The Disciples of Whole Theology and Practice

Following the Diversity of Reformation or the Wholeness of Transformation

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Chapter 1 The Discipleship Manifesto of the Gospel

Be still, and know that I am God!
Psalm 46:10[1]

As I begin this study, two historical moments emerge from my memory. These two pivotal moments, one from my personal history and the other from church history, continue to influence my life's journey—in ways agreeable, and yet contrary, to the gospel of the Christian faith.

The most pivotal point in my life occurred when I became a Christian at the age of twenty. This decision-point didn't happen in a church context or among any other Christians but occurred decisively by myself while in the U.S. Air Force. Two matters stand out in my reflections that continue to be influential in my journey of faith. First, I wasn't a Christian prior to then because I honestly felt my life had more significance than the Christians I saw and knew. Yet, in spite of my successful efforts and broad experiences, I was dissatisfied in my person, and thus asked God to show me—beyond what I saw in Christians—what he had to offer. This led to the second matter.

In that initial period of my journey of faith, I didn't have a regular church context or Christian fellowship. I turned to the Bible and listened to God speak, notably to me. In my naiveté I took God's words at face value and believed literally what he said. For example, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil 4:13) was formative in my early Christian life, and I learned to trust him accordingly—that is, expecting God's words to be fulfilled, even when situations appeared to the contrary. The key issue here was listening to God speak (communicate) instead of my speaking for God, and then trusting in the truth of his communication in our relationship. This deeply touched my heart in a way I had not previously experienced.

Unfortunately, yet not surprisingly, my simple relational faith was increasingly distracted from this vital relational process of listening, thereby disrupting my intimate relational involvement with my God. This subtle shift happened as I became more involved in church and "learned" how a Christian should be. Furthermore, my relationally significant early faith became an established religious faith as I formally engaged in biblical and theological studies, not to mention my preoccupation with philosophy and apologetics. The Bible became more critical than essential, and its relational significance was commonly lost in translation as I subtly began speaking for God instead of listening. What resulted from this theology and practice was a doctrinally correct religious faith without the relational significance of the good news of God's words communicating the full, complete, whole relational purpose and outcome of God's offer—which I had originally requested beyond what commonly exists among Christians in all their diversity. Basically, I turned from the purpose I originally became a Christian

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

in order to perform what Christians are supposed to do. What evolved was my priority focused on serving, which even with my good intentions made secondary my relationship with God and listening to his communication. Subtly, my serving and Christian reasoning developed at the expense of our relationship together. Sound familiar?

Contrary to common belief, serving and studying the Word are not valid indicators of giving primacy to relationship with God—the primary reality composing the truth of the whole gospel. As we listen to Jesus, this will be apparent in the identity of disciples who truly "Follow me!"

The second pivotal historical moment happened in church history, whose 500th anniversary is observed this year: the Reformation. While I didn't participate in the original moment, along with most Christians I continue to experience the effects and their ongoing influence on Christian theology and practice. The diversity of these effects challenges the undiluted truth of the whole gospel and the integral words of God in the Bible (e.g. as Paul challenged, 2 Cor 2:17; 4:2). Consider these implications: If the primary (not total) context of God's communication is Scripture, why and how does the Reformation principle of 'Scripture alone' (*sola scriptura*) result in such diversity? If the good news of God's presence and involvement in the human context is determined solely by God's grace (the Reformation principle of *sola gratia*), why and how is God's involvement so diversely defined, with such diversity of results? If the human response to God's grace can only be consummated by 'faith alone' (*sola fide*), why has this faith become a misnomer for diverse Christian practice that all Christians do not share? And how does the diversity of theology and practice that emerges from these *solas* witness to the world—much less to each other as Christians—the relational reality and experiential significance of a gospel that is worth claiming and proclaiming because of the following basis: (1) this gospel is constituted directly by the whole and uncommon (holy) God and not by any substitutes, and thus (2) its outcome is fulfilled beyond and above any alternative for life in the human context, and with nothing less?

In other words, did the diversity of the Reformation evolve because God spoke and his followers acted on that relational basis; or does the diversity of the Reformation in fact displace God's voice with the secondary words of their concerns, priorities and interests, thereby fragmenting both God's relational purpose in the gospel and our response to God—ultimately fragmenting the Christian God of the gospel with subtle substitutes bearing the same name, who is less than whole? Therefore, in proclaiming the gospel, can we truly claim to have personally received all that God offered by grace, and nothing less or no substitutes? Moreover, as people who subscribe to the authority of Scripture, have we taken liberties with God's Word—likely motivated by 'the priesthood of all believers'—in order to establish our own identity, which intentionally or inadvertently makes distinctions with other Christians invariably in a comparative process of right-wrong, better-worse? Given the fragmentary condition of the global church, can we really presume to have the solution to the human condition when our own problems remain unresolved and our condition is without wholeness?

This 500th year since the Reformation is a good opportunity for all Christians to examine our existing condition and reflect on these questions. The Reformation was the key stimulus that accelerated not only theological diversity but also its enactment in divisive practice. This fact should at the least chasten observances of the Reformation this

year. Even more important, what has evolved from the Reformation is an unspoken commonly shared culture, the reality of which knowingly or unknowingly has justified existing conditions. On the one hand, this underlying culture ostensibly promotes engagement in and adheres to the presupposition of 'the priesthood of all believers' as a fundamental norm (validated by Peter's words, 1 Pet 2:4-5,9). On the other hand, however, this culture's defining composition is shaped by the fragmentary human condition of reductionism, whereby this culture's unspoken values and norms are subtly determined by reductionism's counter-relational workings. Moreover, the diverse practices of this culture cultivate their specific *brands* of values and norms in more homogeneous contexts dominated by people alike; this, of course, intentionally or inadvertently reinforces the counter-relational workings of reductionism and its fragmenting of persons and their relationships. As from the beginning, God's ongoing challenge to us in this evolving condition is "Where are you?" (Gen 3:9).

This underlying culture—which ironically amounts to a counter-Christian culture among God's people—needs to be understood and addressed in order to change our existing condition to become disciples of whole theology and practice, those not following the diversity merely of reformation or its counterparts such as even renewal, but the wholeness of transformation composed in, with and by the gospel.

The issues in the above two pivotal historical moments continue to have major influence in shaping the identity of our God and the gospel, as well as forming the identity of those who claim such a gospel and follow such a God. With ongoing concern for these and related issues, this study unapologetically defines the discipleship manifesto intrinsic to God's response to humankind and thus essential to the whole gospel, in order to "make disciples" of persons who "follow me" in whole theology and practice—the Reformation and theological education notwithstanding.

The Identity of God

"Surely I spoke of things *about God* I did not understand, things too distinguished for me to know" (Job 42:3, NIV).

Likely the least recognized and most consequential assumption (or presupposition) that Christians make is the identity of their God. In the global church today, this assumption is problematic because the Christian God may not have the same identity among the diversity composing the church—even though the same name is used by all. This should raise the urgent question whether all Christians worship the same God.[2] This is an assumption that logically would be legitimate to make, but under scrutiny has no valid basis in both global theology and practice.

At this stage it may seem odd to be questioning the identity of God in a study on Christian discipleship. The ironic issue, and underlying problem here, is this: The identity of God in whom Christians put their faith and the Jesus they follow are often not congruent with the Word of God, in spite of the authority Christians give to the Bible.

[2] For an expanded discussion of this question, see my study on the Trinity in *The Face of the Trinity: The Trinitarian Essential for the Whole of God and Life* (Trinity Study, 2016). Online at http://4X12.org.

Measured by the undiluted truth of the whole gospel, the God many Christians have faith in is on a different theological trajectory than the God involved in the human context; and the Jesus many Christians follow is on a different relational path than the Jesus responding to the human condition. Therefore, it is imperative at the initial stage of this study to challenge, indeed even confront, the assumptions we have and continue to make about God's identity.

The identity of Christianity has an increasingly distinct global make-up, with the Western world no longer composing the majority identity of Christians—though the West still is the dominant influence that shapes Christian identity and the identity of God. Nevertheless, the unmistakable reality (at least to non-Christian observers) is that Christian identity is more diverse than the peoples and cultures of the world; and its variegation even increases with changing situations and circumstances, with over 40,000 Christian denominations today and counting.[3] The prominent formation of Christians identities (emphasizing pl.) evolved with the most diversity from the Reformation, yet Christian diversity is not due solely or even mainly from the Reformation itself. The Reformation really only amplified how Christians all along have defined themselves and determined their practice based primarily on these **three basic questions**:

1. How do we know God, or even if God exists?
2. How do we respond to this God to define our faith?
3. How does this faith grow and develop?

The issues central to these basic questions existed before the Reformation and go back to the early church and the time of Christ. They all converge in the pivotal history of Jesus, who embodied the Word communicated from God that disclosed the identity of not just God but the whole and holy/uncommon God distinguished beyond the common of the human context. The identity of God disclosed by the Word cannot be diversified by common human terms (even by Christians) without fragmenting the identity of God and rendering God no longer whole and uncommon. The resulting diversity involves a reductionist process of ***commoni*zing** God on the basis of our human contexts (personal and/or collective); commonization and contextualization are intertwined, and they remain entangled in human terms and practice—in spite of even good intentions by Christians. This underlying cultural practice is a critical influence still determining much of the practice of contextualization (e.g. of the gospel) engaged by Christians today. The obvious consequence for Christians is claiming the identity of and practicing a faith in a different God than the whole and uncommon God vulnerably disclosed by the Word.

