiable whole gospel of the Word. Simeon, who embraced the whole gospel as the Spirit revealed to him, clearly distinguished the gospel's good and bad news, and he anticipated its impact on those in the tradition of God's people:

“This child is destined for the falling and rising of many in *God's kingdom*, and to be *the significance* that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too” (Lk 2:25-35).

Therefore, the bad news of the gospel not only antecedes the good news but necessarily qualifies what the good news is that is essential for *whole* justice and *uncommon* peace—the whole-ly relational outcome of Jesus' uncompromised gospel.

The roots and branches of the gospel not only challenge our theological anthropology and view of sin but intrusively confront them, just as the Word enacted. The Word's gospel embodied face to face, by its integral composition also by necessity exposes the bad news of persons whose identity and function are reduced to outer in—that is, anything less and any substitutes of their whole persons created from inner out.

He confronts any reduced theological anthropology and exposes the shame of those reflecting, reinforcing and sustaining the sin of reductionism—the shame that emerged from the primordial garden (Gen 3:7-9), which set into motion the injustice of the human condition. The shame of persons reduced from the whole of who, what and how they are (as in *bosh*, Gen 2:25) is the penultimate injustice that violates the *vested rights* from God inherent to all persons created in God’s image and likeness, thereby preventing the fulfillment of their inherent human need. Furthermore, the reduction of persons precludes the just claim to the *privileged rights* unique to all persons created in God’s qualitative image and relational likeness, because reduced persons do not function in their created uniqueness and thus lose their privileged rights by default. This is the justice intrinsic to the whole gospel that the Word brings to victory with wholeness (uncommon peace, Jn 14:27), which any claiming and proclaiming of the gospel cannot omit by default or exclude by design.

If reductionism is not the core of our view of sin, this challenges the gospel we claim, and confronts its salvation we proclaim as being saved from. Why? Because when the roots of the gospel do not go to the depth necessary to attend to reductionism, then that gospel’s salvific branch is truncated in what it saves *from*, as well as truncating or even missing its salvific branch of what it saves *to*. Such salvific branches may be sufficient for persons and relationships composed by a reduced theological anthropology, but they are insufficient for those from a whole theological anthropology. Unmistakably then, these roots and branches are by necessity intrinsic for political theology and will be discussed further, along with related context above, in coming chapters.¹⁰

Knowing “Where are you?” and “What are you doing here?” can only be understood from the roots of creation in the beginning, and by recognizing the roots that evolved from the beginning. From these conflicting and competing realities, we are faced with admitting that mutating branches evolved from these roots do indeed exist, if not prevail, in our way of life, our human order, and the rule of law determining their integrity and thus level of quality. Political theology is responsible specifically to clarify the nexus between these issues and correct the conflict between them. This responsibility must be fulfilled in order for political theology to be significant for the daily public and personal practice of Christians and churches. Anything less and any substitutes subject us all to the influential shaping of the counter-relational workings subtly encouraged by Satan.

¹⁰ For an expanded study on the gospel’s justice and peace, see my study *Jesus’ Gospel of Essential Justice: The Human Order from Creation through Complete Salvation* (Justice Study, 2018). Online at <http://www.4X12.org>.

Chapter 3

The Nexus of Past and Future

**In the beginning was the Word.... He was in the world
and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him
...his own people did not accept him.**

John 1:1, 10-11

“Have I been with you all this time, and you still do not know me?”

John 14:9

The chaotic violence on January 6, 2021, which engulfed the U.S. Capitol and Congress, may trigger dystopian fears about the near future. The historic reality of current days serves as a cautionary tale that we need to examine, and which political theology needs to help us understand. The cautionary tale of this current crisis does not foreshadow the U.S. devolving into a banana republic, though it doesn't rule out a coup d'état of some kind. Understandably, people here and abroad are speculating: Is this the end of what can't get worse, or is it the beginning of what will get worse? Yet, and this is crucial for such thinking, predicting the movement from past to future requires an understanding of the difference between *nature and nurture*, which mirrors the difference between genetics and environment. Thus, probability is an inadequate predictor of how the future will be without accounting for intervening determinants.

Speculations notwithstanding, what becomes the central theme of this cautionary tale is not merely the vulnerable state of democracy but the very notion of democracy itself. Two underlying realities are becoming evident: (1) the exposure of the illusion of democracy, which claims governing by the people, with majority rule under the principle of equality of rights, opportunity, and treatment—the reality of which is nonexistent in democracy's history and is more virtual than real in the U.S.; and (2) the exposure in the dynamics of the underlying human condition that is intrinsic to all participants in a democracy. Based on these two realities, the recent chaos in the U.S. should not be surprising, but in fact be expected as a logical conclusion from evolving antecedents.

The nexus of the past in the second reality unfolds the future of the first reality. The future of democracy depends little on its formative past, as the variable function of the U.S. Constitution has demonstrated consistently to bring us to where we are today. Critically then, the nexus of past and future needs further examination and deeper understanding, not just for democracy but for the totality of the human order and all its

ways of life. And Christians need to be at the forefront of this pursuit, because our theology is essential for the nexus of the past to be understood in order for our practice to unfold in the future according to this nexus without the shaping of intervening determinants. This nexus of past and future is crucial for our public witness to be able to clarify and correct other nexuses that can only attach degrees of uncertainty to past and future, which render the future uncertain inseparably from the past's uncertainty.

Certainly as well as obviously, the past only gets to the future through the present. Less obvious, however, the nexus between past and future is often not recognized, understood or simply ignored by the present. This lack makes their connection even more crucial for determining whether the future moves forward from the past or recycles it. This certainly has direct implications for our way of life, which we must address urgently to prevent the inevitable repercussions on our identity and function, and their composition in our daily life present and future.

Vignettes of the Past or the Big Picture

For the most part, democracies have operated with the knowledge of “good and evil” that have evolved from the beginning in the primordial garden. Keep in mind that the pursuit of this knowledge was cleverly designed for human progress, the design and function of which democracy presumes to exemplify. The U.S. in particular has based its conventional wisdom on this “good and evil”—the knowledge to “make one wise” (Gen 3:5-6)—operating under its subtle assumption of working for the common good. This all points to the historical fragments used as vignettes of the past to illuminate the big picture needed to advance in the future. Whatever the historic value in nexuses of past and future are in operation, these nexuses should not be assumed to have certainty, nor presumed to be the truth to give us the big picture that is vital for the present to advance forward into the future and not recycle the past.

All Christians and churches are currently challenged more than before to know the nexus of past and future that they use explicitly or inadvertently, in order to understand the basis for their everyday identity and function as well as how their public way of life is shaped. Observers both locally and globally are viewing the picture drawn from all these parts, which for them will illuminate if we are distinguished with significance amidst current events today. That is to say, does the Christian faith provide the big picture unique for humanity that others should seriously consider as vital for their ways of life?

From the beginning, God's people have had difficulty staying focused on God's big picture. Historically, Christians have been susceptible consistently to fragmenting the Word communicated from God, using a narrowed-down perceptual lens and reduced interpretive framework just as the persons in the primordial garden did.¹ As an evolving consequence, those believing in the truth of God's Word (notably evangelicals) frequently have been selective in using only parts of the Word—namely from God's Rule of Law through the gospel to the Word's new way of life—to piece together variants of the big picture for our faith. The problem with this piecemeal process, however, is the indispensable fact that the reality of the Word's whole big picture is always greater than the sum of no matter what parts are pieced together—**the synergism of the Word**.

Therefore, the Word not only challenges this so-called big picture composed from only fragments of the Word, but he also confronts how it is pieced together and those who composed it. This involves exposing the genius of Satan's counter-relational work not to explicitly decimate the Christian faith but to subtly *minimalize* its significance essential for humanity. **Minimalism** renders Christian theology and practice insignificant to heal and make whole the human condition, which includes the human condition of Christians and churches.

The Tension of Minimalists with the Word

With the biblical composition of the Word incorporating the OT and NT, it is not surprising that Christians become selective in their focus and in what to include for God's big picture. The issue, however, is less about the partial content included, but more so about how or why those fragments were selected. This exposes the underlying purpose that serves those being selective, which is not only an issue challenged by the Word but a critical problem confronted by the Word—the ongoing tension minimalists will have with the Word. They may not be aware of this tension with the Word composed in relational language, because they are focused on the Bible composed in referential language—presuming the Bible's referential terms are their cornerstone (Isa 28:16) but, in reality, the Word is their stumbling stone (Isa 8:14; Rom 9:32).

The tension and related conflict of minimalists with the Word is illuminated throughout God's big picture that the Gospel of John summarizes to help his readers. John's purpose is that they not accept anything less and any substitutes for the Word, but rather that they embrace the *whole* of who and what the Word constituted in the beginning and how the Word embodied since. Thus, John's Gospel is the key text for the integral composition of political theology and unavoidable for any and all who follow the Word—and not the Bible as their reference book.

¹ For an expanded study on biblical interpretation, see my study *Interpretation Integrated in 'the Whole-ly Way': The Integral Education and Learning of Knowing and Understanding God* (Bible Hermeneutics Study, 2019). Online at <http://www.4X12.org>.

The Gospel of John isn't structured by the historic narrative of Jesus' life, as highlighted in the other Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. More significantly but not less historically, the composition of John's Gospel illuminates the theological nexus of the past and the future that the Word constituted, embodied and enacted. Therefore, what unfolds in this Gospel helps readers understand **the whole big picture** of the Word's theological trajectory and relational path, of which the Synoptic Gospels provide only various vignettes. John's whole big picture of the Word integrally illuminates the whole of God and God's whole way of life that are both essential for our identity and function, and vital for our way of life to *be* in likeness of nothing less and no substitutes—and thus not to be misled or misguided with anything less and any substitutes.

John rightly starts “In the beginning” that constituted the Word in the ontology of the whole of God, later illuminated as the Trinity (Jn 1:1-2,18,33). From this ontological whole, the Word functions in wholeness to create all life—not just fragments of life but the whole of life (1:3-4). From this incomparable beginning, the unimaginable emerges in this irreducible whole picture. The Word was vulnerably illuminated in the world (1:4,9) and relationally revealed his whole person to others he created in likeness (1:14). The Word wanted to make direct relational connection, but his person was not recognized, received and embraced for relationship together (1:10-11). What emerges from the relational dynamics of the incarnation is typically interpreted as the beginning of the gospel. Yet, that's not the whole picture of the gospel, which now unfolds the good news of the Word's theological trajectory and relational path for covenant relationship together initiated with Abraham.

It is at this juncture in John's Gospel that the convergence between the development of covenant relationship together and the misinformed or misguided minimalists is ongoingly highlighted by John to illuminate the Word's whole picture. John weaves together the Word's relational connections and his dissonant encounters, in order to integrate the Word's theological trajectory and relational path to consummate the whole gospel's relational outcome in new covenant relationship together in wholeness—with nothing less and no substitutes able to account for the Word's vulnerable presence and relational involvement, even though the misinformation and disinformation by the minimalists have prominently been misleading and misguiding others in their faith. To emphasize John's purpose, the Word's relational connections and dissonant encounters are not necessarily in historical sequence but are presented to integrate the whole big picture needed to integrally know the Word's whole identity and understand the Word's whole function.

Since this study is on political theology and not a commentary on John's Gospel, I will only highlight the following:

1. The Word is the Light for the darkness of humanity that illuminates God's whole picture of covenant relationship together (1:4-5,12). John the Baptist, as unique as he was, gave witness to the incomparable identity of the Light (1:6-9,15,27), whose unparalleled uniqueness illuminated the whole of God (1:32); his witness introduced the Messiah, and any future witnesses of this good news who minimize the whole of God in any way thereby diminish the Light for humanity. John's unique witness was uncommon to his surrounding context, which distinctly reflected the uncommon identity and function of the Word without reducing the Light by deflecting attention onto himself to highlight his own ministry. This unequivocal reality of John's witness was uncommon because he reflected the Word's whole picture, wherein he didn't engage implicitly in self-interests as minimalists do (3:23-37). Essentially, any witness of the Word does not reflect the Light unless that witness integrates the Word's whole picture; anything less and any substitutes render all witnesses to minimalists. John's Gospel highlights their tension with the Word, in order for his readers to understand that they could also be minimalists by default.

2. The Word's first disciples straddled the line of convergence between being involved in covenant relationship together with the Word and being minimalists. This ordinary group (neither extraordinary nor exceptional) included the writer John, who was no mere observer to all unfolding with the Word; any kind of observers of the Word by default become minimalists because they lack direct involvement with the Word in covenant relationship together. Minimalists, however, are circumscribed by far more active behavior, the function of which outlined in John's Gospel can be described as **minimalist disorder**. This Gospel helps us understand that a minimalist disorder is not always obvious in one's theology, and could be less apparent in one's practice (cf. 7:1-5). For example, the early disciples objected explicitly to Mary's intimate relational response and involvement with Jesus that affirmed her covenant relationship with the Word; their objection in contrast reinforced their implicit minimalism that countered the primacy of covenant relationship with secondary matters (Jn 12:1-8, cf. Mk 14:3-9). Under ordinary conditions this minimalist disorder is obscured until brought to light by the Word, who later exposed the disciples' minimal involvement with him that had the relational consequence of not truly knowing his person (14:9)

This illuminates that minimalism is most apparent in the context of direct relationship with the Word; this relational condition is when the tension of minimalist disorder is at its highest to precipitate its overt function—which Peter demonstrated in refusing to let the Messiah wash his feet (13:1-8). John's Gospel confronts us at the core of

our theology and practice to understand unequivocally: The workings of minimalism critically affect the nexus of past and future that Jesus' followers use to shape the Word with only vignettes of the past. Political theology must be able to recognize this in followers of the Word, in order to clarify and correct their way of life to *be* compatible with the theological trajectory and congruent with the relational path of the Word's whole picture. John's Gospel is indispensable for clearly illuminating this integral relational context, process and outcome.

3. When Jesus called persons to "Follow me" (1:43), this wasn't a mere invitation without cost. The Word's call to discipleship directly challenges the surrounding culture that shapes our identity and function; and "Follow me" confronts the cultural bias that reduces his person from wholeness and minimalizes the primacy of relationship intrinsic to "follow my whole person in reciprocal relationship together" by substituting the secondary deeds of serving (12:26). When Nathanael was encouraged to follow Jesus of Nazareth, he clearly expressed his cultural bias: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (culturally labelled a second-class town). Revealingly, he relinquished his cultural bias when he came face to face with Jesus' whole person (1:43-50).

Minimalists diminish the priority of covenant relationship together with secondary priorities, which form their underlying self-interests shaped by their cultural bias—as the disciples demonstrated above. Three culturally interrelated interactions recorded by John define how the Word addressed this formative culture, which teaches us to follow in likeness according to his **three-fold approach to culture**:

(1st) At a traditional wedding—typically lasting about seven days, with wine central to the festivities—Jesus' mother expected him to culturally defer to the problem of depleted wine (2:1-10). Jesus responded to the cultural situation, however, within certain limits that were not defined by that culture. Rather he responded according to his primary identity and function, which turned that culturally acceptable situation for him into an opportunity to vulnerably share his whole person in order for his followers to experience deeper covenant relationship together (2:11). Since that cultural situation didn't prevent him from being his whole person, the Word demonstrated how to address and deal with culture in this **qualified cooperative approach**.

(2nd) In strong contrast, the Word is very confronting of the cultural bias of minimalists, whose self-interests diminished the whole significance of covenant relationship together; the range of these interests reinforced and sustained the underlying workings of self-ism. This unfolds when Jesus forcefully cleared out the religious workings of reductionism prevailing in the temple culture, in order to restore this relational context to the wholeness of covenant relationship together (2:12-20). Historically, this was unlikely an initial temple cleansing that Jesus repeated after his triumphal entry (Mt 21:12-15). Yet,

John juxtaposes this next to the wedding to position it early in his Gospel, in order to emphasize the vital importance of confronting the cultural bias of minimalists and countering its cultural workings no matter how embedded in tradition. Thus, John establishes further the Word's **conflict approach** to culture (even as religious culture) in order to indelibly inscribe the precedent early for Jesus' followers to practice without option: both to incur the cultural costs for affirming the Word's whole picture (e.g. 7:28-32; 8:48-59), and to pay the personal costs for direct involvement in the primacy of covenant relationship together (e.g. 6:60-66; 14:1-9). Obviously, these costs heighten the tension of minimalists with the Word; and the costs precipitate minimalist disorder because they are unavoidable to "Follow my whole person in reciprocal relationship together by being where I am."

(3rd) John further illuminates the Word's approach to culture in a pivotal interaction that highlights the nexus of the past and future in the Word's whole picture. The Word initiated direct interaction with a Samaritan woman, which simply went against the cultural norms both for race and gender. The Word countered that prevailing culture in order to neutralize its consequences, so that he could reveal to her face to face the whole of God and the primacy of covenant relationship, which had precedent and thus primacy over any and all revered traditions from the past (4:4-42). The minimalism of his disciples once again appeared in this interaction, contrary to the Word's direct involvement with those measured as *less* in the minority population. This direct relational involvement is essential to embody the Word's **neutralizing approach** to culture.

Therefore, John's Gospel unequivocally records the Word's integrally **integrated three-fold approach to culture**: the qualified cooperative approach and the conflict approach, balanced ongoingly with the neutralizing approach—all for the essential purpose of countering the workings of reductionism. Since culture is inseparable from existing ways of life, political theology is responsible to detail each of these approaches to culture in our everyday way of life, and including their costs to our identity and function. John doesn't record vignettes of the past but the Word's whole picture for this future to be the experiential truth and relational reality for the *new* the Word embodies and enacts.

4. Next, John's Gospel illuminates the subtlety of minimalism practiced in the present that distorts the nexus of past and future constituted by the Word. When nexuses composed presumably in terms similar to the Word's become incompatible and/or incongruent with the Word's, they cause an impasse that disrupts the designed development and growth of covenant relationship from past to future. This impasse involves the interaction of culture with the political process of the rule of law. The culture

of minimalists is subtly practiced by either politically enabling or being complicit with those enacting a variant rule of law explicitly or implicitly different from to God's Rule of Law. Such **enablers** and **complicitors** are exposed by the Word in order for God's Rule of Law to fulfill its purpose of growing covenant relationship together—not the mere purpose of a moral-ethical code that minimalists reinforce. Further examples are recorded throughout this Gospel to highlight this opaque minimalist dynamic, represented by three notable variations.

The difference between an enabler and a complicitor is not always apparent, and at times a minimalist engages in both. This is reflected in variation (1), which may seem like an addendum to the key text of John 3:16, but in reality this account is an essential part of the nexus in the Word's whole picture (3:1-15). As a Pharisee and member of the ruling Sanhedrin, Nicodemus was an enabler of a political culture that diminished God's Rule of Law to a variable moral-ethical code of behavior, which was observed with the bias of self-interests. Nicodemus must have questioned his complicity because he initiates a clandestine interaction with the Word, who then clarifies and corrects Nicodemus' party's prevailing political views that reflected a weak view of sin. The Word perplexes this biblical scholar, who had yet to recognize his minimalism and thus to understand his enabling and complicit function contrary to the Word—all of which pointed to Nicodemus' reduced theological anthropology. Yet, Nicodemus' self-doubt about his role in all this left him open to change—the transformation of his person from inner out that constitutes being “born again” (as John notes later, 7:50-51; 19:39).

Variation (2) involves more explicit enablers who appeared to give assent to the Word (8:31-47). But the Word exposed their minimalism composed by a weak view of sin without reductionism, which distorted God's Rule of Law and misled them in illusions of their status in covenant relationship. Their biased lens prevented them from understanding the Word's relational language that would free them to be transformed for the experiential truth and relational reality of covenant relationship together in wholeness. As long as they embraced minimalism, however, they would remain enablers in conflict with the Word's Rule of Law and thus always contrary to the Word's whole picture involving “the truth will make you free.” Nothing less and no substitutes will enable this relational outcome, and anything less and any substitutes will at the very least always be complicit in minimalizing its relational reality. This leads us to a third variation of minimalism in its unexpected opaqueness.

Variation (3) should concern Christians most urgently about minimalism in their way of life; this is likely John's purpose to close his Gospel in order to support the essential nexus unfolding in the Word's whole picture (21:15-23). The cultural shaping of Peter's identity and function demonstrated at his footwashing wasn't merely situational. Just as the road to Jesus' crucifixion precipitated Peter's minimalist disorder, his

condition revealed not a transitory condition but the relational condition of his person from inner out. The relational condition of his person is how Peter engaged in following Jesus to shape his discipleship. The opaqueness of his minimalism also pervades discipleship today, which renders Christians to the same relational condition demonstrated by Peter. At this stage for Peter, nothing John records indicates a change in Peter—notwithstanding his remorse after his denials (Lk 22:62), which John doesn't record likely because of its limited significance for change in Peter's person. Peter's relational condition rooted in reductionism, as is our relational condition, didn't just end with the resurrection now a reality—contrary to the assumption of many Christians about salvation. The reality of this relational condition is prolonged by any and all existing variations of minimalism in Christian practice that sustain a weak view of sin; and Peter epitomized this reality for the Word to illuminate.

The opaqueness of Peter's cultural complicity with reduced human identity and function composed by outer-in distinctions was now transparent before the Word. Peter now came face to face with his reckoning of the depth (not extent) of his involvement in covenant relationship together as the Word pursued his person with "Do you love me?" From his reduced theological anthropology, Peter's minimalist reply focused on the extent of his involvement measured in quantitative terms like his service and length of discipleship. His answers of extent could not account for the depth (i.e. the qualitative level) of relational involvement from inner out that constituted the *love* essential for covenant relationship together rooted in the qualitative-relational basis of the covenant of love (Dt 7:7-9), which the Word vulnerably enacted for Peter to enact in likeness (Jn 13:34; 15:12). The qualitative level of involvement in relationships can never be measured in quantitative terms, yet minimalists substitute such terms to measure love contrary to the Word—the reckoning of which the Word continues to enact face to face with Christians today (cf. Rev 2:23).

According to the Word, *love* is the qualitative relational involvement constituting the Word's Rule of Law, the fulfillment of which makes unmistakable the only love distinguishing the Word's followers in his likeness (13:35; 15:9-12; 17:26). Without this love's relational depth of involvement, the counter-relational workings of reductionism will continue to dominate a weak view of sin; and its most infectious symptom is the relational distance maintained with each other, even among the sacred gatherings of Jesus' followers. Such relational distance has serious consequences for the public way of life, and these consequences reverberate in its human order. Given the future of the early church awaiting him, Peter stood facing the most significant crossroads of discipleship that any of us could and thus must also face unavoidably: "Do you love me?"

It is at this "Do you love me?" juncture that political theology gets to the heart of the rule of law most significant for our way of life and its human order.

The Ruling Nexus of the Word's Whole Picture

Without the primacy of relationships in the qualitative level, the nexus of past and future in the Word's whole picture is lost—even if Christian theology includes love as an important characteristic of faith. Christian minimalists, for example, co-opt the Word in a subtle way that substitutes the quantitative Bible in referential language for the qualitative Word in relational language—and using the co-opted Word, for example, to justify views and sanction actions as ordained by God. The repercussions from co-opting the Word evolve opaquely in Christian theology. Notably, any theology composed with a reduced theological anthropology and a weak view of sin without reductionism invariably substitutes nexuses under the assumption of having God's big picture. From the beginning, the Word has been well aware of human tendencies and predispositions, so the Word constituted covenant relationship to *be whole* on the irreducible and nonnegotiable basis of the Word's Rule of Law. Therefore, in the Word's whole picture, nothing less and no substitutes for this *ruling nexus* can grow covenant relationship together in wholeness.

The problem, however, from the beginning continues to be the subtle turn to a reduced theological anthropology and a weak view of sin that is typically made by minimalists, even unintentionally by default. The essential responsibility of political theology is to ongoingly examine theological anthropologies and views of sin, in order that our way of life integrally unfolds from the past to the future as indelibly imprinted in the Word's whole picture. As John's Gospel does, political theology needs to provide the blueprint for the Word's whole picture to ensure that nothing less and no substitutes unfold. Yet, political theology must also insure that exposing anything less and any substitutes in Christian practice is not just a theological challenge, but by necessity this critiquing process also involves both a cultural challenge and a political challenge; why, so that the full scope of public life is scrutinized. And make no mistake, minimalists come from all positions on the theological, cultural and political spectrum.

The Word's gospel is rooted in the relational covenant of love that emerged in the Book of Love (Dt 7:7-9). The depth of this covenant relationship unfolds in **the engendering nexus** legitimized just in God's Rule of Law. Thus, the relational growth of the covenant of love is contingent on the partners in this covenant carefully following God's Rule of Law (Dt 7:11). Therefore, for the engendering nexus to truly grow this covenant relationship from the past to the future, this nexus must be integrated with **the ruling nexus** inscribed in the Word's irreducible and nonnegotiable Rule of Law. As unequivocal as the Word is about this, however, language issues have raised various questions theologically, culturally and politically, which have led to variable reading of God's Law that render it no longer irreducible and nonnegotiable. In other words contrary

to the Word, what has evolved is that the defining nexus indelibly imprinted in the Word's whole picture has been replaced by substitute nexuses composed from a weak view of sin without reductionism, which is reinforced and sustained by a reduced theological anthropology.

The relational consequences from reworking the ruling nexus with reduced nexuses from variant rules of law are immeasurable. The human order of life is at stake here, from which our way of life is inescapable. The relational consequences that reverberate from past to future inevitably resound in the present. Urgently and critically then, we need to understand the language issues raised theologically, culturally, and politically, and thereby address them decisively. This process will extend throughout this study.

The prime theological issue with the Word centers on the language of God's revelation. Does the Word use language to inform or to communicate, to discourse or to make connection? How would you answer this regarding the Word's Rule of Law? The Word adds, "why is my language not clear to you?" (Jn 8:43, NIV), to amplify the issue facing minimalists.

The text of the Bible was written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, yet this literary fact does not necessarily define the composition of Scripture and the language distinguished by the Word. An abundance of exegesis and word studies of the biblical languages, not to mention critical studies, have accumulated a wealth of data (cf. Eccl 12:12) that have not progressed biblical studies with the significance to answer Jesus' above question. The biblical text is expressed in various genres, which is helpful to know for discerning what is being expressed. This knowledge, however, neither accesses the *original* composition of the Word nor insures an understanding of the composition in its *original* language—that is, beyond and deeper than its Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek wording. This deeper composition of the Word doesn't clearly emerge and fully unfold from its commonly used expression unless that composition is perceived (read and listened to) in what is truly its original language. Stated briefly: The original language antecedes the biblical languages and gets us to the nature of the Word's language, which is essential for understanding the Word.

In the beginning the Creator constituted the persons (no matter the gender) in the primordial garden with an irreducible ontology, an irreplaceable epistemology and a nonnegotiable relationship, the function of which distinguished the image and likeness of the whole of God (integrally incorporating the Word and the Spirit). Those defining words from the Creator (Gen 1:28-30; 2:16-17), expressed in an historical or allegorical context, were either given to human persons to inform them of the parameters of their human function; or they were shared with those persons to communicate distinctly the terms for the relationship between them and the Creator. If the words communicated the

terms for relationship together, then these relational terms could only be distinguished when composed in relational language. Anything less than relational language would be ambiguous, elusive, and simply open to variable interpretation of those relational terms; the consequence would be to substitute the Word's relational terms with other (notably human) terms to define the relationship.

What evolved from the beginning clarifies the language issues of today. First of all, the nature of the language expressing God's words was changed from the relational language originally used *to communicate* to an alternate language used merely *to inform* (Gen 3:4-5). The shift to the now primary focus on transmitting information over communicating relationship then opened the door to two major linguistic shifts of the words from God:

1. A selective process of omitting, neglecting, disregarding, or denying God's words, albeit in a manner that seems reasonable and not irrational, or even merely benign.
2. The deconstruction of the words from God and their reinterpretation in an alternate language speaking "like God," which both informs (read misinforms) and serves the self-interests/concerns of the interpreter (as in 3:6).

These major shifts transposed 'the words *from* God in relational language' to 'the words *of* God in referential language', and thereby altered the nature of the Word's original language. The consequence for this beginning that still prevails today is this reality:

The prevailing use of referential language that is unable to compose relational terms in order to communicate but instead is limited only to inform—the narrow transmission of information—therefore a language that cannot understand the composition of the words *from* the Word no matter the wealth of information (even about "good and evil") processing the words *of* God it can transmit to speak for God (as if "like God").

Indeed, "Why is my language not clear to you?"

Substituting referential language for relational language has changed the nature of language, which then also alters the purpose of language. This is the linguistic condition from the beginning that composes the narrative of the human condition; and this language has also impacted the way we think and see the world. Sadly, yet not surprising, we seem to be unaware of or appear to not understand the nature of the language that God uses and that we use instead—the purpose and goal of reductionism subtly working since the beginning. The language issues related to this linguistic condition have also evolved culturally and politically.

When the language composing God’s laws merely transmit information, the terms of those laws assume a different “integrity.” In referential language, God’s laws are transposed from their intrinsic qualitative-relational terms for the primacy of relationship together to mere quantitative terms that may or may not have any significance beyond notions of human relations. The information of quantitative terms has variable value, the characteristics of which are shaped by culture that render the terms of God’s laws to variable interpretation. Ever since God communicated the relational terms of the Rule of Law, the prevailing culture of God’s people has been instrumental in shaping the variable value and the variable interpretation of the Law’s relational terms, thereby compromising the integrity of God’s Law by redefining its primary relational purpose for covenant relationship. The variants from these counter-relational workings of culture continue to evolve among us today, much like the variants of the coronavirus today that make this infection a resistant condition to overcome.

From the primordial garden to the Law to the teachings of the Word, if the language you use is referential language, then what is the purpose you get from your interpretations; and what significance does that purpose have to God?

Language Barriers

In the nature of the Word’s relational language, the only purpose that Word has, embodies, enacts, and fulfills is to communicate with persons for relationship together. The Word is not for our information to conform to, and therefore is distinguished just for our inner-out involvement in the primacy of vulnerable relationship together—reciprocal relationship together face to face, person to person. Moreover, this primacy of relationship is constituted by persons not subtly defined and determined from outer in as those in reduced identity and function, but only the reciprocal relationship involved vulnerably with persons from inner out constituted in whole identity and function. When the nature of the language in use has lost its relational integrity, then that language has compromised its purpose for the persons engaged. The unavoidable consequence is that that language either has no significant purpose or is simply used as an end in itself. Referential language fulfills either consequence in its designed purpose; but then, that is the nature of referential language as conjointly composed by reductionism and propagated by its counter-relational workings (as Jesus clarified and corrected, Jn 8:44-45).

What Jesus illuminated in the above interaction is that there are unavoidable **language barriers** preventing understanding; and that until these language barriers are removed there will be interpretive conflicts and impasses in understanding, namely in our relationships and their human order. This problem is analogous to marriage conflicts, which may require the spouses to have marriage counseling to get past the language

barriers that they either don't understand or are reluctant to face. In such situations counseling is not merely a suggestion but a need.

The Word provided this vital feedback for God's Rule of Law in order to correct the variable interpretation and reduced purpose shaped by the prevailing culture of God's people (Mt 5:17-48). God's laws had been transposed from their primary relational terms to secondary outer-in behavioral terms, which served as an end in itself to observe as self-conscious identity markers. Consequently, the language the Word used originally to communicate the Law for relationship together had now become a barrier to relationships—contrary to and in conflict with the relationships God's Law is designed to grow together.

Language barriers by nature and on purpose subtly pervade the Christian community, distinctly shaping both relationship with God and relationships with each other either without relational significance or in non-relational terms. On the one hand, this is not surprising because this existing (and still evolving) condition is the ingenious workings of reductionism. On the other hand, for example, Christians can and should experience more reconciliation since this is the stated outcome for the whole gospel composed by the Word (as in Col 1:21-23; Eph 2:14-18). Even though this prominently referenced composition of the Bible has been used to formulate doctrines of salvation, which most Christians subscribe to, has this doctrinal language (no matter how dogmatic) significantly reduced the language barriers still existing in relationships both with God and each other? If not, why this disparity between our theology and practice?

Consider that subtle language barriers also emerge in the common use of technology today and the level of involvement it generates that diminishes relationships, as noted above. Users have not understood the nature of such language barriers and have been reluctant to face them because of an underlying addiction to this technology. This addiction has evolved similarly to the current opioid addiction crisis in the U.S. Opioid addicts may have initially used painkillers for legitimate needs, but soon found themselves entrenched in its use as an end in itself. Compounding this addiction is the pharmaceutical industry, which has promoted opioid use despite knowing its consequences for users. This condition is accelerated by doctors' prescription abuses. Yet, both for users and developers, these current conditions help point out the nature of language barriers also in theological education that is not understood or is resisted to face up to, and thus may even willfully impose, sustain and promote language barriers on purpose.

Connecting to Politics

This points to how Western culture has propagated Christianity in a language of a virtual reality simulating God's big picture. Moreover, the Western cultural bias has effectively enveloped the Word's whole picture in a theological fog, which is evidenced

in the nexus that the West substitutes with variable interpretation and application of God's laws. And these issues raised culturally become more evident politically, notably in the skewed rules of law used that govern with inequity and recycle inequality—the substitute nexus of past and future contrary to and in conflict with the ruling nexus of the Word's whole picture. This certainly reveals the uncertainty of democratic policy, as well as brings out the tenuous basis for democratic ideology.

Obviously, cultural and political issues, along with related language issues, are a “natural” occurrence in human relations, thus as such they should be expected as simply our human condition—perhaps as the evolving new normal. On the other hand, the strong view of sin encompassing reductionism does not renegotiate the Word's Rule of Law to adapt to our evolving relational condition. Yet, this renegotiation has evolved subtly in our practice if not our theology also. The current political divisiveness dominating the U.S. is simply a demonstration of this human condition, and the language barriers of identity politics can be summed in a single word: toxic. Toxic is the single “word of the year” chosen for 2018 by the editors at the Oxford English Dictionary; Dictionary.com chose “misinformation,” which is certainly a primary medium of toxic language and the driver of conspiracy theories. This word describes the language dominating throughout 2020 and into 2021, and the obvious purpose it has fulfilled in its use. Sadly, but not surprising, Christian leaders have also used toxic language to emphasize their partisan political views, as well as engaged in the spread of misinformation to support these views.

In the human relational condition, culture and politics interact to synthesize what become systemic language barriers (explicit and implicit), which shape human life with inequality and govern the human order with inequity. We need to understand how critical language is in this synthesis, because the barriers created go beyond the use of such language to exist in our thinking and our view of the world. As science has discovered, the language we speak also shapes both the way we see the world and even the way we think (not necessarily producing thought).² 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. Therefore, the fact is that the cultural and political languages we speak inevitably shape, on the one hand, the way we see human life and, on the other hand, the way we think about humanity. This reality of our minds helps illuminate the nature of our human condition and the language barriers evolving from it to determine human relations, even in relation to God. And the reality evolving today demonstrates how biased thinking has skewed the view of sin that defines our way of life and determines its human order.

² Reported by Sharon Begley in “What's in a Word?” *Newsweek*, July 20, 2009, 31.

At this pivotal juncture, we are both challenged and confronted by our roots and the nexus that brings the past into the future in the Word's whole picture. Because covenant relationship together is rooted in the Word's covenant of love, the Word's Rule of Law must by its nature be understood first and foremost as the relational terms of love. Accordingly, the ruling nexus of love in the Word's whole picture is irreducible and nonnegotiable to any reduced terms, whether from a reduced theological anthropology or a weak view of sin. Culture and politics, however, have fostered language barriers for love that have reduced both the meaning of love in the Word's Rule of Law and its qualitative significance in relationships together.

From the viewpoint of your actual practice and not your theology, how do you define love (both God's and yours)? In your everyday way of life, what priority does love have that is evident in your relationships? Given your honest findings, what do you think your language of love is, and how do you think its composition has been shaped or formed? And what influence would you give to this language on how you see your way of life, as well as how you think about others?

Love is a universal theme in most languages of the world. The nature and purpose of love language, however, are not universal. What the word means and how it is used varies between languages, including among those with the same language. These differences also exist among Christians. While such differences would be compatible with a postmodern perceptual-interpretive framework, they are incompatible with the Word's language of love. In referential language, love is a word, concept, ideal and thought, the expressions of which do not distinguish the nature and purpose of love in the Word's relational language. And the thinking formed by referential language about love subconsciously erects a language barrier with the qualitative and relational love words *from* the Word, even while the thoughts could be focused on the quantity of love words *of* God. This language disparity is the result of a perceptual lens in what we see and an interpretive mindset in how we think, which referential language forms by the subtle workings of reductionism in their counter-relational nature and purpose.

Christians engaged directly or indirectly in partisan politics, as well as participating by default in fragmenting the global church, are expressing a language of love that resounds in the barriers erected around relational distance, fragmented or broken relationships. It is this language of love co-opted from the Word that composes their rule of law determining their everyday way of life; and its consequential language barriers determine the human order to which they conform and impose on others to conform. The Word, however, exposes the insignificance of this language of love used as the standard in their rule of law: "If you love those who love you, *or who are likeminded*, what reward do you have? Does not even the *opposition* do the same? And if you *are engaged* only *with those considered your cohorts*, what more are you doing than others? Do not even *those considered less than you* do the same?" (Mt 5:46-47). This transposed language of

the law creates barriers to love that limit loving to “you shall love your *friends*” and construct it to “hate, *put down or dismiss your perceived enemy*” (5:43)—thereby deconstructing the Word’s Rule of Law for the covenant of love. The resulting rules of law from this deconstruction have enforced covenants in the name of God, but their presumptuous reality has been incompatible with the Word’s Rule of Law and thus incongruent with the covenant of love in the Word’s whole picture. Because culture and politics interact to create this synthesis, the Word deals with the political realm like the integral approaches to culture to extend integrally into **the integrated three-fold approach to politics**:

- (1) the qualified cooperative approach that does not compromise the Word’s Rule of Law (as in Mt 22:21; Lk 5:33-6:11).
- (2) the conflict approach that opposes the contradiction of the Word’s Rule of Law and the fragmentation of wholeness in persons, relationships and their human order (as in Mt 10:34; Mk 11:15-17).
- (3) the neutralizing approach that openly heals human inequities and reconciles human inequalities (as in Lk 7:36-50; 10:38-42; 11:14-23).

Whenever the ruling nexus of the Word’s whole picture is restored, there will be a reckoning of past and future for our theology, culture and politics. The significance of political theology makes this restoration imperative and thus unavoidable, which then makes this reckoning imperative and thus inescapable. Political theology makes these imperative notably for Christians engaged in identity politics by adhering to partisan politics at the expense of the Word’s ruling nexus. Christians and churches who don’t explicitly work for restoring the Word’s irreducible and nonnegotiable ruling nexus, thereby intentionally or inadvertently serve as enablers of variant rules of law or serve by default as complicitors reinforcing and sustaining them—either of which cannot escape the Word’s reckoning of the sins of reductionism (Mt 5:17-20).

Returning to the Past for the Future

The nexus of past and future remains in operation one way or the other. The path we are on in the present will inform us of what to expect in the future. Our present path also reveals where we came from in the past and thereby where we are going to for the future. Presently, we are focused more on where we’re going in the future, with little if any awareness of where we came from. This indicates the assumptions made about our roots, while widely presuming that our branches in life have the right roots to keep growing in the future. Branches flourish, however, only from whole unfragmented roots

that are presently nurtured and nourished with the qualitative-relational substance of life in God's likeness, which cultivates the future of their well-being in wholeness. Therefore, knowing the roots of our past is essential for understanding where we are going and what we can expect in the future; and this knowledge and understanding are irreplaceable to guide us in the present on this nexus and none other—that is, nothing less and no substitutes.

The Word's whole picture is ongoingly subjected to competition from vignettes of the past. As noted earlier, Peter's vignette of the messiah shaped by cultural-political bias came into direct conflict with Messiah's whole picture (Mt 16:21-23); this conflict quickly emerged even after Peter appeared to know the essential roots of the true Messiah (16:15-16). This makes evident that even when our theology may have the right roots, what we practice in our way of life could easily be determined by selective vignettes of the past that never give us the whole picture. This was the problem Saul also had until he encountered the Word's reckoning on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-18, cf. Phil 3:4-6). The consequence of this problem is that an incomplete, misleading or incorrect past becomes the nexus to the future. Such a past becomes a misinformed playbook for our way of life, its human order, and all its related branches.

When human history and church history are examined without any of their redactions, then a clear pattern emerges: The range of shortcomings enacted in the past consistently do not educate significantly enough for the present to learn from, and this factual basis has not been sufficient for the present not to repeat the same shortcomings. As the axiomatic saying goes, 'Those who don't learn from history repeat it'. The Word adds the axiom: "The measure of the past you use will be the measure of the future you get—no more though likely anything less" (Mk 4:24-25). Thus, this axiomatic truth keeps evolving historically: Theologically, culturally and politically, the prevailing mode has been to repeat or recycle the past, leaving the future with little if any hope for change; and, to reemphasize emphatically, thereby enveloping the Word's whole picture in fog that obscures it in everyday life. Therefore, it is simply indispensable to know "Where are you?" and to understand "What are you doing here?"

Currently, where we are in 2021 and are going in the future depend on what we've been doing in the nexus with the past. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic certainly has spread more widely in 2021 than this past year and the nexus from this past is inseparable from this future. Wearing masks and social distancing or not continue to connect 2020 to 2021 as a determinant for the level of coronavirus infection, with mutating coronaviruses compounding this connection. This scenario highlights what is a historical fact: The wrong nexus from the past makes the future regress; likewise, the nexus with the wrong past makes the future repeat.

The recurring dynamic in human life highlights the need for change. From the beginning, this human dynamic has evolved from the critical juncture at which it shifted from the primacy of its created qualitative-relational constitution to its reduction by a captivating quantitative composition. Historically to the present, the seduction of this quantitative composition for human identity and function has prevailed over and dominated their primary qualitative-relational constitution of creation. The reality of what has evolved in human life and its human order is entrenched in this past. This constrained and strained reality brings to the forefront **two strategic issues**: (1) the inescapable past that must be addressed, understood and accounted for, and (2) the undeniable fact of the unavoidable need for turn-around change to transform (not mere reform) our human condition. These strategic issues make irreplaceable understanding the past of creation and its evolution, plus make essential **the nexus of change** for the past of creation to become the future of creation recreating human life and its human order.

The Past and Future of Creation

The two strategic issues point back to John's Gospel, which illuminates the strategic unfolding of the Word's whole picture. The Word is the creator of all life, yet human life either didn't know him or didn't accept him (Jn 1:3,10-11). Why? Because humanity turned away from the original qualitative-relational constitution of creation to embrace a reduced quantitative composition that evolved (or mutated) from it. This obviously distorted the past of creation and made ambiguous the future that would flow from it. John's Gospel illuminates the Word's whole picture that unfolds strategically in this human condition. Fast-forwarding from creation, the Word embodied the Truth of the Life created in the Word's whole likeness, whereby he enacted this Life on the qualitative-relational Way that created life constituted for covenant relationship together (Jn 14:6). In spite of the Word's now vulnerable presence and direct relational involvement, the essential qualitative-relational nuances of the Word's strategic action elude the human identity and function composed quantitatively from outer in by a reduced theological anthropology. Furthermore, the essential qualitative-relational significance of the Word's integral action is lost on those with a weak view of sin lacking reductionism, unable to discern the fragmentation of the whole. Nicodemus' past was exposed in his direct vulnerable encounter with the Word, which made evident his reduced theological anthropology and weak view of sin that the Word illuminated as needing to be recreated from the inner out (i.e. transformed). Unequivocally, the Word strategically unfolds the nexus of change necessary by the nature (*dei*, Jn 3:7) of covenant relationship, as opposed to the mere obligation (*opheilo*) associated with covenant as commonly fulfilled.

In this nexus of change, the Word's strategic action unfolds from the past of creation's evolvment (or the original made *old*) to its turnaround, in order for the *old* to be born anew from above (*anóthen*, inadequately rendered by "again"), so that the new creation is raised up for the new covenant together (Jn 1:12-13)—the embodiment and enactment of the Truth, the Life and the Way nuanced in, with and by the new wine (Lk 5:36-39; 22:20; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15). The nexus of change is no mere notion, nor is it a theological concept promoting a theological ideal. For that reason, the essential qualitative-relational nuances of the Word's strategic action elude the identity and function of those with a reduced theological anthropology; and the essential qualitative-relational significance of the Word's integral action is lost for those having a weak view of sin. Thus, all theological anthropologies need to return to the past roots of creation in order for the future of the new creation to be a reality; and any view of sin needs to return to its past roots evolved since creation, so that the future of the new creation will not be diminished by the repetition of sin.

As the Word made unequivocal for Nicodemus, the new creation is the outcome solely from **redemptive change**: the vulnerable qualitative-relational process in which the *old* in us is relinquished in order for it to die, so that the *new* for, about and in us will rise. Without making vulnerable the old in us—which Nicodemus initially did and Peter had difficulty doing—this old will not be released to die (an ongoing death, not a singular death, cf. Lk 9:23-24), and the new does not have the freedom to rise (an ongoing rise, not a singular raise). Certainly then, without redemptive change the past in us can only recycle in the present, keeping the future of creation in the *old* with only a blind faith for a new creation. Where does that leave our way of life and its human order? And what *news* can we offer for the evolving ways of life and human orders surrounding us that are in crisis?

The gospel in the Word's whole picture is neither virtual news nor misleading news, rather integrally composed by both bad and good news. The Word's *whole* gospel is incomplete without the bad news (not misinformation or disinformation) that the Word confronts "until he brings justice to victory" (Mt 12:20), because "I have not come to bring *mere common* peace but a sword" (Mt 10:34). Contrary to common peace, the Word's sword was necessary to enact in order for the Word's covenant of peace (Eze 37:26, cf. Isa 54:10) to be extended only in this peace's uncommon terms to sustain the Word's covenant of love, so that this nexus brings the good news of the new covenant for the new creation. In the Word's strategic action, the bad news antecedes the good news, and the whole gospel can only be claimed as news both bad and good.

Yet, make no mistake in thinking that the bad news is composed by misinformation, disinformation or fake news, because these sources are also targeted by the gospel's bad news as needing to be confronted for change. The nexus of change amplifies the whole composition of the gospel in the Word's whole picture. And the

change required from the past to the future intensifies confronting the injustices of the present and the current lack of wholeness existing in human life—extending the uncommon peace that the Word gives (Jn 14:27)—until the good news is able to complete the change for the *new* future freed from the *old*.

The Nexus for the Future

As the U.S. undergoes the chaotically historic transition to the Biden administration, more questions may remain than be answered about its future. Peoples, tribes and nations around the world likely will have to adapt to the variable changes ahead in the U.S., whether they agree with the changes or not. Interrelated to this political climate, how Christians adapt in this transition also raises questions, which urgently should not remain unanswered about their future. Predicting the future certainly is an uncertain equation, with faith in probability having no prediction certainties. In this historic time of uncertainty, Christians locally and globally, more than any other branch of humanity and any political branch, need to have a nexus for the future that is unequivocally rooted in certainty, whereby that nexus is unmistakably distinguished in their witness to all persons, peoples, tribes and nations in a fragmented world.

The bad news of the whole gospel is the critical key in this current transition that is essential to unlock the door of certainty for the future. According to the integral nature of the whole gospel, Christians and churches must understand that for the future to unfold in the reality of good news, it first has to explicitly and honestly traverse the nexus of change. God's people from the beginning have commonly travelled from past to the future on a road charted widely and with the least resistance, thereby composing that nexus in uncertainty. Misinformation, disinformation and fake news, including conspiracy theories, have misled and misguided those who presumably have been following the Word. Historically, this wider, easier road has been consistently guided by such leaders as prophets (Jer 23:16), shepherds (Eze 34:2), key disciples as Peter (Gal 2:11-14), and arguably including Augustine and Calvin—whose influence modern political theology has evolved from and revolved on³—and many current Christian leaders scattered throughout the global church.

The whole gospel's bad news gets submerged and disengaged when skewed (OK, perhaps screwed) by the good news—not just by variations of the prosperity gospel. Not surprisingly, this nexus for the future has relegated the good news to uncertainty, since the relational significance of the new covenant and the relational outcome of the new creation have been rendered to insignificant ideals in theology and to virtual reality in

³ As reflected in other political theologies previously footnoted.

practice. This insignificance and virtual reality have not been lost on current younger generations, who understandably want more than the anything less and any substitutes that their elders have settled for. Unlike the prevailing state of Christians and churches, however, whether these religious or secular younger generations will pursue nothing less and no substitutes is an open question—which the whole gospel will also require them to address first with the bad news before any expectation of good news.

Because of the Word's synergism—its whole greater than the sum of its parts—the nexus for the future is distinguished unequivocally just in the Word's whole picture. Here again, there are nuances of the Word's strategic action that need to be understood. The whole gospel enacted by the Word makes nonnegotiable the gospel's news, which means that both the bad and the good need to be embraced to claim the Word's gospel. Moreover, since the Word's strategic action is not self-evident on a wider-easier road, this nexus for the future immediately without equivocation narrows the road and makes it difficult to navigate to the whole gospel's relational outcome and conclusion (as in Mt 7:21-23). If the Word doesn't know those who presumably follow the Word, it's because they don't truly know the whole Word even after all that time spent in the same space together (Jn 14:9). Does the Word's justified frustration with his main disciples also directly speak to the relational condition of Christians and churches today, not so much about what they believe but *who* they profess to know?

Nevertheless, the Word's whole gospel, not our partial gospel, is relentless in pursuing us with its bad news about our human relational condition. Therefore, **the nexus for the future** is brightly illuminated first and foremost by *the nexus of change*, nothing less and no substitutes for redemptive change. This opens the narrow door for *the engendering nexus* legitimized just in the Word's Rule of Law, which leads to *the ruling nexus* inscribed irreducibly and nonnegotiable in this nothing less and no substitutes Rule of Law that is by necessity essential to navigate the narrow road of *the covenant of love* with the distinctly unique parameters of *the covenant of uncommon peace*. Along this narrow and difficult road, the nexus for the future unfolds clearly distinguished in *the integrated three-fold approaches to culture and politics: the qualified cooperative approach, the conflict approach, and the neutralizing approach*—with nothing less than whole theological anthropology defining our identity and determining our function, and with no substitutes for the strong view of sin encompassing reductionism.

This integral connection is defining for political theology to illuminate along with John's Gospel, so that our everyday identity and function are congruent and our public way of life is compatible with the whole Word, with the Word's whole picture, as well as with the theological trajectory and relational path of the Word's whole gospel. Political theology lacking this qualitative-relational coherence can only define secondary parts of our identity and function, as well as determine only fragments of our way of life, which then makes their congruity and compatibility with the Word ambiguous or simply a virtual reality at best.

Hereby this integral nexus for the future, we can respond to the Word to answer with the whole Truth of “Where are you?”, and with the whole Life and Way of “What are you doing here?”—and therefore no longer in the relational ambiguity of “and you still don’t know me after all this time together?”

Anything less and any substitutes for our way of life and its human order relegate the future to recycling the past, for which we have ongoing evidence in the present. If we don’t dismiss the bad news as fake news, or obscure it with misinformation, then we come face to face with the Word at the crossroads of what we will do with his uncommon whole gospel.

Chapter 4 The Existential Bad of the Good News

Woe to those who call *bad* good and good *bad*.

Isaiah 5:20, NIV

“When your eyes are good, your whole body also is full of light.

But when they are bad, your body of darkness.

See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness.”

Luke 11:34-35, NIV

It is conventional wisdom that in life the bad has to be received along with the good, that is, since the good doesn't exist apart from the bad. This prominent thinking has guided the collective conscience of human contexts, which often include Christian participants and even church contexts. This realistic mindset, however, must not be a basis for thinking in political theology.

In the reality of the human condition, political theology can't avoid the bad and just focus on promoting the good, notably the common good. Yet, receiving the bad and adapting to it in life is contrary to rejecting the bad and transforming it. This involves the essential difference between the “good and bad” that evolved from the primordial garden, and the “bad and good” news composing **the paradox of the whole gospel** constituted by the Word's strategic action illuminated in the Word's whole picture. In the Word's whole gospel, the good news does not circumvent the bad news, because the bad is a precursor of the good—the good that has to supplant the bad or the bad remains to render the good news fake. Conversely, the bad cannot circumvent the whole gospel, because the gospel's first priority is to change the bad in order for the good to emerge. Crucial also for this understanding is that the good in the gospel is not related to “good and bad,” but this good is related directly to the good of creation (Gen 2:18, as discussed in Chap 2).

The wisdom of political theology guides the human conscience to decisive action just on the irreducible and nonnegotiable basis of the paradox of the Word's gospel, who transforms the existential bad in life in order for the good of new life to become the reality for humanity. According to the Word, the bad news must always be rejected in its existential function in our way of life for the change necessary to be freed from its constraints, so that the good news can be claimed for new life together in wholeness. Therefore, the good news becomes fake news and the gospel becomes a virtual reality, when the bad news is omitted or redacted.

Good Measurement of the Bad

One of life's basic lessons teaches us that the bad keeps evolving, not always explicitly devolving but typically evolving in subtle ways that often fall below the human radar of awareness or even recognition of what's bad. Currently, the COVID-19 pandemic is slowly teaching us that this bad virus is mutating. Recent research has discovered mutations different from the UK variant, notably which originated in California to likely be the main cause of its accelerated surge. How much this variably robust virus keeps mutating will determine how far it will infect us—even without knowing for how long—especially as variants circumvent antibodies, vaccines and related measures. Having no definitive measure of this bad condition leaves us susceptible to prolonged infection and mounting deaths, with less certainty of hope for a cure.

This painful lesson directly applies to all the bad of life that keeps evolving, with its mutations spreading infection throughout the human context without a cure—notably as it circumvents any tentative measures currently addressing it, especially by Christians and churches. The infectious condition of the bad in life needs better critical assessment in order to have the measurement necessary to fully address, properly deal with, and significantly change the bad.

From the beginning in human life, measuring the bad has been on a **spectrum of measurement** ranging from bad, poor, biased, average, impartial, precise to incisive. This spectrum measures the reality of the bad on a **reality scale** weighing perceptions as a false-denied reality, a virtual reality, a reality of life, or a hard reality. *How* the bad is measured on the spectrum can converge with different perception points on the scale to make variant *what* the bad is and thus make variable *where* the bad is. The how, the what and the where have evolved from the beginning to render ambiguous the bad in human life; and the ambiguity of the bad keeps evolving as the bad is reinforced, and sustained by **three circumventing phenomena**: (1) the “**halo effect**” of the bad, (2) the “**balancing act**” of the bad, and (3) the “**immunity escape**” of the bad. And underlying the variant totality of this interrelated process is the evolving reality of “**truth decay**,” which prevents different views and opposing sides from agreeing on existing facts (not alternative) common to all of them. This urgently faces all Christians and churches with the surrounding reality—enveloped in fog and shrouded in darkness—that all of the above need to be understood in order to embrace the bad of the good news, and thereby to receive the Word's whole gospel with a legitimate claim.

In the world of today, not past or future, what do you think is the difference between totalitarianism, authoritarianism, democratic nationalism, and democratic extremism? The obvious difference is their view of democracy as being either bad or good. OK, then what is the common thread running through all of them that weaves each of their views together, as well as ties them all together? Less obvious is the common

measurement used by all of them for *how* they each define *what* is bad and good, and *where* the bad and good are. Much less obvious, even unapparent to many, this common thread unwinds from the same spool of “the knowledge of good and bad” from the beginning (Gen 3:5-6), which has been the evolving basis that has mutated variants of good and bad from past to present to further construct conventional wisdom and the collective conscience. This is the common thread of the human condition, which has infected all dimensions of human life for which democracy cannot claim to be its panacea.

The reality of truth decay intensifying our polarized times is certainly bad, which Christians would agree is bad for the integrity of truth—even though they may participate in it or be complicit with it. Part of the discrepancy or contradiction with truth involves the measurement of bad implied in the condition of polarization. Richard Beck, professor and chair of the Department of Psychology at Abilene Christian University, reflects more deeply on what is called “**affective polarization**,” which is different from issue polarization. Beyond the conflict of opposing views,

“affective polarization concerns the *feelings* we have about the people on the other side of the political aisle...how affective polarization poisons the political well. Affective polarization explains why political conversations are so difficult, tense and unproductive. The possibility of compromise evaporates when seeking common ground is experienced as a moral failure, caving in to the forces of evil.”¹

Would you conclude that affective polarization is the good result of the truth or the bad consequence of truth decay?

The reality of affective polarization is unavoidable for Christians and churches in our everyday practice and confronts the truth composing our theology. Affective polarization also exposes the reality of how Christians determine our public way of life based on how we measure the bad and thus define good. Beck concludes from the evolving dynamic of affective polarization that “politics is becoming our new religion: the repository of our values, the focus of our concerns, the arena of our actions, and our hope for a better future.”²

In the existential reality of our feelings today, the truth of “Where are you?” unfolds inescapably from the measurement of bad and good that is explicit or implied in “What are you doing here?” Therefore, directly countering the defining reality of truth decay—whose measurements of bad and good mislead and misguide our journey of

¹ Richard Beck in “The Hope and the Horror: Reflections for an Election Year,” in *FULLER*, issue #18, 2020, 70.

² Richard Beck, 71.

discipleship in covenant relationship together—we need to implement **the qualitative-relational compass** intrinsic to the Word’s uncompromised Rule of Law. The qualitative-relational compass is vitally calibrated to clearly distinguish what is irreducibly and nonnegotiable primary in God’s creation (original and new) from all the secondary occupying human life. This vital compass is irreplaceable for all Christians to navigate the present with *the nexus for the future*, (1) in order that the existential bad is fully addressed in human life, (2) so that the good news of the Word’s whole gospel is claimed to prevail in the human order—nothing less for the bad and no substitutes for the good.

However, whenever our measurement of the existential bad does not coincide with the bad news of the gospel, the only news that can be accurately claimed is the bad subtly recycling or overtly repeating.

The “Halo Effect” of the Bad

In the discipleship of Jesus’ first disciples, what was the common thread that connected their desire to be the greatest one in this inaugural group (Lk 9:46; Mk 9:33-34; Mt 18:1), and the fact of their not really knowing Jesus’ person (Jn 14:9)? First of all, perhaps not surprising in retrospect, the reality of these two situations reflects this unique group’s own spin imposed on discipleship, whether intentionally or unintentionally. How is this possible since following Jesus was new for them and to all in the surrounding context? This new for them was certainly good or better than what they experienced in life, or else they wouldn’t just follow something new, not to mention uncommon to them. Yet, what to them was obviously good directly correlated to their measurement of the bad, which illuminates how the ambiguity of the bad evolves.

Their desire to be the greatest among them—whether a friendly competition or not is not known—exposes how they defined good by a variant of what is bad. To seek this quantitative distinction of the greatest has to involve a comparative process that thereby presumes the others to be unavoidably *less* in one way or another. The inevitable relational consequence of this quantitatively-based comparative process was the overriding distinction of inequality, which becomes systemic, structural and institutionalized culturally and politically to establish the inequity in the human order. All of this is implied in the disciples’ measurement of bad, which the disciples certainly would have rejected if their cultural and political bias had not reshaped the bad to seem good or at least better than the bad. This subtle reshaping of the bad is what has commonly evolved as the “halo effect” of the bad to make it appear better or even seem good. Does the halo effect become familiar to you from dynamics in the primordial garden?

The relational consequence of human inequality is intrinsic to human inequity, so the latter is never resolved without resolution in the former. Addressing human inequality, however, in its most obvious shape of the bad—for example, racial, class and gender inequality—has long proven to be insufficient to bring resolution to this relational condition. This exposes the limited measurement of the bad that has prevailed culturally and politically, which has prevented the resolution of human inequality and thus has sustained human inequity. Here again, even more subtly, the halo effect reshapes the bad by mutating the created qualitative-relational significance of relationships in likeness of the Trinity to the dominant variant of relationships now shaped by **relational distance**. Consequently, the created significance of what’s “not good to be apart” in relationships together hereby is no longer the prevailing measurement of bad and good; rather the halo effect of the bad subtly makes relational distance not only acceptable in relationships but its dominant condition, even for Christians and the church.

Jesus’ disciples weren’t immune from this dominant variant that has infected the human relational condition since the beginning. Thus, they imposed this cultural-political bias of relational distance on Jesus to spin their discipleship of following him—notably demonstrated by Peter at his footwashing. The Word, however, clearly distinguished the relational imperative for any and all of his followers: “Whoever *claims the distinction* to serve me, must follow me *by its relational nature*, and where I am *as a person*, there will my *distinction-less* follower **be** also *in the depth of reciprocal relationship together*” (Jn 12:26). Therefore, even the greatest cannot follow Jesus’ whole person, because their relational distance will limit their involvement with him to merely occupying the same space together and to just the distinction of serving without the primacy of relational involvement person to person. Because their persons kept relational distance from Jesus’ person, the relational consequence was “and you still do not know me.”

Relational distance is innate to human inequality, the relational consequences of which are intrinsic to human inequity. As long as relational distance is minimalized by the halo effect of the bad, it will remain the prevailing shape of the spin that we put on all our relationships—including in the church, in families and marriages; such relational distance is accepted as the norm or justified as a matter of convenience. As long as quantitative distinctions are minimalized by a reduced theological anthropology, the halo effect of the bad will continue to embrace most variants of human inequality. For example, how has spiritual-gift distinctions reinforced inequality in the church (according to 1 Cor 12:4-7), and how have the so-called greatest gifts sustained inequality with relational distance among members for an inequity presumed to be OK or even good for the church (in conflict with 1 Cor 12:14-26)? The relational consequence certainly evolves in recycling human inequality with its innate relational distance, whereby human inequity cannot be expected to have resolution.

To counter the dominant human inequality and prevailing relational distance of his followers' cultural-political bias, Jesus had a little child stand among them. Then, he told them the bad news of their truth decay: "Truly I tell you *without any halo effect*, unless you change"—that is, from the consequences of "their" measurement of the bad—"and become like children *without those quantitative distinctions*, you will never *belong to my kingdom*. Whoever becomes humble *without distinctions* like this child is the greatest in *my kingdom*" (Mt 18:2-4); "for the least among all of you is the greatest" (Lk 9:48). The Word did not, however, reverse the systemic structural process of comparative human relations to institute an inverse human order. The Word confronted the hard reality of their dominating human inequality and prevailing relational distance to resolve their bad news for the good news of human equity to be claimed.

The bad news of the Word's whole gospel always confronts minimalized measurement of the existential bad, the most subtle of which is the widespread halo effect of the bad that infects the culture and politics of human life in general as well as the discipleship journey of Christians and churches in particular. For example, capitalist democracy is presumed to be good, thus job inequity and income inequality are seen with the halo effect of the bad, which renders them not necessarily good but also not needing to be corrected as bad. Consequently, job inequity and income inequality—with all their racial and gender variants—simply come with the territory of what is arguably good in a democratic system. Therefore, the halo effect makes the bad:

1. Either look less bad than it really is, or else have the appearance of good.
2. Also be redefined by a weak composition of sin that reduces human identity and function to variants of inequality and inequity, whereby the bad is minimalized for the sake of promoting so-called good news.

The effects of the halo effect keep evolving—ongoingly misleading and misguiding, of course, by the subtle and seductive counter-relational workings of reductionism.

Culturally and politically, the fact of truth decay as a pandemic (or endemic) condition along with the reality of spiraling affective polarization are hard realities that are illuminated only on the Word's reality scale. Without the Word's illumination, false-denied reality and virtual reality are circumvented by the ambiguity of the bad. Christians and churches are accountable for where on the reality scale their current mindset measures the reality of what and where the bad are. What the disciples enacted above is a common thread existing also among us today, woven more tightly through our identity and function in our way of life and its human order.

The “Balancing Act” of the Bad

However the bad is measured, the consequences of the bad will never be less but as much and likely more. Just as the latest discoveries have found that current variants of the coronavirus have increased virulence—the power of the virus to cause much more damage—variants of the bad have similar power. At one extreme, the damage from violence has become more widespread, the damage of which has conflated violence as an end in itself and violence as a means to an end. Typically, for example, *domestic violence* has been focused primarily on its damage to families and marriages. The recent variants of the bad have spread domestic violence to the community-at-large and throughout the nation, under the assumption that its good end justifies the use of such means—means which *norm*-ally would be considered bad but now are redefined for a good purpose by rotating norms. The evolving ambiguity of the bad further reinforces and sustains the circumvention of the bad news. Christians and churches commonly proclaim the good news in public without also claiming the bad news both publically and personally. Wherever you are on this cultural-political spectrum indicates your measurement level of the bad

In the consuming climate of polarization today, misinformation, disinformation, fake news and conspiracy theories have darkened the environment, churned up its waters and raised the heat—much like climate change. Surrounding climate conditions have been evolving as the bad descends deeper into ambiguity, especially as conditions are dismissed or denied. The underlying dynamic driving this unavoidable climate is the evolvment of truth decay into pervading mutations of **truth gymnastics** and its bonded cohort of **norm gymnastics**. The halo effects of the bad are sufficient to render the bad ambiguous in our way of life. The balancing act of the bad, however, is also decisive in establishing this ambiguity throughout our way of life and its human order. This dynamic balances the ambiguity of the bad with the good, in order for the bad to circumvent its restrictions by flipping around &/or over the truth and rotating norms to form the balanced routine for the bad to prevail. Based on its defining nature, the workings of truth gymnastics could seem reasonable and norm gymnastics could appear normal—namely as the new normal keeps evolving. This would certainly be evident in times of affective polarization and in periods of minimalist disorder.

We already noted earlier a period of Peter’s minimalist disorder, which then evolved in a time of affective polarization. Together with other disciples, this formative body had to navigate the contending establishments of the Jewish nation and the Graeco-Roman Empire; this involved having to adjust to their pervasive cultural and political norms that interacted to shape the prevailing way of life. It was in this public context that these ordinary disciples were commissioned to be the Word’s witnesses (Acts 1:8). And it

was in this contentious cultural-political climate that affective polarization made them susceptible to truth and norm gymnastics in order to balance the bad for the sake of their witness for the gospel. This would also affect their qualitative-relational compass to navigate their journey as distinct witnesses of the Word.

Peter's witness was highlighted in the formation of the early church, perhaps even assuming its lead. Yet, his discipleship was challenged in the surrounding cultural-political climate, which made evident some dubious practices that diluted, compromised or even contradicted his witness of the Word's whole gospel. For this specific purpose, Luke records in his Gospel the Word's essential imperative: "See to it, then that the light within you is not darkness" (Lk 11:35). Luke was concerned about the equality of the Gentiles and their equal access to the gospel. Thus, he highlights in his Book of Acts this need for equity in the church, for which Peter's witness was problematic.

Peter vocally took the initial lead in proclaiming the gospel (Acts 2-3); and along with John, his witness certainly demonstrated no hesitation standing up to the local establishment (Acts 4:8-12, 19-20). Peter's full witness, however, had issues navigating discipleship's narrow road in that context, because his qualitative-relational compass was not aligned accurately with the Word. The Word's witness (*martys*) denotes one who has firsthand knowledge of the facts of the gospel, therefore who can confirm the truth of the whole gospel's good news by first bringing to light the bad news of the gospel. Thus, a major issue with *martys* is the language barrier created by any other connotations making variable what *martys* denotes. Any *martys* deficient in the integral knowledge of the gospel's facts cannot adequately proclaim the whole gospel, because it lacks in its claim of the bad news on which the good news is contingent. With that deficiency, *martys* navigates a wider easier road that is commonly engaged with truth and norm gymnastics. This is where Luke located Peter in his discipleship journey, of which Luke personally was aware as an ongoing participant with the apostles.

In spite of Peter's early boldness in proclaiming the gospel, he minimized the good news as he engaged in balancing the bad; this essentially revised the bad news that Peter had yet to fully claim. During a meditative moment Peter had, the Word intruded on him that evoked this strong response from Peter—likely expressed from his provoked minimalist disorder: "I have never *embraced* anything that is profane or unclean" (Acts 10:9-14). His measurement of what was bad further evidenced his cultural-political bias, which he earlier also strongly expressed to the Word before the cross happened: "This shall never happen to you" (Mt 16:22, NIV) and "you will never wash my feet" (Jn 13:8). Peter's cultural-political bias not only defined *what* was bad but also determined *where* the bad was. Based on a variant rule of law, his bias labelled all non-Jews as bad and thus to keep relational distance with in unequal relations, the inequity of which certainly revised the bad news of his bias and misrepresented the good news in the gospel that Peter tried to balance with his measurement of the bad. At the point of the Word's intrusion, Peter appeared to understand that "God has shown me that I *had no valid basis*

to call anyone *bad*” (Acts 10:28), because “I truly understand that God shows no partiality *based on outer-in distinctions*” (10:34). Yet, the journey continues.

This prevailing human inequality obviously spread into the church, which now evolved with human inequity that deeply concerned Luke. In the otherwise exciting formative days of the church, Luke highlights the inequality that Hellenists (those embracing Greek culture and politics) had with the dominant Hebrew segment of the church, and the inequity they experienced in their presumed shared life together in the church’s structure and system (Acts 6:1). Later at the ruling council of the church directly addressing the inequality between Jews and non-Jews, Peter supported their equality because “God has made no distinction between them and us” (15:9).

It appeared that Peter learned from the Word and turned around due to the Word’s correction. That turnaround, however, depended on how deeply Peter paid attention to the Word and took to heart the Word’s feedback (cf. Mk 4:24; Lk 8:18). If Peter earlier had listened carefully to the Word about ingesting what’s bad (Mt 15:15-20; Mk 7:17-19), then he wouldn’t have responded to the Word’s intrusion by declaring “I have never....” Because Peter still balanced the bad with his cultural-political bias, the tension in the church between Jews and non-Jews stirred up his affective polarization to try to appease the Jews at the expense of the truth of the whole gospel (as Paul exposed in him, Gal 2:11-14). Peter’s truth gymnastics revised the gospel’s bad news, which minimalized the good news as he engaged in norm gymnastics for the church—sadly, an influential practice that rendered his and others’ witness hypocritical (i.e. *hypokrisis*), that is, by wearing a mask as if he were playing a different role in the church.