This brings us back to the Bible. What valid source is available to us to answer basic question 1? If God in fact exists, what reliable means can we count on to know this God? The reality is that no valid and reliable source is accessible in the human context as the point of origin to know God; indications in physical creation certainly point to this God but are insufficient to know this God (as Paul clarified, Rom 1:20-23). Of course, we could put our faith in anything or anyone; that is the common nature that all human

[3] As counted by the Center for the Study of Global Christianity, noted by Jennifer Powell McNutt in "Division is not necessarily Scandal," *Christianity Today*, Jan/Feb, 2017, 43-45.

practice (including by scientists). For the experiential truth of God, however, to be a valid and reliable reality, God needs to disclose himself in the human context and communicate in relational terms for humans (including Christians) to know of the uncommon God, whereby they need to respond in relational compatibility in order to know the whole of God and put their faith in the whole and uncommon God.[4]

Nothing less and no substitutes speak for God. Only God has the authority to define his identity and determine his presence and involvement in the human context. As part (neither solely nor blindly) of Christian faith, this integral source of knowledge (the primary epistemic source for Christians) is the authority we affirm that constitutes Scripture and that embodied the Word as the truth, the life and the way of the whole and uncommon God. Indeed, the Word directly from God communicates the good news that integrally answers these basic questions and fulfills the relational process necessary to experience their relational reality as the only disciples who "follow me" in wholeness. And this is the identity of God that challenges all Christians today, and the gospel that confronts all Christians to stop presuming and start listening to the Word more carefully (Mk 4:24)—to listen before we speak and then to speak on the basis of what we have carefully listened to from the Word. In order to listen carefully also involves to "pay attention to **how** you listen" (Lk 8:18), because merely implementing the mechanics of listening (i.e. just hearing the words the other person speaks) is insufficient and often results in misinterpretation.

For all Christians to listen thoroughly to God speak in the gospel and to claim the whole and uncommon identity of God, our initial response must—not out of obligation but by the nature of this relational process—undertake **the hermeneutic (interpretation) challenge**: Listen before we interpret what God is saying, and do not make your assumptions the basis for any subsequent interpretations or you will end up speaking for God; this is the hermeneutic clarification and correction that Job experienced in his theological task (Job 38:1-3; 42:3-4). That is to say, "Be still" (*raphah*, to desist, quit, relax, Ps 46:10) by ceasing our initial human efforts to interpret and understand and thereby give God the opportunity to speak, so that we can "know that I am God"—the identity of whom only God can disclose. And the relational outcome will be not what we have "discovered" by our efforts and thus boast, but rather boasting (*hālal*, praising and celebrating) what we have received from God's communication and therefore gained in knowing and understanding God (Jer 9:23-24).[5] Of encouraging significance for us

[4] In her history of American evangelicalism, Molly Worthen presents a crisis among those of the Book (composing the diversity of evangelicals), whose concerns were existential and epistemological and united around three questions: "how to reconcile faith and reason; how to know Jesus; and how to act publicly on faith after the rupture of Christendom." *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 6.

[5] Hebrew and Greek word studies used in this study are taken from the following sources: Horst Balz, Gerhard Schreider, 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. Laid 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

today, this was the relational outcome that convicted Job of God's whole identity in his theological task, when he responded to the hermeneutic challenge (Job 42:4-5).

Any identity of God that does not unfold from the hermeneutic challenge of Scripture should be suspect—and rightfully encountered with a hermeneutic of suspicion—and challenged for clarification, if not confronted for correction. While the text of Scripture requires interpretation, the authority of Scripture is not subject to interpretation—particularly under the cloak of the priesthood of all believers. Authority is God's domain and Christian faith only affirms the truth of this reality, so our faith does not compose this authority. This subtle distinction is critical to maintain in our faith. Moreover, while the practice of this faith may be variable among Christians, the affirmation of this truth is not dependent on faith alone and thus not subject to the diversity of Christian beliefs. Even though the relational response of the priesthood of all believers may reciprocally represent God, those who so respond do not speak *for* God.

The simple truth is: God communicates, and only God speaks for himself, using human contexts, authors and language to express in relational terms the whole of who, what and how God is. All Christians are subject to the authority of God's communication, which is not about conforming literally to the text of Scripture. The hermeneutic challenge is the relational process of involvement that responds directly—neither indirectly nor with the latitude of personal interests and biases—to God and submits to the authority of God's communication. Beyond merely a step of faith, undertaking the hermeneutic challenge requires a valid basis and reliable process of interpreting Scripture that is crucial in order for all Christians to be able to trust what God says and reveals.

Undertaking the Hermeneutic (Interpretation) Challenge

The above three basic questions are essential for the theology and practice of discipleship, which all disciples must answer with relational significance to truly be distinguished as followers of Jesus—that is, distinguished beyond what commonly exists among Christians. Most Christians presume in their practice to have the answers to basic questions 1 and 2, and on the basis of those assumptions (or presuppositions) they answer question 3. But the answer to question 3 can only be fully defined and determined by the depth of significance that question 2 is answered with. Further and integrally, question 2 unfolds (not evolves) defined and determined only by the depth of significance that fulfills question 1. Therefore, as we proceed in this study these three questions are basic to who and what are essential to our faith and vital for how we practice.

Getting to the depth of significance of God's communication in Scripture has been problematic for Christians down through history, to say the least, notably because only relational significance constitutes the depth of God's communication. Relational significance is the difference that distinguishes Go's relational language from the general use of referential language, which is commonly used even by Christians—especially in

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Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1981); Spiros Zodhiates, ed., *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible* (Chattanooga: AMG Publ., 1996).

the academy to compose biblical and theological studies. That makes listening to God not only a priority but primary in the process of interpretation, making all other hermeneutic activity secondary (not unimportant)—perhaps at times even unnecessary, certainly if it distracts us from the primary or disconnects us from the primacy of relationship that the grace of God's communication constitutes. Yet, that still leaves us with the text of Scripture, which is contained within human contexts and historical settings that render God's communication more complex than literal expressions of simple truths.

Since the communication of God's Word is expressed by human authors, in historical contexts and through literary genres, these need to be accounted for in the interpretation process in order not to misunderstand God speaking. And where we need to start is from the beginning with "Did God say *that*?" (Gen 3:1)[6] As emerged from the beginning in the primordial garden, on the other hand, these characteristics of the biblical text are always secondary to what remains primary in God's Word; thus they must neither distract nor take away from the primacy of the relational context, process and purpose of God speaking his relational terms to us. Indeed, "God does say **that**" and our challenge in the interpretive process is to receive God face to face (cf. Num 12:6-8; Job 42:3-5; 2 Cor 4:6), and not take liberties to speak for the Other—as commonly takes place in human interaction to prevent the relational connection for significant communication. In *Other* words, **interpretation of Scripture is making relational connection with the heart of God**—the God who vulnerably makes himself accessible whole-ly (i.e. whole and holy/uncommon) in relational response to us, who responds to our human context for the primacy of relationship together but not according to human terms (including our terms as Christians).

Given the plurality assuming Christian identity and the diversity composing Christian theology and practice, who is making relational connection with the heart of God? What are non-Christian observers to conclude about the lack of coherence in Christian theology and practice, much less assess the fragmentation of Christian identity? Such diversity witnesses to the lack of significance (even to the insignificance) of both Christians and God; and the absence of their wholeness renders the gospel a false hope for the human condition—contrary to and in conflict with Jesus' formative prayer for Christian identity in likeness of the whole of God (Jn 17:20-23).

Jesus made a distinct hermeneutic process the relational imperative for all his followers, or there would be consequences in their theology and practice (Lk 8:18; Mk 4:23-25). Based on his imperative, the unmistakable reason for the existing diversity in Christian theology and practice is failing to meet Jesus' hermeneutic challenge, leaving the interpretation of the Other (the Word and his gospel) to others in all their diversity—even those with good intentions, These others would include the magisterial Reformers and all others (notably evangelicals) who subscribe to *sola scriptura* and *sola fide*.[7] As a

[6] See my study on the hermeneutic challenge from the beginning and its ongoing implications for our theological task. *"Did God Really Say That?" Theology in the Age of Reductionism* (Theology Study, 2013). Online at http://4X12.org.

[7] Kevin J. Vanhoozer examines Christian diversity in both-and terms that affirms a hermeneutic based on the *solas*, and thereby highlights the underlying unity existing in plurality of interpretation. See *Biblical Authority After Babel: Retrieving the Solas in the Spirit of Mere Protestant Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016).

consequence predicted by **Jesus' paradigm**—"the measure you give [or use] will be the measure you get" (Mk 4:24)—the common composition of orthodoxy has become a theological construction without the relational significance of God's Word, therefore lacking the orthopraxy of the whole-ly Way, Truth and Life.

In the hermeneutic challenge both of and by the Word, disciples must be able to distinguish in their theology and practice the relational response of following the person of Jesus in history from a belief (however convicted) in Jesus as a historical subject. The latter belief constrains the Word (even in *sola scriptura*) to a narrowed-down epistemic field (source of knowledge) of mere referential information of Jesus' words, teachings, miracles, example, and the like, But, in explicit contrast and implicit conflict, the former relational response embraces the whole person in relationship based on the relational language communicated by the Word—listening to all his words without selecting only what we want to hear. For these disciples, what Jesus communicated in the Gospels (whether in narrative or metaphor) in different human situations and historical contexts has ongoing relational significance for all Christians (from past to present to future), the authority of which defines and determines all discipleship according to his terms without having the latitude to shape relationship together by our terms (i.e. to diversify the way, Mt 7:13-14, cf. Jn 10:7). Again, the latter's belief essentially speaks for the Other with words (even as correct doctrine) that lack relational significance (cf. "every careless word," *argos*, unprofitable, in Mt 12:33-36).

Certainly interpretation is always occurring about what the Word communicates. The hermeneutic challenge doesn't preclude our interpretation but always puts it in its primary context, whereby the Word speaks first and thus for himself—always Jesus' relational imperative for the hermeneutic process. However—and this must be recognized and acknowledged—as long as the hermeneutic door remains wide open to "Did God say *that*?" others will increasingly speak for God, speaking contrary not to orthodoxy and orthopraxy but to whole theology and practice.[8] This then further raises the question: If Christians meet Jesus' hermeneutic challenge, will there no longer be all this diversity in theology and practice? As just footnoted, opinions differ about the nature of existing Christian diversity and what is needed today. Just taking up Jesus' hermeneutic challenge would likely not eliminate existing diversity, but it would greatly reduce it to the extent of our relational response of ongoing relational involvement in the hermeneutic process—the significant involvement of which is neither defined nor determined by the mere adjective 'relational'. Only the depth of our relational involvement will meet the hermeneutic challenge that counteracts our divisive condition.