This role-playing practice or *hypokrisis* (originating in ancient Greek theatre), however, is not unique to Peter and his historical climate, since it is evident as a common maneuver in the human narrative of church history. Currently, in the prevailing “black and white” cultural-political climate enveloping surrounding contexts in fog, the good and bad are conflated. This subtle conflation operates with balancing the bad; and thus it commonly mixes some existential bad parts in with the good and some good parts in with the existential bad, whereby those parts become redefined accordingly into stereotypes contrary to their true nature. While the black-and-white mindset prevails, the quantitative distinction of white *rules* at the heart of human life and its human order.

What Peter demonstrated is the common gap between the heart and the mind. With his theology having been corrected by the Word, Peter may have had no intentional thought to flip over the truth of the gospel and to rotate norms for the church. Yet, the critical issue is not about mere cerebral function, because the mind is easily misled and misguided, as well as commonly deceived, especially when the brain is conditioned by feelings from the heart. This is why the responses generated by affective polarization to tense situations and circumstances can be subconscious, causing reaction somewhat like a reflex response—a default reaction which the integrated mind and heart of the whole person would not enact (cf. Rom 7:21-23). We cannot underestimate the disparity

between our minds and our hearts that everyday human life can make, which good intentions do not negate. Nor can we overestimate the qualitative-relational consequences from this disparity that ongoingly tries to balance the bad in order to adapt to tense situations and circumstances—adapting, that is, to progress and succeed as the fittest. For Peter, the reality was that his balancing act reinforced and sustained inequality between church members and inequity in their relationships together as the presumed new creation family. This common dynamic, of course, reflects the human relational condition that Christians and churches also enable or are complicit with—whereby they become enablers of injustice and disablers of justice.

This reality among us must not be underestimated, nor can we overestimate its impact on our way of life, personally and collectively. Therefore, emphatically the Word exclaims: “Woe to those who call *bad* good and good *bad*, who put darkness for light and light for darkness” (Isa 5:20, NIV). Furthermore, the Word deeply intrudes with the Spirit to illuminate any darkness within us (as in Lk 11:34-35): “And all the churches will know that I am the one who searches minds and hearts, and I will give to each of you as your *practice in everyday life warrants*” (Rev 2:23).

No amount of the balancing act of the bad will survive to be the fittest of the Word’s witnesses, nor progress to be the greatest of his followers. The Word’s narrow difficult road cannot be widened and made easier by circumventing the whole gospel’s bad news; no good news can emerge from this minimalized source. Those journeying on this wide road “keep listening but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand” (Isa 6:9)—“always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of truth” (2 Tim 3:7, ESV). And truth gymnastics prevents their compass to be correctly aligned to navigate nothing but a wide road.

Nevertheless, in these days of crisis for humanity, balancing of the bad is an evolving reality among Christians and churches, mutating in variants of a new normal composed by rationalizing truth gymnastics and justifying norm gymnastics. In this oft-subtle process, any variant condition flips around our everyday identity and rotates our public function. The longer these variants are allowed to exist, the more resistant they will be to change, that is, the change necessary that will incisively turn around (from inner out) this infectious condition of human life and its reducing effects on the human order.

“Immunity Escape” of the Bad

Circumventing the bad news integral to the whole gospel—which the halo effect and balancing act of the bad reinforce and sustain—allows the bad in everyday life to circumvent the good news that constitutes the other half of this uncommon gospel. The consequence for this gospel is to transpose its composition from the experiential truth to a

mere doctrinal truth, from its relational reality to merely a virtual reality—consequences which can evolve even from good intentions. Christians and churches can claim and proclaim a transposed gospel (the common gospel in use), but they cannot claim and proclaim the whole gospel until the existential bad in our human relational condition is dealt with as a hard reality. This essential action, however, becomes even more difficult when the existential bad can circumvent the measures taken to eliminate it.

For their theology and practice, along with listening carefully to the Word, Christians and churches need to learn acutely from recent discoveries coming to light in these dark days of the COVID-19 pandemic. Mutated variants of the coronavirus are not only increasing in number and spread but also may flourish as novel variants are able to circumvent antibodies, vaccines and related measures, whereby they can effectively escape immunity and continue both to more easily infect and also to further mutate. What's illuminating for us to take to heart is the parallel reality that the existential bad can also flourish as it circumvents modes or inadequate measures to stop it. Under cover of existing fog, the genius of Satan continues his ceaseless counter-relational work to amplify the halo effect, accelerate the balancing act, and intensify the evolution of the existential bad, so that its variants can circumvent common measures by a resistant **immunity escape** that will further subtly infect our way of life and surreptitiously mutate variants of our human order and its rule of law.

Therefore, as with the coronavirus, the interrelated issues of immunity escape facing all Christians and churches are this:

1. Until the bad news of the whole gospel is fully claimed, the bad in human life will continue to circumvent the good news and thereby reduce its significance for humanity.
2. Inseparably, even as the bad news is received, as long as the measures used to address it are weak, the bad will prevail in this critical fight and thereby continue to infect humanity, reduce persons and relationships from their created integrity, minimalize their quality of life, and diminish any light from the gospel to render the good news without significance or simply irrelevant.

The reality of the bad's immunity escape will continue to face us until these issues are resolved. And this hard reality is made more difficult to face when we explicitly or inadvertently serve as enablers or complicitors. Moreover, merely having good intentions to face up is also insufficient, because by default the bad news is still not fully claimed to change the bad first within ourselves. The bad's immunity escape has existed (subtly or not) in Christians and churches from the beginning; and the good news has been insufficient to change our human relational condition because the bad news hasn't been fully claimed.

In the big picture of the COVID-19 pandemic, hopeful signs are emerging as research has discovered mutating coronavirus variants (and strains), from which they can learn when variants escape immunity measures and what measures can best stop this evolution. This highlights how critical measuring the bad is for fighting its immunity escape, and that the deeper and more complete our measurement, the better we can change the bad. From the gospel's roots, there is illuminated this reality:

The gospel's bad news holds all Christians and churches accountable for this deep and complete measurement of the bad; this essential measurement determines how to fight the bad, so that the gospel's redemptive change constituting the good news will be the experiential truth and relational reality of our human relational condition, whereby we can proclaim its whole significance for the human relational condition of all persons, peoples, tribes and nations.

If we are serious about following the Word and make our discipleship the priority, then we must not make assumptions about our measurement of the existential bad as Peter did. Certainly, our measurement becomes more difficult as truth decay evolves and as our perceptions are distorted by affective polarization, which make us susceptible to minimalist disorder. As we navigate all this with the qualitative-relational compass, however, it should become obvious that these dynamics bias *how* we see the bad, *what* we define as bad, and *where* we determine the bad is. Further witnessed in Peter and demonstrated in the range of opinions about COVID-19, measuring the existential bad has not only been difficult but a problematic adventure, a bewildering mystery, and an incompatible paradox—all of which make the bad too ambiguous to recognize in its depths and track completely. A weak view of sin always minimalizes the existential bad, even if our theology composes referential information about the bad. Such referential information does not get to the qualitative depth of the bad to measure its relational consequences completely. That always leaves the door open for weak measurement, which widens the path for bad variants to circumvent detection and thus escape immunity measures addressing a more shallow and incomplete bad. Underlying immunity escape is the genius of Satan, whose commonly undetected counter-relational work was exposed by Paul to illuminate the bad's most subtle variants (2 Cor 11:13-15).

When you focus directly on our current human relational condition, how good do you think our measurement of the existential bad is? And when you consider the relational consequences existing among us, between us and around us, how would you rate our relational condition based on that measurement? Is it compatible or incompatible, congruent or incongruent with the good news of the gospel? The bad news in the whole gospel is neither incompatible nor incongruent but indeed compatible and congruent with the good news. How so? The Word embodied the Light of the Truth, the Way and the

Life in order for the Word's whole gospel to illuminate the bad news, so that the good news could shine fully without being dimmed and minimalized. Again, because of Luke's dedication to human equality and equity, he echoed in his Gospel and Acts the relational Word's resounding imperative: "See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness." In any degree of darkness, the bad continues to evolve in immunity escape.

The Unredacted Bad News of the Gospel

No one wants to dwell on the bad news and disconnect from the hope of any good news, unless they're depressed. Yet, the paradox of the whole gospel requires us to deeply sharpen our focus on the depths of the bad news to fight its breadth in human life. This is neither optional for the good news nor negotiable for those who aren't depressed. Therefore, any redaction of the bad news will always have relational consequences for the good news.

This is demonstrated in the recent news of the military coup in Myanmar, which turned around its transition to a democracy. The consequence of this bad news for the so-called good news of democracy should not be surprising, not so much because of the fragility of democracy and its tenuous notion. More so because Myanmar's de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi, a Nobel Peace Prize-winning champion of democracy, effectively tried to balance the bad with truth and norm gymnastics—albeit with likely good intentions for the sake of advancing democracy. She then by default became an enabler and complicitor of the oppression of the Rohingya Muslims by doing almost nothing to protect them in her country, her quasi-democratic country. Truth and norm gymnastics in any manner simply redacts the bad news to prevent or distort the composition of good news.

When the embodied Word forcefully enacted cleaning out the temple, and also emphasized his coming as distinguished "not to bring *common* peace but a sword" (Mt 10:34), he didn't invalidate the good news composed by the gospel using the means of truth and norm gymnastics. Rather, the Word validated the paradox of his gospel that constitutes its wholeness when the good news is directly correlated to the bad news. This essential correlation precludes intervening variables from preventing the gospel to fulfill its qualitative-relational outcome for human life, its qualitative equity for all persons, and its relational equality in the human order. Anything less and any substitutes of the bad news become intervening variables that disrupt the direct correlation between the good and bad news, which then prevents the relational outcome of the whole gospel.

Since the Word's gospel is rooted in covenant relationship, the bad news evolved as the roots of covenant relationship were displaced and variant branches replaced the qualitative-relational heart of covenant relationship. This evolving bad news is integrated by the gospel into its composition in order that its variant roots and branches can no

longer displace and replace the good news of the gospel's new covenant relationship together. Thus, the gospel's integration of the bad news is by its nature comprehensive, encompassing the counter-relational workings of sin as reductionism; and anything less and any substitutes continue to allow its variants to displace and replace the gospel's good news.

The Word's theological trajectory and relational path enacted the whole gospel to "proclaim justice to *all persons, peoples, tribes and nations*...until he brings justice to victory" (Mt 12:18-20). By necessity, this required integrating all the bad news of injustice into his proclamation of the gospel in order for the relational outcome of justice to be the experiential truth and relational reality. Beside blatant variants and other obvious symptoms of the bad, the existential subtlety of what's bad is the key issue in the bad's infection avoiding detection and sustaining its immunity escape; this subtle process then reinforces and sustains what's blatantly and obviously bad. When the measurement of the bad doesn't encompass its existential subtlety, the bad news is redacted.

The Common Denominator of Injustice

We need to understand the subtlety evolving from the beginning that reinforces and sustains the scope of the bad—the existential bad which emerged from the primordial garden simply as reductionism: the counter-relational work against the *whole* of God and the wholeness of God's creation that subtly works to reduce the human person, their relationships, the breadth of human life and the depth of the human order from their wholeness.

The subtle variants of reductionism keep evolving, which make the bad more ambiguous to be detected and thus more capable of immunity escape. For example, in the formative tradition of God's people, the Sabbath has been a key outer-in identity marker to distinguish them from other persons, peoples, tribes and nations. What should have been integral, however, for who, what and how they are as persons and in covenant relationship together became fragmenting of their created ontology (inner-out identity) and function. Consider carefully the Sabbath in God's Rule of Law, which constituted the climax essential to creation (Gen 2:1-3). The Creator enacted the whole of God's righteousness in what is *right* and whole, and this is how human persons are to function in likeness—function contrary to the pressure and demands of self-determination to measure up and succeed, and that preoccupy us with secondary matters at the expense of the primary. This contrary function from the primordial garden got embedded in human tradition and became entrenched in the status quo of human life, which reflect the workings of truth and norm gymnastics. As a consequence, the Sabbath has been converted into a mere day lacking justice.

Whatever variable practice of the Sabbath we've encountered or engaged in, the Sabbath is integral to justice as constituted by creation. As the whole ontology of God converged in the Sabbath ("God blessed the seventh day and *distinguished* it *uncommon*") and the function of the Creator was integrated whole ("God rested from all the work that he had done in creation," Gen 2:3), likewise the Sabbath integrates human life. That is, integrated in what makes human ontology whole and how to function whole—integrally in likeness of the Creator—notably in a human context that defines persons by the extent of what they do (whether or not in self-determination). Human life and function are fragmentary without the integration of the Sabbath, which is why the Sabbath is imperative for persons to be in created likeness to God's ontology and function. If we observed God on the seventh day of creation, we would not know that he had just created the universe and all life; this observation is critical to make because God's whole ontology and function is neither defined by nor reducible to what God merely does—even as immeasurable as creating the universe (or multiverse). When the Sabbath eliminates the human distinctions of what we do, it equalizes all persons before God and thus with each other as persons created in God's likeness. Otherwise these outer-in distinctions become defining in life.

In the created justice of God's Rule of Law, the Sabbath is the central privileged right³ that must be claimed in created uniqueness (only in the image of God) in order for the vested rights⁴ of persons to unfold to fulfill our inherent human need. Thus, the Sabbath demands from us that anything less and any substitutes in our ontology and function must cease (cf. *rapah*, Ps 46:10), in order to restore us to the wholeness of our person and our relationships (Dt 5:12-15; Eph 2:8-10, cf. Mt 9:13; 12:7-8). Yet, the Sabbath became and remains variable in theology and practice, observed today with variants of a new normal. Variants range from a day without distinction like any other day in the week, to a day off to do anything else, to a rigid religious day as an end in itself. In spite of our traditions and evolved variants, the reality of the Sabbath continues to be the culmination of creation and the key essential to define what is primary and necessary for the created order of human life to be whole. In this created order, the human person was not at the top but at the center, in order to integrate all of creation in its wholeness (as Paul highlighted, Rom 8:19-21)—to integrate and not to dominate or misuse creation to satisfy our self-interest needs. God's justice emerging from the Sabbath is the outworking of the created order for its wholeness in likeness of the wholly Trinity.

³ Defined as the rights unique to all persons created in God's image, who can claim these nonnegotiable rights just in their created uniqueness, unless the rights are withdrawn or denied only by God. Discussed in my study *Jesus' Gospel of Essential Justice: The Human Order from Creation through Complete Salvation* (Justice Study, 2018). Online at <http://www.4X12.org>.

⁴ Defined as the rights from God that are inherent to all persons created in God's image, irreducible rights which cannot be revoked to prevent fulfillment of the human need.

Therefore, the Sabbath we use will lead to the human need-rights we get, which will determine the justice or injustice we practice (see Isa 56:1-2; 58:13-14).

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

Therefore, God's justice is distinguished and God's peace is experienced just in the *relational dynamic of just-nection*: The relational connection required for justice of the human order in the created whole-ly likeness of God (as created in Gen 2:18).

Just-nection, then, is the unequivocal and irreplaceable antithesis that distinguishes justice from what encompasses **the common denominator of injustice**:

The relational distance, separation or brokenness that fragment the human order and reduce persons to outer-in distinctions and thus to any and all relational disconnection contrary to their created likeness to God, which is consequential for preventing fulfillment of the inherent human need as well as for being entrenched in human inequality and shrouded in human inequity (as experienced in Gen 3:7-8,10).

Since Jesus came to fulfill God's Rule of Law for justice to be whole (Mt 5:17-20), he didn't make the Sabbath optional for persons to use as they wish. That would make justice optional also—shaping it by variable thinking and variant practice, as demonstrated in truth and norm gymnastics. Having this option would render human-

need rights to relative enforcement, even if permissible rights⁵ allowed for such practice. In the created justice of God's irreducible and nonnegotiable authority, the Sabbath constitutes a privileged right that we must claim in just our created uniqueness in order for the vested rights of justice to be enforced—irrevocably both for ourselves and others.

Therefore, Jesus made it essential that his whole gospel is embodied and enacted as follows, and imperative to be claimed and proclaimed accordingly:

The bad news of the gospel unfolds on an intrusive relational path to expose the injustice of tradition and similar conventional practices, in order that the good news emerges irreducibly 'whole in justice' and unfolds nonnegotiablely 'uncommon in peace'; and the gospel's intrusive relational path encompasses exposing the shame of the status quo composed by the dominant views of theology (or related ideology) and the prevailing norms of practice, both of which are under the shaping influence of the common—notably in the subtle engagement of truth and norm gymnastics.

This whole gospel emerges only in its qualitative depth and to its relational breadth, when its bad news is not redacted. Yet, claiming and proclaiming the whole gospel is not the rule but the exception among the status quo of Christians and churches—the status quo in which truth and norm gymnastics are the rule and not the exception.

Status-*ing* in Quo

The status quo in many sociocultural contexts is maintained by an honor-shame code of behavior that controls persons to function mainly by avoiding shame. The shame, however, in an honor-shame framework has primarily an outer-in focus and thus revolves around secondary matters. Though this focus assumes it has primary consequences of being considered bad, wrong, unfair or unjust, it is insufficient shame to get to the roots of the human condition. The depth of shame (*bosh*) from the primordial garden is what has composed and will always compose the status quo of human life at all levels of its human condition. This level of shame goes deeper than what's quantified from outer in and gets down to the qualitative-relational consequences at the heart of shame (the *bosh* contrasted in Gen 2:25 and 3:7). *Bosh* signifies the primary consequence from reductionism that is intrinsic to the common denominator of injustice. This depth is the shame of the status-*ing* in quo that the bad news of the gospel exposes in the status quo's oft-subtle lack of just-nection.

The status quo represents the existing state of the human relational condition in general and our human relational condition in particular. In our surrounding contexts,

⁵ Defined as the rights available to all persons to the extent that their enactment either doesn't disrespect, abuse and prevent the fulfillment of their and others' human need, or that isn't allowed access to that fulfillment by the normative enforcement of others notably prevailing in a fragmentary majority.

there emerges a conventional thinking (wisdom) that establishes (formally or informally) a collection of normative values and practices, which explicitly or implicitly maintain the existing state of our human relational condition with this collective conscience. These norms define the parameters for how to think, see human life, and act daily. Since they are based on limited knowledge or biased information, however, the status-*ing* in quo limits how we think, distorts how we see, and constrains how we act. Depending on the surrounding context, that particular status quo enforces *permissible rights* to the extent that its normative framework allows, or which norm gymnastics justifies. The true shame of the status quo emerges when vested rights are denied and privileged rights are prevented—in spite of the extent of permissible rights—which is consequential for persons fulfilling their inherent human need, including even being seduced by illusions of virtual fulfillment (as in Gen 3:6). Christians and churches often appeal to their permissible rights (e.g. for free speech, and religious liberty) in the status quo without being accountable or even aware of vested and privileged rights. This variable condition is the consequence whenever vested rights are reduced and/or privileged rights are renegotiated—both of which evolve from persons in reduced ontology and function, those comprising the status quo. Whatever the variant state of this existing condition, the status quo consists of the (our) human relational condition needing to be made *right* and thus of persons (individually and collectively) needing to be transformed at all levels of human life.

The good news of the gospel alone is insufficient to address the status quo. The reality is that the proclamation of the good news has made little change (if any) on status-*ing* in quo—likely because an existing cultural-political bias doesn't perceive the status quo as needing change. Only the unredacted bad news of the gospel exposes the shame of the status quo and its need to be changed at its core roots. This is the whole gospel that targets the common denominator of injustice to raise up the just-*nection* required to fulfill the inherent human need. The gospel's relational outcome enforces the vested and privileged rights of all persons, all of which elude the status-*ing* in quo in practice if not also in theology.

As discussed earlier, this was Nicodemus' awakening when he pursued the gospel as a key member of the status quo (Jn 3:1-15). Like many Christians today, his affirmation of God's authority and rule of law was composed by referential language, which merely quantified God's terms to the limits and constraints of the outer in that were cultivated by norm gymnastics (e.g. Mt 15:8). So he was shocked by Jesus' relational language that he needed to be transformed in order to be *right* under God's rule. Yet, his normative framework limited how he thought and distorted how he saw Jesus' imperative for him to be transformed, making the gospel incredulous for him: "How can these things be?" Jesus shook up the status quo with the bad news to expose his shame: "You are a teacher of *the status quo* and yet you do not understand these things?"

The status quo involves the most subtle extension of the original shame of the inaugural persons in creation. They shifted from the primacy of their whole persons in relationship together in likeness of the triune God (“both naked and were not ashamed,” Gen 2:25) to the secondary of their persons from outer in, which thereby reduced them to human distinctions in fragmenting comparative relations (“they were naked and *covered the primary with the secondary in order to hide their shame,*” Gen 3:7,10). This shame breaks the just-nection created in God’s likeness and thereby disables persons from fulfilling their inherent human need. Any yearning for its fulfillment or dissatisfaction from being unfulfilled is readily distracted or suspended by the preoccupation with normative values and practices of the status quo—ongoingly rendering persons and relationships in virtual illusions.

The shame of the status quo is subtle and rarely acknowledged, because this normative framework is advocated, supported or sustained with complicity by the majority (notably a moral majority of Christians today). Yet, the prevailing shame of persons in reduced ontology and function, who lack justice in the human order of relationships, is always consequential for denying or squandering the vested and privileged rights of God’s Rule of Law. Thus, the bad news of the Word’s gospel always holds status-*ing* in quo accountable and intrusively exposes its shame of broken just-nection, so that the good news of the whole of justice can emerge and its uncommon peace will unfold—with nothing less and no substitutes in our theology and practice as the sentinels of human life.

The reality of the status quo facing us, and hopefully the reality challenging us to change, is the normative framework shaping or even composing our theology and practice. For example, what forms the identity of our persons and our function in daily life (not just at church), and where do we get our model for everyday relationships? Conventional sources for these shape how we see and think about right-wrong, good-bad, fair-unfair, and just-unjust. If you examine your personal experiences and knowledge of others, what shapes how you see and think about them? The reality unavoidably facing us and challenging us is this: How we live everyday either falls within the normative framework of the status quo or claims the Word’s whole gospel—the latter then countering the status-*ing* in quo of the former, which Nicodemus would testify shakes up the status quo at the core of its theology and practice. In other words, we cannot claim Jesus’ gospel without the bad news, and to only assume we have claimed the good news is to live within the status quo of our theology and practice—which can be the status-*ing* in quo’s spectrum encompassing conservatives, progressives and liberals.

To claim the bad news of the whole gospel, however, is not a simple choice today, because what is measured as bad has become so ambiguous in the existing status quo.

The underlying reality facing all of us, which we are widely exposed to and likely influenced by in some way, is the implied utilization of what in effect becomes **the status quo app**. This app is the perceptual lens and interpretive framework that are shaped by the existing status quo, which becomes the prevailing application used *status-ing* in quo. This consuming app, like other apps, makes it easier to engage in *status-ing* in quo in order to effectively masquerade that bad, so that its detection is minimalized and better able to escape immunity measures.

The status quo app is not the work of modern technology—though such apps do reinforce and sustain the bad in human life—but the genius of Satan, who epitomizes masquerading the bad in the midst of *status-ing* in quo (the evolving reality of 2 Cor 11:14-15). Accordingly, the status quo app is a subtle and seductive key that gives us access to the wider easier ways of life propagated by *status-ing* in quo; and its use redacts the bad news, by which then the good news is rendered to misinformation, disinformation or fake news. Those who claim such rendered good news become myopic in their lens of the bad news, the good news myopia which not only keeps them from claiming the bad news but also misleads them to be absorbed into it.

Absorbing the Bad News or Claiming It

Balancing the bad in human life certainly has been a reality, the facts of which have accumulated notably in democracies. The bad has routinely been rendered less urgent and burdensome, or even denied. Frankly, to accomplish this purpose and survive fit, free people have become experts in truth and norm gymnastics. Without objective truth as the essential basis *in* life, truth as the definitive source *about* life is lost. Then, any truth presumed as the necessary guide *for* life becomes merely relative. It is the relativity of truth that enables norm gymnastics to rotate relative norms as deemed important to fulfill its need, desires or related self-interests. This underlying reality becomes the playbook manifested whenever and wherever people have had the opportunity to exercise these gymnastics.

Thus, this expertise has been critical to survive as fittest in a human context that is inherently bad, even though the intrinsic good also exists in the human context. Christians and churches have been in the middle of the current polarizing climate; and how, not if, they have engaged identity and partisan politics reveals whether they have been absorbing the bad news or claiming it. This is a crossroads facing all of us today, which any connection to the Word's gospel will not allow us to avoid or oversimplify. And the good news myopia common among Christians and churches will not exempt any from their accountability; in fact, this myopia confronts them of the reality indicating already absorbing the bad news. The consequences of the status quo app demand our urgent attention and decisive action.

Notably in polarizing times like today, locally and globally, political theology should be at the heart of the public life of Christians and churches by providing *the qualitative-relational compass* to navigate their discipleship journey. From this essential perspective of the Word's experiential truth and relational reality, the theology and practice from tradition and/or the spectrum of conservatives, progressives and liberals (including the related politics) comprising the status quo raise this pivotal question: What is reinforced and sustained in everyday life, and what in life itself is being changed? Without much conscious thought, the first half of the question would be answered with the assumption that the existing norms are either neutral enough to reinforce (explicitly or implicitly) or positive enough to sustain. The latter half calls for consciously examining existing norms without assuming the false distinction of neutrality, and then challenges negative norms to be changed. For example, technology itself may be neutral but the use of technology is not, and negative norms of technological usage (demonstrated on the internet and in social media) need to be changed rather than reinforced or sustained. Jesus' whole gospel raises this pivotal question and ongoingly holds accountable all who claim the gospel, notably those who proclaim it—accountable namely because of not first claiming the bad news before proclaiming the good news.

Like most Christians, the early disciples used a reduced theological anthropology to define their identity and determine their function by what they do and have from outer in. In our Christian contexts, we may not be asking which of us is the greatest (or first and foremost), but if we use such a reduced theological anthropology, we embed our persons in an inevitable comparative process with others (notably about resumes). This comparative process measures persons on the basis of their achievements, successes and accumulated resources, or potential thereof, and makes distinctions of persons accordingly (e.g. consider an academic vita or a ministry portfolio). These distinctions construct a human order between persons to stratify them to a level justified by the comparative system, which unavoidably fragments their relationships to an inequality that cannot experience just-nection, even at the upper strata.

What Jesus exposed with the gospel's bad news was the existing stratified order enforced by power relations. These power relations also function covertly, for example, by the paternalistic actions of "so-called benefactors" who control others by their subtle manipulations under the illusion of the common good. This inequality is the expected consequence for those engaged in the human comparative process; this evolves for any of Jesus' followers from both (1) their theological anthropology reflecting and reinforcing reduced ontology and function, and (2) their shallow understanding of sin without its roots in reductionism and thus sustaining reductionism—each in contradiction to his gospel. Such persons are subtle *disablers of justice* who become misguided *enablers of injustice*.

So, where does this leave his followers as church leaders and as those working for justice and peace?

This brings us back to the crossroad of the narrow gate-road and the wide gate-road, to the junction of Jesus' uncommon path and the common path, to the disjuncture between the irreducible and nonnegotiable just-nection and the common denominator of injustice. The bad news of Jesus' gospel always brings person to this critical intersection of life, which is why claiming the bad news is indispensable and not optional. One of the critical problems facing us at this crossroad is that each alternative may have a similar presenting appearance, and the distinction between them will not become apparent until the roots of each are exposed by the depth of reality in everyday life. This critical problem is addressed by Jesus in his manifesto for his followers (Mt 7:24-27). There are common illusions about the construction of a human order, about building conventional structures in a society, community and family, even about the development of churches and ministries, whose foundations appear to be on the right basis until the hard realities of life expose their shortcomings (e.g. about persons, relationships and sin), bring down their bad assumptions (e.g. about the common good), and crumble their misplaced (false) hopes and practices (e.g. about peace and justice).

The Word enacted the created justice of God's Rule of Law, which embodied the nonnegotiable Way, the invariable Truth and the irreducibly whole Life from inner out for the primacy of reciprocal relationship together with the whole-ly Trinity (Jn 14:6-7). Based on this relational process, his sentinels are to (1) listen carefully to "the word from my mouth" (Eze 3:17, cf. Mk 4:24) and (2) "act on them *in your daily practice*" (Mt 7:24) and (3) "you shall give *others* warning from me" (Eze 33:7), thus (4) to function as shepherds of God's flock (as in Jer 23:3-4). This relational process became the functional model for church leaders to grow both in their own development and for the church as family in the primacy of just-nection. This growth requires redemptive change from the prevailing norms of the status quo and related tradition, in order for that old to die and the new to emerge truly as new (as in Lk 5:33-39; 2 Cor 5:16-17; Eph 4:22-24). This relational process and outcome of the gospel is predicated on claiming the unredacted bad news contrary to being absorbed by its redaction.

No one knew the need for personal transformation more profoundly than Paul. The misguided passion of Saul was transformed into his enlightened response to the whole of God (i.e. the *pleroma* of God, Col 1:15-20; Eph 1:22-23). In his integral fight for the whole gospel and against all reductionism, Paul gathered the leaders of the churches in Ephesus to make irrevocable the imperative of their calling: "For I did not shrink from declaring to you the **whole saving purpose** [*boule*] of God. Keep watch over, *pay close attention, devote yourself vulnerably* [*prosecho*] to your *whole person* and all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God" (Acts 20:27-28). Since Paul was well schooled in his religious tradition (Acts 22:3; Phil 3:5-6), he was aware of previous shepherds of God's flock who took care of their self-interests and engaged in making distinctions among persons (as in Eze 34:1-6; Jer

50:6, cf. Jude 11-13). This oft-subtle lack of justice was the status quo condition that Jesus ongoingly encountered while proclaiming the gospel (Mt 9:35-36). Contemporary shepherds also encounter this condition in the church, whether they recognize it or not, which makes Paul's imperative for their calling a valid source of bad news composing the gospel.

The urgent question facing the sentinels of human life is: Will we be shepherds reflecting, reinforcing or sustaining the common denominator of injustice, or will we be shepherds of justice in likeness of the Shepherd (Jn 10:14-16, cf. Eze 34:11-16)?

As evolved from the primordial garden, the pivotal shift of persons from inner out to outer in formed **the critical distinction for human persons** that constructed human identity and function. From this defining distinction evolved related formative human distinctions (such as race/ethnicity and class, besides gender), which have adapted into the prevailing norms of everyday life such that they pervade even the theology and practice of God's Rule of Law and its order for life together. Human distinctions were the critical issue underlying the problems in the church that Paul faced, fought against, and worked for transformation, much to Paul's grief and frustration (1 Cor 1:10-13; 3:1-4, 18-22; 4:6-7; 2 Cor 10:12); and this practice countered the bad news and contradicted the good news of the gospel (Gal 3:26-29; Col 3:9-11; Eph 2:14-22).

From creation the whole-ly God did not make distinctions of persons—"both naked and were not ashamed *of the whole who, what and how they were*" (Gen 2:25). In God's Rule of Law for human life and its order, the Word made no distinctions in the ontology and function of persons in likeness of the Trinity, which distinguishes the church in its whole identity and function that is fulfilled only in the primacy of relationship together vulnerably equalized without distinctions (as in Acts 15:9). Christian leaders who practice anything less and promote any substitutes are shepherds functioning as disablers of justice as created by God and enablers of injustice composing the common norms of everyday life—the distinctions of those "naked from outer in and covering up the whole who, what and how they are" (as evolved from Gen 3:7,10). Those with such distinctions become mere objects of persons shaped by the prevailing norms, rather than persons as subjects fighting against their reductionist influence.

This then raises key questions needing our urgent response: "Where are you *in this human condition*?" and "Who tells you that you are naked?" (Gen 3:9,11). The vested and privileged rights for fulfilling the inherent human need of all persons are at stake in our response.

On his intrusive relational path Jesus ongoingly responded to persons denied their human-need rights, yet he was countered by leaders serving as sentinels of the law, shepherds of the flock, who functioned as disablers of justice and enablers of injustice

(e.g. Mt 9:1-13,27-34; 12:9-25; Lk 7:36-50; 13:10-17; Jn 5:1-15; 9:1ff). Human distinction-making has always been the underlying issue at the roots of injustice, and a prime symptom of absorbing the bad news. Christian leaders need to recognize the presence of this in their theology and practice or be subject to subtly falling into becoming shepherds and enablers of injustice—those who are disablers of justice even with their good intentions.

Until his transformation, Peter was one of those leaders with good intentions who simply reinforced and sustained the core norms explicit to his tradition and implicit to his surrounding context's status quo. This made evident his use of the status quo app that masqueraded the bad with his truth and norm gymnastics. By design or default, this entailed having a theology and practice that countered the bad news and contradicted the good news of Jesus' gospel (e.g. in his theology, Mt 16:21-23, and in his practice, Jn 13:5-8). In anticipation of this condition for Peter and to distinguish the pivotal alternative for his leadership function, Jesus asked Peter face to face:

“Do you involve your whole person with me in the primacy of reciprocal relationship together in likeness of my involvement with you?” “Yes...yes, indeed...of course I do.” Then, “Feed my sheep my words...shepherd them with justice...grow their persons without distinctions so that their vested and privileged rights will be enacted to fulfill their inherent human need to be whole as family together” (Jn 21:15-17).

As the *right* Shepherd, “I feed and shepherd the flock with justice” (Eze 34:16) and “proclaim justice to *all persons, peoples and nations*” (Mt 12:18). And he expects nothing less and no substitutes from leaders for their ontology and function in his likeness.

For those in likeness of Jesus, their righteousness and justice must be integrated (just as “righteousness and peace kiss,” Ps 85:10) and be the defining basis for their function (“the foundation of your throne,” Ps 89:14). In other words, the whole of who, what and how they are must be in just-nection in order to “go before *them* and make *the intrusive relational path for their steps*” (Ps 85:13). The Word “loves righteousness and justice” (Ps 33:5) but only in the invariable terms of relational language, just as God's righteousness and justice are invariable and thus are nonnegotiable for those in likeness (cf. Jer 9:23-24).

Therefore, as Jesus' whole-ly followers, his shepherds cannot function as disablers of justice and his sentinels cannot function as enablers of injustice. They “must follow me *in the primacy of reciprocal relationship together in wholeness*” (Jn 21:19,22).

And Peter evidenced as a defining harbinger for church leadership that the underlying reality surrounding all of us is the pervasive dynamic of *distinction-making*, the inequality and inequity of which evolve in a comparative system to fragment just-nection for persons and their relationships, both in the church and in the world. If this bad news is not claimed as the hard reality, then it unavoidably, inescapably and inevitably is consequential for absorbing the bad news in one's own life and therefore reinforcing and sustaining the bad news in all human life.

Make no mistake then, "Woe to those who call *bad* good and good *bad*." Does this make it imperative to examine "...that the light within you is not darkness."

Chapter 5 The Calculus for Human Life and The Algorithm for the Human Condition

“I will make justice the measuring line and righteousness the plumb line.”

Isaiah 28:17, NIV

**“But let those who boast boast in this, that they understand and know me,
that I am the LORD; I act with steadfast love, justice and righteousness,
for in these *relational actions* I delight.”**

Jeremiah 9:24

The U.S. Supreme Court and lower courts have dismissed all lawsuits against voter fraud in the recent election, because none of them made a legitimate case to support the accusations of fraud. Making a case legitimate for the courts is presumed to be based on the law, a calculus which is not always a good assumption to apply even for the courts. Intervening variables such as politics must also be accounted for in determining the legitimacy of a case and its merits; intervening influences certainly have skewed the court’s calculus such that a calculus of variations and finite differences must also be included instead of making assumptions.

In the court of public opinion, making a case is less about its legitimacy and more about its appeal to political variations and cultural differences. For example, amplifying misinformation, disinformation and fake news is the growing influence of conspiracy theories, which have composed cases that directly speak to existing affective polarization and appeal to the stress of minimalist disorder. This growth is cultivated and nurtured by the pervasive memes that have captivated the internet to masquerade in the legitimizing framework of the status quo. Thus, for example, by exploiting efforts to protect children from the sexual abuse by the “enemy.” QAnon has garnered support from a wider demographic having good intentions. Motivating even unsuspecting Christians. The consequences of all this have yet to play out in what’s next in the coming days. Waiting to see, however, is not an option for political theology. The calculus of variations and differences existing around us must be included in order for Christians and churches to have their calculus for human life to be legitimate, and their algorithm for the human condition to be significant—with nothing less and no substitutes defining their identity and determining their function in their everyday way of life.

The Human Genome and Phenotype

All humans are conceived and born with a common genome unique to humankind, which on the one hand is invariable and thus an independent condition. Yet, on the other hand, intervening factors from both heredity and the environment result in differences from person to person. These emerging differences from birth define our variation in anatomical traits, which collectively is called a phenotype in biology. A phenotype also includes psychological traits, which result mainly from its environment while anatomical traits result mainly from its heredity—though environment and heredity factor into both traits. The key to the formation of a phenotype is the intervening factors that determine the variations from person to person as well as their collective differences in human life. Therefore, while the human genome is the invariable independent condition, a phenotype is always a dependent condition variably shaped by intervening factors.

Biology defines the human genome from outer in to quantify *who* the person is, and thereby defines a human phenotype for *what* and *how* persons are. Theology defines the human genome from inner out to distinguish who the person *is* in primary qualitative relational terms. Biology's genome is limited and thus incomplete, whereas theology's genome is whole. Political theology, however, must also account for any human phenotype that has evolved to distort the perception and understanding of the human genome. For both biology and theology, this requires accounting for the intervening factors that shape the formations of a phenotype.

In mathematics, the accuracy of any calculations depends on accounting for intervening variables (or dependent variables) by the calculus of variations and finite differences, which determine their effect on the dependent variable being calculated. The resulting dependent variable is inseparable from the independent variable in the equation. For biology, the outer-in human genome is the independent variable that becomes affected by a phenotype's variations and differences formed by intervening factors. For theology, to know and understand how the inner-out human genome of creation is affected in everyday human life is directly correlated to the calculus of the existing variations and differences of a phenotype composed by intervening factors. Political theology cannot assume the integrity of the whole human genome and thus presume its well-being without this calculus of its dependent phenotype. Like math, only far more consequential, this human equation also is the unavoidable challenge before us that must be solved in order to heal the integrity of the inner-out genome and to ensure its well-being for all human life regardless of phenotype.

Since the beginning, the inner-out human genome was created in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God to constitute the qualitative-relational integrity of human identity (or ontology) and function. What phenotype has evolved from the beginning to alter human identity and function in emerging variations and existing

differences? First and foremost, the qualitative integrity of human identity and function was mutated by the quantitative from outer in. When quantified from outer in, human identity and function are reduced to the quantitative distinctions of what they have and do, the differences of which form a phenotype that compromises the qualitative integrity of the inner-out human genome. How so?

Consider how recent crises have amplified “Black Lives Matter,” and also amplified subtle pushback from “All Lives Matter” as well as aggressive reaction from variants of “White Lives Matter.” On the one hand, certainly black lives and all lives matter. Yet, on the other hand, the significance of *matter* is based merely on a phenotype and doesn’t get to the underlying depth of the inner-out human genome. In other words, the identity and function of these protestors are based on their quantitative outer-in distinctions (their specific phenotype variant), all of which compromise the qualitative integrity of all persons in the human genome regardless of phenotype. What does this mean for race relations, and what is its implication for racism?

Democracies can declare “All men are created equal” and promote “government by the people for the people.” Yet, this common gendered language and apparent distinction exposes a phenotype that prevails over the human genome; and this subtle dynamic transposing what’s primary is typically not understood. What kind of phenotype does this language communicate to a young child, or to anyone older learning English as their second language? And what does this language tell citizens who are limited or denied direct participation in this government, or who don’t benefit personally from it?

In this prevailing phenotype, all lives don’t matter because all lives are not important, that is, as created in the whole human genome. Accordingly and consequentially, this phenotype doesn’t equalize all persons and also isn’t inclusive of all people. This inequality and inequity should be expected even in a democracy whenever a phenotype displaces the inner-out human genome and compromises its qualitative integrity. Along with gender, race is the most prominent distinction that composes a phenotype, the quantitative basis of which compromises the qualitative integrity of the human genome’s identity and function for all persons created in the whole of God’s qualitative image. Therefore, as long as a phenotype is the basis for human relations, race (along with gender) is the prominent distinction that skews relations in human life to a comparative order of inequality, because human identity and function based on what one has and does relegates some as better (as in whites) and others as less (as in blacks).

The inequality of this human order has evolved from the beginning, and its variants even in the name of democracy continue to reinforce and sustain the inequity of racism—even under the illusion of God’s human genome, which has been distorted by a phenotype. Racism is in the DNA of a phenotype and will not be resolved until that phenotype no longer prevails. Even if black lives matter in a phenotype, black lives will not be *important* without their qualitative significance constituted by the qualitative integrity of the inner-out human genome. As long as the outer-in distinctions of a

phenotype are defining for human identity and function—this includes capitalizing Black over black—discrimination of any kind will be reinforced and sustained in human life and the human order, including by and for Christians and churches.

The full resolution of discrimination in general and racism in particular has not unfolded from the efforts of social justice and for civil rights. Notwithstanding their good intentions, social justice centers on a phenotype of the human genome rather than the human genome itself. Consequently, social justice is focused on the outer-in distinctions, and thus by default social justice is skewed by the quantitative limits and constraints of those distinctions. This biased lens was evident, for example, in the development of the Civil Rights Movement, in which its leaders exercised gender bias and discrimination to favor men over women. The limits as well as constraints of social justice and civil rights remain until their calculus for human life shifts in the human equation from the variable phenotype (formed as a dependent variable) to the invariable human genome (established as the independent variable). And their algorithm for this human condition will not bring full resolution until the following is accomplished: The intervening variables affecting the qualitative-relational integrity of the human genome by the dependent phenotype shaped by those intervening variables are neutralized or eradicated, so that resolutions will be completed in the wholeness of the inner-out human genome's identity and function for all persons regardless of phenotype. Until then, this human condition keeps recycling, as we've witnessed for too many years now, whether in racism, sexism or xenophobia.

Therefore, the qualitative integrity of the human genome is also compromised whenever its integral relational integrity is fragmented by a mutated phenotype that reduces the primacy of relationships created to be equalized and intimate together in the relational likeness of the Trinity. From the beginning, human relationships were reduced from the relational integrity "not to be apart from the whole" (Gen 2:18), which fragmented their relationships to a secondary function for the sake of making primary outer-in identity and function. The evolving occupation and preoccupation with the secondary of life to now be primary in human identity and function—contrary to and in conflict with the primary identity and function of the whole human genome—mutated relationships to a condition of *relational distance*, which reduced relationships to a mere association and fragmented them in variants of community, marriages and families, even in church fellowships. Obviously, technology has intervened to amplify relational distance in our human relational condition. What other intervening influences can you identify? Have politics, and its identity politics and partisan function defined Christians' identity and determined their function in the strain of affective polarization and the stress of minimalist disorder?

More significant, however, is all the quantitative variants evolving from the beginning that have compromised the integral qualitative-relational integrity of human identity and function constituted by the invariable human genome. Starting with the

human desire to progress, and perhaps to survive as the fittest and to be the greatest, human persons and their relationships in everyday life have been susceptible to the subtle and seductive influence of reductionism's counter-relational workings, which continues to shape our phenotype always by compromising the qualitative-relational integrity of the human genome—an immeasurable cost to pay for what's only secondary. The ongoing consequence on our identity and function, personally and collectively, continues to be incalculable, eluding the prevailing calculus for human life and rendering inconsequential the pervasive algorithm for this human relational condition. This puts the created human genome in a fog, making it indistinguishable from a phenotype that envelops our identity and function, our relationships and their human order in the shroud of its variants.

So, is there any place for a phenotype to have legitimacy? Yes, when a phenotype reinforces and sustains the qualitative-relational integrity of the human created-invariable-whole genome rather than compromises it; and when a phenotype reinforces and sustains the genome's human identity and function rather than fragments or displaces their qualitative image and relational likeness. Nothing less and no substitutes warrant the use of a phenotype, and anything less and any substitutes require a phenotype to be changed or at least neutralized. This involves addressing the intervening variables from culture and politics just as the Word engaged these contexts with *the integrated three-fold approaches to culture and politics* (notably in the conflict and neutralizing approaches)—with nothing less than the whole theological anthropology defining our identity and determining our function, and with no substitutes for the strong view of sin encompassing reductionism.

A Fragmentary Majority or the Whole Minority

Since its historic composition, “We the people” has been a rallying call for democracy and the shouting cry to be free. As a proclamation of “We the people,” however, any such freedom should not be confused with an individual(s) being free to do whatever they want. This has led to a recent movement to restore the *us* in U.S. For the sake of the majority, there are limits and also constraints on individual(s) freedom. At the same time, “We the people” is not free to define its composition in whatever way desired, that is, if it in fact truly represents all the people distinguished by *we*. Yet, historically and currently in polarizing times, “We” has not been inclusive of “the people” constituted by the inner-out human genome but limited to a phenotype; this has compromised the qualitative-relational integrity of the genome's identity and function for all people. Since the outer-in identity and function of some people don't measure up to a prevailing phenotype, then they are explicitly or implicitly excluded from the functional significance of “We the people.” In other words, the common dynamic of inclusion always includes some form of exclusion.

Christians and churches need to reckon with “We the people,” both in public life and in church life. The issue between the created human genome and a phenotype has been an ongoing tension and conflict in human life that needs to be recalculated in our fragmentary human condition currently amplified by affective polarization. God has dealt with this throughout the course of human life, beginning at a key point in humanity. Underlying its narrative details (Gen 11:1-9), humanity appeared to come together in Babylonia, and “We the people” resolved to construct their identity above all of human life, by which they would function as one people and not be fragmented. The problem with their good intentions, however, was that “we the people” was based on a phenotype of outer-in identity and function that constructed their collective life subtly contrary to and in conflict with the inner-out human genome of God’s creation. God would not allow this illusion of human unity evolving from the counter-relational work of reductionism masquerading in self-autonomy and self-determination. Thus, God simply relegated them back to the truth of the hard reality facing them: They were just a fragmentary majority lacking wholeness in their way of life and human order.

In the new normal of polarization, a pivotal cultural-political issue facing all Christians is the democratic notion that the majority rules. In such democratic contexts (including in churches), this notion has never insured the same benefits for all those composing the majority and certainly not for those outside the majority (cf. Acts 6:1, noted earlier). The hard reality is that democracy does not serve all the people but only a fragment of the majority, or mainly the dominant segment of the majority. This keeps exposing the prevailing phenotype displacing God’s human genome. Why God doesn’t intervene as demonstrated in Babylonia is an open question, but God holds us accountable for reinforcing and sustaining a fragmentary majority lacking wholeness in our public and church way of life and human order. Whether Christians care about or are even aware of those not included because of being excluded by design of a phenotype is a pressing question, which the Word confronts us with “Where are you?” and “What are you doing here?” Even by default, *where* and *what* are calculated by the human genome and not a phenotype, thus the algorithm for this human relational condition is up to us to be responsible for the well-being of those left out, as well as accountable for the ongoing care of those lacking. We cannot simply delegate this algorithm to a democratic system to replicate, nor even assume that this is merely a quantitative outer-in reality that can depend on measures using an artificial intelligence (AI) algorithm to duplicate. This is a heart matter for the whole person from inner out to respond to on the basis of their genome, and not simply a mind matter that a phenotype can define.

Human inequality and inequity are at the heart of a fragmentary majority, whose human relational condition defines the identity and determines the function of those composing this majority. Are Christians and churches part of this composition? Absolutely. Either by direct participation or by default, collectively we have been enablers or complicitors of this common majority that is both fragmentary in its way of

life and fragmenting of its human order. The strain of affective polarization and the stress of minimalist disorder make status-ing in quo easier for us, with the status quo app a convenient approach to maintaining involvement in or association with the common majority. “What are you doing here?” makes evident the shortcomings in our calculus for human life, which reflects not accounting for the intervening cultural-political factors that have compromised the independent human genome by a dependent phenotype, and thus has flipped around the human equation with skewed and biased calculations for promoting human life and addressing the human relational condition. And Christians and churches have been in the mix of the majority that reinforces and sustains this human equation fragmenting human life and its human order. The hard reality is that a fragmentary majority merely reflects the human relational condition.

Christians and churches will continue to be a part of this common fragmentary majority until we willfully disengage from it by becoming members of the whole minority. The existential bad of a fragmentary majority is the absence of just-nection in its human order, which reflects the way of life intrinsic to a prevailing phenotype that defines the majority’s identity and determines its function, whereby those who are different are subjected to inequality and inequity. There may be some elements of immature justice (as in social justice) existing in its human order, but this is insufficient for the mature justice required to establish the *right* order of relationships together in the created human genome for persons to have the *right* relational connection in God’s likeness—rights that social justice and civil rights don’t establish. Only this *right* of mature justice is integral for the just-nection that distinguishes the whole minority of those restored to the qualitative-relational wholeness of God’s human genome.

The Word is clear about the calculus needed to distinguish the whole minority from a fragmentary majority. First of all, this minority is based on a solid rock foundation (as in Mt 7:24-25) with the Word as “the cornerstone” (Isa 28:16; Eph 2:19-20). This foundation is not a static condition with the Word as the cornerstone in name only (cf. Mt 7:21-23). In contrast this foundation revolves on the Word’s relational imperative (Mt 7:24) that forms the integral relational context and process essential for this minority to be whole. This integral condition is an uncommon condition from what is common to a fragmentary majority, as well as a “stumbling stone” for a common majority (Isa 8:14; Rom 9:32). How does this become a stumbling stone? As a former activist for a fragmentary majority—who openly disabled justice and enabled injustice to oppress the whole minority—Paul exposed the defining dynamic for the majority’s identity and function based on the quantity of what they do and have (Rom 9:32). The resulting outer-in distinctions made evident the underlying comparative system pervading a fragmentary majority that reflected, reinforced and sustained the human inequality and inequity encompassing the human relational condition. The cornerstone of the qualitative-

relational Word will not only “make people stumble” but will also “make them fall” (9:33). In other words, people (including Christians) stumble and fall with a reduced theological anthropology and a weak view of sin lacking reductionism.

In this relational context and process, the Word made definitive the calculus necessary to distinguish this whole minority as *uncommon* from the prevailing common: “I will make *mature* justice the measuring line and righteousness the plumb line” (Isa 28:17, NIV), because “righteousness and justice are the foundation of your *kingdom, its Rule of Law and human order*” (Ps 89:14). Integral to mature justice is righteousness—*sedaqah*, a legal term used to distinguish relationships engaged by the whole of who, what and how a person *is*, and thereby can be counted on by others in the relationship to be that whole person from inner out. The calculus for righteousness, therefore, precludes being defined by the outer-in differences of a phenotype, which then creates opportunities to build on the solid basis of the just-nection necessary for human equality and equity.

This uncommon relational context and process of the whole minority, however, cannot be presumed and must be ongoingly reinforced and sustained by direct engagement in the Word’s integrated three-fold approaches to the culture and politics of a fragmentary majority. Thus, using the qualitative-relational compass is essential to navigate this polarized context. For example, how does the mindset of NIMBY reflect a fragmentary majority? And how do Christians reflect, reinforce and sustain this mindset (including like-mindedness) as enablers and complicitors to allow such thinking to play out? Consequently, is the like-mindedness practiced among Christians and churches any different than NIMBY?

Given the polarization saturating our minds and hearts, how well are Christians and churches following the Word’s calculus for his whole minority? The cultural and political realities today are challenging to say the least. More so, they confront us with the ongoing pivotal decision either to be absorbed into these realities or to be distinguished from them. For sure, the former decision involves status-ing in quo of a fragmentary majority, while the latter involves taking on an identity and function that distinctly contrasts to the majority’s. Furthermore, the latter involves the inner-out uncommon that unavoidably conflicts with the outer-in common, which cannot be presumed possible to integrate and at times even to coexist. The psalmist further illuminates this relational context and process for the uncommon whole minority: “O LORD, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell in your holy hill?” (Ps 15:1)—that is to say, who may be involved in your uncommon presence and belong to your uncommon family?—“Those who walk blamelessly [*tamiym*] and *practice* what is righteous” (*sedeq*, v.2). *Tamiym* is to be whole in one’s person distinguished by *sedaqah*’s inner-out of who, what and how the person *is* and thereby can be counted on to be that person in relationships together, because “they *communicate in relationships this truth from their heart*”—which doesn’t maintain relational distance, for example, with misinformation or in other ways commonly creating relational distance. Examine those relational contexts

elaborated on by the psalmist that reinforce and sustain relational distance, all of which fragment persons and relationships in human inequality and inequity (15:3-5).

The subtle counterpart to the psalmist's examples is the like-mindedness prevailing among Christians and churches that creates variants of relational distance—a relational condition which affective polarization easily turns into a comparative competition that often renders the other as the enemy. But even as the enemy, the Word's Rule of Law to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Mt 5:44) cannot be engaged with relational distance. As a substitute, Christians shape their rule of law to support a compromise to the qualitative-relational integrity of the uncommon inner-out human genome (e.g. Mt 5:21-43). What they may call righteousness to justify their way of life, in the truth of the Word actually disqualifies them from being involved with the whole of God's uncommon presence and belonging to the Word's uncommon family (Mt 5:20).

Because those belonging to the whole minority navigate a narrow difficult road with the qualitative-relational compass intrinsic to the Word's irreducible and nonnegotiable Rule of Law, they don't have the flexible liberty assumed by those of a fragmentary majority on a wider easier byway (cf. Isa 56:11; Jer 18:15). Once Christians take a byway and appeal to that liberty in one way or another—for example, in freedom of speech to voice their opposition or with freedom of religion to have in-person worship—they assume their place in a fragmentary majority at the expense of being connected to the Word's whole minority. The subtlety of engaging a majority's process creates fog for Christians and churches to understand the underlying flaw or deficiency of democracy, which is its fostering of the *individual* with freedom (contrary to 1 Cor 10:23-24; Rom 15:1-2; Gal 5:13; 1 Pet 2:16).

In and of itself, focus on the individual is not bad or wrong; however, promoting the individual is never done in a vacuum and always done in direct context with others. Thus, priority given to the individual is always accomplished by giving others a lower priority. Despite any good intentions, therefore, the individual's gain always comes at the expense of those others. In other words, democratic individualism is simply an evolved variant of *self-ism*, whose self-consciousness shapes the collective conscience of a democracy and its fragmentary majority; and its effects and affects reverberate through the human order to reinforce and sustain inequality and inequity. In God's human order, the individual person's well-being is always contingent of the well-being of the human family, locally and at large.

In a fragmentary majority, common political views gain basis in the worldview of their proponents, which is rarely scrutinized with significance by the majority. In this context, if Christians don't articulate the uncommon worldview for their political views (as in Isa 9:6-7), then they are absorbed by and into a majority's political views such that they now reinforce and sustain those views as enablers or complicitors. Even more

consequential, they become enablers of injustice and disablers of justice, whether willfully or by default. In the existential reality of this human relational condition, only the just-nection based on the Word's calculus of mature justice and whole righteousness can restore them to belong from inner out to his uncommon minority family in whole relationship together.

It's tempting for Christians and churches to turn to a fragmentary majority for the algorithm to address the human relational condition. Even if we may believe they resolve our own relational condition among ourselves, yet such algorithms would be incompatible to apply to the human relational condition because they would be insufficient to get to the depth and breadth of humanity's condition. This is the majority's bias that Christians and churches have absorbed into their daily lens to form myopia. Without getting to the heart of the human problem, its relational condition will merely recycle in variants and thereby keep repeating, as evident in human history and church history. This incompatibility is apparent to the *integrated citizens* of the Word's kingdom, whose primary identity and function situated in the surrounding political-cultural context of a fragmentary majority are always defined and determined by their whole minority (cf. Jn 17:14-18). Such algorithms would commonly not seem incompatible for Christians and churches, who have crafted their citizenship in a fragmentary majority either as dual citizens with the convenient separation of church and state, or as hybrid citizens under the assumption of church-state compatibility—perhaps with the state being an extension of the kingdom of God. Integrated citizens are guided by the qualitative-relational compass from the Word's Rule of Law, whereas dual and hybrid citizens rely on variant rules of law for guidance that widens the way for variable application.

The Rule of Law or Rules of Law

In mathematics, probability is the rule by which calculus determines its calculations; the more probable the calculus is the better its calculations. In physical science, probability continues to be the rule in the conclusions made. In human life, however, probability is only theoretical and has no existential certainty; thus, it has no valid basis of certainty to be the rule for human life—in spite of any reliability that probability may provide to make the calculus for human life. From the beginning, the human relational condition doesn't exist with probability, which was the false assumption underlying the construction of the Tower of Babel. The human relational condition evolves with variants of life's similarities, the mutations of which have been improbable and even illogical to prevailing human thinking. So, then, what should be the rule for human life.

The improbability of human life due to its human relational condition was certainly not lost or forgotten by the God of creation, whose human genome has been subjected ongoingly to a phenotype. Therefore, the Word made no assumptions of probability when forming the covenant relationship together of love but provided the irreducible and nonnegotiable Rule of Law essential (1) for the calculus for human life together and (2) for the algorithm for the human relational condition. Throughout the history of God's people, however, this improbability of human life has been lost or forgotten; thus, the influence of the human relational condition has been instrumental in the shaping of variant rules of law that effectively compromise the Word's Rule of Law. These variants have been composed even with good intentions and under the assumption of God's ordination. This is currently where many Christians and churches are found and need to be relocated in the Word's Rule of Law by its qualitative-relational compass.

In the existential bad surrounding us today, our political views could reflect reasoned thought, but such views often lack logical thinking because of the bias of partisan and identity politics. This bias is amplified by affective polarization, which readily rotates the norm of reason to *rationalization*. Political philosophy needs to be both reasoned and logical, on the one hand, yet also have the qualitative-relational understanding that reflects the human order of God's creation. This understanding is hard to gain in the context of a fragmentary majority that formulates its rule of law with the uncertainty of probability. Gaining this understanding unfolds from the irreplaceable requisite to learn the qualitative-relational depth of the Word's Rule of Law (Ps 119:27,34,73,144,169); this integral understanding also forms the qualitative-relational basis for teaching and learning in Christian education at all levels, from the church to the academy (119:99-100).

In today's politically and culturally polarizing conditions, Christians and churches have been doing a balancing act using the U.S. Constitution's rule of law to define their rights in human life. These rights, however, are limited to the *permissible rights* of a fragmentary majority that are also constrained by a phenotype. Because the ruling nexus inscribed in the Word's Rule of Law is disconnected in their balancing act, the *vested rights* of God's human genome and the *privileged rights* of the Word's whole minority are precluded, thus creating illusions about *where* they are and *what* they are doing here. Their balancing act makes evident the truth and norm gymnastics employed, in order to get their end goal accomplished or merely to have their desires fulfilled. This norm of rationalization knowingly or inadvertently justifies variants of truth to balance the bad with the good, whereby the bad news of the whole gospel is diminished always with the unintended result of its good news minimalized. In other words, turning to a variant rule of law involves them in (1) the rationalization that their end justifies the use of any means, or simply becomes a convenient end in itself—either of which reinforces and sustains their primary citizenship in a fragmentary majority—that (2) both reduces and

renegotiates the Word's Rule of Law primary for the way of life of the identity and function in the Word's whole minority.

On just the basis of the qualitative-relational Word, not quantified in referential terms, political theology counters truth and norm gymnastics directly. In so doing without apology but with love, it exposes this *common-izing* process that ongoingly works to diminish, minimalize and reconstitute the *uncommon* of those following the Word's narrow difficult Way of whole Life based on the certainty of Truth constituting his Rule of Law. Until this integral rule prevails for Christians and churches, our calculus for human life will continue to be incomplete and our algorithm for the human relational condition will remain insufficient.

The Rule or the Exception

Most of the rules in human life come with an exception. That is, whenever or wherever the rules may apply, there will always be exceptions made in their application. At the point where exceptions are attached to rules of life, this opens to door to probability defining the calculus for human life and determining algorithms for the human relational condition. This certainly renders uncertain the application and outcome of the rules for existential life, with the rights from those rules becoming only relative. Current rules of law are enveloped in this fog as exceptions are a fact of life for the status quo of a fragmentary majority. Exceptions while *status-ing* quo include making concessions or compromise, which politicize the rule of law mainly with the balancing act of the bad. This exceptionalist mindset is not overlooked by the Word, whose relational involvement is palpable. This is illustrated by a "Non Sequitur" comic strip with the subtitle of "Moses' Question and Answer Period": Standing before the majority with the Ten Commandments tablets in his hands, Moses says "My mother always said there's no such thing as a stupid question. So I'll go ask and get back to you on that." He then proceeds up the mountain to ask God, and he returns with the tablets after being zapped to say, "OK...so my mother was wrong, and no, they're not like menu options."¹

The Word's Rule of Law has consistently been subjected to exceptions in one form or another; in fact, the embodied Word was frequently accused of making such exceptions (e.g. Mk 2:16,18,24; 3:2). Those presumably following the Word have also made exceptions with the assumption of being justified. However, the Word clearly clarified and corrected exceptions made to his Rule of Law in order to unequivocally distinguish (1) the plumb line of righteousness for the calculus for human life to be complete as constituted in the Word's whole minority, and (2) the measuring line of justice for the algorithm for the human relational condition to be sufficient to make whole the fragmentation of persons and relationships from reductionism.

¹ By Wiley, *Los Angeles Times*, January 10, 2021.

Who, what and how we are emerge from and unfold with the state of our righteousness. Righteousness is not an attribute, which is how Christians usually think of it. Rather righteousness is the constituting root that bears the fruit of our identity (ontology) and function, determining the reality of who, what and how our person is in everyday life—the ontology and function in likeness to the God of righteousness. Thus, righteousness is integral for the integrity of our person and our involvement in relationships—just as it is for God’s presence and involvement—which produce the underlying basis for mature justice and its outcome of uncommon peace. Accordingly, the state of our righteousness is crucial, and any illusion about its roots or its fruit is deeply consequential for the nature and extent of justice and peace we can engage in. This is the basis for the psalmist declaring for the LORD that “righteousness composes the wholeness of his presence and involvement” because “righteousness and peace kiss” (Ps 85:10,13) and “righteousness and justice are the foundation for your authority and rule of law” (Ps 89:14, cf. Isa 11:3-5).

Righteousness, however, has been one of the key terms whose understanding has eluded much theology and practice, with direct consequences for peace and justice. The central either-or disjunction around which Jesus’ manifesto for his followers revolves is this:

“Unless your righteousness exceeds [goes beyond to be full] the so-called righteousness of the reductionists, you will never be whole in God’s kingdom, be right with God’s authority and just by his rule of law” (Mt 5:20).

The reductionists (segments of Judaism) simply constructed a *new normal* for righteousness, which reduced the wholeness of God’s authority and fragmented the justice of God’s Rule of Law. This “new” normal righteousness emerged from a reduced theological anthropology that quantified persons to the outer in by fragmenting the law to simplified identity markers, by which they quantified their practice in secondary matters for their self-determined function in what amounted to self-justification (sound familiar?). The qualitative-relational terms for the primacy of covenant relationship together in wholeness (as in Gen 17:1; Ps 119:1) no longer were the basis for righteousness as defined by God (as in Gen 15:6; Rom 4:1-3). Notable in this reconstruction of righteousness to the “new” normal were the administrators of God’s law (priests, Levites), who lived in and promoted their selective bias shaping the rule of law in human terms for peace and justice—all contrary to and in conflict with Levi (Mal 2:5-9). YHWH dispelled their illusion and exposed their delusion, subsequently replacing them with the High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek (king of Peace) to constitute the true righteousness of the new covenant relationship together (Isa 11:3-5; Heb 6:19-20).

Yet, a new normal for the identity and function of who, what and how we are subtly prevails today—quantified by the internet and amplified by social media—and perhaps is more embedded with our illusions and entrenched in our delusions of peace and justice. Along with its adaptation by technology, this so-called new normal evolves in one way or another by the selective bias (1) expressed in reverence of status and prestige, (2) exercised with idolization of power and influence, and (3) demonstrated by the glorification of wealth and resources. In all their forms at all levels of human life, this composition of an assumed new normal has reflected, reinforced and sustained our human relational condition and has interfered with its redemptive change—shortchanging or retarding the basic outcome of the Word’s whole gospel.

Illusions and delusions from the new normal have seduced Christians and preoccupied us with the secondary over the primary in our everyday priorities (as the Word outlines, Mt 6:19-32). But, the Word counters any new normal for righteousness, peace and justice with “seek first and foremost his kingdom and his righteousness” (Mt 6:33). That is, not to “strive” (as in NRSV) for an attribute called righteousness but “pursue” (*zeteo*) the whole presence and involvement of who, what and how God is and can be counted on to function in relationship together. If God’s integrity is not accountable in relationship, what significance does “his righteousness” warrant to pursue? Likewise, in this primacy of reciprocal relationship composed by God’s authority and Rule of Law, the who, what and how we are can also function in likeness to God’s righteousness; and in this mutual accountability, the relational outcome will include the secondary necessary for wholeness of life in its created justice. Those who pursue his righteousness “will be filled with satisfaction” (*chortazo*, Mt 5:6)—not necessarily happy in their outer-in secondary matters but satisfied with the whole integrity of their person from inner out, enacted integrally in the primacy of relationship.

This is the only righteousness that distinguishes the whole ontology and function of who, what and how we are as his followers—those who belong relationally (not referential members) in his family and thus “I know you.” Furthermore, contrary to common priests of the new normal, from this High Priest also emerges “a holy [uncommon] priesthood” to constitute the whole identity of all of us in his likeness to function as “a royal priesthood” (1 Pet 2:5,9) in order to be *right* as his whole-ly sentinels of human life. This is the uncommon righteous priesthood of followers who administer justice only by the nonnegotiable relational terms of the Word’s Rule of Law and thereby who make the irreducible peace of wholeness.

The rights of human persons, being and life emerge from a deeper layer of justice; and this layer reveals some authority granting rights by using its set of laws, precepts, stipulations or commands. Such authority and its laws have operated with relativism in human life, composing a fragmentary basis influenced and shaped by the human condition. Stated simply: While any rule of law may prevent anarchy, it does not guarantee function *with* justice and thus *for* justice. The basis on which rights are based

commonly signifies further fragments of justice at best that are insufficient for how to see and think about rights and justice. The most common and encompassing fragment is **social justice**, which is an insufficient lens and inadequate mindset yet what prevails for justice. Social justice is a generic term that neither is whole nor unifies all aspects of justice. Moreover, the sum of all these fragments still doesn't add up to the essential whole of justice necessary for human life in order to get *right* the human relational condition of the human order. The authority of the embodied Word, however, clarified and corrected this often subtle relativity from reductionism in order to get *right* the roots of justice at the heart of human life—which we cannot ignore or avoid to get *right* our own theology and practice.

Jesus summarized this clarification and correction in his Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7). For now, we will limit our discussion focused on the right of free speech. In his focus on God's Rule of Law, he brings out the rights of justice and what is essential for its practice. He first clarifies the law against murder and this blatant abuse of human persons. Encompassed in this physical abuse, however, is also verbal abuse transmitted by speech, which discriminates against the integrity of others and/or abuses their dignity (Mt 5:21-22). So, for example, abortion kills persons but words do also. Does this apply to Christians voicing their opinions today? In the created justice of God's authority and under its Rule of Law, persons are free to speak but do not have the right of speech that discriminates and abuses, which includes microaggression and passive-aggressiveness. Furthermore, Jesus also made unequivocal that persons who presume to have this right are accountable for overstating the law and will be prosecuted for violating God's Rule of Law. The freedom of speech, and related freedom of religion, is always qualified by the roots of justice that cannot be relativized, or else the rule of law undergoes variable practice as witnessed in polarized conditions today.

As a further example of the relativism of the rule of law and its related rights, Jesus turns to the law of sexual misconduct (Mt 5:27-30). Relative interpretations of this law have opened the door either to ambiguity about misconduct or to complicity of such misconduct. Yet, what Jesus clarified is that few could be guiltless of sexual misconduct. Adultery, for example, is conducted both in the physical act and merely as a desire conducted in the mind, and both are consequential of sexual misconduct. This includes reducing persons to physical objects in our mind, which we are free to conduct but no one has the right to this misconduct or is guiltless in it. Critically then, the Word grounds the Rule of Law in the complete view of sin, which an incomplete (weak in understanding and application) view of sin allows for variable practice. Thus, if the Rule of Law were enforced on all those guilty of the true depth of sexual misconduct, who would remain without the burden of injustice (cf. Jn 8:3-7)? The roots of justice expose the relativity of those implicit in or complicit with any form of injustice.

With the irreducible and nonnegotiable authority of God, Jesus clarified and corrected any relative rule of law with the invariable Rule of God's Law. At the heart of God's authority is the wholeness of God, by which all human persons are constituted irreducibly from inner out and their relationships are composed in nonnegotiable primacy. Whole persons from inner out are complex subjects who cannot be reduced to simple objects from outer in. Objects simply function as those *subject to* and re-acting in their situations and circumstances, which reduce *who* is present and fragments *what* is involved in relationships—contrary to their inherent wholeness. Accordingly, the Word establishes this whole theological anthropology at the root of justice and makes it essential for the Rule of Law to unfold *right*.

Therefore, the wholeness of persons is central to the invariable Rule of God's Law; and this wholeness must not be compromised, for example, by oaths that redefine a person's integrity from inner out to outer in (Mt 5:33-37). The primacy of relationships in wholeness is at the root of justice, thus must not be engaged relative to situations and circumstances by giving them priority, or justice is reduced and the rule of law is relativized to a fragmentary practice of relationships (5:38-44). Social justice falls into this relativism because it is not composed by the roots of justice. The unavoidable consequence for all this relativism is to enable injustice and disable justice—the inescapable condition of reductionism at the fragmentary heart of the human relational condition.