At the same time, to discount illusions and simulations of unity, we need to ongoingly emphasize that the hermeneutic key to the reality of Christian unity is not conformity to and uniformity in theology and practice, but rather receiving the depth of the whole gospel and the wholeness of Jesus. **The unavoidable challenge** for all Christians is becoming disciples of whole theology and practice that unfolds from the gospel and is distinguished by its Word. For this relational outcome to unfold, however,

[8] Christian Smith describes this existing condition in Christianity with stronger either-or terms in *The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicism Is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2011). Peter J. Leithart calls for the death of Protestantism in order for the unity in the church to be restored, in *The End of Protestantism: Pursuing Unity in a Fragmented Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016).

integrally includes in the unavoidable challenge the ongoing fight against reductionism and its counter-relational work that subtly fragments the whole gospel and reinterprets the Word's wholeness into parts not integrated together or simply missing. This challenge has not been well incorporated into the hermeneutic process, mainly because reductionism is either ignored or not understood (even by church leaders and those in the academy).

Reductionism emerged distinctly in the primordial garden yet unfolded with ambiguity (Gen 3:1-5). The subtlety of reductionism's workings created hermeneutic confusion and theological fog by first raising reasonable skepticism or the seeds of doubt with the seemingly harmless question "Did God say *that*?" Implied in this query of interpretation, which seems basic for all wanting to know what God said, is a hermeneutic shift of who has priority in the interpretive process: "If God did in fact say that, then what did God really mean by that?" This is when and how the hermeneutic door has opened wide for others to render their voice to speak for God's intentions (e.g. "you will not die," v.4). The consequence is a subtle fragmenting of God's words apart from the wholeness of God's communication and thus a shift into diverse theology (as in "your eyes will be opened and you will be like God," v.5) and practice (on the assumption of "knowing good and evil"). Sounds reasonable, doesn't it—after all, the main alternative is to be a biblical literalist or to fall into skepticism, perhaps solipsism, even despair. With the hope of knowing what God said since this beginning, however, the hermeneutic process has been developed with further sophistication and justification; yet it mainly still operates implicitly under the priority of the interpreter and thus covertly under the determining influence of reductionism.

A reductionist mindset has prevailed in human history, shaping human perceptual-interpretive frameworks and lenses in underlying ways with a fragmentary focus. Today, the digital age of modern technology has imposed its parameters on our thinking and shaped our practice with a dominating binary perceptual framework and interpretive lens. Subtly, our knowledge has been reduced mainly to either-or quantitative terms, which lacks qualitative depth and relational significance—e.g. as gained from the Internet and experienced on social media. In no other context is this more true, though not prevailing overtly, than in the history of God's people, with the modern Christian context the most evident. A cartoon demonstrates this condition. Moses is seen returning from Mt Sinai with the stone tablets of God's commandments raised above his head, with this new declaration for God's people: "**Behold! Now both thinner and lighter**."[9] Ironically, and sadly, the historical reality for ancient Israel was their reduction of God's relational terms for covenant relationship together down to "thinner and lighter" conforming to a code of behavior for religious-national identity, thereby losing the qualitative depth and relational significance of the covenant relationship of God's love (as in Dt 7:7-9).

Also, sadly, yet not surprisingly, to this day new "thinner and lighter" declarations are made to speak for "Did God say *that*?" and/or to give account for what God really meant by *that*. What does this say both about contextual influence in our interpretations and about the so-called authority of God's communication in Scripture, which we supposedly affirm by our so-called faith? And directly related, what does this "thinner

[9] From *Parade Magazine*, "Cartoon Parade," 12/8/2015.

and lighter" say about the integrity of the gospel—is it really binary—and its so-called grace, which we presumably claim by our so-called faith?

Christian identity today is thinner and lighter than it ever has been. Whether new followers in the global South will change the course of this condition or merely add to the diversity of theology and practice, remains an open question. Renewal today simply could be another version of reformation. However, if the hermeneutic door remains open, we can only expect an increasing diversity of discipleship, resulting in the truth of the whole gospel eluding those who presume to claim its good news. And this Christian condition will continue because it evidences the presence of the human condition that has yet to be redeemed as an experiential reality—even though the relational reality of redemption has been completed according to the gospel. The **narrative of this human condition** (our human condition) can be summarized with the following understanding, for which all Christians are accountable and need to be responsible:

> From its beginning the human condition **consists** of reductionism; and this human condition **persists** with reductionism's counter-relational workings against God's wholeness; and these subtle practices **resist** (even unintentionally) the gospel of God's relational response to make us whole; the relational consequence is for our human condition to **subsist** in diverse theology and practice (contrary to whole theology and practice), persisting in ever new thinner-and-lighter alternatives that consistently counter, fragment and reduce God's whole theology and practice.

Absent from this narrative is significant coherence in the interpretation of God's Word, the coherence which distinguishes and thus understands the whole composing the Bible over merely parts (including their sum) of it. Christians need to be ongoingly aware that this whole of the Bible cannot be understood from just its parts; nor can it be distinguished by the quantity of parts, or the sum of those parts. God's whole is disclosed in a process of *synergism*, in which God's whole is always greater than the sum of multiple parts (including the diversity of interpretations). The primacy given to parts always emerges from reductionism and evolves with a fragmenting hermeneutic that is unable to integrate those parts into the whole—an inability evident of the human condition.

In their manifesto for coherence in Christian interpretation, Craig Bartholomew and Heath Thomas identify the cause and results of interpreting only parts of the Bible: "a plurality in theological thought and work is a direct result of the human condition." For them, it is critical to interpret the whole that is outlined in the Bible in order to understand how the voice of God expressed in Scripture is heard in relation to all of human life, starting with Christians.[10] For this outcome to unfold, our interpretation cannot be based on partial or selective words from God—not to mention be predisposed by familiar words—but only by allowing the whole of God and the whole gospel to communicate to us without reducing or fragmenting their words. Yet, what must also be

[10] Craig G. Bartholomew and Heath A. Thomas, eds., *A Manifesto for Theological Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 20.

understood in this hermeneutic challenge—particularly by those engaged in theological interpretation for biblical theology—is this: The interconnections made from the Bible in only referential language do not result in the whole of God's communication expressed only in relational language. Biblical theology in referential language is still fragmentary and thus is always insufficient for whole theology and practice, at best only simulating the experiential truth and relational reality of God's disclosures that compose the full relational significance of the Word.

Jesus made imperative for his followers the hermeneutic challenge because he expects all of us (not just a resourceful few) to have integral understanding of God's disclosures. This integral understanding (*syniemi* in NT) integrates the parts of God's disclosures (not just adding them up) to distinguish the whole—similar to putting together the pieces of a puzzle to get the complete picture, which doesn't result from merely studying the Scriptures (e.g. Jn 5:36-40, cf. Lk 10:21). Nor does this understanding result from committed serving; the early disciples failed to engage the hermeneutic process of *syniemi* with Jesus' disclosures (notably in Mk 8:14-21), and this thus clouded their hermeneutic lens to minimize their relational connection with Jesus (as in Lk 9:44-45). Although Christians today may not respond to the relational imperative of Jesus' hermeneutic challenge, it is inescapable for those who remain identified as his followers. Therefore, even the very gospel that followers claim does not escape scrutiny for this pivotal reason crucial to our theology and practice.

The reality from the paradigm of Jesus' hermeneutic challenge (Mk 4:24) is that 'the measure of the gospel we use is the extent of discipleship we get!' Discipleship is the direct outcome of the gospel we embrace. Another way we need to understand this correlation from Jesus' paradigm, especially crucial in the existing condition of Christian diversity: The discipleship we practice signifies the type of gospel we claim, and the gospel we proclaim has significance only to the extent of the discipleship we practice. This unavoidably confronts all Christians with Jesus' hermeneutic challenge and urgently holds us accountable to return to Scripture in order to receive our essential knowledge and integral understanding of the whole of who, what and how the Word *is* composing the gospel.

Good News versus Fake News

Since, as Jesus implied, the gospel is defining for the discipleship we practice, it is immediately vital and ongoingly essential that all Christians have an accurate account of the Good News. In the recent U.S. context, a major highlight in the media has focused on fake news and alternative facts in defining scenarios. Spurred by President Trump, a climate of fake news and alternative facts has enveloped identity politics and deteriorated into intense divisiveness, making it problematic to distinguish truth from falsehood, fact

from fiction; apparently, fact-checking no longer has significance. Analogous to these issues is the human drama evolving in the Christian context and the integrity of its gospel; this certainly raises legitimate questions about the sources for its theology and practice and how their credibility is determined. Within a global context of diversity and a variable climate of differences, Christian identity emerging from the gospel warrants scrutiny about whether it is based on the truth of good news. Or whether this condition evolved from representations of the gospel focused on secondary matters that have composed variations amounting to fake news. Using only one example, I consider the prosperity gospel as simply fake news, with its subtle variations selective about their facts to present a relative gospel of alternative news. Thus, it is critical to know the source for diverse theology and practice and the credibility of their nuances—whether this condition reflects truth or alternative facts.

Similar to identity politics, Christian identity has fragmented not only into different parties—as noted earlier, into over 40,000 Christian denominations globally and new ones forming daily—but also into separate practices that share little in common beyond the Christian label. In spite of some Christian coalitions forming in response to different issues, plurality has evolved into new thinner and lighter meaning for the Rule of Faith. Perhaps for many Christians, biblical fact-checking has been replaced by proof-texting, in order to gain so-called credibility at the expense of biblical integrity.