In contrast and conflict with reductionism and its pervasive yet subtle relativism, the relational purpose and outcome of the Word's definitive terms for justice are “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (5:48). That is, be complete, whole (*teleios*) in your persons and relationships, because anything less and any substitutes for justice and the Rule of Law fragment your person and relationships—a condition lacking justice and living in injustice. Accordingly, by his relational purpose and outcome the authority of the Word continues to integrate all rights into God's Rule of Law, whereby they are rooted in the whole relational context and process of justice as created by its whole and uncommon Source.

In the defining “therefore” then:

The Word clarified and corrected that the transition to justice is *whole*, and only the wholeness of persons and relationships constitute the roots of justice and its invariable outcome for everyday life in uncommon peace.

The Surface of the Law or the Heart of the Law

Christians cannot presume to know the Word's Law just because they are familiar with the Ten Commandments and how Jesus summarized them into two (Mt 22:37-40).

Knowing this information doesn't mean we understand the depth of the Word's Rule of Law for our way of life and its human order (cf. Dt 8:1-5). Since God created all persons in the Trinity's qualitative image and relational likeness, in order to go beneath the surface to the heart of God's Law, the psalmist appeals for "understanding that I may learn your *relational terms for life together*" (Ps 119:73). He made no assumptions about "whose way is blameless [*tamiym*, whole] who walk in the *relational terms* of the LORD" (119:1). Like the psalmist, we need to go from the appearance and mere engagement of God's Law to the depth of relational involvement of the Word's Rule of Law; and this points us directly to the plumb line of righteousness (Ps 119:7,137,144).

True righteousness in likeness to the Trinity's is indispensable for completing the wholeness of peace and having *right* the justice of the invariable rule of law from God's authority. We can neither replace this righteousness with a variably new normal nor substitute for it with any form of self-determination, and then expect to discern any illusions of peace and justice. Righteousness is essential to distinguish the integrity of the whole who, what and how we are, by which others can count on to be whole from inner out and thus who will be *right* and bring wholeness to relationships. Without righteousness in his likeness this relational process doesn't emerge and its relational outcome doesn't unfold—only illusions and delusions of them, which Jesus dispels and exposes for the redemptive change necessary to be transformed from these ontological simulations.

Ongoingly, he challenges his followers to understand their roots from their theological anthropology and to know the basis for their everyday practice, so that they can be distinguished whole from any subtle new normal of reductionism. He faces his sentinels with this unavoidable reality:

The transition to justice is complete when it is made whole by the Subject's salvation—the salvation composed just in relational terms for subjects in likeness to live *right* in the primacy of reciprocal relationship together in wholeness.

This is the critical junction at which theological anthropology and sin as reductionism converge. That is, our theological anthropology should be at disjunction with reductionism, but having the *right* theological anthropology depends on our view of sin. How we view sin defines what salvation encompasses, whereby our persons and relationships are determined. A truncated salvation does not save us *from* the depth of sin composed by its roots of reductionism, consequently this limited salvation does not make *right* our persons and relationships by saving us *to* wholeness. This consequence impacts the peace and justice of our everyday life, and it likely promotes a variably new normal for how we see and think about them.

Therefore, we are faced with this **unavoidable reality**: Justice is never *whole* without the full salvation that conjointly saves us *from* reductionism and saves us *to* wholeness. This reality interfaces with this **inescapable reality**: The roots of justice definitively emerge in creation, but because of the invasion of reductionism in human life (e.g. by intervening variables) to construct its human condition, justice unfolds only with this full salvation.

The irreplaceable key that unlocks the transition from reductionism to justice is Jesus' gospel of peace. The gospel's wholeness was enacted by his righteousness (they kiss) in order to constitute our righteousness in likeness to his. However, a new normal has pervaded theology and practice with an incomplete Christology and a truncated soteriology—notably composed by an interpretive lens of Scripture in referential language and terms (demonstrated by most evangelicals, as in Jn 5:39). Not surprisingly, this has left many persons in churches without the full satisfaction of true righteousness (the 4th beatitude, Mt 5:6), and thus without its integrally connected peace in a condition lacking justice.

For those whose righteousness is in his likeness, their full satisfaction in the primary frees them from any self-concern (or self-autonomy) about the secondary or from the need to secure some benefit from their achievements (or self-determination). This freedom opens up opportunities for more vulnerable relational involvement, for example, to extend compassion to others in relational terms and not merely to do things for others (the 5th beatitude for identity formation, 5:7). Most important, this freedom clears the person's heart from the distraction of the secondary in order for the vulnerability of one's full involvement to be in the primary of relationship together, foremost with God; these vulnerable persons are the blessed (fully satisfied) who "will see God" face to face and thereby intimately know each other (the 6th beatitude, 5:8). It is from the primacy of intimate relationship together that persons are transformed into the new creation of God's family, from which emerges the wholeness of persons and relationships—the relational outcome from the gospel of peace. Those claiming this wholeness are the persons completing the transition to justice—whose whole ontology and function distinguish them to be "the peacemakers of wholeness, for they will be *known* as the daughters and sons of God" (the 7th beatitude, 5:9). This is the *right* and essential outcome of the whole identity of Jesus' uncommon followers.

Therefore, as Jesus made conclusive in his paradigm for all his followers:

- The measure of righteousness we use will be the extent of peace we get.
- The measure of peace we use will be the extent of justice we get.
- The measure of justice we use will be the extent of wholeness we get in our persons and relationships.

The transition to justice is incomplete without wholeness; and peace is inseparable from righteousness. Without the integrity of righteousness and its full satisfaction in his likeness, true righteousness cannot be distinguished from any assumed new normal. Accordingly, peace will not emerge and justice will not unfold. Thus, the plumb line of righteousness and measuring line of justice are constituted by the integral qualitative-relational terms of the Word's Rule of Law. When this is relativized or exceptions are made in their application, then a variant rule of law is composed that makes incomplete the calculus for human life and renders inadequate the algorithm for the human relational condition.

In contrast to and in conflict with what is the common of human life and its human order, human life in the qualitative image and relational likeness of its Creator converges with its qualitative-relational human order only when they are integrated from inner out, the uncommon heart of which constitutes the qualitative-relational terms for relationship together to be whole.

Calculating the Common from the Uncommon

Compromising the Word's Rule of Law by conflating it with a variant rule of law has overtly and covertly evolved from the beginning under the assumption of "knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:5); this conflated rule of law has unfolded in simulations and illusions presumed to be good. This faulty assumption has adapted subtly into the prevailing thinking and pervasive perception of **the common good**. Most Christians and churches embrace the conventional wisdom and collective conscience of the common good. Yet, this directly involves a lacking measurement of the existential bad of the good news, and with likely good intentions includes balancing the bad with the good. Thus, our calculus for human life and algorithm for the human relational condition are misled by incomplete knowledge and misguided by insufficient understanding (contrary to Jer 9:24), which prevails in the Christian gospel used today and pervades the church's mission.

What has adapted into the common good revolves on two basic issues critical to understanding the common good: (1) the state of what is called 'common', and (2) the composition of what is considered 'good'. Any use of the term 'the common good' makes assumptions about these basic issues, and its application appears positive under the further assumption of having the appropriate outcome for all persons and peoples on the earth. These assumptions are rarely challenged, if at all,² but they are consequential

² Two examples by Christians, who center on the common good but don't address assumptions about it, are: Jim Wallis, *The (Un)Common Good: How the Gospel Brings Hope to a World Divided* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2014), and Miroslav Volf and Ryan McAnnally-Linz, *Public Faith in Action: How to Think Carefully, Engage Wisely, and Vote with Integrity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016).

for Christians in their claim to the good news of the gospel and in their related work for the common good.

The inaugural human persons were constituted in creation justice under the authority of God's Rule of Law for its human order in wholeness. But, when they "saw that *the alternative* was good" to fulfill their common needs, desires and concerns, they chose the alternative to creation justice in wholeness; they made this choice subtly under the assumption that they would also "know good and evil like God" and thereby have the wisdom to act for their common good (Gen 3:5-6). These consequences followed:

1. What emerged from this alternative constructed the prevailing human condition constituting the human context, known as *the common*. Most important, the state of this common exists in reductionism, that is, in a state of reduced ontology and function in all its diversity and variations at all levels of human life—a state in subtle contrast, variable contradiction or conflict with creation justice.
2. What evolved from this alternative also transposed the composition of *good* to be compatible with the common, thereby redefining 'good' to be inclusive of reduced ontology and function in their variations and diversity making up the human context. In much postmodern thinking, this "good" would be desirable because it is more inclusive of the human context to represent the common good. This redefining of good involved both the common-ization of "good" and the renegotiation of "evil" (making it variable and relative), which signified the misleading promise made in the primordial garden about "knowing good and evil like God." Consequently, this composition of good encompassed the human condition and thus fell into ambiguous distinction with evil—the "good and evil" of the alternative to creation justice that composes the existential bad in human life.

These consequences have evolved subtly into the prevailing notion of the common good; and when its assumptions are not challenged, the common good adapts even more subtly to pervade Christian theology and practice with its common-ized and relativized shaping. As an extension from the primordial garden, this existing condition among us has fallen into the virtual realm composing the common good, having only assumptions to cling to.

Therefore, the reality facing us in applying the common good to human life is unavoidable:

The common good is not always *good* according to God's eyes, whose lens distinguishes the reality of creation from the virtual and augmented realities of human shaping; nor does the common good routinely serve all human life in the inherent human need of all persons and peoples—at best serving only their

permissible rights, which is insufficient to fulfill the inherent human need that requires vested and privileged rights.

This reality is the genius of reductionism, which generates illusions about “good and evil” and promotes misinformation, distorted facts and fake news about the utility of the common good. The purpose of reductionism is to counter wholeness—the wholeness of God and the wholeness of human persons created in likeness. The counter-workings of reductionism generate *ontological simulations* and *epistemological illusions* of human identity and function, which have become the default condition that subtly pervades our theology and practice. And reductionism’s most ingenious counteraction is the alternative of the common good, and seducing us with its appealing results or lingering hope.

Accordingly, when Christians hear the human-life buzzword ‘the common good’—even if only in their own thoughts and words—we must neither automatically affirm that it’s good, nor simply accept that it’s beneficial for humanity or even benefits just the majority of the human population. One example of the subtle influence of reductionism in the common good involves benefitting the majority of the human population, as in globalization. Sounds good so it seems unreasonable to discount it. But, on what basis can we say that this is good without assuming that the majority isn’t wrong, unjust or bad—which human history disproves and current global inequities expose? For the enforcement of God’s Rule of Law, God clearly instructed a different perspective: “You shall not side with the majority so as to pervert justice” (Ex 23:2). Others who advocate for the common good also emphasize giving the poor special attention or treatment. Yet, for the whole justice of God’s Rule of Law, “nor shall you be partial to the poor” (Ex 23:3, cf. Dt 1:17). With their apparent thinking about the common good, Jesus’ first disciples had yet to learn in their advanced discipleship what priority to be given to the poor, in contrast to what Jesus makes primary for all persons and relationships in his gospel (Mt 26:6-13). These examples evidence the influence of reductionism by common-izing how we think, see and act.

Therefore, until the basic assumptions about the common good are clarified and corrected, we need to exercise the valid means of a ‘hermeneutic of suspicion’ on any reference to the common good. In other words, we need to be engaged ongoingly in the fight against reductionism or this critical battle will subject us to the common’s influence composed by reductionism—notably shaping ontological simulations and epistemological illusions. Whether in a reduced theological anthropology or having a weak view of sin without encompassing reductionism, the shaping influence of reductionism will subtly pervade our theology and practice and prevent our whole transition to justice.

As a former reductionist with fragmented theology and practice, Paul knew how irreplaceable the fight against reductionism is for the integral fight for the *good* of the

whole gospel. When he countered reductionism in the church and the fragmentary theology and practice preventing wholeness of persons and relationships in the church, Paul qualified Christian freedom: “All *good* things are *permissible rights*, but not all ‘*good*’ things are beneficial...not all ‘*good*’ things build up *the whole*. Do not seek your own *good* but *the good* of the other” (1 Cor 10:23-24). Paul, however, didn’t affirm the common good, instead he countered the assumption that it would build up the whole. By correcting the misguided assumptions extended from the primordial garden, Paul further clarified the issue for our theology in order for our practice to be *right*, or best, and not simply common-ly good: “I want you to be wise in what is *truly* good and *clearly distinguished from* what is *unambiguously* evil. *In this fight* the God of peace will crush Satan, *the author of reductionism*, under your *whole-ly* feet” (Rom 16:19-20).

In his defining fight against reductionism, Jesus wielded the sword of uncommon peace to unmistakably distinguish that he did not “come to bring peace to the earth *for the common good*” (Mt 10:34-36). His purpose is to break apart the simulation in existing bonds in relationships, to cause conflict in the conventional unions of human life, and thereby to tear down common illusions to expose the underlying reality of reduced persons and relationships without just-nection in the fragmentary human relational condition (Lk 12:49-53). Without the common thinking of civility and a fashionable notion of being irenic for the sake of the common good, Jesus strongly declared the bad news of the gospel. This is the uncomfortable part of his gospel that commonly gets revised by misinformed, distorted or fake news in order to reflect, reinforce and sustain the virtual and augmented reality of common peace (as in Jn 14:27). Jesus’ intense fight against reductionism—for example, enacted intensely against the reduction of persons and relationships in God’s house (Mk 11:15-17; Jn 2:14-17)—expressed the depth of his whole person from inner out, and thus caused him to weep over what others assumed to be of the common good, weeping because their common peace lacked wholeness for all human life and its essential order of all persons and relationships (Lk 19:41-42). And as Jesus made unequivocal, his uncommon peace remains indistinguishable for them from common peace because it is “hidden from your *lens assumed under the common good*.”

By relentlessly declaring the bad news of the gospel in his fight against reductionism, the Word exposed, clarified and corrected the assumptions of the common good. His declarations extended further and unfolded deeper integrally with the good news proclaiming **the uncommon good** distinguished by only the Word’s whole gospel. Yet, the uncommon good will be hidden from our lens also as long as we lack clarity about the common good and its common peace. This clarity will elude how we think, see and act (1) if we dismiss the uncommon good as a mere ideal without real significance, or (2) if we simply ignore its reality because the uncommon good involves more vulnerable change than we are willing to undergo for the integral heart of human life and/or to undertake to make whole the fragmentary heart of the human relational condition (including our condition).

Having clear distinction of the common has been an ongoing problem, because it has conflated with the uncommon rather than being calculated from the uncommon. This conflation certainly then makes problematic being set apart from the common as necessitated by the nature of being uncommon (holy) in likeness of the whole-ly Trinity (as Paul makes definitive, Eph 2:21; 4:24). However, when the uncommon is also clearly distinguished from the common—that is, the common calculated from the uncommon—then the good news of the uncommon will shine on the darkness of the common’s bad news. This deeply sharpens the focus necessary to recalculate the common from the basis of the uncommon, which then makes complete the calculus for human life and also makes fully sufficient the algorithm for the human relational condition. And both this calculus and algorithm directly point to and encompass the change necessary (1) for justice to rule and not be an exception, and (2) for peace to be the uncommon wholeness that the Word gives in contrast to the common peace given by humankind (Jn 14:27).

The Algorithm for Change

The existential inequality (alive unredacted) and evolving inequity (evident today even in health care) entrenching the human relational condition have consistently escaped immunity, because the measures used to change this condition have been incomplete and insufficient. These measures for change reflect an incomplete calculus for human life that lacks just-nection due to compromising the qualitative-relational integrity of both the inner-out human genome and the Word’s Rule of Law. The compromised latter is directly correlated to the compromised former by the rule of a phenotype. For example, two problems for implementing the Word’s Rule of Law are witnessed ongoingly in the following:

1. When the Law used is reduced of its integral qualitative-relational composition, thus making variant laws incomplete, insufficient or contrary for the inherent equality and innate equity of the created human order.
2. When the Rule used is reconfigured from its integral integrity for a variant rule shaped by rulers and their enforcement that skews, contradicts or is in conflict with even their variant law, which thereby renegotiates a variant rule of law to fit their terms and serve their interests.

This is witnessed today in many Christians who support Donald Trump because of the goals they pursue. But, they have exempted Trump from the Word’s Rule of Law, the exception of which demonstrates their truth and norm gymnastics to justify reaching their end-goal by the use of variant means. In other words, Christians and churches have become politicized; conversely, their theology and gospel are also politicized. Who and

what were politicized first depends on how they evolved in the common. Being politicized is indicative of the reality of first being common-ized.

From the past to the present, such resulting rules of law reflect, reinforce and sustain the human relational condition in a diversity of reduced human orders, which are mutated as human life keeps evolving in the basically unchanged inequality and inequity of humankind. Without the change necessary to turn this human relational condition around, these variants keep recycling in one way or another, and will keep repeating the past until the algorithm for change itself is changed.

Change is usually implied in any conversation for the common good; and change is always an explicit or implicit goal for those calling for justice and working for peace. Change, however, in the uncommon good of the Word's gospel is neither optional or temporary for human life, nor merely remedial for everyday life. The significance of change cannot be just a moment in time or involve just a movement of action. In the whole gospel, significant change is the transformation of life (and lives), which is constituted by the redemptive change of both the *old* (i.e. the reduced, fragmented, bad, wrong, unfair, unjust) being terminated and the *new* (i.e. the whole, good, right, fair, just) raised up for the experiential truth and reality of the heart of human life and its essential order for all persons and relationships. Anything less and any substitutes for redemptive change reduce such change to conventional change. At best, the significance of conventional change is (1) temporary for the human condition because it doesn't get to its fragmentary heart, and (2) fleeting for everyday life because it doesn't involve congruence with the heart of human life.

When Jesus' gospel is not compartmentalized, the uncommon good of the non-compartmentalized gospel offers, involves and requires redemptive change of reduced ontology and function in all its variations and forms in everyday life and at all levels of human life (including institutional, systemic and structural). This redemptive change encompasses the ontological simulations and functional illusions that compose our default mode. When his disciples' everyday practice made evident their reduced ontology and function centered on human distinctions from outer in ("the greatest," Lk 9:46; 22:24), he told them the whole truth: "Unless you change *from inner out* like *vulnerable* children, you will never *belong to my kingdom family*" (Mt 18:3). His truth, however, was not about **conventional change** merely from the outer in; outer-in change is the *metaschematizō* that even Satan promotes (2 Cor 11:14-15). The truth of his gospel is the "turn-around change" (*strepho*) signifying the **redemptive change** of transformation from inner out (*metamorphoo*). *Metamorphoo* is the only change congruent with the whole gospel and thus the relational outcome constituting the uncommon good of Jesus' gospel, which Paul, on the one hand, made conclusive (2 Cor 3:18; 5:17) and, on the other hand, made imperative as the ongoing change necessary in order to be distinguished from the common (Rom 12:2). And as Peter would testify about the good news, the

uncommon good offers, involves and requires nothing less than redemptive change of reduced ontology and function, the condition he persisted in; and that no substitutes such as conventional change are sufficient or acceptable for redemptive change, such as Peter attempted until his transformation.

The need for change is basic to the human condition since the primordial garden. We all, then, need change, whether we seek, want or even recognize it; this need is innate to our human condition. More complex is the type of change required to meet this need. Since the beginning, however, the means for change utilized in the human context for changing the human condition have complicated both what is significant change and what brings significant change (e.g. the misguided tower of Babel, Gen 11:1-4). The whole gospel's uncommon good clarifies and corrects what is needed for the human condition.

This is witnessed at the crucifixion by the two criminals crucified on each side of Jesus. They represent views that today would be considered views from the left or the right. Again in his concern for human equality and equity, Luke is the only Gospel to record this revealing interaction (Lk 23:39-43). One of the criminals kept insulting Jesus from his political-cultural bias, because he wanted conventional change, "Are you not the messiah? Save yourself and us" (v.39). But the other criminal rebuked his counterpart for disabling justice and enabling injustice, because he wanted the deeper change brought by Jesus that would turn him around in redemptive change (23:40-43). What view is from the left or the right is irrelevant here, since conventional change is the scope of change advocated by both the right and the left. The pivotal issue that the whole gospel illuminates is between conventional change and redemptive change; and what is illuminated clarifies and corrects the algorithm for change necessary to turn around the human relational condition.

First, the terms are clarified to avoid confusion or conflation of terms. Conventional change is common change, and redemptive change is uncommon change. That which is common is distinct to the human context, human life and its persons. Uncommon (or holy) distinguishes God and God's relational context and process unique to God, which the embodied Word vulnerably enacted ongoingly. The common and the uncommon are mutually exclusive and thus should not be confused with each other. Moreover, the common and the uncommon are incompatible and therefore must not be conflated. Since conventional change is common change, the extent of this change does not and cannot exceed the common. While our desire for or pursuit of change may not go beyond the extent of conventional change, our hopes for change often exceed common change. Likewise, those working for justice and peace tend to pursue the limits of conventional change, while their hopes and expectations usually exceed common change—notably true for Christians. It is problematic for those needing, wanting or working for change either to not understand or to ignore the extent of that change; and it is disappointing, frustrating, angering or depressing when their hopes and expectations

for change are not fulfilled. But, this process reflects how conventional change gets confused with redemptive change, and, more importantly, how uncommon change is conflated with common change to mislead those needing and wanting change as well as to misguide those seeking and working for change.

Jesus clarifies for us what is axiomatic (Mk 4:24): **The change we use will be the extent of change we get.** When his axiomatic clarification is listened to (Mk 4:24), then his correction can be received.

Conventional change may serve and does indeed work for the common good. The common good, however, cannot be confused with the uncommon good and must not be conflated with what the Word's gospel distinguishes only as the uncommon good. What he brings (as in Mt 10:34) and what he gives (as in Jn 14:27) are only uncommon and thus exclusive to the whole of God and God's relational context and process. The unique nature of what Jesus brings is irreducible in the human context and by human life and its persons; and the uniqueness of what he gives is nonnegotiable to all human terms. In other words, the uncommon good is unmistakably distinguished from the common good and must never be confused or conflated with it. This critical clarification and correction were initiated by God in Babylonia, where God deconstructed the tower of Babel for the corrective purpose to expose the false hope of a common good and to dispel the illusion of its expected outcome from common change (Gen 11:5-9). God's purpose wasn't only to clarify and correct but also to prepare the way for the uncommon good to be received; and further integrated in God's purpose, to enact the uncommon change necessary for this relational outcome to be whole and uncommon (whole-ly) as the experiential truth and relational reality in human life and its order for all persons and relationships.

The tower of Babel predates the hopeful change that has evolved in two prime examples of recent history. One example counters what Jesus brings and the other example contradicts what Jesus gives, both of which compete with uncommon change and its uncommon good. The first prime example has a conflict approach to change, which could be confused with the sword Jesus brought and his approach to culture and politics. This is the Marxist ideology and its Hegelian dialectic (thesis-antithesis-synthesis), which socialism-communism has implemented under the assumption that it will result in the synthesis for the greater good of the people. On the one hand, a conflict approach to change is warranted because significant change requires the *old* to be terminated for the *new* to emerge—which is the unequivocal purpose of Jesus' sword and his counter approach to culture and politics. On the other hand, a Marxist-Hegelian dialectic does not merit affirmation of the means used for its end to bring about a synthesis. Its common thinking, explicitly or implicitly, is that the end justifies the use of its means, even if the means are wrong or unjust.

The systemic use of power relations to enforce change formally breaks justice and officially legitimizes its injustice. This common thinking about “good and evil” relativizes what is *right*, and thereby promotes, reinforces and/or sustains the disabling of justice while enabling injustice. Therefore, the conflict approach to change of Marxist ideology (and all its variations) cannot be confused with the sword of uncommon change that Jesus brings:

The common’s conflict approach to change works variably to disable justice and to enable injustice, while the uncommon’s redemptive change serves invariably for the just-nection of all persons and relationships in wholeness; the former works under the assumption of serving the common good, while the latter serves only the reality of the uncommon good and thus works for the only *good* that distinguishes justice by the Word’s whole gospel the whole non-compartmentalized gospel.

The verdict on the Marxist-Hegelian dialectic has not been concluded because the jury on socialist-communist history is still in session. But, the synthesis for a new human order has had no indications of being nothing more than a false hope—not only in falling short of utopian expectations but with its dystopian consequences. Nevertheless, the anticipated victory for this hoped-for result has not stopped many from continuing to pursue this common change, likely in the absence of real hope for significant change. Variations of a conflict approach have adapted into many forms of protest (political, social, economic, religious, and the like) that have been aggressive (in both macro- and micro-aggression) and thus violent (even implicitly as Jesus defined in God’s Rule of Law, Mt 5:21-22). Even knowingly in their common thinking, their approach to change has adopted the principle of the end justifies the use of its means. These varying conflict approaches to change—which includes the adaptation of the Marxist dialectic in liberation theology—are still simply common change that should not be confused with the uncommon change Jesus brings.

At the same time, this is not to say that the approach to change should be nonviolent. What does need to be said, however, is that when viewed through the lens of uncommon terms, the approach of nonviolence is an oversimplified notion of change, as difficult as this approach is to embrace and enact. Such change is unable to deal with the existing depth of the *old* even though it may address and confront the old, thus it merely acts as common change working for the common good. Consider this sensitive example, which various persons could have misgivings accepting. Though Martin Luther King’s nonviolent approach to change eventually included the global injustice of the Vietnam War, it never encompassed the sexism within the Civil Rights Movement to change the gender inequality existing among themselves—notably those proclaiming and working for the common good. In other words, change became selective and likely protective for those who didn’t want to be vulnerable from inner out.

This makes evident the fact that Christians who advocate for nonviolent change distort what Jesus brings with his sword, either by commonly idealizing it or by simply ignoring it. The consequence has been that the redemptive change needed, for example, to clean out God's house has been absent, which has left the relational orphans populating churches without justification—leaving the church in the simulation of its practice and the illusion of its relationships together. This relational condition is not the uncommon good that Jesus' non-compartmentalized gospel brings. The sword of Jesus signifies the intensity (not the violence) with which the battle against reductionism (the full scope of sin) must be fought. Thus, Jesus' sword is the relational extension of God's wrath in the OT. Contrary to common perception and thinking about God's wrath, this intensity expressed the heart of God's grief in relational response to the scope of sin as reductionism, which reduced persons and relationships from their wholeness created in the image and likeness of the Trinity. The heart of God's grief first responded intensely to this reductionism with the flood, and only because of Noah's wholeness (*tamiym*) was he saved from God's intense battle against reductionism (Gen 6:1-9).

God's wrath and Jesus' sword express the heart of the Trinity's grief (as in Lk 13:34; 19:41-42) in the relational response necessary to bring the uncommon change for transforming the human condition and its fragmentary relational order. Therefore, the unavoidable reality facing Christian leaders and activists is this: The *old* is not eliminated without directly countering it intensely, and this conflict does not terminate without Jesus' sword of uncommon change for only the uncommon good. Accordingly, even nonviolent approaches to change should not be confused with the uncommon change required for the uncommon good of the Word's whole gospel (not our variants of the gospel).

All the above approaches signify common change, which in one conventional way or another disable justice and enable injustice by reinforcing and sustaining the reduced ontology and function of the human condition. Moreover, any form of power relations at any level becomes an enabler of injustice and a disabler of justice (cf. Lk 22:24-26). Whether intentionally or inadvertently, these approaches counter what Jesus brings. The redemptive change brought by Jesus is the only good news to integrally lead to the whole and uncommon relational outcome for human ontology and function, and this wholly relational outcome is the uncommon good that Jesus gives.

Next, contradicting the uncommon good that Jesus gives is the second prime example in recent history: globalization, as it has evolved from colonialism and been adapted from the Enlightenment. Countering the uncommon good brought by Jesus and contradicting this reality that he gave are not mutually exclusive but interrelated in critical ways. They are both problematic in their underlying reductionism that promotes and generates results different from the Word's whole gospel. Yet, it is one issue for

conflict approaches to counter what Jesus brings by using a misleading or misguided hope, and a deeper, more complicated issue to contradict the uncommon good he gives by using a false hope.

Analogous to the global effort by Babylonia to “build ourselves a *global community*” (Gen 11:4), political globalization evolved in human history to “make a name for ourselves.” The construction of this “name for ourselves” required (1) competing with the kingdom of God to rule the world, and (2) imposing its rule over others under the dominance of its sovereignty. This global process formed the dynamic of colonialism (or imperialism), which has been the prime political example that has disabled justice and enabled injustice—a dynamic generated often by the myth of the common good. As a subtle extension of the Roman Empire, Constantine (in the 4th century) justified this dynamic with a false hope of building Christendom; and the U.S. has intensified the colonial dynamic by common thinking that amplifies the myth of Manifest Destiny and/or the false hope of democratic ideology—both illusions having justified the enabling of injustice that contradicts the uncommon good given by Jesus. Many Christians in the U.S.—notably those supporting nationalism and promoting exceptionalism—would either disagree with this assessment or feel very uncomfortable accepting it. But, then, they have to answer to the type of change they advocate and be accountable for its effects on their own lives, the church, this nation and the world. And the change they use and get from it have to be measured by the uncommon change for the uncommon good of the non-compartmentalized gospel that Jesus brings and gives.

From political globalization has evolved economic globalization. The modern development of the economy distinctly adapted from the Enlightenment (around the 18th century), which promoted two movements for so-called human progress:

1. The reliance on rationalized thinking to supposedly enlighten human perception and action, which, on the one hand, would challenge human development beyond tradition but, on the other hand, would compete with the uncommon change that Jesus brings by substituting a secular worldview (**secularism**) to contradict the uncommon good Jesus gives.
2. The emergence of modern science, which challenged traditional beliefs and the limits of their conclusions (e.g. the order of the universe) to both (a) justify secularism for human development and (b) prioritize the development of technology for human progress—the primacy of which has pervaded modern life and preoccupies (even dominates) persons over the primacy of relationships together.

By adapting in this evolutionary process, the economy underwent pivotal change with the Industrial Revolution (starting from the late 18th century) and has since progressed (i.e. evolved) as energized by the natural (common) selection of the economy's fittest components to survive. The economy's survival of the fittest generates the economic colonialism necessary to empower the progress of the global economy, even over the objections of tribes and nations. Like political globalization, of course, this defining dynamic of economic globalization also contradicts the uncommon good that Jesus gives.³

Economic globalization, however, doesn't survive by colonialism alone. The survival of its fittest has a much more subtle basis. Earlier, Jesus alerted his followers to what contradicts what he gives (the scope of Mt 6:19-32). What he defined is the mentality and lifestyle of **consumers**. *Consumerism* drives the common everyday life and practice that fuels economic growth; and the subtle the-more-the-better mentality and the explicit lifestyle of greed intensify consumer drive to reduce persons to mere objects manipulated and forged by economic promotion (as Paul alluded to, Eph 2:3). Economic globalization survives only by the consumption of its common goods, which it multiplies by creating the subtle need for **convenience** and **efficiency**. These human-shaped needs consume consumers—even at the expense of fulfilling their inherent human need basic to all persons—which economic globalization has now substituted as the prevailing source for the good life. Moreover, discordant clouds have formed over the expanding scenario of the global economy, which darkens its optimistic basis (1) on the misguided assumption that the earth's natural resources can support unlimited economic growth, and (2) on the misleading assumption that all human labor benefits from capitalist development.

Therefore, Christians need to awaken to the consuming reality enveloping our everyday life. The priority given to consumption, plus the pursuit of convenience and the search for efficiency, all reinforce and sustain economic globalization, and thereby also enable the injustice of its colonial practices and disable the justice needed for the care of all creation. Since we are all consumers in one way or another, wanting convenience and desiring efficiency to some extent, the priority we give to these even if not excessive will determine whether or not we also contradict the uncommon good Jesus gives—as well as also counter the uncommon change he brings.

Given these two prime examples of hopeful change and related variations of them on the personal or collective level, we are always faced with the significance of the change we use. This change is especially important for the goal of those calling for justice and working for peace. Significant change, however, is neither just a moment in time nor involving just a movement of action. How we think, see and act regarding

³ Further discussion on globalization, aimed at the global church, is engaged openly by Vinoth Ramachandra, *Subverting Global Myths: Theology and the Public Issues Shaping Our World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008).

change have to be challenged ongoingly by the distinction between common-conventional change and uncommon-redemptive change. All the issues about change converge in the vital difference between *metaschematizō* (outer-in change) and *metamorphoo* (inner-out change), as distinguished by Paul; and this critical distinction between the outer in and inner out cannot be confused with each other or conflated together, because they signify the incompatibility of human identity and function in either reduced terms or whole terms. The former involves common change and nothing more, and the latter involves uncommon change and nothing less.

It should be evident in how we think, see and act that the type of change is crucial for the outcome desired, hoped for and expected. The self-evident reality is:

The change we use will be the extent of change and related outcome we get—which either at best serves only a common good variably defined, or at the least works for the uncommon good of all persons and relationships in wholeness.

Metamorphoo distinguishes the uncommon change necessary by its nature (not by duty or obligation) for the whole (not partial or fragmentary) relational outcome of the uncommon good that Jesus brings and gives (as in 2 Cor 3:18). Only inner-out change unequivocally distinguishes the uncommon from the common (as in Rom 12:2), and thereby constitutes the uncommon-redemptive change of the whole gospel (as in 2 Cor 5:16-17)—which common-conventional change is unable to bring and give, yet may try to simulate (as reductionism does, 2 Cor 11:13-15) or create illusions about (as Peter attempted, Gal 2:11-14).

The uncommon good of the whole gospel that Jesus brings and gives emerges by the redemptive change of the who, what and how persons are from inner out (the plumb line of their righteousness), and it unfolds with the wholeness of their righteousness in likeness of God's. This relational outcome of wholeness is the primacy defining the full identity of those in God's kingdom-family and that determines their primary relational involvement with the whole of who, what and how God is—as the Word makes conclusive in contrast and conflict with the common (Mt 6:33). Anything less and any substitutes of who, what and how persons are reflect, reinforce and sustain the reduced ontology and function that both counters what Jesus brings and contradicts what he gives. Those reductionists are in need of redemptive change in order to be involved in and belong to relationally the uncommon good of his whole gospel of uncommon peace—as the Word clearly distinguished for the who, what and how his true followers are in wholeness (Mt 5:6,9,20). This plumb line is irreducible and nonnegotiable.

The Relational Outcome of the Gospel's Calculus and Algorithm

The calculus for human life and the algorithm for the human relational condition in use are consequential unavoidably for either turning around human inequality and inequity or recycling them to continue to repeat the bad's past. Those used by Christians and churches are notably consequential for God's whole picture. In today's polarized climate, the calculus and algorithm used by a majority of Christians and churches has been consequential of repeating the bad's past, whether willfully by design or willingly by default. Their witness leaves many observers (especially younger generations) wondering or confused about the gospel they claim and proclaim as good news. This has compounded the existing crisis, because the definitive hope for fixing this human crisis is obscured or even lost for many needing, wanting and seeking resolution. Many of these experience what is illustrated in a "Prickly City" comic strip. The two main characters who are best friends, the conservative Carmen and the liberal Winslow, have been undergoing dismay and conflict over the current political crisis in the U.S. Carmen confesses to him, "I am having a profound crisis of faith, Winslow." He replies, "You mean with..." as he points his finger to heaven. She clarifies, "No, I mean here," as she grasps her chest. He responds, "Oh, that's too bad." Carmen then states, "I know because" as Winslow interjects with dismay, "There's a book to help with the guy up there, but I don't think there's a book about fixing what's in there..."⁴

So, "Where are you?" in the Word's whole gospel, and "What are you doing here?" with this gospel's bad news, so that its good news will bring Light to human fog and darkness? Indeed, where today is the relational outcome of the whole gospel?