What is claimed and proclaimed today as the Christian gospel must be examined, clarified and corrected. The differences of Christian identity formation make evident that the Good News has undergone revision by substitute variations shaped essentially from subtle accounts of fake news; or Christian divisions have effectively reconstructed the gospel with alternative facts, convincingly supported by proof-texting instead of fact-checking. For example, do all Christians celebrate the truth and reality of the incarnation (as described in Lk 2:34-35) or its variation embedded in Christmas tradition?

Directly or indirectly, specifically or generally, formally or informally, in one way or another Christians (individually and collectively) have conflated God's communication and the Word with other words (e.g. "knowing good and evil," Gen 3:5) to form diverse theology and practice. While most of these results appear to have justification—composed by the committed faith of Christians, *sola fide*, with the assumption "your eyes will be opened…like God"—the underlying reality is that the integrity of the truth of the whole gospel has been compromised. Here again, the subtlety of reductionism is at work to fragment God's whole, which has not been recognized, understood or has simply been ignored—especially with concerns for special interests and self-determination (as in Gen 3:6).

While the integrity of the Good News may not necessarily have been compromised with overt fake news or explicit alternative facts, there is a more subtle process compromising the gospel's integrity that is commonly used among Christians: **paltering**. "Paltering" is the active use of a truthful statement to mislead someone. This process goes beyond merely omitting the whole truth, which may not be known or understood at that moment. Among Christians, paltering is a method of using God's truth in a fragmentary (or selective) process that reduces the whole truth by selectively stating only fragments of truth yet representing that as the whole truth, thus basically misleading

others. Nuances in diverse theology and practice also appear to have a solid foundation, and this condition makes paltering less obvious in its fragmentation. Intentionally or inadvertently, paltering is engaged for a favorable response—the use of which is most evident in declaring the gospel. For example, how many Christians declare the truth of the gospel with Simeon (defined in Lk 2:29-32,34-35) and embrace the whole gospel from Jesus (clarified in Mt 10:34-36)? What kind of response would such a gospel bring today? More importantly, how does this gospel define the disciples who "follow me?"

What then would you call those proclaiming the gospel without fully informing potential followers of the response required of them and what must be ongoingly involved by them?

The truth of the whole gospel distinguishes the good news of only God's relational response of grace to the human condition; this is the only gospel that composes the significance of *sola gratia*, and thus cannot be diversified. Yet, the only way we can know of the gospel's truth and understand its wholeness is by the distinguished disclosure of God's communicative action—distinguished beyond commonization and human contextualization. The relational context and process of God's communication are composed and expressed explicitly in Scripture. This distinguished composition makes primary the relational significance of *sola scriptura*—again, the authoritative truth of which we affirm by faith, without having the latitude to be selective or to palter by our faith.

In what condition do you locate your gospel? And what does your discipleship indicate about your gospel?

The importance of these issues was demonstrated among Jesus' early followers. After Jesus fed the 5,000 (Jn 6), many observed this good news and on this basis determined to follow him (6:14-15, 24-25). We can imagine their thinking: "This good news proves that our Messiah has come for our benefit, so let's follow him to gain these benefits"—which Jesus clarified (6:26) and then corrected (6:27-29), and thus they asked for more proof (6:30). Furthermore, Jesus also defined what composed the depth of the whole gospel (6:45-51, 53-58). The truth of the whole gospel was beyond what these followers wanted and were willing to accept in its full substance. Therefore, since many of his disciples could not validly revise this good news with alternative facts (6:28,30,42,52), they would not accept the integrity of this gospel and no longer followed Jesus (6:60,66). At least we have to appreciate their honesty and that they didn't just simulate their faith.

In contrast to these disciples, Peter declared his version of the good news: "You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God" (6:68-69, NIV). So, do you agree with Peter's gospel? Yet, what are those "words of eternal life" and who is "the Holy One of God" composing the gospel? Peter had part of the correct doctrine that composed the gospel, but that part was insufficient to compose the depth of the whole gospel, and also inadequate to understand the relational significance, purpose and outcome of Jesus' gospel and not Peter's version. Later, Peter declared in response to Jesus' query ("who do you say that I am?") that "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" based on the Father's revelation (Mt 16:15-17). Here

also, Peter had the gospel partially correct; but that didn't account for the fake news and alternative facts about the Messiah prominent in his context, which subtly influenced Peter's perceptual-interpretive lens of Jesus and revised the gospel. In Peter's version, even after Jesus vulnerably disclosed how the gospel would unfold, Peter sternly rebuked the Truth, the Way and the Life with the false news "Never Lord! This shall never happen to you" (Mt 16:21-22, NIV). Though Peter obviously remained a disciple, how does what Peter followed differ from the disciples mentioned above?

What unfolded in the early period of Peter's discipleship demonstrated the paradigmatic reality of Jesus' hermeneutic challenge: The gospel you use will determine the disciples you get and the discipleship you practice. At a pivotal interaction that was defining for their relationship together, Jesus made his whole person vulnerable to his disciples for intimate relationship together—without the relational barrier of titles (e.g. Lord) or the relational distance of roles (e.g. Teacher). His uncommon involvement was enacted to determine their discipleship by the relational significance of the gospel and its relational outcome of wholeness in the primacy of relationship together as family, not merely about serving, as he washed their feet. Peter once again strongly objected, "You will never wash my feet" (Jn 13:1-8). In Peter's interpretation of the good news, his Lord could not engage in demeaning action; and Peter's hermeneutic bias would not allow his own person to be vulnerable for such intimate relational connection with his Messiah, the Son of God, the Holy One with the words of eternal life. In other words—Peter's own contrary words—the gospel he used determined the discipleship he practiced, not to mention the disciple he embodied whose feet were not available to Jesus.

As the early church formed, its formation was not whole and its relationships were fragmented (e.g. Acts 6:1). Jesus clarified this condition for Peter and corrected his theology to make it whole (Acts 10:9ff). Peter had interjected alternative facts (10:12-14) to what he had heard Jesus clearly define previously (Mk 7:7-19); thus, Peter essentially revised "the words of eternal life" that he earlier affirmed about Jesus. Peter's corrected gospel was later crucial for the Jerusalem church council to establish the church in whole theology and practice (Acts 15:7-11). While Peter's theology was corrected by Jesus, his practice still remained inconsistent with the truth of the whole gospel. Therefore, Peter's contrary discipleship (*hypokrisis*) had to be confronted and corrected further by Paul (Gal 2:11-14).

Yes indeed, the gospel we use will define the disciples we are and the discipleship we practice. And even correct doctrine does not guarantee understanding the whole gospel and experiencing its relational outcome of disciples transformed to be whole, live whole and make whole. These are the followers of the good news distinguished only by the whole theology and practice disclosed by Jesus, together with the Father and the Spirit, who disclosed nothing less and no substitutes. The whole gospel is composed by the Trinity, so to follow Jesus' whole person by necessity involves integrally following the Father (Jn 10:30,38) and the Spirit (2 Cor 3:17-18) or else we claim an incomplete gospel of fragmentary good news. Yet, as long as the hermeneutic door remains open to fake news, alternative facts and paltering, Christian diversity will be highlighted in reformation (and even in renewal) and prevent whole theology and practice. To the

diverse condition of so-called good news—just as he kept reminding Peter of what is primary and thus imperative (Jn 21:19-22)—Jesus clarifies and corrects with the depth of relational significance composing "Follow *the whole of* me" that distinguishes only his disciples.

Thankfully, Peter was open to feedback, so that he was clarified and corrected on his journey to be transformed to an uncommon (holy) disciple "by the sanctifying [make holy, uncommon] work of the Spirit" in order to follow whole theology and practice in "*relational congruence* to Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 1:2, NIV); and, therefore, who "spoke from God, *not for God, with God's words and not his own, according to the depth of his relational involvement with* the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet 1:21, NIV). We today need to learn from Peter's discipleship and receive the good news of the Spirit's presence and involvement to help us also become disciples who follow the whole theology and practice of Jesus. This relational outcome requires a hermeneutic centered on the whole gospel, not parts of it or revisions of it.[11]

Until this relational outcome becomes our experiential reality, perhaps we can empathize with Jesus' relational sadness over segments of not just the Jewish community but over segments of all God's people (including us), when he vulnerably shared: "How often have I desired to gather *the* children together *in my family* as a hen gathers her brood under her wings *in wholeness*, and you were not willing" (Lk 13:34). Moreover, hopefully we can reflect on the words Jesus told the disciples in the church in Sardis, and "listen to what the Spirit is saying": "I know your *discipleship*; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead *in reality*. Wake up…for I have not found your *discipleship* complete [*pleroo*, i.e. to be whole] in the sight of my God" (Rev 3:1-2,6, NIV).

The Epistemological, Hermeneutic and Ontological Work of the Holy Spirit

Some Christians advocate for a distinct hermeneutic of the Spirit (Spirit hermeneutics and Pentecostal hermeneutics) to meet the hermeneutic challenge of Scripture.[12] Any hermeneutics from the Spirit, however, may be incomplete and thus insufficient for the challenge; this would be true if the interpretive process is not undertaken in the Spirit's full context.

Down through church history since Pentecost, the good news of the Spirit's presence and involvement has been revised with fake news, alternative facts and paltering, which would include fragmentary interpretations from diverse Pentecostal and charismatic practices.[13] Pentecost represented much more than the pivotal point in the history of God's people in which the Spirit emerged. The fact is that the Spirit was always present from the beginning (Gen 1:2) and the Spirit's person already involved

[11] Graeme Goldsworthy advocates for such a hermeneutic in *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006).
[12] For example, see Craig S. Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics: Reading Scripture in Light of Pentecost* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016).
[13] Anthony C. Thiselton provides an important overview of this history and makes helpful insights in the hermeneutic process for theology and practice, in *The Holy Spirit—In Biblical Teaching, through the Centuries and Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013).

(e.g. Isa 63:10). Simeon correctly interpreted the whole gospel because "the Holy Spirit rested on him…revealed to him by the Holy Spirit…guided by the Spirit" (Lk 2:25-27).

Pentecost amplified the Spirit's presence and intensified the Spirit's involvement, and thereby signified the pivotal relational process that integrally distinguished the further presence and involvement of not merely God but the whole and uncommon (holy) God, and that brings to completion the Trinity's relational response to make whole our human condition. The Spirit's relational purpose and work is irreplaceable in the relational process to wholeness and, therefore, indispensable for this relational outcome to be our experiential reality, both in our whole person and in the whole church family. On this relational basis, Jesus makes it the relational imperative: "Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the *diversity of* churches" (Rev 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22).

The Spirit is neither a mere theological attachment (pneumatology) to our theology nor merely a spiritual supplement to our practice. Seen and interpreted in that way renders our theology and practice fragmentary, without the knowledge, understanding and essential reality constituting whole theology and practice. The existing diversity of our theology and practice reflects the absence, neglect or misuse of the Spirit, whose person is involved only in relational terms and engaged in the primacy only of relational work. The relational terms and work of the Spirit's person function in the triune God's relational context and process. This is critical for our theology and crucial for our practice in two definitive ways: (1) Both the Spirit's presence is not subject to be shaped and the Spirit's involvement is not determined by human contextualization; and (2) the Trinity's relational context and process requires our reciprocal relational involvement in order to have connection with the Spirit's person and ongoingly experience the Spirit's work. What is critical for us is not a theological concept but a relational context; nor is what is crucial for us a spiritual exercise but a relational process.

The primacy of relationship over spirituality is essential to experience the relational work of the Spirit, who is the basic source for the following:

1. The **epistemological work** needed to know God by expanding our source of knowledge (epistemic field) beyond human limits and constraints—as Jesus outlined (Jn 16:13-15) and Paul summarized (1Cor 2:9-16)—without which we are left to mere human assumptions and efforts.
2. The **hermeneutic work** necessary to understand the whole of God by deepening our perception and clarifying, correcting and convicting (a tri-C process) our interpretations in order to integrate the various disclosures by God to have whole (not total) understanding (as in *syniemi and synesis*) of who, what and how God is —as Jesus promised (Jn 14:26; 15:26) and Paul experienced (1 Cor 2:12-16)— without which we are left merely to our explanations and conclusions.
3. The **ontological work** required to transform who, what and how we are into wholeness in the image and likeness of the Trinity, by consummating intimate relational connection with Jesus on the cross and completing the relational outcome of the resurrection together—as Jesus indicated (Jn 14:27) and Paul detailed (Rom 6:5-10; 2 Cor 3:16-18)—without the reality of which leaves us in our fragmented human condition.

In the feedback Jesus gave to those disciples who found the Word of the gospel too hard to digest, Jesus clearly made evident the absence of the relational work of the Spirit in their effort to follow Jesus: "It is the Spirit who gives life [his ontological work]; *human effort* is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are *distinguished by* Spirit [his epistemological and hermeneutic work] and life" (Jn 6:60-63, ESV). This feedback continues to apply to all his followers today, even though the gospel has been declared and the Word is known—at least in referential language and terms. Nevertheless, the Spirit is present to lead us deeper into the truth embodied by Jesus the Word (Spirit's epistemological work) and thus is involved to help us interpret Scripture according to the Word's relational language and terms (Spirit's hermeneutic work).

The Spirit's work, however, involves distinct relational work (1) to connect us in the relational context of God's disclosures communicated only in relational language (epistemological work), and thereby (2) to help us be involved in God's relational process (hermeneutic work)—both of which are distinguished from merely human contexts (and contextualization) and processes (and commonizing). The reciprocal nature of the Spirit's relational work requires not only our attentive listening (as in Mk 4:24), but also the relational involvement (implied in Lk 8:18) that emerges only as the relational outcome of being transformed such that we can indeed be relationally involved with our whole person (Spirit's ontological work) to know and understand God's disclosures. Biblical and theological interpretation does not fully take place with the Spirit in reciprocal relationship without this ongoing transformation from our human condition in reductionism and its counter-relational workings. Anything less than and any substitutes for transformation can undertake only illusions and simulations of the Spirit in the interpretive process, which can at best only result in the fragmentary knowledge, interpretations and disciples composing Christian diversity today.

The relational work of the Spirit's person underlies this study and will unfold throughout its pages, without which renders all that will be said with no relational significance both to God as well as to all Christians. As we proceed on this relational basis, there are ongoing questions to keep in mind, whether explicitly stated or not:

- The **epistemic question**: Is God accessible for anyone to know, and on what basis?
- The **hermeneutic question**: Is God able to be understood in terms significant to my, our, and all of life?
- The **ontological question**: Can who, what and how God *is* be known and understood completely (as whole, not totally) or just partially?
- The **relational question**: How can we experience this God directly and ongoingly?[14]

Underlying these questions and related issues is the reciprocating relational process constituted by the Spirit. This *uncommon* reciprocating relational process—not

[14] In advocating for theological interpretation of Scripture in order to compose biblical theology for the church, Craig C. Bartholomew and Heath A. Thomas, eds., address similar questions and issues in *A Manifesto for Theological Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016).

subject to shaping by our human contexts, nor determined by our common terms—always necessitates our ongoing compatible (i.e. *uncommon*) relational involvement, in order to distinguish the whole theology and practice that integrally embodies the experiential truth answering these questions and the relational reality of their relational outcome. Emphatically stated, therefore again and again, the ongoing presence and reciprocal involvement of the Spirit's *person* (not power, force or energy, even as love) is simply irreplaceable for our theology to be whole and indispensable for our practice to be whole—**whole-ly** (both whole and holy) in likeness of the whole-ly of God constituted by the whole-ly Trinity.

Distinguishing the Discipleship Manifesto Unfolding from the Gospel

In a recent study on the current condition of discipleship in the U.S., Barna Group researched Christian adults, church leaders, exemplar discipleship ministries, and Christian educators. "The clearest insight from this study [on 'What is discipleship?'] is that it's unclear!"[15] Such a study makes evident both the variable involvement by Christians with the Spirit and the diverse understanding Christians have of the gospel, both of which have left us in a condition lacking a manifesto definitive for all disciples and discipleship. Either there isn't such a manifesto signified by the gospel, or we are not paying close attention to what and who is disclosed by the Word.

The gospel declares the good news of God's unwarranted initiative to enact the unmerited relational response to the human condition, otherwise known as grace and too often oversimplified with notions of "grace alone" (cf. *sola gratia* associated with the Reformation). God's good news, as is commonly assumed, neither began with the incarnation nor can be limited to it.

While God certainly responded to save Noah from the human condition, this was situational and did not establish God's full relational response. That good news of God's full relational response emerged with the formation of the covenant with Abraham (Gen 17:1-11). The nature of God's response is essential to understand for composing the truth of the gospel. The covenant God established was not based on an exchange framework that formed a contract of exchange between the parties involved (a quid pro quo); this would amount to fake news, not good news, though many still see covenant with God basically in exchange terms. Historically, the faith of God's people in response to the covenant has often been reduced to such exchange terms, thereby essentially revising the gospel with alternative facts; and paltering has been used to evoke such responses to the gospel, which includes misrepresenting "by faith alone" (*sola fide*) and promoting diverse discipleship.

God stipulated terms for the covenant, initially for Abraham and later expanded with Moses in the Torah. These nonnegotiable terms unfolding from the gospel devolved among God's people as the relational terms were reduced to a behavioral code that served a covenant of exchange—for example, keeping the commandments to reap God's benefits. Various scenarios renegotiated the covenant with alternative facts, essentially

[15] Barna Group, *The State of Discipleship* (The Navigators, 2015), 19,24.

under the assumption 'do this and God will do that'; and this assumption basically continues today to define God's terms unfolding from the gospel (e.g. with a consumer gospel), though Christians may not admit to ulterior motives for being obedient in the faith.

God's terms, however, are distinguished only as **whole relational terms**—even for the new covenant—all of which converge in God's declaration to Abraham: "Walk before me and be blameless" (Gen 17:1); that is to say, "Be involved with me in relationship together and be *tāmiym* [complete, whole] in your person and involvement." The nature of God's response is the essence of relationship—the relationship constituted in who, what and how the Trinity is—therefore the covenant (including the new covenant) can only be distinguished with the truth of the gospel as the covenant relationship composed by the Trinity's relational response of grace. Furthermore, God's unwarranted, unmerited response constituted the covenant relationship only as **the covenant of love** (Dt 7:7-9). God's love has always been good news, yet fake news and alternative facts have misrepresented this gospel distinguished by the depth of God's relational involvement (the significance of love) and the covenant relationship of love that unfolds from the whole gospel.

As an example, what is the main thought that comes to your mind about the book of Deuteronomy? Since Deuteronomy is part of the Torah, Deuteronomy is commonly perceived in our interpretations of the Pentateuch as the primary source of God's commandments. However, when all the pieces of Deuteronomy are put together for the whole picture (as in *syniemi*), what emerges is not the "*oughts* of faith"—the alternative facts for a "rule of law" that substitutes implicitly for the Rule of Faith. In the truth of the facts, the big picture of God's whole distinguishes Deuteronomy as 'the book of love' (integrate Dt 4:37; 7:8; 10:15; 23:5; 33:3). Rather than the mere limits of commandments, Deuteronomy composes the good news of God's relational response of love and distinguishes God's relational terms for the depth of relational involvement, which is necessary in the covenant of love in order to determine relationship together in wholeness (*tāmiym*, Dt 18:13).