In the strategic trajectory of the whole gospel, the embodied Word vulnerably revealed his whole person in direct face-to-face interaction with a marginalized person (Jn 4:4-42). This interaction was strategic for the Word's gospel, because it also illuminated both the gospel's bad news and the relational outcome of its good news. Strategic to his gospel, the Word countered and neutralized this marginalized person's racial-gender inequality and its inequity both culturally and politically. These issues were not a sidebar to the strategic revelation of the Good News but integral for the whole gospel. As such, the gospel proclaimed by the Word was clearly distinguished as uncommon from the surrounding cultural-political context of the common—distinguished unequivocally uncommon as it countered and neutralized the common's consequences. Thus, the Word's uncommon good in this interaction bewildered his disciples, who "were astonished that he was speaking with a woman" (4:27).

The fact that his disciples were so surprised should not be surprising. Human inequality and inequity were not of central focus in the common cultural-political lens. In

⁴ By Scott Stantis, *Los Angeles Times*, February 4, 2021.

the reality of their distinction-based identity and function to be the greatest, the disciples—along with many likeminded Christians today—actually reinforced and sustained human inequality in human life and human inequity in the human relational condition because of an incomplete calculus and insufficient algorithm. Consequently, the strategic trajectory of the Word’s gospel unfolding right before their eyes simply eluded their biased lens. The critical relational consequence for them was the lack of just-connection inherent to the whole gospel, which left them at an ongoing relational distance with the Word. The reality of relational distance is the relational condition of (1) not being vulnerably involved directly with the Word to know his whole person (Jn 14:9), and (2) not able to experience the relational outcome of his gospel (Jn 17:26).

This common relational consequence was further demonstrated by the disciples, which will intensely illuminate the whole gospel’s calculus and algorithm that are intrinsic to its relational outcome being fully claimed and rightly proclaimed by us today. At another pivotal interaction, the tactical trajectory of the Word’s gospel unfolded, and this further distinguished what was *good* in the uncommon from what was merely the common good. In order to deepen her initial relational involvement of discipleship directly with the Word—which neutralized the existing cultural-political human inequality (as Luke recorded in his concern for equality, Lk 10:38-42)—now Mary relationally responds deeply in intimate connection with the Word as never before (Jn 12:1-8; Mt 26:6-13). The Word was unfolding in the bad news in order that the good news be fulfilled. Mary’s vulnerable relational action by implication also countered what prevailed culturally and politically, which was her profound statement that the Word highlighted: “I tell you the truth, where this gospel is preached throughout the world, *the relational outcome* she has *enacted* will also be told, in memory of her” (Mt 26:13).

Her profound statement was not only lost on the disciples but countered by them for the sake of the common good to help the poor. Perhaps with good intentions, their reaction to Mary demonstrated the tension between the insufficient algorithm of the common good and the complete calculus of the whole gospel’s uncommon good. The poor are certainly central in the issue of human inequality and inequity, with the high rate of poverty in the economically rich U.S. being the prime example. Yet, the algorithm for this condition will never be sufficient until it includes what is primary for the human relational condition. Thus, the rich could be very poor, though obviously not for economic reasons, because of what is primary for human life as created in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the Trinity: the whole person from inner out directly involved in relationships together of wholeness—nothing less from outer in and no substitutes from the quantitative. The primacy of the whole person equalized in intimate relationships together is the qualitative wholeness of the relational outcome in the Word’s gospel. This is the *who* and the *what* Mary enacted in her statement that the good news of uncommon good makes complete and sufficient in the algorithm for the human relational condition.

The strategic and tactical trajectories enacted by the embodied Word constitute the whole gospel, whose qualitative-relational roots cannot evolve to form variants of the gospel as witnessed today. In the Word's uncommon good, the significance of change is always relational, and redemptive change only transforms in the primacy of relationship. Thus, significant change always encompasses, involves and changes relationships, which unmistakably contrasts with common-conventional change. Any change that is not so engaged relationally falls short and, therefore, is insufficient to bring the complete change and give the whole outcome that transforms relationships in their primacy. Uncommon change is irreplaceable to bring the complete change necessary for mature justice and to give the whole outcome constituting peace as wholeness. Anything less and any substitutes, even with good intentions, at best result in premature justice and immature peace.

Accordingly, and invariably, when we call for justice, we have to know what indeed brings justice; and when we work for peace, we have to understand what truly gives peace.

The uncommon change of the uncommon good emerged distinguished in relational terms when God responded face to face with his kingdom-family by the relational involvement of his definitive blessing (Num 6:22-27). "*The whole of God* make his face to shine upon you...and give you peace" is the most common blessing in our tradition, whose use has lost its relational significance and has either ignored or not understood the essential significant change at the heart of whole-ly God's relational response. By "give you" (*siym*), God is not acting as a mere benefactor, nor is it merely highlighting God's good character to give. The deeper meaning of *siym* used in God's response centers on the heart of what whole-ly God brings and gives: (1) to bring about a change, and integral to this change (2) to establish a new relationship. Thus, the Subject's face-to-face response to subjects (not objects of his blessing) is to bring the significant change that establishes them in new relationships. The relational outcome is not a "new normal" but gives them the new order of relationships together in *shalom*—that is, their well-being in wholeness to constitute their just-nection as subjects in the whole-ly God's whole and uncommon family. The measuring line of justice is irreducible and nonnegotiable.

Sadly, those associated with God's kingdom-family turned God's definitive blessing into a "new" normal by first transposing the uncommon change God brings to common change, and then by common-izing the uncommon peace God gives (cf. Isa 29:13). The pervasive consequence was to convert God's uncommon good into a prevailing common good. This conversion continues today, subtly shaping how we see and think about the gospel to counter the uncommon change Jesus brings and to contradict the uncommon wholeness he gives. The Word had to clarify and correct this conversion throughout his embodied presence in order to expose the common-ization of what he brings and gives.

Along with the early disciples, the majority associated with God's family functioned in common peace to counter the *sym* of whole-ly God's relational response, and thereby contradicted the *shalom* he gives (Lk 19:41-42). As evident in his post-ascension critique of churches (Rev 2-3), the palpable Word (together with the Spirit) continues to pursue us in any distorting conversion of the uncommon change he brings and the uncommon peace he gives. His relational purpose is always for the just-nection of all persons and relationships in the uncommon good. Furthermore, his ceaseless purpose in this vital process pursues us, so that any call for justice will not stop prematurely until just-nection is complete, and that all work for peace will not be engaged immaturely without wholeness and settle for common peace. Jesus knew all too well from his personal observations that common thinking, perception and action result in anything less than their maturity until they undergo uncommon change.

In the ordinary terms of the gospel, the sword of uncommon peace that Jesus brings and gives would seem to contradict peace and to function counter to it. That would only be true for our theology and valid in our practice when the focus is reduced to common peace. The truth of the Word's whole gospel, however, that invalidates other gospels using his name is this: Whenever common peace is used in place of uncommon peace, there is a contradiction of what Jesus gives; and whenever our work revolves around common peace, it functions counter to the uncommon peace that Jesus' sword brings.

The uncommon good of Jesus' whole gospel unfolds in his discipleship manifesto for all his followers (the Sermon on the Mount, Mt 5-7), emerging with their definitive identity formation (the Beatitudes, 5:3-10). Their identity as "peacemakers" is not merely a partial identity but their whole identity as the "children of God" (5:9). Yet, only those who are relationally involved with God with their whole persons from inner out in reality relationally belong in God's family (5:8), which emerges from only the uncommon-redemptive change of the who, what and how they are (5:3-6). Therefore, in Jesus' uncommon good, the uncommon change of peacemakers involves only whole persons who work just for uncommon peace. These daughters and sons in God's family know that anything less is an immature account of their whole identity, and that any substitutes are an immature peace of the whole who, what and how they are and function (for the righteousness of 5:6). Immature peace and uncommon peace are at the critical disjuncture composed between "the wide gate and easy road" and "the narrow gate and difficult road" (7:13-14). This disjuncture continues to create both fog for his followers' theology and ambiguity confounding their practice, such that they stop prematurely without just-nection in their call for justice, and engage the work of peace immaturely without wholeness by settling for common peace. This describes the who, what and how of persons prevailing among those associated with God's kingdom, whose reduced identity and function composed the religious status quo that Jesus required his true followers to go further and be deeper than, without stopping short in their righteousness (5:20).

Reductionism is always imposing its “knowing good and evil” on those functioning merely as objects shaped by the human context in reduced ontology. These are the sentinels (Eze 33:7-9) who all too easily claim premature justice and who all too widely profess immature peace—taking a wider trajectory and easier path than the Word (cf. Eze 34). Yet, this bad news is redeemed and transformed by the good news: the uncommon good that Jesus brings with uncommon change and gives with uncommon peace. If we are willing to turn around from the assumptions in our theology and change the bias in our practice, then our just-nection can be completed to counter premature justice rather than countering what Jesus brings; and then our persons and relationships can be made whole to contradict immature peace instead of contradicting what Jesus gives. The common-good workings of reductionism always seeks to convert the uncommon good, so that premature justice will subtly pervade everyday life to enable injustice, and that immature peace will prevail over human life to disable justice and prevent just-nection.

Once again, the uncommon good Jesus brings and gives faces us with this persistent reality:

How we see and think about change will be the change we use, which will be the change we get...which will be the justice and peace we use, which will be the justice and peace we get—all of which will compose either the common good or the uncommon good...that we get as outer-in persons or experience as inner-out persons, who serve as mere servants or work for as whole persons in the Trinity’s likeness.

The common good is composed by reduced ontology and function that lacks just-nection regardless of the amount of premature justice and immature peace generated; this is the consequence of a reduced theological anthropology and weak view of sin. In contrast and conflict, the uncommon good is constituted by whole ontology and function in the *right* relational order for the just-nection of all persons and peoples in whole justice and uncommon peace. The relational outcome of the Word’s whole gospel brings and gives nothing less and no substitutes.

To know what indeed brings justice and to understand what truly gives peace converge in **the integrating dynamic of just-nection** that Jesus brings and gives. As the conclusive extension of the definitive blessing of whole-ly God’s face (2 Cor 4:6), the Word’s gospel embodies the primacy *of* God to enact the primacy of face-to-face relationship for the persons primary *to* God. The *right* order of relationship together, which was created by the Subject only for subjects in his likeness, is the whole-ly relational outcome of just-nection. God’s justice is distinguished whole and God’s peace is experienced uncommon by the integration just in *the relational dynamic of just-nection*. Jesus redeems, reconciles and transforms the relational connection required for justice of the human order in the integrally created and newly created whole-ly likeness

of God (summarized by Paul in 2 Cor 3:18; 5:16-17; Col 3:10-11). Therefore, just-nection is the unequivocal and irreplaceable antithesis that distinguishes justice from **the common denominator of injustice** (discussed in Chap 4):

That which encompasses the common's prevailing relational distance, separation or brokenness that fragment the human order and reduce persons to any and all relational disconnection contrary to their created likeness to the Trinity; this is consequential for relegating persons to relational orphans, the relational condition that disables them to function in their vested and privileged rights, and thereby prevents fulfillment of their inherent human need, whereby their everyday function subtly enables injustice—reinforcing and sustaining injustice even as they exercise their permissible rights.

The obscured reality, verified by existing facts, is this: Without just-nection persons fall into this *equation of injustice*. Contrary to any misinformed, distorted or fake news, this inescapable reality composes the human relational condition that pervades the existing human order with relational orphans—pervading even the church, countering and contradicting the Word's gospel (Jn 14:18). Premature justice does not bring just-nection and immature peace does not give wholeness; and their premature and immature fruits expose the roots of the tree they come from (as in Mt 7:15-20). Moreover, while such prevailing premature justice and pervasive immature peace may serve the relative notion of the common good, they do not, will not and cannot *work* for the uncommon good of the Word's gospel. What *works* in the whole gospel only brings justice by uncommon change and gives peace through uncommon peace. As a further qualifier, what Jesus brings and gives do not preclude the diversity exercised in efforts for justice and peace but rather are against the reductionism expressed in their lack of maturity. Thus, the uncommon good of the Word's whole gospel should not be confused with a common metanarrative that postmodernism opposes; nor should the Word's uncommon good be conflated with the grand narrative proposed by modernism, which has been adapted into traditional theology and the practice of the status quo—the evolving narratives of variant calculuses for human life and algorithms for the human relational condition.

The uncommon good Jesus brings and gives distinguishes only the uncommon, so that it is irreducibly incongruent with the common and, therefore, is nonnegotiable incompatible with anything common. Even a partial hybrid in theology or practice are indigestible for the uncommon's integrity—as the church in Thyatira was corrected by the Word's critique (Rev 2:19-23). For the sentinels of human life to function in premature justice is to be misguided in their calling and to have misguided results. For

the shepherds of God's family to function with immature peace is to be misled in their purpose and to mislead others for the outcome. This immaturity creates a crisis of credibility about what sentinels and shepherds do bring and give, which continues to evolve among Christian leadership today. In the Word's perception and thinking, this existing condition is encompassed in the bad news of his gospel, which apparently has not been received to clearly distinguish *whole-ly* in much theology and practice today. But, not surprisingly, nothing more than the common (change, peace, good) can result and should be expected whenever what Jesus brings is countered and what he gives is contradicted.

Therefore, make no mistake, the calculus for human life and the algorithm for the human relational condition that we use in our gospel is the relational outcome we get, nothing more but perhaps less. Does your algorithm resolve the bad news of the human relational condition? And does your calculus fully constitute the good news in human life?

The Word summarized what's the qualitative-relational primary to God over all the secondary in human life, and thus the only relational outcome of significance: "Do not boast *in the outer-in distinctions of what you have and do*; but let those who boast boast in this, that they understand and know me, that I am the LORD; I act with *the relational involvement of love, justice, and righteousness in all of human life*, for in these *relational actions* I delight" (Jer 9:24). The whole-ly Trinity's delight is the relational responsibility of those who claim the gospel's relational outcome to be equalized and made whole in the primacy of relationship together in the Word's family. We are accountable in this boast alone. With the Word's plumb line of righteousness and the measuring line of justice, nothing less than human equality and human equity are at stake here; and in this there can be no substitutes in order that the created qualitative-relational integrity of human life and its human order be restored to wholeness—the uncommon whole in the image and likeness of the whole-ly Trinity.

Certainly then, anything less formed by a reduced theological anthropology compromises righteousness and thereby reinforces and sustains human inequality. Likewise, any substitutes taken from a weak view of sin compromises justice and thereby reinforces and sustains human inequity. Whenever and wherever anything less and any substitutes exist, the experiential truth of the whole gospel and the relational reality of its whole-ly relational outcome are reduced in a fog to a mere propositional truth and to merely a virtual reality at best. Because of such a distorted lens used for the gospel's calculus and algorithm, Luke recorded—again, in his concern for human equality and equity—the Word's relational imperative: "Therefore, consider *deeply* [*skopeo*] whether the light in you is not darkness" (Lk 11:35).

Chapter 6

The Light in the Darkness

**From now on, therefore, we *define no person from a human bias from outer in....*
So, if any *person is transformed from inner out by Christ's whole person,*
there is constituted together the new creation family:
everything old from the common has passed away; see the reality,
everything has become new in the uncommon.
**All this *experiential truth and relational reality are from God,*
who reconciled us to himself through Christ *in the primacy of relationship together*
in wholeness as family, and has given us the family responsibility to be
*ongoingly involved in the essential relational work of reconciliation.*****

2 Corinthians 5:16-18

The Word's narrow road for political theology leads straight to the church, whose identity and function journey with difficulty directly through the limits and constraints of human inequality and inequity. The church journeys through this existential inequality and inequity in order for its identity and function to be turned around to equality and equity in the church. Journeying on this narrow difficult road, the church is constituted in the experiential truth and relational reality of the whole gospel's relational outcome, whereby the church becomes *the penultimate witness* for equality and equity in the existential human relational condition (as the Word prayed, Jn 17:20-23). This gospel's relational outcome is rooted in the covenant of love, and its branches of relationship together in wholeness only unfold according to the qualitative-relational terms of the Word's Rule of Law. Thus, since this journey for the church is both narrow and difficult, it is problematic as witnessed in the church's history past and present.

In the separation of church and state, is the church above the law and thus not bound by it or accountable to it? Perhaps, that depends on the nature of the law. In the confluence of church and state, when is the church bound by and accountable to the rule of law? That also depends on the variant used for the rule of law. This has evolved for the church just as variants of the rule of law have evolved. With political and cultural issues, influences and consequences intervening on the church, what distinguishes the church from these evolving distinctions?

What has not evolved, however, is the Word's Rule of Law, and thus the church being bound by and accountable to it without the negotiable right to ever be above the Law. This is what the church, locally and globally, faces in the current human crisis, whether politically, culturally or medically. And the integrity of church branches and their witness lie in the balance of the shifting winds in the surrounding polarized climate (as Paul illuminated for the church, Eph 4:14-16).

Church Originalism, Legalism or Voluntarism

The judicial philosophy of **originalism** has been the key position of the U.S. Supreme Court since the inception of the Constitution. Originalists believe that judges are bound by the constitutional text and that its words should be read as the public would have understood them at the time each provision was written. That doesn't mean that originalists always understand the intentions of the author, nor that they necessarily get them right in the rule of law; any lacks typically reflect the influence of intervening political and cultural factors. Yet, this is implied in originalism and the key to applying the rule of law, unless a bias skews originalism. The counterpart to originalism is **legalism**. Legalists hold to the letter of the law, imposing strict literal interpretations of the law in its application, which give no consideration for the intent by the authors of that law. Christians have occupied either of these positions to define the law and determine its rule of law.

For the free majority, locally and globally, they have been status-ing in quo in the position of **voluntarism**: a doctrine or system based on voluntary or willing participation in the rule of law, which promotes that the reality of human life revolves ultimately on the nature of free will. Thus, the application of the law centers on the rights of freedom for voluntarists, and participation in the rule of law depends on those rights not being denied or abused. Voluntarism is obviously more flexible than originalism and less strict than legalism. But it certainly also opens the door to relativism of the law and widens the way to more easily justify not adhering to the rule of law. Are Christians also occupying this position in the situations and circumstances of the surrounding climate today?

These three positions parallel positions churches have taken directly with the Word's Rule of Law. Since its inception, the church has had difficulty with its constituting terms for the covenant relationship together of the Word's new creation church family; this difficulty continues to evolve for the church in its witness evident today in many churches. The existential integrity (not the theological ideal) of church branches in the early church had to be clarified and corrected by the palpable Word (together with the Spirit, Rev 2-3), whose intrusive purpose was for churches to be whole and uncommon like the whole-ly Trinity (as he prayed for his church family earlier, Jn 17:14-26). The Word's incisive feedback also confronts the integrity of current church branches and their witness, because the shifting winds of the surrounding climate still have the same impact past to present. Over 70% of the churches examined by the Word had been on a byway from the qualitative-relational terms of covenant relationship together that composed the Word's Rule of Law. As one of the main leaders of the early church, this byway also deeply concerned James (Jas 2:8-10). Would this reflect the percentage of current churches on a byway if they were examined directly by the Word?

The new covenant constituted by the Word for his church family's relationship did not negate, change or minimize the qualitative-relational terms rooted in the covenant of love (Dt 7:9), which composed the original terms of his Rule of Law (Mt 5:17-18). The Word examined these churches on this irreducible and nonnegotiable basis. All the churches emerged in the shifting winds of a surrounding cultural-political climate. How they adapted to and survived in those intervening factors is at the heart of the Word's critique. And any current church planting and development need to examine these church roots to understand what underlies the church branches they want to grow.

The first church in Ephesus was in the most cosmopolitan of the seven cities of the churches examined.¹ Ephesus contained one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the Temple of Artemis, which served as the center for emperor worship. This political climate obviously created tension for all the churches under Roman rule, and how they adapted to a Roman imperial edict and other disinformation unfolds in these churches. The church in Ephesus was the most rigorous in resisting the winds of its surrounding climate (Rev 2:1-3). The church basically held onto a strong position of legalism with the Word to interpret its rule of law by the strict letter, not yielding to intervening factors. Yet, their practice of the letter of the law failed to either understand or enact the Word's intentional purpose that composed the qualitative-relational terms of the Word's Rule of Law for the primacy of relationship together rooted in the covenant of love; their failure exposed their reduced theological anthropology. Therefore, the Word declared unequivocally to their legalism: "I have this against you, that you have abandoned the primacy of the direct relational involvement of love, of which my love first constituted you as my church family" (v.4). Thus, this church had to take responsibility for the primary—"from what you have fallen, then turn around from the limits of your legalism and return to the qualitative-relational primacy of the Word's Rule of Law for relationship together in wholeness" (v.5)—the primary relational involvement of love that the letter of the law never duplicates, no matter how rigorous its application.

Legalism, to one extent or another, is a common position held by churches trying to maintain their identity in the shifting winds of their surrounding contexts. The Word's feedback challenges them to examine how this has affected their function—namely, "What are you doing *in your relationships?*" and "Where are you *in the primacy of the direct relational involvement of love?*"

In contrast to the Ephesian church, the church in Philadelphia adhered to the Word with a position in the nature of originalism (3:9-13). Philadelphia housed various temples in this volcanic area that composed a very fertile territory. Thus, the Roman emperor Domitian put political pressure on the city to enforce his self-interests, which

¹ Contextual information taken from Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Revelations* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), and from Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary, New Testament* (Downers Grove: IVP Press, 1993).

certainly intervened on this church along with the cultural intervention of the Jewish community excluding them from association together (as experienced also by the church in Smyrna, 2:8-11). If the church had been influenced by these intervening factors, that would have biased their originalism in the interpretation of the Law to make partisan the application of the Rule of Law. In spite of these intervening political and cultural pressures, this church cultivated their whole minority identity to function in their qualitative-relational integrity constituted by the Word, adhering to the original integrity of the composition of the Word's Rule of Law: "I know that you have but little power *as the minority*, and yet you have kept *the qualitative-relational integrity* of my word and have *been relationally involved directly with my person*" (3:8). The primacy of their relational involvement was reciprocated by the Word, which is the qualitative-relational nature of the Word's Rule of Law for reciprocal relationship together to be his whole minority (3:9-13). Illuminating this church's originalism is crucial to the Word's critique of churches, because it clarifies what and how a church, its persons and relationships need to *be* in order to be whole as the Word's new creation church family—the uncommon whole minority in the evolving context of a common fragmentary majority.

The whole minority church of originalism not only contrasts with the church of legalism but also conflicts with the fragmentary majority churches of voluntarism. The remaining four churches in Pergamum (2:12-17), Thyatira (2:18-29), Sardis (3:1-6) and Laodicea (3:14-22) held to some variant of voluntarism, each of which exposes how they adapted to the intervening political-cultural factors that shaped their identity and function belonging to a fragmentary majority. Their willful participation in God's way of life became voluntary in their public way of life as a church. Thus, what is common to these churches of voluntarism is how relatively the Word's Rule of Law was applied, which could even contrast with legalism but is unequivocally in conflict with originalism. Not surprisingly then, common to voluntarist churches is their participation in truth and norm gymnastics, which by choice or default makes them enablers and complicitors of the status quo in a fragmentary majority that enables injustice and disables justice.

The church in Laodicea (3:14-22) was *status-ing* in quo in the context of the wealthiest Phrygian city, known as a prosperous banking center and for both its textile industry and its renown medical school. Accordingly, this church defined its identity and determined its function on the secondary basis of these quantitative distinctions, which made them very comfortable in the illusion of their self-assessment in a fragmentary majority—thus not knowing the existential condition of their identity and function (v.17). The consequence of their self-autonomy and self-determination made them indifferent to the institutional, systemic and structural inequality and inequity of their surrounding

context. This made evident their selective bias of participating in public life in relative tension with the irreducible and nonnegotiable terms of the Word's Rule of Law—a tension rationalized to serve their self-interests. In other words, this church was indistinguishable from the common surrounding them because in reality their identity and function were common-ized, and thus a church of insignificance like distasteful lukewarm water in the mouth (v.16). The Word ongoingly pursues voluntarist churches, because by status-*ing* in quo in a fragmentary majority they are unable to belong in relationship together with his whole minority (3:19-20).

A subtle version of a voluntarist church was in Sardis (3:1-6), which like the Laodicean church was status-*ing* in quo in a surrounding context that hosted many pagan cults and had a large, powerful and wealthy Jewish community. Since the Christian community there seems to have experienced no persecution, this voluntarist church practiced status-*ing* in quo in that surrounding context to build up for its identity “a name, reputation, brand [*onoma*] of being alive” (v.1). *Onoma* was the distinct outer layer of their identity. Perhaps their gatherings and worship reverberated with such strength that it even impressed pagans and Jews. What this church accomplished was to use the status quo app to, in effect, generate “likes” in a fragmentary majority as if on social media. The virtual reality of their esteemed identity, however, was intrusively clarified and corrected by the Word when he declared the relational imperative: “Wake up...for I have not found your *practice of church identity and function* complete [*pleroo*] in the *lens* of my God” (v.2). The practice that defined this church (“your works,” *ergon*) was incomplete because it was contrary to *pleroo* (to make full, complete or whole). To be complete can only be based on God's whole and uncommon qualitative-relational terms, which cannot be defined by the common of a fragmentary majority.

Common-ization is the critical issue for the Sardis church, and being common-ized remains the key issue for all voluntarist churches. Common-izing compromises both a church's way of life and the Word's Rule of Law, as well as obscuring any light for the church's witness in the surrounding darkness. 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* from outer in, not the qualitative function of *zoe* from inner out. Their reputation signified only a substitute (*onoma*) for the integral identity of who, what and how his church is, consequently lacked the integrity of wholeness. While the Word's polemic about soiled and white (*leukos*, bright, gleaming) clothes described those incomplete and a remnant who weren't incomplete respectively, bright clothes symbolized those who participated in God's life (3:4). This is about reciprocal relationship and involvement together, which soiled clothes symbolized a relational barrier to, precluded or maintained with relational distance. Any type of “soiled” clothes—whether stained by blatant sin or dirtied from subtle incomplete work, including preoccupation with the secondary—would have this relational consequence.

What this more subtly indicates is the lack or absence of ongoing involvement in the *ek-eis* (“out of”-“into”) relational dynamic that the Word made the relational imperative for his church family to be distinguished *en* (“in”) the surrounding contexts of the world (the Word’s defining family prayer, Jn 17:11,14-18)—distinguished in their whole and uncommon identity from the common and fragmentary surrounding them. Without this relational outcome from the *ek-eis* relational dynamic, this church became subject to the shaping influence intervening from reductionist sources (like culture and politics) with the following consequences:

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

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

Therefore, churches today with a wide reputation and huge brand need to examine the basis for their identity and function, and what they’re filling their churches with. The Word assesses the integrity of church witness only from inner out; and any identity and function composed by a reduced theological anthropology and weak view of sin will always be incomplete and subject to the Word’s “Wake up” call.

Moving on to a more complicated variant of a voluntarist church is the hybrid found in the church at Thyatira (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; and we are well aware of the tension between exclusion and inclusion. The economic structure of this church's surrounding context shaped them to take an apparent pragmatic approach to their practice of faith, rather than become isolated economically and socially. Thus, as a voluntarist church they were more tolerant of questionable differences and became complicit with surrounding practices by using truth and norm gymnastics; this certainly made relative the application of the Word's Rule of Law.

In the nature of this surrounding context, the Word acknowledged this church's extensive Christian practice: love, faith, service, patient endurance, and that their "last works are greater than the first," indicating not a status-quo church but actually performing more practice than before. Yet, what the Word clarified and corrected was that their practice also "tolerated" (*aphiemi*, to let pass, permit, allow, v.20) a prevailing teaching and practice from the surrounding context (likely related to trade-guilds), which compromised the integrity of a church's whole theology and practice. Significantly, their hybrid process was not simply an issue about syncretism, synthesizing competing ideologies, or even pluralism; and the issue also went beyond merely maintaining doctrinal purity (as in the Ephesian church) to the deeper issue about participation in (*en*) a surrounding context having the prevailing presence of reductionism and its subsequent influence on their perceptual-interpretive lens. Their lens, of course, determined what they ignored (or tolerated) and paid attention to, which shaped their practice in a hybrid process (like the church in Pergamum).

In spite of being what would be considered an activist church that cared for people, they made pragmatic concessions with good intentions to serve the common good. The consequence was to become enablers and complicitors of a fragmentary majority, which compromised the integral whole and uncommon integrity of their righteousness and also the qualitative-relational integrity of the whole justice from the Word's Rule of Law—contrary to the Word's plumb line of righteousness and in conflict with the measuring line of justice. Theologically, the Thyatira church demonstrated a weak view of sin, that is, sin without reductionism, consequently what they certainly must have considered good works was 'good without wholeness'. Functionally, this exposes their lack of reciprocal relational involvement with the Trinity in the indispensable *ek-eis* reciprocating dynamic necessary to distinguish their whole identity

as the Trinity's family *en* the surrounding context without being fragmented by it in a hybrid process.

What converges in a hybrid process is critical to listen to carefully and pay attention to closely: 'sin without reductionism' subtly composes 'good without wholeness'—which may survive the common good but not the uncommon good of the whole gospel—so that the church's theology and practice are not distinguished whole in the world, even though perhaps having longstanding, popular or uncompromising distinction in the surrounding context (as other churches demonstrated). To what extent does a hybrid process shape the global church today? Added attention needs to be paid to global South churches, who must adapt to a global economy, fixed cultural traditions, and even the spirit world. Yet, common practices by global North churches already demonstrate having absorbed the limits and constraints from the common into their theology and practice, although the hybrid process is much more subtle. Regardless of the variants of voluntarist churches, the Word makes it unmistakable to them "that I am the one who searches minds and hearts, and I will *respond* to each of you as your *existential identity and function* deserve" (2:23).

The Word certainly searches the minds and hearts of all churches, whether voluntarist, legalist or originalist. The political and cultural factors intervening on churches ongoingly create shifting winds in the surrounding climate; and all churches must go beyond merely adapting to these conditions and be responsible to deeply engage in neutralizing and countering them. To clarify this responsibility for addressing these intervening factors, the Word's integrated three-fold approach to politics and culture includes the qualified cooperative approach. Yet, in these shifting winds there are competing definitions of *cooperation* that counter the Word's approach. For this reason the Word's approach is always the qualified cooperative approach, and thus it is cooperative only when such cooperation does not compromise our whole identity and function from inner out in the primacy of relationship together. In other words, the cooperative practice of the church in the surrounding context must not be common-ized but clearly distinguished whole and uncommon. For this to be the existential identity and function of the church, it must be responsible to neutralize and counter the pervasive and prevailing workings of the common. Then, this whole-ly church illuminates light in likeness of the whole-ly Trinity, which the surrounding fog and darkness cannot obscure.

Common Ground or Uncommon Connection

In the intervening winds of politics and culture, the public life of Christians and churches are faced with the question of whether they have essentially formed a religious culture and a politicized religion. Those formations may not be explicit enough to readily recognize, but they would be evident sufficiently to recognize cultural and political

influence and shaping. They should examine if this forms the composition of their identity and function. And is this the common ground that underlies their gatherings as church beyond the ostensible theological markers identified in statements of faith? These are crucial issues notably in a polarized climate, which is amplified for Christians and churches by affective polarization—making them increasingly susceptible to misinformation, disinformation and even to embracing conspiracy theories, as witnessed today. This is political theology’s reckoning alert and beckoning call for our public way of life, because the church is the penultimate witness for the relational outcome of the Word’s whole gospel.

The Word’s “Wake up” call to a highly successful church confronted the reality that “I have found your *church practice* incomplete based on the *qualitative-relational lens of the Trinity*.” What then did this church witness to in the persons and relationships composing it? This is directly relevant today because a majority of churches fall into this scenario, whether they would be considered successful or not. The central issues is the existential basis for all these gatherings as church, which always bears a witness.

The Zoom Church

During the COVID-19 pandemic, churches who didn’t defy health orders have been relegated to virtual gatherings using Zoom. This has been challenging for churches and its members to engage as a substitute for in-person gatherings—though likely less challenging than for students struggling during this crisis. Virtual gatherings as church, however, is not a recent phenomenon; it has actually existed since the early church, which by necessity prompted the Word’s “Wake up” call. What has evolved since the early church is analogous to what’s experienced in the Zoom church.

Certainly, Zoom gatherings require some behavior modifications from in-person gatherings. Yet, do the behaviors modified really involve much difference from in-person interaction? Consider what you see on the Zoom screen, an image of each person participating even if they don’t say a word. Then consider how much that image reflects that person; and if you don’t know the person from before, what does the image make you think about the person? Zoom screens obviously only show the upper image of a person, which has resulted in numerous facetious remarks and jokes about what the lower half of the person is showing.

The sum of Zoom gatherings involves the real dynamics of human relations in general and in-person relationships in particular. Foremost is the presentation of *self* in an image that only partially represents the whole person, or even an image in contrary reflection of the real person. These images involve merely outer-in distinctions that obscure the whole person behind what effectively serve as a veil or a mask. The relational consequence from these dynamics are immeasurable in human life and far reaching for the church:

1. The existential reality of relational distance, which is merely duplicated in virtual realities like Zoom.
2. Relegating all outer-in distinctions for persons to the inevitable comparative process intrinsic to reducing persons to what they have and do, whether in Zoom or in-person gatherings.
3. This replicates in church gatherings a system and structure that reinforce and sustain human inequality between those persons and human inequity among them.

These consequences evolve in such gatherings all because their whole persons (not partial images) have not been vulnerably involved in face-to-face relationship together (not outer-in gatherings) to be whole and uncommon in likeness of the whole-ly Trinity.

These consequential relational dynamics reflected the gatherings that the early disciples had with Jesus. In their outer-in distinctions (e.g. to be the greatest among them), they maintained relational distance from Jesus (as in Mk 9:33-34) as they participated daily in what Jesus was doing. Most consequential, however, no matter how much time they spent together and saw what he did, they still did not have the inner-out depth of relational involvement to know his whole person (Jn 14:9). It's as if all their time together was a Zoom gathering—gathered together on common ground without the uncommon connection to be his church family.

Moreover, this relational syndrome also mirrors the incomplete practice of the Sardis church and the relinquished primacy of the covenant relationship of love by the Ephesian church. This reflects the negative impact both on the integrity of a church's condition and on the credibility of its witness. Whether in virtual or in-person gatherings, these churches re-envision the church and thereby reconstitute the relational outcome of the gospel. This effectively obviates their witness since their identity and function do not illuminate in the darkness but simply blends compatibly into the common. The church, locally and globally, struggles in this relational condition; and its branches need to be restored to their qualitative-relational integrity, so that their penultimate witness will be fulfilled.