From this beginning, the gospel of God's relational involvement ongoingly unfolds in God's definitive blessing (Num 6:24-26), and what is further disclosed is **the face (*paneh*) of God**. *Paneh* signifies the very front of the person's presence, not an oblique, opaque or obscure view of the person, thus involving the vulnerable disclosure of the person. The good news of **God's definitive blessing** is that the figurative face of God (who has no literal face) is vulnerably distinguished by God's depth of involvement in face-to-face relationship together—as Moses experienced (Num 12:6-8):

> "The LORD bless you…make his face to shine upon you *in face-to-face relationship*, and be gracious *in relational response* to you…lift up his face to you *eye to eye* and give you peace."

This blessing is still good news today when heard in its relational terms. Yet, it is commonly repeated in a perfunctory way (as in a benedictory blessing) that has lost its relational significance, rendering the face of God to a still portrait for us to display and remember. Perhaps this is the extent of the good news that persons are comfortable possessing.

If we indeed embrace the truth of the gospel disclosed in God's definitive blessing, the reality is that the face of God is intrusive (face to face) and thus confronting (eye to eye)—in contrast to the norm in human interaction and in conflict with what dominates social media today. Therefore, what is distinguished unfolding from this gospel is intimate relationship together, both with God and each other; and, if we are honest with ourselves, in reality we are neither accustomed to such depth of relationship nor even willing or capable to be vulnerable for this intimacy together. God understands our condition better than we do; and on this basis what unfolds from this gospel must clearly be distinguished to constitute our faith and practice: "…and give you peace."

"Give" (*siym*) can be rendered and has been presumed in various ways—think again about a covenant of exchange. *Siym* in the good news of God's face in relationship together unfolds in these relational terms: 'to establish a new relationship', which then requires a change from the old (notably our fragmentary relational condition), so that persons and relationship together will now be constituted in *wholeness* (the peace of *shalôm*). Nothing less than and no substitutes for this new relationship together in wholeness (*siym* with *shalôm*) distinguishes what unfolds from the good news of God's face; and this is the truth of the whole gospel that cannot be revised by fake news or renegotiated with alternative facts. In other words, speaking for God's relational terms, what does this say about our diverse interpretations and our diversity of practice that are presumed to flow from the gospel?

The gospel of God's face unfolds further to be disclosed face to face and eye to eye as never witnessed before. Now we come to the incarnation and the face of Jesus, who embodies the depth of the whole gospel and fulfills the whole of God's relational response of love to our human condition (as Paul summarized, 2 Cor 4:4-6). At this pivotal point, we need to keep in mind the four questions (epistemological, hermeneutic, ontological, relational) stated above, and then ask relatedly: What is this new relationship from the face of God? And what is this wholeness of the covenant and how are we to understand this to define our faith and determine our practice?

Parallel to the gospel, and often in open contrast to if not in subtle conflict with it, the diversity of Christianity has evolved since the early church, as Jesus exposed in his post-ascension critique of the church (Rev 2-3). Both within and outside the ancient Roman empire, diversity in theology and practice may in fact have been more the rule rather than the exception, at least more than often presumed.[16] So, the diversity that continues to exist today in Christian theology and practice indicates an insufficient or lack of connection with the gospel of God's face—that is, relational connection, not doctrinal connection, as Jesus clarified and corrected for the church in Ephesus (Rev 2:2-4).

If we are to distinguish the nature and significance of discipleship unfolding directly from the gospel, this gospel can be neither just any gospel nor even the truth of a gospel (portion of good news). But this gospel must by its nature be the truth of the whole gospel in order to compose the complete significance of "Follow me." The other versions of the gospel yield the diversity existing from past to present. The foremost priority, therefore, for our identity, theology and practice as Jesus' disciples (assuming we follow

[16] For examples of the diversity that evolved in early Christianity, see William Tabbernee, ed., *Early Christianity in Contexts: An Exploration across Cultures and Continents* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014).

Jesus) must first be to understand the whole identity of Jesus and the effect his whole person had on other persons to make them his followers. Not only is this critical to fulfill his commission to "make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19) but to fulfill in our own life what it means to be his disciple (Jn 12:26).

The whole identity of Jesus (not fragmented by his teachings, miracles, example, etc.) is both at the heart of the gospel composed by God's face and thus central to the text of Scripture. The relational terms of Scripture provide the text composing the narrative history and inspired testimony about Jesus remembered by his distinguished first followers, which ironically includes his identity as seen by his enemies.[17] How we interpret his identity from these accounts is antecedent to and defining for our identity as disciples and is determining for how we follow. Or, as made paradigmatic, the gospel we use will be the disciples/discipleship we get. Once again, then, with the diversity existing among Christians throughout church history—not solely but notably from the Reformation for us today—what does this say about our gospel? Besides related issues about the integrity of Scripture, what does this say about the identity of Jesus we follow and, unavoidably, about our interpretation of Scripture composing our theology and practice? Moreover, how is all this diversity compatible with the view of the authority we affirm for Scripture alone (*sola scriptura*) by our faith?

Our existing condition raises the questions of where we can find integrity in theology and practice and how it can be restored in who, what and how we are. For the only response able to fulfill this need we turn to the whole gospel embodied by Jesus' whole person, from whom unfolds the whole theology and practice that distinguishes his disciples from the diversity in Christian theology and practice existing globally.

This is the relational purpose of this study. And its relational outcome will unfold with the gospel of the whole and uncommon God's face to distinguish an irreducible and nonnegotiable manifesto for all Christians that is not subject to any of our diverse theology and practice. As will be discussed later, this manifesto is outlined definitively by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (as in Mt 7:14,21-23) and summarized in the book of Hebrews (see Heb 5:11-6:1). Yet, the wholeness composing this manifesto does not mean and should not be confused with conformity to homogeneity and with precluding the God-given diversity of persons composing his family—those persons together in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the Trinity. At the same time, the gospel of God's face is intrusive, and Jesus along with the Spirit may clarify, correct and convict more than you can anticipate or may want disclosed. Whoever is willing (cf. Lk 13:34), however, to "Be still and desist from human determination," they will experience the relational reality of intimately knowing God in the new relationship together constituted by wholeness , and thereby converge in *the* church (not *a* or *any*) reconciled and intimately involved together as God's new creation family.

This study unfolds on this relational basis, therefore, be humbly still, listen deeply together with the Spirit, and respond according to only God's whole relational terms!

[17] For a discussion of this identity of Jesus, see Chris Keith and Larry W. Hurtado, eds., *Jesus among Friends and Enemies: A Historical and Literary Introduction to Jesus in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

Chapter 2 The Intrusive Gospel of God's Face

The LORD our God made a covenant with us…. The LORD spoke with you face to face.

Deuteronomy 5:2,4

This *person* is appointed for the fall and rising of many…so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.

Luke 2:34-35, ESV

Being introduced to the gospel affects Christians in various ways. When I asked God for good news for my life, it was neither a pleasant experience nor an emotional one. I addressed the existing reality in my life and just honestly requested his response—nothing less, and as I experienced, much more than I expected; this *more* keeps requiring my adjustment, that is, transformation and not just reformation. Yet, for some Christians, 'much more than expected' is more than wanted or, at least, more than a willingness to receive. This quandary is an issue that anyone receiving the gospel encounters, whether consciously or not. And the gospel we eventually embrace in fact could be an alternative reality to the truth and thus depth of the whole gospel.

The effects of good news are more than pleasing to hear and comforting to receive. Good news (i.e. not composed with alternative facts) can be profound, penetrating, provocative, encompassing and integrating for our life. Though I never articulated it initially, this kind of effect was the good news I wanted from God. Little did I know at the time that the gospel must be received in its depth in order to experience its full significance. Of course, variations of the gospel substitute with less depth, which may be more palatable (cf. Jn 6:52,60) but not whole. In a time when what is proclaimed as good news has suffered a credibility problem, it is critical for Christians to make distinctions of variable gospels of anything less and any substitutes, as well as essential for Christians to distinguish the whole gospel. These distinctions are critical to make integrally in our theology and practice, since the gospel we use will be the disciples and discipleship we, the church and the world get.

The gospel proclaims the extent and depth of God's relational response of grace to human life. When this is understood and received, faith alone is the compatible relational response (the relational significance of *sola fide*) that is congruent with God's relational response of grace (the nonnegotiable relational significance of *sola gratia*). This compatibility and congruity are contingent then on nothing less than and no substitutes for the whole gospel.

The urgency then for all Christians is the importance of understanding: How does the gospel's depth in reality unfold and what is its full significance?

This whole understanding (*synesis* from *syniemi*) will emerge when we meet the hermeneutic challenge that requires our involvement to "Be still" by ceasing our human efforts to explain, and "Pay attention to what you hear *from the Word*" (Mk 4:24). From Jesus' paradigm of reality, the following discussion unfolds according to this measure:

1. The face of God we use will be the presence and involvement of God we get.
2. The presence and involvement of God we use will be the gospel we get.
3. The gospel we use will be the Jesus we get.
4. The Jesus we use will be the disciples we are and the discipleship we practice.

The Improbable Theological Trajectory and Intrusive Relational Path of the Gospel

The gospel centers on the truth of God's accessibility, the truth of which certainly has been debated among humans since the beginning of history. Yet, whatever explanations and conclusions have been proposed, the truth of God's presence and the fact of God's involvement are either an experiential reality, or some alternative reality based on inadequate assumptions (e.g. composing virtual reality) or based on alternative facts (or interpretations) to compose an augmented/enhanced reality without relational significance. If the alternative reality of God's presence and involvement is sufficient for us, then, for our clarification, that is not the gospel of God's face staring at our face deeply, with a penetrating and provoking focus that is encompassing and integrating of life.

Therefore, on the one hand, the experiential reality of God's presence and involvement is the inescapable gospel of God's face staring into our face. On the other hand, the gospel of God's face is still either deniable (e.g. by those not wanting more and substituting fragmentary or fake news) or avoidable (e.g. by those not willing to address more and standing behind alternative facts)—effectively denying and/or avoiding the depth of God's presence and involvement unfolding with God's face, who composes the truth of the whole gospel. Consequently, as prominently existing today if not prevailing, fragmentary-fake news has compromised the integrity of this truth, and alternative facts have redefined the reality of this fact—all of which have emerged from our diverse interpretations to compose our diverse theology and practice.