Countering the Re-envisioned Church by Restoring God's Family Lens

The Word's "Wake up" call to churches is based on God's undistorted lens, the qualitative-relational lens that neutralizes and counters the common myopic lens prevailing in churches. When you look at your specific church branch or at the host of church branches today, it is essential to understand the roots from which these churches branched. In spite of the theology stated for the vision of many churches, their practice has been coopted by surrounding influences mainly from culture and politics. Currently, for example, identity politics has shaped the church's public identity, and partisan politics has skewed its function, in which the church descends into gatherings of like-mindedness.

The consequence of this intervention has coopted the church to practice essentially a **politicized religion** in the appearance of a **religious culture**; and such explicit or implicit simulations and illusions of faith increasingly blend in with today's post-Christian period pervading in secularism.

This redefining process has produced church branches, the variants of which have re-envisioned the church to render them incomplete according to God's lens, and thus incompatible with the Word's vision for his church (Eph 1:22-23; 4:13). Therefore, all the variants of the re-envisioned church need to be neutralized and countered.

The partisan influence from the surrounding context intervening on the church is increasingly consequential:

1. For embedding churches in the common distinctions valued in their surrounding context (as in the church in Laodicea).
2. Thus for inevitably engaging churches in an assumed comparative process or a presumed stratified system of distinctions (as in the church in Sardis) that renders the human order unequal.
3. Then for unavoidably making churches into enablers and complicitors of the existential human inequality and inequity surrounding them.
4. Thereby for misleading them to become enablers of injustice and disablers of justice.

Before countering this partisan influence on the early formation of the church in the palpable Word's post-ascension church critique, the Word in the incarnation neutralized partisan influence on the initial formative process for the church. For example, this partisan influence was neutralized by the Word in embracing the Samaritan woman and by taking into his family the marginalized tax collectors Matthew and Zacchaeus (Lk 19:1-10).

Most significantly, the Word counters the re-envisioning of the church in a pivotal interaction often overlooked on the cross. This interaction needs to be understood in the full context leading to it. The embodied Word constituted the new relational order for his followers' life together, which countered the common relational order of family they were used to (Mt 12:47-50, cf. Mt 10:34-39). This is the family of the formative church that Jesus promised to them (Mk 10:23-30; Jn 14:18,23). In his intrusive relational path, Jesus was not anti-biological family, whether in extended kinship or nuclear form. Rather he countered the primacy given to it because it was only secondary (not unimportant) for his disciples. The relational path Jesus enacted was the relational progression that constituted his church family—the existential uncommon relational outcome of the gospel that he saved us *to*. Therefore, his church family is primary for his disciples. Yet,

this primacy is warranted only when the persons composing the church are whole and their function in relationship together as family is determined by the new relational order belonging to Jesus, who embodied and enacted the whole-ly Trinity.

The created wholeness for the person is inseparable from one's relationships. This means that persons can never be whole by themselves, namely as mere individuals. Therefore, the individual person alone is never sufficient to complete being whole; for the person to be whole as constituted by its created nature (original and new) in the image and likeness of the whole-ly Trinity involves also the relationships together necessary to complete being whole, God's relational whole as in the Trinity. This integral identity of persons and relationships together in wholeness is disclosed first in the Trinity—as relationally revealed by Jesus—to help us understand our ontology and function in likeness.

No trinitarian person alone is the whole of God. That is, each trinitarian person is whole-ly God but is not complete in being the whole of God apart from the other trinitarian persons; necessarily by its nature only the three trinitarian persons together constitute the relational ontology of the Trinity—in whose likeness human persons have been created and thus must function by its nature to be whole, God's relational whole. Anything less and any substitutes are reductions of the whole—that is, “to be apart” in ontology and function—thus can never reflect, experience or represent wholeness; at best they are only the ontological simulations and functional illusions from reductionism and its counter-relational work.

On this irreducible basis, then, the reality facing our persons, relationships and churches is this: The wholeness of all our persons, relationships and churches is **trinitarian wholeness**—nothing less than and no substitutes for the whole-ly Trinity, “so that they *all* may be *whole*, as we are *whole*” (Jn 17:21). This reality is not virtual, an alternative reality or a deniable reality that we can dismiss as a theological construction, since it emerges only face to face distinctly without the veil in the primary context of relationship together.

Yet, there is a diverse condition of persons and relationships occupying the church today. Most function “to be apart” as relational orphans in the common variants of the human relational order—who don't belong by choice or are unable to belong by design. In contrast and conflict, the persons and relationships belonging to Jesus' church family are whole-ly in ontology and function, and therefore live whole in uncommon relationships together in likeness of the whole-ly Trinity—all of whom and which are distinguished by the uncommon while still in the common (the *ek-eis* dynamic Jesus prayed for his family, Jn 17:15,21,23). What unfolds here is the relational progression of Jesus' whole-ly disciples belonging to his family, whose integral identity is composed and thereby distinguished together in the new relational order.

The new relational order is not optional for the church family of the whole-ly Trinity. Jesus didn't enact his whole ontology and function as just an alternative for us to consider. When we focus specifically in relational terms on the various interactions Jesus had with persons, what unfolds is his relational progression in establishing the new relational order of his family. Jesus was not involved in isolated or unrelated encounters; rather he was always relationally involved in the Trinity's family love for the relational purpose to pursue, embrace and establish persons to belong in his family. His essential relational work must not be oversimplified, nor its relational outcome minimalized. The relational outcome was not to belong as mere church members, nor to become just relational orphans without truly belonging to his church *family*. Furthermore, his whole relational outcome was never optional for those who claimed the Good News, therefore cannot be optional for those occupying the church today.

For example, when Zacchaeus responded face to face in relationship with Jesus—an involvement that was prohibited in the existing relational order of Jesus' religious culture—the relational outcome wasn't whether or not Zacchaeus wanted to belong in God's family. Jesus simply declared that this marginalized or discarded person now belonged (Lk 19:9). And based on his adoption, Zacchaeus' new identity as a son in God's whole-ly family came with nonnegotiable relational responsibilities that all family members are accountable for to each other to reinforce and sustain the Word's essential relational work.

The Word's qualitative-relational lens of his church family countered the re-envisioned church with this new relational order and makes family members accountable to each other in what can only be the uncommon way. This brings us to the pivotal interaction on the cross that resounded in Jesus' defining statement for his church family. To his mother, "Woman, here is your son," and to his beloved disciple John, "Here is your mother" (Jn 19:26-27). We cannot overlook or take lightly the relational significance of his family love communicated in this statement. By countering what was common in the surrounding culture with the whole-ly culture of his family, Jesus was fulfilling what he saved us all *to*—which is not a mere option for us to consider. In this relational reality (not a dramatization or metaphor) Jesus gives us a partial entrance into salvation's relational outcome by opening the functional door—behind the curtain without the veil, thus demolishing the holy partition—to salvation's new life and practice.

In this defining moment, circumstances, culture, family and Jesus' promise to his disciples (specifically Mk 10:29-30) converge for those persons to make this intimate relational connection. The initial relational outcome forms the functional roots for the relational growth and development of his church as family. By building relationally with the persons who truly constituted his family (see Mt 12:47-50), Jesus demonstrated the functional significance of being his family in what needs to be understood as a defining interaction for all his followers, 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), 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. Jesus wasn't 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-ly Trinity, his whole-ly life and practice constituted function beyond the counter-relational workings of reductionism prevailing in the surrounding context, which he expected also of his followers in order to participate in his new covenant family (Mt 5:20).

Jesus' integral trinitarian relational context of family and relational process of family love was clearly illuminated in his painful condition yet sensitive relational involvement with Mary and John; again, this 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 and relationally enacted the family love of the whole-ly Trinity. In the most touching moment on the cross, Jesus teaches us the relational reality of what being his family means: how to see each other, how to be involved with each other, and how the individual person is affirmed in submitting to him for family together.

For Jesus, family involvement was based on the Trinity's intimate relational involvement of love, so being his family cannot be understood from our conventional perceptions of family involvement or by our conditioned feelings of obligation, and such sentiments of love. Despite his circumstances, Jesus focused on Mary and John with the deepest love involvement and affection (*agape* and *phileo*, cf. Jn 5:20, Dt 7:7-8): "*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 person affirmed in submitting to him?

Jesus gave his followers *new eyes*—**God's family lens**—with which to see each other, 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 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. And that is how he wants us to be involved with each other, not stopping short at any point on this progression—no matter how well we have been servants together, nor how much we have shared as friends. This deeply touching interaction was Jesus' 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 only by qualitative-relational terms. This essential relational work involves the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes, just as Jesus lived and went to the cross. Persons in likeness live the whole function of salvation's new life and practice in the existential by their ongoing relational involvement in this essential relational work, which makes secondary any other acts of service.

For this unequivocal purpose and essential outcome, Jesus' action was just as much for John's benefit as it was for Mary—both in provision and opportunity. In reciprocal 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, Jn 19:27). He didn't just take her into his house to be merely a household member; he embraced Mary as his own mother (or kinship sister). She must have embraced him also as her son (or kinship brother). In response to what each of them let go of in order to follow Jesus, he promised them an even greater family beyond what existed (Mk 10:29-30). True to his words as ever, he fulfilled his promise to them initially in this down payment. This is the uncommon relational outcome existentially for each individual who submits to him to participate in his family. The greatest satisfaction of being accepted without outer-in distinctions, the deepest fulfillment of the individual's self-worth from inner out, the most certainty of one's place and belonging can be experienced by the individual person only within the relational reality of the whole of his new covenant family composing his new creation church in the new relational order. Anything less and any substitutes are merely virtual.

This uncommon connection distinguishing the new relational order of the church family can only be *complete* when in qualitative-relational likeness to the whole-ly Trinity. The integrity of this church's relational condition can be nothing less, with no substitutes shaped by the common in surrounding contexts. However, this is always met with competition from the common ground of anything less and any substitutes, alternatives which are incomplete and thus fragmentary for persons, relationships together and their human order. Re-envisioned churches gathering in like-mindedness

dwell comfortably on common ground, a convenience sufficient for their idea of church. But, they labor in the relational condition of a relational order lacking the relational connection that is only experienced in the uncommon condition of transformed relationships—relationships equalized in their human order and intimately involved in their relational connection together integrally as the Word’s church family.

Opposing Church Divisions by Family Together in Wholeness

In a polarized climate, locally and globally, Christians and churches are susceptible to the stress from affective polarization and the instability of minimalist disorder, which even getting a COVID-19 vaccine has amplified for many because of the inequities in who gets it. While churches may argue for having a justified case for how they gather, all this fragments their theological will to allow their practice to be co-opted by partisan influences. Like-minded gatherings have been the common solution to this divisiveness, a solution both in public life and church life. This solution, however, really reduces us to a double-minded condition (cf. Jas 1:2-8), which will not resolve a divided heart (cf. the Thyatira church). The relational condition of churches reflects the need to change from being double-minded to whole-hearted, so that churches can assert theological will over co-opted practice.

The reality facing the church today, locally, regionally and globally, is that re-envisioned churches domesticate the church in the calculus and algorithm of a fragmentary majority. Domesticating the church in the surrounding context allows the parameters of peace and justice to be dictated by the common majority. This process makes evident that a church is common-ized in a dynamic contrary to and in conflict with the whole-ly Word and his family (Heb 2:11; 1 Pet 1:15; 2:9-10). Thus, domestication signifies church identity and function contrary to the Word’s church family of outliers (as in 1 Pet 1:17; 2:11; Heb 11:13). This distinction brings to the forefront the current state of the global church and the relational condition composing its church branches.

As the functional key, Jesus’ essential relational work demonstrated the relationships of love necessary to be the whole-ly Trinity’s new covenant family with family love (both *agape* and *phileo*), and this initial experience constituted the uncommon roots of his church as family. Moreover, this relationally experienced reality signified the ongoing fulfillment of his covenant promise to his followers (Mk 10:29-30) beyond what they could imagine. The essential reality of this whole relational outcome becomes distinguished in the here and now by the whole function of his church family in the new relational order, whereby the whole-ly church’s persons and relationships integrally enact the whole gospel embodied by whole-ly Jesus for all to belong to the whole-ly Trinity’s family (Jn 17:21-23; Eph 2:14-22).

The ontology and function of the church in the new relational order emerges definitively from Jesus' formative family prayer (commonly seen as his high priestly prayer, Jn 17). Based on his prayer, the global church is *one*, not a division of many churches. For the global church to be one it must be whole by the nature of its likeness to the Trinity, rather than a collection of fragmentary parts. Like the Trinity, all the persons and relationships of the global church must be whole persons in whole relationships together rather than based on their variable surrounding contexts. Accordingly for the global church, the variable integrity of their diverse condition no longer would be in likeness of the whole persons in whole relationships together constituting the Trinity. In practice if not in theology, our existing diverse condition reflects a likeness shaped more by the surrounding context; this **domestication** then makes evident belonging to a common culture over belonging to the whole-ly Trinity's family. For the global church to be in likeness of the Trinity, its persons and relationships must by necessity (without option or negotiation) be constituted by the new relational order established by whole-ly Jesus in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes. By belonging in this whole-ly relational condition, we would not be confronted with the critique "Wake up...for I have not found your *function* complete [fulfilled whole, *pleroo*] in the sight of *the whole-ly Trinity*" (Rev 3:2).

The new relational order is not a separatist order isolated from human contexts. On the contrary, it functions with direct relational involvement in human contexts—defined by the Word's three-fold integrated approach to culture and politics—but not according to the existing order of those contexts. The Word's approach is necessary in order to bring change to persons and relationships, which may require changing that existing (old) order, or at least its contextualized or commonized bias influencing persons and relationships. The *new* intersects the *old* in the relational progression of Jesus' intrusive relational path to integrate the bad news into the good news of the whole gospel. The relational progression of the change he enacted always engaged persons from inner out. By engaging the whole person with his whole person, Jesus enacted the theological anthropology (countering the existing anthropology) necessary to address our human relational condition and to transform our persons and relationships in two essential ways:

1. The whole person from inner out cannot be engaged by outer-in distinctions of what a person does or has (or doesn't do or have). These distinctions are the basis in human relations for a comparative order (structure and/or system) that measures persons on this scale and thereby designates them to a particular level in this comparative order—all of which underlies human inequality and inequity. Obviously, the higher we are the better off and the lower the worse off. To whatever extent, we all participate in this comparative process (cf. the early disciples, Lk 9:46; 22:24), which (a) reinforces and sustains human inequality and inequity, and (b) exposes an underlying reduced theological anthropology that

counters Jesus' whole theological anthropology. By engaging the whole person from inner out, Jesus disregarded all human distinctions and **equalized all persons** from their comparative value. Then, he redeemed persons from the reduced ontology and function of those distinctions, so that their comparative worth will be equalized from inner out as whole persons—free from the veil of distinctions that occupied them from outer in. The relational outcome also transformed their relationships from this comparative process to be equalized together in wholeness, without which their persons and relationships could not *be* whole and function whole. Therefore, Jesus transformed persons and relationships from their deficit condition belonging to a comparative process—the deficit evident in church divisions—vulnerably to their whole condition of relational belonging in **the process of equalization**. Being equalized, however, is only the first essential step in their transformation. Integral to the equalization of our persons and relationships to complete the relational equation of transformed persons in transformed relationships is this second essential step.

2. The whole-ly Jesus always engaged persons face to face, whether they could receive his person or not. He enacted this relational process by vulnerably involving the heart of his person without his titles, roles and resources, in order to make relational connection in the primacy of face-to-face relationship together. In this relational process, he vulnerably involved his whole person to enact on the cross the essential relational work needed for direct face-to-face involvement in relationship with the whole-ly God (as in Heb 10:19-22). By removing the veil, human persons could now have heart-to-heart connection for face-to-face relationship together with the whole-ly Trinity. The transformation of persons from inner out opens their heart to the heart of Jesus, the Father and the Spirit. When hearts open to each other and come together in relationship, the relational outcome is **intimacy**. This intimacy also extends throughout God's whole-ly family when hearts open to each other in relationship together without the veil. Yet, intimacy in relationship together cannot unfold until persons emerge whole by being equalized from their distinctions that form the veil for relational distance; only simulations and illusions of intimacy exist when equalization is not a relational reality. Mary demonstrated the integral process of transformed persons in transformed relationship by being equalized in her person, so that she opened her heart to come together intimately with the heart of Jesus—in anticipation of, yet prior to, Jesus' essential relational work on the cross to remove the veil from our hearts (as in 2 Cor 3:16). As long as persons do not relationally progress vulnerably behind the curtain in their relational involvement with Jesus on the cross to have their veil removed, they will not be equalized from their distinctions in reduced ontology and function (reduced theological

anthropology). This lack or absence will always create a relational barrier for the heart to open intimately, even masked by subtle illusions of intimacy. At the same time, just being equalized from our distinctions does not guarantee that our persons will open our hearts to be deeply vulnerable for intimacy in relationships together. Nevertheless, when we experience intimacy with the whole-ly Trinity as family together, we extend our persons and relationships to each other in likeness—which is what and who Jesus enacted to transform our persons and relationships (as in 2 Cor 3:18).

In the relational equation of transformed persons in transformed relationships, both equalization and intimacy are integral to the new relational order. Therefore, our belonging to the new creation church family based on the new relational order requires nothing less than equalization and no substitutes for intimacy in both our persons and relationships. Anything less and any substitutes do not involve the relational progression of the change to transformation but the subtle regression that continues to reflect, reinforce and sustain our relational condition in an old order of stratified relations shaped by the common and belonging to a surrounding culture—the relational condition composing church divisions.

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 belonging together “in the bond of wholeness” (Eph 4:3, cf. Rom 8:15-16). This bond (*syndesmos*) is the whole relationships binding the church together from inner out as one interdependent body, which the Word embodied and enacted 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 church divisions—existing even with an ontological simulation of 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 serving to promote the mere absence of conflict. The wholeness of the global church does not emerge from such theology and practice.

Any form of reductionism is never an option or substitute for the whole-ly Trinity and the Trinity'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 completeness of God in Christ 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).

Though Paul was not trinitarian in his theology, traditionally speaking, the Spirit was the key for him in his practice (cf. 1 Cor 2:9-13). The dynamic presence and involvement of the Spirit's whole person 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 Thess 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-ly Trinity's new creation family in whole relationship together without the veil as the church in relational likeness of the Trinity (2 Cor 3:16-18), the completeness of Christ (as *pleroma*, Eph 1:22-23; 1 Cor 12:11-13)—which is why the person of the Spirit is deeply affected, grieving over any reductionism in reciprocal relational involvement together (Eph 4:30). With the *new de-contextualized and de-commonized lens* from 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, which is congruent with their experience of relational involvement from the Trinity and in likeness of how the Trinity engages relationships.

The *agape* relational involvement Paul defines is not about sacrificial love but family love. Clarifying and correcting misconceptions of *agapē* and Jesus' love, family love submits one's whole person from inner out to one another in equalized and intimate relationships signifying whole relationship together—love in likeness of how the whole-ly Trinity functions together and is relationally involved with us. Paul defines conclusively that in the midst of reductionism, this is the new creation church's new relational order in which "the *uncommon* peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your *persons from inner out* in Christ Jesus *from reductionism*" (Phil 4:7) and by which "the God of *wholeness* will be *relationally involved* with you" (4:9).

What unfolds from Christ as the church's **uncommon peace** is the relational significance of persons redeemed from their distinctions, and relationships together freed from the relational barriers keeping them in relational distance, detachment or separation. However comparative relations may be structured, Paul declares in unmistakable relational terms: "Christ has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of *fragmenting differences*" (Eph 2:14, NIV). The relational significance of this uncommon peace is not for the future but for this essential reality to unfold in our experience here and now in the church. This is the pivotal breakthrough in human relations that will transform the church to the new creation of persons redeemed, and thus freed for their relationships to be reconciled in the new order uncommon for all persons, peoples, nations and their relations since 'from the beginning'. "Christ's *relational* purpose was to create in *his wholeness* one new *humanity* out of *their fragmentation*, thus making *them whole in uncommon peace*" (v.15). When this identity composed by the new relational order becomes the existential relational reality for the persons and relationships of the church, they can claim salvation *from* sin as reductionism and salvation *to* wholeness together; and by only this relational reality, they can proclaim and whole-ly witness to the experiential truth of this good news for human relations. Without this essential reality, persons and relationships in the church regress in what amounts to fake news based on alternative facts; this is the syndrome underlying church divisions.

Therefore, the church and its persons and relationships are accountable for tearing down any existing holy partition that allows them to maintain practice with relational distance as if still in front of the curtain torn away by Jesus. By being involved with Jesus' essential relational work enacted behind the curtain, we also are accountable for removing any existing veil over our face in order to be vulnerably involved face to face in the intimate relationships together that Christ saved us *to* today and not for the future. In other words, the intimate relationship of equalized persons in the church is neither optional nor negotiable but essential for the church's whole-ly identity to be distinguished in likeness of the whole-ly Trinity. Without the church's whole-ly identity, the church functions with, in and for church divisions.

For Paul, God indeed is not a God of fragmentation but the God of wholeness; therefore only 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-ly Trinity in distinct relational terms (Eph 2:17-22), to constitute the Word's relational whole as family in the Trinity's relational likeness (Col 3:10-11,15; 2 Cor 3:18), and to embody and enact as Jesus' whole-ly disciples the ontological identity and relational belonging that are necessary to fulfill the inherent human relational need and resolve the human problem of inequality and inequity existing both in the world and even within churches (Eph 3:6,10-12; 4:13-16).

Congruently, in transformed ecclesiology the identity for all churches is distinguished beyond all surrounding contexts with nothing less and no substitutes for the following:

The church in whole ontology and function in relational terms constitutes only transformed persons relationally involved by family love in transformed relationships together integrally equalized and intimate, which composes the new relational order for the church's whole-ly identity progressing uncommonly in wholeness in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole and holy Trinity (Eph 4:23-25)—who is not a God of reductionism promoting ontological simulations and functional illusions that only regress.

Solely on this basis will the global church “be *whole-ly* as we are *whole-ly*,” and will its persons and relationships “become completely *whole*, so that the world may know that you have sent me *to make them whole* and have loved them *intimately* even as you have loved me” (Jn 17:22-23).

In this uncommon relational outcome of family together in wholeness—which unequivocally opposes churches of anything less and any substitutes—the qualitative-relational integrity of the church's relational condition is clearly distinguished to illuminate unambiguously the credibility of the church' witness as the light in the darkness.

Freed to Reconcile

There is one encouraging narrative in the midst of today's polarized crisis: the unmistakable exposure of the evolving human relational condition inherent to humanity, innate to all humankind, and intrinsic to the human order. This exposure is clearly evident even in a democracy, whose ideology points to an evolving utopia rather than devolving dystopian situations witnessed in its past and present. In theory, democracy is for every individual to be free in their way of life, with rights for the pursuit of their happiness. What truly exists in U.S. democracy is this reality: Where and when individuals have been truly free, their exercise of freedom has exposed their human relational condition that reinforces and sustains human inequality and inequity between individuals—which certainly prevents every individual to be free. The good news integral to this bad news, however, is that the Word reconstitutes freedom to heal the human relational condition.

When “Christ Jesus broke down the relational barrier that divided persons by their outer-in differences” (Eph 2:14), he freed them from the condition “to be apart from God's created wholeness” (Gen 2:18) both as an individual and in relationships together. This initial redemptive change freed partisan individuals to come together as persons from inner out in order to be reconciled together in wholeness as one family (Eph 2:15-

16). Therefore, persons were freed not to be more capable to pursue their individual interests (Gal 5:1,13) but freed from inner out for their persons to be equalized, and thereby be transformed from their relational condition “to be apart” and free to come together with other persons (whatever their outer-in distinctions) in intimate relationships together as family “just like the Trinity” (2 Cor 3:16-18; Eph 2:19-22; Jn 17:22). Christians are freed and churches are free for no other relational purpose and outcome.

The Word reconstituting freedom for no other relational purpose and outcome is the pivotal breakthrough in human relations for resolving the inequality and inequity in the human relational condition. Most certainly, this must first be the experiential truth and relational reality for churches existentially in their persons and relationships. That’s why this breakthrough in relationships foremost includes and directly involves relationship with the whole and uncommon God. “In *their wholeness together* to reconcile *all* of them *having distinctions* to God through *his relational work* on the cross, by which he *redeemed their fragmenting differences*” (Eph 2:16). It is indispensable for us to understand what Paul unfolds for the church here is that reconciliation is inseparable from redemption (to be freed). To be freed by redemption is integral for reconciliation in order for relationships (including with God) to come together at the heart of persons in their ontology and function from inner out. Since the prevailing condition for persons is not inner out, this then requires persons be redeemed from outer-in distinctions that prevent this relational connection. We cannot maintain distinctions among us and have this breakthrough in relationships for their reconciliation. This is a confronting issue for those in the church (notably its leaders), who depend on distinctions to establish their identity and self-worth. All discussion about reconciliation must include this reality or there will be no redemptive change in our relationships that brings us together equalized intimately person to person, face to face without the veil.

Therefore, the integral relational significance of **redemptive reconciliation** is for the heart of persons now freed and equalized to be vulnerable to each other (including God) and come together in intimate relationships. Intimate relationships are the relational outcome distinguished by the redemptive reconciliation of uncommon peace. Paul doesn’t merely recommend the uncommon peace of Christ but makes it imperative for transformed relationships equalized and intimate in the new relational order. With God, intimate relationship involves going beyond conventional spirituality and a spiritual relationship to the following: the existential relational reality of the whole person vulnerably involved ongoingly with “God in boldness and confidence” (Eph 3:12), rooted in the experiential truth of being redeemed from human distinctions, from their fragmentation and the deficit condition of reduced ontology and function, and then reconciled in wholeness together belonging in God’s family—“the *intimate* dwelling in which *the whole-ly* God lives by his Spirit” (Eph 2:22, NIV cf. Jn 14:23). Accordingly and indispensably, to have this relational outcome with the Trinity and with each other

requires existing relations to be transformed from the relational distance of their distinctions to intimate relationships composed by the redemptive reconciliation of uncommon wholeness. This whole-ly relational outcome is the whole gospel and the cross that Jesus enacted to fulfill for our intimacy together heart to heart, thus with-in nothing less than our complete identity as persons face to face. Mary embodied and enacted the whole-ly relational outcome of this gospel, in contrast and conflict with the other disciples who struggled in something less at Jesus' expense and in their relationships together.

The relational significance of intimacy in church relationships should not be idealized, or even spiritualized, because this indeed uncommon relational outcome is at the heart of what Christ saves us *to* (integrally with what he saves us *from*). There is no good news unless the church is being transformed to intimate relationships together, no matter how clearly the gospel is defined in our theology and how much it is proclaimed in our practice. This new relational order was the only relational purpose for Jesus when he cleaned out his house for all persons, peoples, tribes and nations to have relational access to God; and the church is accountable to clean out its own house in order to "gather with me and not scatter" (Mt 12:30). To complete his only relational purpose for his house, on the cross Jesus also deconstructed his house by tearing away the prominent curtain (demolishing the holy partition) to open direct relational access face to face with the whole and uncommon God (Heb 10:19-22). This irreversible breakthrough in relationship with the Trinity included removing the veil to transform relationships both with God and with each other to intimate relationships together (2 Cor 3:16-18).

Thus, the experiential truth and relational reality of the Word's breakthrough in relationships both neutralizes the relational distance common in human relationships and existing in churches, and also counters the inequality and inequity inevitable from such human relations.

The Equalizer Emerges

In this new relational order of the integrally equalized and intimate relationships that constitute freed church gatherings, what unfolds is the experiential truth and relational reality of the existential new creation, not its notion or ideal (2 Cor 5:16-17). The Word constituted the new creation to be existential in our persons, relationships, way of life together and its human order; and this only becomes the experiential truth and relational reality when distinguished clearly as uncommon from the surrounding common.

When churches and their persons and relationships function in the new relational order of transformed relationships equalized and intimate together, their whole-ly identity is both de-contextualized from belonging to a surrounding culture and de-commonized

from shaping influence by the common. The unfolding relational outcome of their relational progression with the whole-ly Trinity is the new creation church fulfilling its family responsibilities by (1) face-to-face involvement in equalizing just as Jesus equalized, and by (2) living equalized together just as the trinitarian persons are equalized together in the Trinity. The church's equalizing likeness to the ontology and function of the whole-ly Trinity constitutes the global church family's ontology and function as **the equalizer**, first among themselves and integrally then in the contextualization and the commonization of the human condition.

Equalizing is directly correlated to peace. The peace given by Jesus and extended by Paul, however, cannot be confused with or associated with the common notion of peace used in the human context and typically by Christians. In contrast and at times even in conflict with this peace, Jesus and Paul's peace was always and only uncommon peace. This is a crucial distinction needing to be made in our theology and practice that cannot be underestimated or overemphasized, or else we revolve on immature peace lacking wholeness.

Contrary to common peace, uncommon peace is not a comfort zone or a place of convenience for the church family to practice its faith, because the wholeness of uncommon peace conjointly fights for the whole gospel and fights against its reduction to anything less and any substitutes, even if the latter is doctrinally correct. As embodied by Jesus, this integral fight is for the primacy of persons and relationships in their wholeness of ontology and function and against their fragmentation, often subtle, to anything less and any substitutes in reduced ontology and function. This reduction is typically observed in Christians using the model of Micah 6:8 for their practice composed in the terms of common peace, which merely engages in premature justice and immature peace.

In Paul's integral fight of Christ's uncommon peace, he illuminated the relational significance of uncommon peace and its relational purpose, process and outcome definitive for the church and its persons and relationships to be whole together—without fragmentation and any relational distance, detachment or separation (Col 3:15). This uncommon peace needs to compose the church's theology and practice today both in the fight for this primacy of persons and relationships and against their reduction in any way. The explicit or implied reductions by secondary matters have eluded our understanding and fogged our perception—notably by a contextualized bias that enables inequality and a commonized bias that is complicit with inequity. Without uncommon peace, the experiential truth and relational reality of the church *family* of Christ does not emerge and unfold, even though simulations of the church *body* of Christ exist today as in the past. What then specifically distinguishes the whole and uncommon identity of the church in everyday life today?

When the palpable Word, illuminated with the Spirit, transformed (not converted) the divisive Jew Saul, his purpose was not for common peace to negate the conflict of Saul's power relations against the church—which the Word received personally, “why do

you persecute me?” (Acts 9:4-5) The Word’s complete purpose in whole relational terms was for Paul’s redemptive reconciliation from his fragmentation as a member of God’s people to his wholeness as a person-child belonging to God’s whole and uncommon family. And on the relational basis of this experiential truth, Paul’s whole witness would help unfold with the palpable Word the relational reality of the new-order church family (Acts 26:14-18; Rom 5:10-11). This relational significance and outcome of the uncommon peace of Christ is what Paul illuminated definitively for the relational reality of the church to be whole. The global church needs to take into its heart what Paul unfolded with the palpable Word (1 Cor 2:10-16).

In Paul’s transformed ecclesiology, the bond of wholeness with the Spirit is the 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 equalized relationships without the veil. This relational process of equalizing from inner out needs to be distinguished in the experiential truth of church identity and function, and not remain in doctrinal truth or as a doctrinal statement of intention, or else its relational reality will be elusive and likely submerged in an alternative or even virtual reality. When doctrine causes an impasse in the church’s relational progression, 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 as family to function in uncommon wholeness in the qualitative image of God and to live ongoingly in whole relationship together in the relational likeness of the whole-ly Trinity.

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. These are dynamics and related changes that the global church must absorb deeply into its theology and practice in order for its whole-ly identity to unfold in likeness.

First Key Dynamic: *the structural dynamic of access*

While church 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, 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 distinctions that treat persons differently (denoted in *diakrino*, 1 Cor 4:7)—that is, without **the reducing syndrome of *diakrino*** confronted in the church by Paul—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). This structural dynamic of access both confronts churches of like-mindedness and challenges even multiracial-cultural churches evolving today while still maintaining a dominant bias.

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. Church leaders, for example, notably pursue such advantages to establish their "brand"; and most churches reinforce this subtle process of inequality by seeking *personalities over persons* for their leadership. 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 and establishes a structure of exclusion with a system of inclusion. 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 prevailing over the quantified distinctions of what persons have and do. 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 personness (distinguished from self-*ism*) 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 relationship-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-ly Trinity’s new creation family.

This structural dynamic flows directly to the contextual dynamic.

Second Key Dynamic: *the contextual dynamic of reconciliation absorbing natural human differences and valid God-given distinctions*

This is not a contradiction of the church without *diakrino*, but the acknowledgement of the fact of differences in natural human makeup (the primary human genome with its secondary phenotype) and the reality of valid distinctions given by God, without the church engaging in the reducing syndrome of *diakrino*. The ancient Mediterranean world of Paul’s time was a diversity of both natural 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 make-up in identity 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, yet this change should not be confused with the outer-in distinction priority of multiculturalism. Paul was pivotal in bringing such redemptive change to the church (e.g. 1 Cor 11:17-22; Gal 2:1-10), which is incompatible with any forms of reduced ontology and function—which multiracial-cultural churches typically still reinforce and sustain. In other words, without the reconciliation dynamic of family love, inclusiveness is still shaped by the bias of exclusion.

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 natural human differences into the primacy of relationships together, but not 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 multiracial-cultural 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 as persons made whole from inner out; thus, this inner-out intimacy always has priority over any outer-in secondary. This is the dynamic made essential by Paul for the church's "unity of the Spirit in the bond of uncommon peace/wholeness" (Eph 4:3,16); and the relational outcome is not a hybrid church with a mosaic of differences but persons and relationships made uncommonly whole together in likeness of the whole-ly Trinity—the new relational order of the church as the new creation family.

This reconciliation dynamic signifies the contextual change necessary for the church to be ongoingly involved in the relational process of absorbing natural human differences into the church without dissolving or assimilating those differences. Churches typically are not constructed with this design—a design evolving from the early church that had to be corrected (Acts 15:7-11). This involves, therefore, a church's willingness to change to adjust to differences and even to adopt some differences—that is, only those differences that are 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 the church to become the equalizer in its new relational order. No claim can be made about having a church structure of access if the church's context is not reconciling; conversely, a church cannot claim to be reconciling if equal church access is unavailable to others with differences. Inclusion must always contend with the bias of exclusion.

In addition, just as Peter was chastened by Christ in his contextualized bias 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 (*phronēma*) and perceptual lens (*phroneō*)—likely formed with a contextualized or commonized bias (as in Rom 8:5, cf. 2 Cor 11:12)—to understand the significance of differences to the whole-ly Word as well as of those in the whole-ly Trinity. It also requires us to honestly account for any outer-in bias necessitating the change of transformation to the whole *phronēma* and qualitative *phroneō* from the Spirit (as Paul delineated, Eph 4:22-25; Rom 8:5-6, cf. 12:2). This humility and honesty are essential for the church's contextual dynamic of reconciliation to be of functional significance to absorb natural 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—distinguishing its whole-ly identity in the new relational order—also directly involve the other two interrelated key dynamics. These are dynamics for the individual person and our relationships. The four dynamics intensely interact together in reflexive relationship that suggests no set pattern 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. The global church and all its persons and relationships, therefore, are accountable together for their ongoing involvement in these integral dynamics with the essential dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes.

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 lens and interpretive framework influenced by contextualized and commonized biases and shaped by intervening cultural-political factors in the surrounding context. This is why humbly accepting the limits of our particular way of thinking and honestly accounting for our bias in seeing other things in general and other persons in particular are both 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 by the church, yet their functional significance in the church interacts with and will ultimately be determined by each individual person’s response—a response whose significance must be composed in vulnerable relational terms and not be mere referential terms enhanced even with good intentions. This is an existing issue in the formation of multiracial-cultural churches today, which even their church leaders struggle with.²

In everyday life, the person’s response will emerge either from outer in or inner out, and it may shift back and forth from one person and/or situation to another. What differences we pay attention to and ignore from our perceptual-interpretive lens are critical to understand for the following ongoing interrelated issues: (1) what we depend on to define our person and maintain our identity; (2) then on this basis, how we engage relationships in these diverse conditions; and, thus (3), based on these two issues what level of relationship we engage in within the church. These are **inescapable issues** that

² This issue is discussed by sociologist Korie Little Edwards in “When ‘Diversity’ Isn’t Enough,” *Christianity Today*, Vol. 65, No. 2, March 2021, 36-41.

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.

In Paul's whole theology and practice, 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 the counter-relational workings of reductionism (Gal 5:1,13; 1 Cor 8:9). From this interpretive framework and perceptual lens, which counters contextualized and commonized biases, 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 vulnerable relational 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 according to the immediate context, yet responds in what appears to be an absence of self-identity in where he belongs. His response also seems to contradict his relational imperative to "Live as children of light" (Eph 5:8). In reality, however, in terms of the three inescapable issues for all persons (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 subtly masquerade in the context of their differences. Contrary to these reductionist practices, Paul engaged in practices of wholeness without the veil of outer-in distinctions. 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 (natural or not)—which always remained in secondary distinction from the primary. He openly 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 thus could be counted on by them to be that whole person in his face-to-face involvement with them—his righteousness integrated with the qualitative-relational integrity of his identity. 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), in order 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*—and perhaps for them to become members of a church—but for the whole 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). Therefore, his inner-out response to others’ differences clearly distinguished to what and whom Paul belonged.

It is essential for all in the global church to take Paul seriously and to highlight him along with Mary as the disciples of whole theology and practice necessary for the relational progression of the whole gospel—not for merely promoting a partial gospel. In the face of others’ differences, Paul neither distanced himself from them in the province of ‘his little world’ nor did he try to control them to assimilate and fit (or conform) into his world and the comforts of his framework—as witnessed historically in the Western church and presently in segments of the global church. In contrast, he acted in the relational trust of faith to venture out of his old world (and old wineskin ways of thinking, seeing and doing things) and beyond the limitations that any old interpretive framework (contextualized or commonized bias) imposes on personhood and relationships. Paul underwent such transforming (not reforming) changes in order to illuminate the wholeness of God in the midst of reductionism, thereby acting on his relational imperative to “Live as children of light” (Eph 5:8). In this essential relational process, he also illuminated the relational need of the person and persons together as church to have contextual sensitivity and responsiveness to others in their contextual differences, without losing the primacy of who and whose he was, or denigrating their own ontological identity of who and whose they were (cf. Paul in Athens, Acts 17, and Jesus at the wedding in Cana, Jn 2:1-11).

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 to belong in the relational whole of the Trinity’s family. Yet, Paul’s response also demonstrated the needed changes within the individual person involving redemptive change (old wineskins, biases 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), and thus be freed from the limits and constraints imposed from outer in. 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-ly Trinity’s new creation family.

Change always raises issues, especially if it intrudes on our freedom to live as we want, which the COVID-19 pandemic certainly has made evident. 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. There is a fine line between obligation and freedom, which is confused when our responses are merely to conform. For example, in this current pandemic, Christians truly express loving caring for others when their response is the expression of their freedom. Freedom itself, however, becomes a self-serving reduction when it is only the means for self-autonomy, self-determination or self-justification, because these are subtle yet acceptable substitutes from reductionism (as the Word exposed, Mt 5-7). 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 in both our persons and relationships (1 Cor 10:23-24). Redemption by Christ and what he saves *from* are inseparable from reconciliation and what he saves *to*. To summarize the relational process and outcome:

The integral function of redemptive reconciliation is the whole (nonnegotiable) relational process of the whole (untruncated) relational outcome of the whole (unfragmented) gospel. Anything less and any substitutes for any of these essential dimensions fragment the church and reduce its persons and relationships.

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.

The integral function of whole persons and whole relationships together is deeply integrated, and their interaction must by their nature in relational terms 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 person 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 for the purpose of 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 and the identity of our belonging, 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 perceptual lens and mindset, one's own identity and 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 either 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 to those in wholeness but only to those in reduced identity and function (cf. his personal assessment, Phil 3:7-9; also his challenge to Philemon as the owner of the slave Onesimus).

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 personal disclosure, 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 depth for Paul enacted the first two inescapable issues that first defined his whole person and identity, and thereby engaged relationships with others' differences—both of which mirrored how Jesus enacted his person in relationships and thus unmistakably identified Paul as his whole-ly disciple.

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. This then also includes the underlying bias not merely from a specific cultural or political context but shaped by the common prevailing in human life. If the vulnerability of family love is to be relationally involved, 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 the primacy of wholeness but creates tension or anxiety when the secondary is made primary. 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 our own existing condition being challenged to change and our need for it.

Therefore, our faith as relational trust in ongoing reciprocal relationship with the Spirit is critical for freeing us to determine what is primary to embrace in church life and practice and what we need to relinquish control over “for the unity of the Spirit in the bond of wholeness” (Eph 4:3; Gal 5:16,25). The bond of wholeness by its nature requires change in us: individual, relational, structural and contextual changes. With these redemptive changes for persons, relationships and churches—encompassing the three inescapable issues in their depth—the integral function of redemptive reconciliation can emerge in family love for vulnerable involvement with others (different or not) in relationships together from inner out. Such reconstruction by design becomes, lives and makes whole uncommonly in the new relational order, which is not a mere option, merely recommended or simply negotiable for churches and its persons and relationships. Anything less and any substitutes for persons, relationships and churches are no longer whole and uncommon.

The dynamic flow of these four key dynamics is the dynamic of uncommon wholeness composing the experiential truth and relational reality of the church’s identity and function as equalizer from inner out. In ongoing tension and conflict with the church in the bond of wholeness is the counter-relational workings of reductionism seeking to influence every level of the church—individual persons, 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). Accordingly, the reciprocal nature of the Spirit’s relational involvement makes change in our persons, our relationships and our churches an open question. Our lack of reciprocal involvement makes the Spirit grieve (Eph 4:30).

God's family has become the vulnerable dwelling of the whole and uncommon Trinity (as Jesus made conclusive, Jn 14:23, and Paul definitively reinforced, Eph 2:19-22). Yet, this relational outcome has no relational significance as long as the curtain (holy partition) and veil are still present, which is integral to the relational work of the Trinity (2 Cor 3:16-18). The Trinity is vulnerably present and relationally involved for intimate relationship together. While we cannot be equal with God (perhaps the purpose for some in the practice of deification), we have to be equalized to participate in and partake of the Trinity's life in family together. That is, we cannot be intimately involved with the Trinity from the basis of any of our outer-in distinctions, all of which signify the presence of the veil keeping us at relational distance. Those distinctions have to be redeemed without exception, so that we can be equalized from inner out and thereby reconciled in intimate relationship together; and this equalization is necessary to be transformed in relationships together as the Trinity's whole and uncommon family.

Therefore, the transformed relationships that distinguish the church family must then be, without variation, both equalized and intimate. There can be no complete intimate involvement together as long as the veil of distinctions exists. Distinctions focus our lens on and engage our practice from outer in, unavoidably in comparative relations that create distance, discrimination, separation and brokenness, all of which are incompatible with intimate relationships, and incongruent with equalized relationships. Therefore, the experiential truth and relational reality of the redemptive reconciliation of uncommon peace (never commonized) involve the church in the integral transformed relationships together of equalized persons in equalized relationships, who are vulnerably involved in intimate relationships face to face, heart to heart as the Trinity's whole and uncommon family as the equalizing church.

Indeed, based on the uncommon peace of Christ that Paul makes the only determinant for the church (imperatively in Col 3:15), nothing less than equalized relationships and no substitutes for intimate relationships compose the new-order church family of Christ, whose wholeness distinguishes the church's persons and relationships in their primacy of whole ontology and function in likeness of the whole-ly Trinity. If we take Paul seriously, we cannot take him partially or use him out of his total context but need to embrace his whole theology and practice for ours to be whole also. Therefore, beyond any contextualized or commonized bias, what emerges from the church's uncommon peace is the experiential truth of **uncommon equality**, which is the good news transforming the fragmentation and inequality of all persons, peoples, tribes, nations and their human relations—transforming the bad news encompassing human inequality and inequity. The relational reality of this uncommon equality unfolds from the relational progression of this whole-ly church family as it is ongoingly involved in equalizing all persons, peoples, tribes, nations and their relationships—equalizing in whole relational terms composed by the redemptive reconciliation of uncommon peace.

All these essential dynamics converge to distinguish the church as **the intimate equalizer**, the new creation church family living together in wholeness by only transformed relationships integrally equalized and intimate.

One qualifying note should be added to clarify the intimate equalizer church. As the new-order church family in likeness of the Trinity, the intimate equalizer church is still the body of Christ. That is, the functional order that Paul outlined for the church to compose its interdependent synergism is still vital (1 Cor 12:12-31). The uncommon equality composing the church in the intimacy of uncommon wholeness does not mean that all its persons do the same thing and equally have the same resources, nor does everyone engage their practice (including worship) in the same manner. The new-order church is neither a homogeneous unit nor a monotonic composition. Diversity as nonconformity in what persons do and as non-uniformity in the resources they have are basic to the synergism (not the sum of diverse parts) of the body of Christ. The key issue is not differences but distinctions associated with differences that limit and constrain persons and fragment the relational order of the church family from wholeness together. Having this nonconforming and non-uniform diversity in the church is important for the church's interdependent synergism, but each difference from outer in is secondary and must be integrated into the primary of the whole church from inner out, that is, the vulnerably intimate church in uncommon wholeness and uncommon equality (Eph 4:11-13,16, cf. Col 2:19). When differences (such as gifts and services, 1 Cor 12:4-11) become the primary focus, even inadvertently, they subtly are seen with distinctions that set into motion the comparative process with its relational consequences, which persons and relationships with these distinctions have to bear—the consequences Jesus saw in the temple before he redeemed it.

Despite the extent of differences in the body of Christ, Jesus embodied the church to be nothing less than whole (complete together, *pleroma*, Eph 1:22-23). As the *pleroma* of Christ, the church body is neither a mere gathering of our differences nor merely a collection of these differences, as if their distinctions enhance the integrity of the church. In this sense, the metaphor of the body of Christ is insufficient to compose the whole-ly identity of the church as *family*, whose identity is composed only in the new relational order of the whole-ly Trinity.

The defining line between diversity and distinctions has disappeared in most church theology and practice (including the academy's) today, such that the consequences are not understood or recognized. In whatever way those consequences emerge in the church (local, regional, global), they all converge in inequality of the church's relational order—if not explicitly then implicitly. This unequal relational order of distinctions is contrary to and in conflict with the uncommon wholeness of Christ, therefore incongruent with the Trinity. As Paul made definitive Jesus' salvific work for the church (1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:26-29; Eph 2:14-16; Col 3:10-11), Jesus enacted the good news in order for this relational purpose and outcome:

To compose the uncommon equality of his church family at the heart of its persons and relationships in whole ontology and function, and therefore unequivocally transformed them (1) to be redeemed from human distinctions and their deficit condition and (2) to be reconciled to the new relational order in uncommon transformed relationships together both equalized and intimate in their innermost, and thereby congruent in uncommon likeness with the wholeness of the Trinity.

Redemptive reconciliation is not optional but essential to the uncommon whole of who, what and how the church and its persons and relationships are *to be* in and for this essential work. This is the gospel of wholeness the Word enacted to constitute the existential new creation as his uncommon church family in nothing less than the intimate equalizer.

On this relational basis alone, the Light's witnesses are illuminated "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8) with no substitutes for their identity and function.

The Light Embodied Inner Out as the Penultimate Witness

In the Word's political theology for public life, the global church and its church branches need to understand their gospel roots in order to claim its relational reality and proclaim its experiential truth constituted by the qualitative-relational roots from the Word. This must not be oversimplified (e.g. with truth gymnastics) or minimalized (e.g. by norm gymnastics), because the branches illuminating from its roots is at stake in this evolving issue.

The Word's whole gospel never brings the good news without encompassing the bad news. If the bad news is not encompassed, the light doesn't shine in the darkness. Therefore, only the Word's whole non-compartmentalized gospel embodied the Light that shined brightly in the darkness. The Word, however, didn't embody his gospel simply to transmit information about its truth as a proposition, a lingering hope or a virtual reality. His whole person from inner out was vulnerably involved in a different uncommon way, whereby the relational reality of the whole gospel could not be minimalized to a virtual reality. Indeed, the Light shined in the darkness only embodied from inner out.

With nothing less and no substitutes illuminated by the Light in the darkness, his gospel's roots reveal that the Trinity constituted the unequivocal *equalizer* of human life and the human order ever since they were equalized in the beginning at creation—equalized in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the Trinity. Because human life evolved and the human order mutated into the human relational condition, the Equalizer also had to be the *Reconciler* in order for human life and its order to be equalized anew by the redemptive reconciliation of the new creation (2 Cor 5:17).

Thereafter to the present, the Equalizer gives his witnesses the responsibility to be the equalizer; and this responsibility cannot be fulfilled unless they are also the reconciler—with nothing less and no substitutes. Only these branches of the church illuminate the roots of the whole gospel.

For the churches composing the global church to *be* this penultimate witness in their existential identity and function, their light needs to be embodied from inner out for wholeness to prevail over any fragmentary reductions. This integrated whole, however, of persons and relationships together as church family is also uncommon from what exists in the human context, in the surrounding contexts, and in our Christian contexts. A subtle assumption, which is not apparent as a theological assumption, made by people of faith in the past and presently is that “You thought I was *common* just like yourself” (Ps 50:21). Based on this assumption God has been contextualized and commonized in diverse ways on our terms. The relational progression Jesus enacted, and continues to enact as the palpable Word with the Spirit, *de-contextualized* and *de-commonized* the whole of who, what and how God is, and thereby disclosed the vulnerable presence and relational involvement of the whole and uncommon Trinity. Yet, even bias in traditional trinitarian theology commonly has not encompassed the uncommon presence and whole involvement of the Trinity as disclosed by the Word.

Disciples of Jesus “Follow me” in his relational progression to the new, thus to be relationally involved “where I am” (Jn 12:26) in what integrally is irreducibly whole and nonnegotiable uncommon. Being uncommon involves knowing where we belong and to whom. Just as Jesus prayed for all his disciples to belong as he belongs, and to be sanctified (made uncommon) as he is sanctified (Jn 17:15-19), our progression to be uncommon necessitates ongoing involvement in the following to be “where I am”:

1. The process of *reciprocating contextualization* (RC) between our primary context of belonging and our secondary context in the world, thereby addressing our contextualized bias that confuses or obscures where and to whom we belong.
2. The *process of integrating our priorities* (PIP), with the secondary always encompassed and subordinated into the primary, the distinction of which becomes ambiguous when our contextualized bias is not addressed; otherwise, the primary becomes distorted and inverted with the secondary when our commonized bias is not negated.
3. Embracing the distinguishing character *with-in* the Uncommon (not just parts or selectively) in order to negate the subtle influence of the bias *for* the common, our commonized bias.

This is the only discipleship that distinguishes his whole-ly disciples who belong to the whole-ly Trinity (as distinguished in Eph 2:19-22).

Therefore, for our persons, relationships and churches to *be whole-ly* and function in the likeness of the whole-ly Trinity, we all (both individually and collectively) need unavoidable ongoing involvement in **the pivotal processes of de-contextualization and de-commonization**—notably to redeem any contextualized bias and commonized bias existing in our midst for us to be freed from their limits and constraints. This conscious involvement is indispensable in order for the relational outcome to be transformed to the new creation of our persons, relationships and churches, and to function with-in the relational progression of the Trinity’s relational response of family love to our undeniable relational condition—and extending now to the human relational condition of all persons, peoples, tribes and nations as the penultimate witness for the whole-ly Word and his nothing-less-and-no-substitutes gospel.

So, we the equalized together intimately as church, “who have been reconciled with the Trinity in reciprocal relationship, have been given the essential work of redemptive reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:18). The Trinity expects nothing less from us and holds us accountable for no substitutes for our essential work. May our light embodied inner out shine in the surrounding darkness!

Chapter 7 **Summoning Essential Workers**

**“Do you love me more than *the secondary*?...
do you love *my whole person*?...
do you love me *with your whole person*?...
then nurture my family.”**

John 21:15-17

The public life of political theology is always directly involved in the existential. Currently, the COVID-19 pandemic has dominated our existence. During this condition, essential workers have come to the forefront to help us deal with it at various levels of life. Two kind of workers have been designated as essential: (1) those who sustain our physical health, and (2) those who sustain our lifestyle. The latter has increasingly been brought to the forefront by the intolerance of disrupted lifestyles, which for some appear to cause more strain and pain than their physical condition. Who is essential and what they are essential for are critical issues to sort out in public life.

Underlying the COVID-19 pandemic, and more encompassing of human life, is the pandemic of the human condition, whose existential relational condition is endemic throughout human life and prevails in all variants of the human order. The strain and pain on humankind caused by this pandemic, however, has not brought to the forefront the essential workers for our whole well-being, though there are workers who sustain our various ways of life during this all-encompassing pandemic. Therefore, all Christians and churches have a reckoning alert in this pandemic to distinguish who is essential and what they are essential for in their Christian and church life, as well as in their public life.

The Summons Unfolds

It’s a given, of course, that everyone needs physical health to survive in any pandemic. However, since no part of humanity is less fit than another, then no segment of humankind needs to survive as the fittest. Survival of the fittest is the evolutionary alternative to creation, in which the human person made the reductionist transposition from the qualitative inner out to the quantitative outer in, whereby all persons have become shrouded in outer-in distinctions that keep their relationships veiled in relational distance. This syndrome has devolved throughout human life to compose its inequality and the inequity of the human order. This has mutated God’s creation constituting the inner-out human genome in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the Trinity, thereby reducing it to the fragmentary human relational condition composing the pandemic entrenched in all of humanity and constraining every segment of humankind.

In this existential reality, who becomes essential in the full depth of humanity and what are they essential for in the complete breadth of humankind?

The identity of these essential workers is distinguished and their function unfolds from the summons by the Word in indicative relational terms to determine its predictive purpose. This summons from the Word is recorded only in John's Gospel, whose design was to illuminate the Word's whole picture. The Word's summons antecedes his Great Commission, yet his summons unfolded after his resurrection integrally to make his commission contingent on it and thereby to validate his witnesses.

The resurrection is definitive for the Word's summons to be indicative of who are essential workers and predictive of what they are essential for. On the experiential truth and relational reality of his resurrection, the Word's new creation is constituted to transform (1) persons from outer in to be restored to wholeness from inner out, and also (2) their relationally-distant relationships composing inequality and inequity to be equalized in intimate relationships together without outer-in distinctions, which constitutes whole persons belonging together in the Word's new creation family—no longer “to be apart” but whole together only in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the Trinity. Therefore, in the existential reality of the new creation, the Word summons essential workers made whole in integral equalized and intimate relationships together during a pivotal post-resurrection interaction (Jn 21:15-17).

It may seem obvious that Peter was an essential worker who would witness for the Word. Yet, given his vacillating discipleship recorded up to then, on what basis could we make such an assumption? This is crucial to understand both for Peter and ourselves, because the Word makes no such assumptions about persons in his summons. Thus, in the Word's indicative relational terms, he wants to distinguish the existential new creation in each person summoned, which Peter was only in the process of claiming yet unmistakably in the midst of. The Word's inquiry is indicative of **the relational progression** for the new creation:

“Love” in common terms focuses primarily on doing something positive for others. For the new creation, **love** is the depth of direct relational involvement with the other, which is uncommon to human relationships but primary for the new creation—“Do you love me more than the secondary?” What's uncommon about love in the new creation is that (1) it connects directly with the other person to be intimately involved with their whole person not defined by outer-in distinctions—“do you love my whole person?”—which (2) requires our whole person to be vulnerable from inner out in order for intimate connection to be openly involved face to face, person to person with the other's whole person, without the veil of outer-in distinctions keeping them at a relational distance—“do you love me with your whole person?”

The Word's summons takes persons through this relational progression in order for their new creation to be ongoingly distinguished. This may make some uncomfortable or anxious who aren't yet in the primary relational condition of the new creation (as Peter demonstrated). As persons are involved in this relational progression, the new creation is distinguished to identify them as essential workers for the pandemic of the human relational condition. At this indicative juncture definitive of the new creation, the Word's summons for essential workers determines their predictive purpose in his qualitative-relational imperative: (1) "nurture my family in the new creation of transformed relationships together integrally equalized and intimate," and (2) "cultivate my new creation family in the pandemic of the human relational condition in order to counter human inequality and neutralize human inequity with the redemptive change necessary for the uncommon good of the whole gospel's relational outcome," which integrates all the existential bad news into its qualitative-relational good news. Essential workers, therefore, fulfill their purpose as witnesses of the Word's whole non-compartmentalized gospel to make new creation members of all persons, peoples, tribes and nations—with nothing less and no substitutes defining their identity and determining their function as essential.

Does the Word summon you as his essential worker?

The Summons' Dissonance

It is likely that the Word's summons has been overlooked because it is obscured by the Great Commission. Every Christian probably knows about the Great Commission, though few know the full significance of "make disciples" (Mt 28:19-20). Thus, how Christians "go" and churches "make disciples" has mainly focused on evangelism, that is, proclaiming a compartmentalized gospel. The Word made axiomatic, however, that the gospel we claim will be the gospel we proclaim, nothing more (Mk 4:24). This directs us back to examining how carefully we listen to the Word (cf. Lk 8:18). The Word's summons is readily overlooked because it has dissonant sounds that are difficult to listen to, and thus would not resound for Christians and churches. His summons' dissonance makes it easier to ignore and not listen attentively to with the depth of response from our person. What, then, are its discordant terms that make his summons have such dissonance for Christians and churches, including many who affirm his Great Commission?

Peter, that is, the new creation Peter, illuminated the fundamental issue underlying the dynamic between dissonance and consonance, which he was now able to do from his personal experience of redemptive change and transformation. Peter made imperative (1 Pet 1:14-16) for Christians and churches not to conform from outer in to the common

surrounding us (*syschematizo*, as in Rom 12:2), because “as he who summons you is **uncommon**, be uncommon yourselves in all your *identity and function*.” Here now is the tension causing dissonance and the conflict with consonance: the uncommon instead of the common for defining our identity and determining our function with nothing less, and the uncommon prevailing over any substitutes from the common. Peter could make this imperative, because only the uncommon constitutes the new creation that distinguishes the persons summoned by the Word for his essential workers.

Therefore, examine carefully the dissonant terms of the Word’s summons that are uncommon to what’s common:

- “Do you **love me more than the secondary**?”—First, he defines love as the depth of relational involvement with the other person(s) and not what is done for the other; then he determines the primacy of this depth of relationship together as primary over all the secondary in everyday life, not necessarily at their exclusion but always as a lower priority to the primacy of relationship together.
- “do you love **my whole person**?”—The Word makes a crucial distinction between his teachings, actions and resources—all of which have a basis to follow and thus love (contrary to the discipleship of Jn 12:26)—and his whole person. The former revolves on outer-in distinctions defining persons by what they have and do, which then creates a barrier with that person to maintain relational distance or reinforce inequality in the relationship; but the latter distinction centers on the person from inner out, making all such outer-in distinctions secondary or irrelevant, and thus removing that veil causing a relational barrier in order for deeper relational connection.
- “do you love me **with your whole person**?”—Certainly, by clarifying and correcting any outer-in distinctions imposed on his person, the Word also clarifies and corrects any outer-in distinctions that define the identity and determine the function of those he summons with his plumb line of righteousness. In other words, likely the most dissonant of his terms, those persons are not and cannot be relationally involved in the depth of love with him unless they have experienced redemptive change from the *old* of outer in and been transformed to the *new* from inner out. This whole person from inner out can only be the new creation, defined by nothing less and determined by no substitutes. Thus, relationships together in the depth of love person to person are vulnerable relationships from inner out, and anything less and any substitutes from the person keep that person from being vulnerable from inner out, which is evident of a veil present from an outer-in distinction (as evolved from the beginning, Gen 3:7).

Accordingly without reduction or negotiation, the persons in the Word's summons can only be the new creation, who are clearly distinguished as uncommon from what's common in the surrounding contexts of everyday life. When their public identity and function are distinguished uncommon, they qualify to be the essential workers for the Word's new creation family. If persons work for the Great Commission but don't qualify to be the Word's essential workers, their work still doesn't fulfill the uncommon purpose his summons has for them. At best, like Peter's initial work in the early church, they function in roles behind the veil of outer-in distinctions (the *hypokrisis* exposed in Gal 2:11-14). Even with good intentions, this work reinforces and sustains inequality and inequity in the church (as in Acts 6:1; 10:15; 15:5-9; 1 Cor 1:10-13; 4:6-7), which counters rather than fulfills the new relational order of the Word's whole gospel that constitutes the body of Christ in the integral equalized-intimate relationships together of his new creation church family. Nothing less and no substitutes determine the uncommon existential purpose for essential workers in the Word's summons.

- “**nurture** my family”—Nurture (*poimaino*) is another term that could easily become dissonant in the Word's summons, because what's consonant for many Christians and churches in how they define it has been common-ized; that is, nurture commonly encompasses the intervening factors in the surrounding environment that shape, for example, a phenotype or the existing norm. Given the above indicative terms, what's primary and only secondary for the Word?; what's the difference between building church and growing family?; and how is the new creation family distinguished from what's common in churches and in the surrounding environment?. “Nurture **my** family” is neither negotiable nor optional, and anything less and any substitutes for the new creation are no longer “my family”. As a key leader in the early church, Peter didn't understand what distinguishes the Word's church, thus he practiced what was common until he turned around and was transformed to the new creation. Therefore, what truly “nurtures my family” is constituted (1) by persons intimately involved in the above relational progression with the Word in the new creation, who then become essential workers (2) for the uncommon purpose to nurture, cultivate and grow the new relational order of integrally equalized-intimate relationships necessary to become and *be* “my new creation church family,” as well as procreate “my new creation family” among all persons, peoples, tribes and nations to counter human inequality and neutralize human inequity—the Word's measuring line of justice.

Thus, the Word's summons qualifies the relational purpose of his Great Commission, and further makes his witnesses contingent on being his summons' essential workers. This

also makes being his followers contingent on the above relationship progression of discipleship, whereby the relational purpose of all his workers is contingent on his summons' uncommon purpose defined and determined integrally by his new creation family—with nothing less and no substitutes in the gospel they claim and proclaim. Accordingly by necessity, the Word's summons qualifies and makes contingent both the nature of evangelism and what's involved to "make disciples."

So, are you an essential worker?

His Summons' Exclusive Inclusiveness

The identity of essential workers as the new creation is irreducible and their function is nonnegotiable. This makes the Word's summons exclusive for only these essential workers. The primacy of their identity and function is not subject to common variants in the environment shaped, for example, by culture and politics. Yet, these persons in the new order of relationship together don't conform to a homogeneous unit and structure. The new creation church family operates as the organic body of Christ (Eph 1:22-23), in which each part of the body serves a different function according to their primary function in equalized-intimate relationships together of wholeness in the Trinity's likeness (1 Cor 12 :12-27; Eph 4:11-13). Therefore, based on the exclusive summons of the new creation, the Word is completely inclusive in summoning all who belong to his new creation church family to be his essential workers, without exception. No one, regardless of the part they serve in the body of Christ, is excluded from his summons.

The inclusiveness of the Word's summons can create further dissonance because of its uncommon nature qualifying who is an essential worker to "nurture, cultivate and grow my new creation family"—not only in the local church but globally for all persons, peoples, tribes and nations. Even children and the childlike can qualify as essential workers (as in Mt 18:1-4; 21:15-16). This inclusiveness counters any inequality in the church and makes essential any and every part of the body of Christ for the equalized identity and function of the new creation church family. Thus, you must not eliminate your person as an essential worker just because of what gift you have (or don't) and can do (or can't).

Since there is no herd immunity for the pandemic of the human relational condition, common workers are simply incomplete and common measures are always insufficient to turn around this prevailing condition endemic in the human order—good intentions and the common good notwithstanding. Without reduction or negotiation,

therefore, the Word summons uncommon essential workers in intimate relationship of wholeness together in order to join him in healing the relational condition, first of churches and then of its human order throughout human life—urgently bringing to the forefront these whole-ly essential workers. This summons thereby brings together the uncommon relational outcome of the Word’s whole non-compartmentalized gospel and leads to the completion of the Word’s whole big picture.

In this political theology, however, those defining their identity and determining their function by a reduced theological anthropology and a weak view of sin without reductionism, they need not respond to the Word’s summons because they cannot qualify as his essential workers in penultimate witness. So, “where are you?” in the Word’s summons, and “what are you doing here?” for it both in the whole gospel and in what’s next for you and your church in the whole picture?

Glossary of Key Terms

“affective polarization”: different from issue polarization, this concerns the feelings we have about the people on the other side of the political aisle, which explains why political conversations are so difficult, tense and unproductive (chap. 4:71).

the critical distinction for humans: the pivotal shift of persons from inner out to outer in to form this defining distinction that constructed human identity and function, from which evolved related formative human distinctions such as race, class and gender (chap. 4:91).

the engendering nexus: The Word’s gospel rooted in the covenant of love unfolds in this nexus legitimized just in God’s Rule of Law, thus the relational growth of the covenant of love is contingent on participants carefully following God’s Rule of Law (chap. 3:54).

herd immunity: the notion where the majority of the population has antibodies to resist infection from some prevailing virus (chap. 2:32).

integrated citizens: the essential dynamic of citizenship that clearly distinguishes God’s kingdom from all others, whereby the primary identity of God’s people is defined and their primary function is determined as integrated citizens, and thus unmistakably distinguished from surrounding identity and function (chap. 1:5).

integrated (whole) citizens: Jesus’ followers who live “in the world” in their integrated whole identity and function based on the uncommon peace (wholeness) that Jesus gives (chap. 1:7).

integrated (whole) culture: the everyday way of life of integrated citizens distinguished by the uncommon peace that Jesus gives in contrast to and even in conflict with the common peace “as the world gives” (chap. 1:7).

the integrating dynamic of just-nection: God’s justice is distinguished whole and God’s peace is experienced uncommon by the integration just in the whole-ly relational outcome of just-nection, the relational dynamic of which Jesus redeems, reconciles and transforms the relational connection required for justice of the human order in the integrally created and newly created whole-ly likeness of the Trinity (chap. 5:130).

the intimate equalizer: the new creation church family living together in wholeness by only transformed relationships integrally equalized and intimate (chap. 6:169).

just-nection: the *right* order of relationship together created by the triune God for whole persons having the right relational connection in his likeness (chap. 4:84).

minimalist disorder: the behavior of minimalists notably lacking direct involvement with the Word in covenant relationship together, but also far more active behavior occupied with secondary matters (chap. 3:49).

norm gymnastics: as truth decay evolves, the ambiguity of the bad is balanced with the good in order for the bad to circumvent its restrictions by rotating norms to form the balanced routine for the bad to prevail (chap.4:75).

the outer in: the pivotal shift from the beginning that reduced human identity and function reduced from their qualitative-relational nature from inner out to become quantified by the outer in based on quantitative terms (chap. 2:26).

the paradox of the whole gospel: the “bad and good” news composing the gospel constituted by the Word’s strategic action illuminated in the Word’s whole picture, which is contrary to the “good and bad” that evolved from the primordial garden (chap 4:69).

person-consciousness: the ongoing involvement of the inner-out person’s identity and function by their essence in the qualitative image and relational likeness of their Creator (chap. 2:27).

progressing survival: the subtle counter-relational workings of reductionism among Christians and churches to advance in their faith and progress in their ministry and mission, the pursuit of which converges with the innate need to survive and the competitive desire to succeed (chap. 2:36).

the qualitative relational compass: intrinsic to the Word’s uncompromised Rule of Law, this compass is vitally calibrated to clearly distinguish what is irreducibly and nonnegotiable primary in God’s creation (original and new) from all the secondary occupying human life (chap. 4:72; 5:118).

redemptive change: the vulnerable qualitative-relational process in which the *old* in us is relinquished in order for it to die, so that the *new* for, about and in us will rise (chap. 3:64).

the reducing syndrome of *diakrino*: the process of defining persons by outer-in distinctions and treating them differently to create relational barriers in a comparative system and stratified structure (chap. 6:159).

the ruling nexus: for the engendering nexus to truly grow the covenant of love relationship from the past to the future, this nexus must be integrated with the ruling nexus inscribed in the Word’s irreducible and nonnegotiable Rule of Law (chap. 3:54).

self-consciousness: the self-focused survival of the outer-in self's identity and function by the dominance of a self-centered process (chap. 2:27).

self-ism: the composition of stereotypes underlying human life based on outer-in distinctions that become basic for defining human identity and determining human function, such that human persons are limited to and constrained in the particular stereotype depicting their self (chap. 2:31).

sin as reductionism: the view of sin that encompasses the reduction of the ontology and function of persons and relationships from their wholeness created in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the Trinity, which emerged from the beginning and has evolved since beyond a simplified sin as merely disobedience (chap. 2:24).

the relational progression: the relational process of the new creation that constitutes Jesus' followers to be whole persons in relationship together integrally equalized and intimate in wholeness, and thus who are the penultimate witnesses of his essential workers (chap. 7:174).

the status quo app: the perceptual lens and interpretive framework that are shaped by the existing status quo, which becomes the prevailing application used for *status-ing* in quo and makes it easier to engage in it (chap. 4:88).

the synergism of the Word: the reality of the Word's whole big picture is always greater than the sum of no matter what parts are pieced together (chap. 3:47).

three circumventing phenomena: the existential bad in human life keeps evolving as the bad is reinforced and sustained by practice of these phenomena (chap. 4:70).

"truth decay": this evolving reality from the three circumventing phenomena prevents different views and opposing sides from agreeing on existing facts common to all of them (chap. 4:70).

truth gymnastics: the evolvment of truth decay, in which the ambiguity of the bad is balanced with the good in order for the bad to circumvent its restrictions by flipping around &/or over the truth to form the balanced routine for the bad to prevail (chap. 4:75).

the uncommon good: by declaring the bad news of the gospel, the Word exposed, clarified and corrected the assumptions of the common good, which extended further and unfolded deeper integrally with the good news proclaiming the uncommon good distinguished by only the Word's whole gospel (chap. 5:116).

the whole big picture: the theological nexus of the past and the future of the Word's theological trajectory and relational path constituted, embodied and enacted that reveal the whole-ly Trinity and the Word's whole-ly way of life (chap. 3:48).

whole-ly: is the integration of whole and holy (uncommon) that distinguishes the whole-ly God and the Word's way for us to be distinguished whole-ly unequivocally in likeness "just as the Trinity is," which is contrary to the fragmentary and common in all of human life (chap. 1:10-11).

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