Based on the experiential reality of the accessibility of God's presence and involvement, the truth of the whole gospel provides the full, complete profile of God's face (*paneh*). God's face is deeply penetrating, provoking, encompassing and integrating, because the gospel unfolds the face of God that is integrally distinguished above just an oblique profile and beyond merely an opaque profile. If our gospel does not define the full profile of God's face, we cannot claim or proclaim the whole gospel. Is this perplexing, deflating or stirring?

Let's reexamine the gospel—not necessarily as you have heard or seen it but as communicated by God's relational terms. Communication in God's relational terms, however, is in contrast to what is common in the human context and thus often in tension with human terms. Does this sound like good news to you?

The accessibility of God originates from God's context, which is distinguished from the human context. What distinguishes the context of the Christian God is that God is holy (*qadash,* signifying *uncommon,* Lev 10:3; 2 Chr 30:27; Ps 22:3), and therefore separated from all that is *common* in the human context. This insurmountable separation can be understood as **the holy partition** that is inaccessible to anyone or anything common (cf. Ex 3:5). Thus, it is imperative that "you are to distinguish between the *uncommon* and the common" (Lev 10:10), in order for the whole gospel to be integrally received and responded to in its depth.

The distinction of uncommon is not a theological concept with limited practical application. Nor is uncommon a theological nuance with little significance other than perhaps the practice of what is 'theologically correct' (t.c., the counterpart to p.c., politically correct). Uncommon integrally distinguishes (1) the ontology of God (the whole *who* and *what*) from all other ontology common to the human context, and (2) the function of God (the whole *how*) from all other human function common in the human context. The good news is the experiential truth and reality that human ontology and function can be transformed from the limits and constraints of the common and be distinguished in the image and likeness of God's uncommon ontology and function. Without the uncommon whole of who, what and how of God, our ontology and function can only be common, defined and determined by the common's limits and constraints—to be discussed further throughout this study.

From the holy partition, the theological trajectory of God's face penetrated the common sphere of the human context. In a distinct way this uncommon source of God's relational response of grace created an epistemological problem for the common, because God's face emerges from beyond the inviolable limits of the common's epistemic field (source of knowledge and truth). Consequently, the constraints of the common context make God's trajectory into the human context improbable, if not impossible as some attest by their faith. Improbability, however, must not be confused with impossibility but profoundly points to the extent of the gospel. That is, God's face is distinguished beyond merely a deistic God and often more deeply significant than the God of theism—at least as commonly profiled, even with *sola scriptura* and by *sola gratia*. The experiential truth and objective fact of the gospel—beyond the limits of objective truth—is this reality:

> In God's relational response of grace vulnerably enacted from the holy partition, nothing less than the face of God's **improbable theological trajectory** *invades* the human context and *provocatively* encounters humans by an **intrusive relational path** of no substitutes for the whole and uncommon God.

Therefore, the face of God we use in our theology is the presence and involvement of God we get. Depending on the measure used, this may not be good news after all.

The Primacy of Relationship Face to Face

The reality of face-to-face encounters is the primary means by which the whole and uncommon God's presence (*paneh*) is involved, and the full profile of God's face is experienced (cf. Num 14:14; Dt 5:4). Only nothing less and no substitutes for the gospel, therefore, distinguish the improbable theological trajectory (from common accounts of God's presence) and the intrusive relational path (from less threatening accounts of God's involvement) of the uncommon and whole profile of God's face. And, as reflected in prevailing composition, anything less and any substitutes no longer compose the truth of the whole gospel but merely 'thinner and lighter' news.

The intrusive, penetrating, provoking news of God's presence and involvement is good news for some but bad news for many. The invasion of God's face stares directly into our face for the face-to-face challenge of our view of the world; yet, further and deeper, face to face challenges more than the ideology of our worldview. God's improbable presence challenges the core of how we see reality itself—penetrating behind our virtual realities and deeper than our alternative realities. And encompassing more than our general view of all reality itself, the intrusive face-to-face involvement of God's face confronts the depth (even deeper than core beliefs) of how we see our own **person**: the everyday reality of who, what and how we are as persons from our inner depth to our outer self—that is, our whole person whose full profile is often obscure or hidden even from our own self. In the gospel of this "forgiving God," forgiving (*nasa*, Ps 99:8) means to lift up another's face, which has the only purpose of direct face-to-face relationship together without guilt or shame. This is the primacy of relationship that composes the gospel only face to face, which is problematic for those primarily focused on other areas of the gospel (e.g. doctrine and related issues occupying the academy).

As an available option, of course, many don't want to be vulnerable to their own person, and thus they find God's face too threatening to encounter at true face value and to be involved with face to face. For them, they commonly either reject the gospel (e.g. as fake news) or revise the good news with alternative facts or interpretations in order to reduce the gospel of the intrusive face of God—especially with subtle revisions that appear reasonable and/or justified. Either way the whole gospel is not received or responded to; even God's forgiveness (in *nasa*) cannot be received without th primacy of response face to face. Christians of whatever variation need to be aware of this volitional option and to give account of the extent and depth of their gospel. How comprehensive and therefore intrusive is your gospel?

The covenant relationship of love—as constituted only by the whole and uncommon God's relational response of grace (Dt 7:7-9)—unfolded always and developed solely (*sola gratia*?) by the direct involvement of God's "own presence" (*paneh*, face, Dt 4:37). God's very own presence should not be simply assumed as normal, because God's uncommon presence in the human context is improbable and for rationally-based humans is unimaginable. Within these human limits and constraints, the involvement of God's face had to be intrusive in order for the whole and uncommon God to be known and understood. On this relational basis alone and for only this relational purpose and outcome—the sole relational significance of *sola gratia*—the gospel distinguishes the depth of the covenant relationship of love in its primacy of face-to-face

relationship together. All Christians—especially those influenced by the gospel shaped from the Reformation—need to understand and face the truth that the new covenant embodied by Jesus (Lk 22:20, which was too threatening for some disciples, Jn 6:60,66) was not the inauguration of a different covenant but rather the deepest extension of the covenant of love. Therefore, we are challenged, if not confronted, directly to our face to embrace the covenant relationship of love in the primacy of face-to-face reciprocal relationship together.

The face-to-face significance constituting the primacy of covenant relationship emerged with Moses. At a vital point in his following God's lead—in contrast to God's intrusion earlier (Ex 3:6)—Moses openly asked the LORD for deeper connection "so that I may know you"; this was the ongoing connection in reciprocal relationship together (Ex 33:12-23). In one sense, Moses didn't know fully what he was asking. This was understandable since he was focused on the whole and holy God, who is distinguished (*pala*, as in Job 42:3) beyond comparison in the human context and thus beyond human terms and experience (as Job learned, 42:4-5). Nevertheless, because of God's relational involvement of love, the depth of God's presence (*paneh*, face) continued to unfold in reciprocal relationship with Moses:

> "My *paneh* will go with you" (Ex 33:14); "Thus the LORD *communicated directly* to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend" (Ex 33:11, cf. Num 12:6-8)—the intimate connection that was too threatening for others (Dt 5:4-5)—therefore, Moses was vulnerable in relationship together with the involvement of his whole person, "whom the LORD knew face to face" (Dt 34:10).

This relational process is the relational basis, relational purpose and relational outcome composing the whole gospel that distinguishes its **primacy** both in nothing less than relationship together and in no substitutes for face-to-face involvement. Past and present, God's love is enacted exclusively in the context of relationship and is involved inclusively in the process of face-to-face relationship: "*The whole and uncommon God* loved *you*…with his own presence…*and communicated* with you face to face" (Dt 4:37; 5:4). When the uncommon God became accessible and is further accessed by this relational context and process, the whole of who, what and how God *is* in ontology and function emerged and unfolds. No other God has been vulnerably accessible to us, even if bearing the same name. Therefore, only the experiential truth of this relational context and process define the gospel and thereby integrally determine the relational reality of our response of faith and involvement in reciprocal relationship together. Until all this is put together in our understanding (*syniemi*) to know the full profile of God's face (cf. Jn 14:9), there is an immeasurable amount at stake: the whole of who, what and how God is, as well as the whole of who, what and how we are, and what unites us together.

The experiential truth of God's face and the vulnerable reality of God's presence and involvement compose the good news only in **the integral primacy of not just relationship but face-to-face relationship together**. If the reality of our gospel does not involve us in the primacy of face-to-face relationship together, we have claimed an alternative reality—even if augmented and enhanced. Therefore, the face of God we use in our practice is the presence and involvement of God we get in our experience.

Nonnegotiable Terms for Reciprocal Relationship Together

Whether we've been a Christian for a long time or are a new Christian, understanding what constitutes being a disciple of Jesus and what's involved in discipleship is not conceptual knowledge of basic information. The common thinking that 'the more we know the more mature Christian we are' is not a measure of significance in God's terms. Rather we are addressing an ongoing journey composed by a relational process that requires us to deal with the vulnerable presence and intrusive involvement of the whole and uncommon God.

At whatever stage of our Christian life, the option is always available to us to avoid or keep our distance from God's intrusive face. The main issue here is not an outright rejection of God but the unavoidable issue of who defines the relationship and thus how our relationship is ongoingly determined—the primary issue in all relationships. The terms, however, for relationship together with God are neither optional nor negotiable to human terms (even as mature persons of faith). Thus, on the one hand, just as the face-to-face involvement of God's face confronts the depth of how we see our own person; on the other hand, how we present our face and how we involve our person expose issues shaped by human terms—terms which we commonly use to define our person and determine our relationships. These are the everyday terms we subtly use in relationship with God. Consider the subtle terms established in their surrounding context that declared followers of Jesus interjected to determine their discipleship (see Lk 9:57-62); consider also the implications of Peter's bold commitment to follow Jesus with his entire life (Jn 13:37) after he rejected the intimate relational response of Jesus to vulnerably wash his feet.

Who defines the relationship with God and how this relationship is determined remain an open question that must be answered neither in ideal terms nor even in theological terms. For example, as seen in Peter, what do we do in our discipleship when we are faced with Jesus' actions or words that are contrary to our basic practices personally, socioculturally and religiously? The simple, unembellished or unenhanced reality is that we ongoingly seek even inadvertently to renegotiate God's relational terms with our reduced terms. Moreover, our everyday terms are also becoming programmed in our brains by modern technology, for example, in a dependence on our mobile phones for social media connections to define our persons and determine our relationships. Our terms aren't always apparent to us, yet their influence is evident when our terms are threatened or lovingly challenged to change. The extent of our resistance to changing (literally turning around) to God's relational terms will remain in effect in one way or another, until we are redeemed from our defining terms and transformed to wholeness in our person and relationships.

The issues of our person and relationships are unavoidable in the human context and indispensable for all human life. Therefore, the presence and involvement of God we experience is the gospel we claim in our theology.

This brings us to **the pivotal point** in the gospel, the transition of which will determine the persons and relationships we get.

Persons of faith have renegotiated God's relational terms for reciprocal relationship together from the beginning (e.g. Gen 3:6; Dt 10:16; Jer 4:4; Mk 7:6-8, cf. Rom 2:28-29; Heb 10:5-10). This reflects the common nature of how we live as persons and engage in relationships; we simply shape things on our terms and subject God to our shaping in both our theology and practice. In other words, we give priority (read primacy) to our terms while subtly rendering God's terms for persons and relationships secondary (as Peter demonstrated earlier). Yet, the key in this relational process is less about blatant disobedience and more about redefining who, what and how we are in relationship with God.

This deeper issue gets to the heart of our theology and practice by focusing on our **anthropology**: the basis for how we define persons and determine relationships, which underlies all matters of human life. Penetrating to the heart of our life is why God's face confronts our face in the depth of how we see our own person daily (even moment to moment). This everyday reality is critical for how we live with our self, with others, and thus with God. Alternative and virtual realities have shaped our anthropology in pervasive and subtle ways; and this has significantly influenced the **theological anthropology** defining our ontology and determining our function in reduced and fragmentary terms less than whole.[1] Consequently, the face of God pursues us in depth to get to the heart of our person and relationships: "Where are you?" (Gen 3:9) and "What are you doing here?" (1 Kgs 19: 9,13)

Therefore, the presence and involvement of God's face we experience in relationship together is the gospel we claim in our theology and receive in our practice.

Integrating the Whole Person from Inner Out or Reconfiguring the Person from Outer In

God's relational terms emerged at creation (Gen 1:26-30) and in the primordial garden (Gen 2:15:18) to constitute human persons and relationships together in unchanging, unalterable, immutable wholeness. These persons were defined and their relationship was determined in invariable wholeness from the inner depth to their outer composition, which established them together in distinct consciousness of their whole person (**person-consciousness**, Gen 2:25). Unlike chameleons changing according to their surrounding context, whole persons and relationships are integrated from inner out according to the qualitative image of the uncommon God and the relational likeness of the whole of God—the whole-ly God, the Trinity. Therefore, the created wholeness of persons and relationships is irreversible—that is, unless they shift to human terms and thereby reconfigure their person and relationships from the outer in (demonstrated in Gen

[1] For an expanded discussion on the basic issue of 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.

3:6-7). The shift included going from person-consciousness from outer in to an outer-in focus on their self, thus establishing the **self-consciousness** prevailing in the human context (including churches) that so preoccupies persons and relationships. This shift shapes persons and relationships to the subtle influences of the surrounding human context and thus to the captivating influence of reductionism and its counter-relational workings.

The experiential truth of the uncommon God's qualitative image and the relational reality of the Trinity's relational likeness are not *subject to* human terms and shaping. Yet, God is ongoingly *subjected to* our subtle shifts to our terms, all of which reconfigure our persons and relationships with a theological anthropology of reduced ontology and function contrary to the image and likeness of God's whole ontology and function. In other words, common in our faith and practice are prominent illusions about our person (e.g. as saved sinners, in our spirituality and our righteousness) and simulations in our relationships (e.g. in our church fellowship, our service and our worship). Underlying such illusions and simulations is a theological anthropology that defines our person based primarily on the quantitative terms of what we do; and this invariably has shifted our focus to outer in and the inevitable comparative process with what others do (as the disciples engaged, Lk 9:46; 22:24)—all of which determine how we engage in relationships based on secondary matter, even with God. What this exposes further and deeper is our need for the integrating effects of the gospel of God's face, who urgently wants our response to "Where are you?" and "What are you doing here?"

The pivotal issue of either integrating or reconfiguring our person will define the extent of our person and determine the depth of our relationships that compose who, what and how we are in everyday life. This inner-out or outer-in composition implies what makes up the image and likeness of God, the reflection of which then validly or invalidly signifies who, what and how God is. Indeed, an immeasurable amount is at stake here, with which we gamble by any shifts to our terms. God, however, is unwilling to allow the shaping of human terms to reduce or fragment the whole ontology and function of God and of God's image and likeness. Moreover, though we willfully compromise the created integrity of our person and relationships, the nature of who and what God is doesn't allow God to change the integrity of whole ontology and function, or God would no longer be God. Nor can we *be* the image and likeness of God in anything less and any substitutes, even though we make that assumption.

Therefore, the face of God is always pursuing, intruding and provoking the depth of our person from inner out in order to encompass and integrate our whole person—the gospel of God's deliverance and salvation (i.e. transformation) to wholeness. In this vulnerable relational process the heart is primary and all our other functions are secondary, regardless of what priority we may give them. Here again, the underlying issue of our theological anthropology is defining for us: The theological anthropology we use will be the persons and relationships we get.

Clarifying and Correcting Our Theological Anthropology

The responsibility of theological anthropology is to be theological—that is, not physical, social or philosophical—and thus not to shape its theology anthropologically, which is more complicated than appears. This responsibility cannot be fulfilled as long as our epistemic field is restricted to the limits of the human context, and also by its constraints. To go further than these limits and get beyond its constraints, we can again learn from Job's experience. In his frustration or cynicism, and perhaps despair, Job initially raised this question (from an opposite approach made in worship, Ps 8:4; 144:3): : "What are human beings that you make *such a big deal* (*gadal*) of them, that you *even* set your heart (*leb*) on them and are *involved* (*paqad*) with them every day…*all the time*?" (Job 7:17-18) What provoked Job's question specifically involved his own person in God's context.

First, Job experienced being the object of Satan's reductionism that defined his person by what he had and did (Job 1:10-11); but Job would not let his person be defined in those reduced terms (1:20-22). Then, Job's focus on his person shifted from inner out (2:3) to outer in (2:4-5). When he also made the outer in primary, he was conflicted in person-consciousness (whole person focused) and became self-conscious (centered on his outer-in self) in his context with God (e.g. 10:1; 27:2). What unfolded is critical to the process of theological anthropology and basic to what and who constitute the person in God's context.

To answer his question about the person in God's context, Job narrowed his epistemic field (e.g. 23:3, 8-9) in order to explain his person (but limited to outer in), and why this was happening to his person in God's context. What Job experienced was a struggle common to all persons in God's context: the vacillation between inner out and outer in (19:26-27)—also between person-consciousness and self-consciousness; and the confusion that preoccupation in the outer in creates (19:19; 27:2; 29:2-5). In the midst of this struggle, Job's will still focused on the primacy of relationship with God (2:9-10; 13:15), even though his person-consciousness waned. His main focus on relationship was the key that allowed him to receive feedback to his answers—answers which begged the question from God (38:2)—in order to engage the relational epistemic process with God for the heuristic function to know and understand his (including our) whole person in God's context. The relational outcome is theological anthropology rather than theology shaped anthropologically.

In God's response to Job (38-41), God takes Job's epistemic field beyond the human context to establish the person in God's context, that is, the complete context necessary to compose the narrative for human being in whole ontology and being human in whole function (as in 38:36). Therefore, in Job's assumptions about the person in God's context, he realized his speculation was based on a narrow epistemic field and its hermeneutic limits (40:5), which merely reflect the limits and constraints of the human context. In distinct humility, he received God's direct relational response in this relational epistemic process (42:4-5); and God's intrusive response provided Job with the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction needed for whole knowledge and understanding contrary to his fragmentary knowledge and understanding (42:3). This relational outcome can only be experienced in the primacy of relationship with God in epistemic humility.

For our edification and humility, Job learned the following in being apart from God's relational context and relational epistemic process:

> Anything less than and any substitutes for the whole signify theological anthropology discourse that "obscures (*hashak*) God's plan and purpose (*'esah*) for the human person with words without whole knowledge and understanding" (*da'at*, 38:2); this is the reductionist result of attempting "to explain (*nāgad*) the person in God's context I did not understand, the person too distinguished (*pala*) for me to know from a limited epistemic field and narrow interpretive lens" (42:3).

The heuristic process (the journey of human discovery) does not and cannot go beyond its epistemic field. So, for example, both science and theology cannot explain, define and determine the human person any further than the knowledge available to them in their epistemology—though obviously this hasn't stopped speculative discourse from speaking about and even for God (sound familiar?). As we deliberate on the person in God's context, we need to learn from Job. He experienced ontological struggle when he focused on his outer in, which led to relational difficulty in reciprocal relationship with God. On the one hand, Job shared his feelings openly with God but then, on the other hand, he spoke for God on his own terms; and the latter involved both an epistemological and hermeneutical problem. The ontological, relational, epistemological and hermeneutical issues are critical for our knowledge and understanding of the whole person distinguished in God' context.

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

Evolutionary biology highlights the development of the physical body, including the brain, for Homo sapiens—that is, the bodily development of human antecedents in physical form. While I affirm this physical development, science cannot assume that this physical body developed into the human person. Even with the development of the brain for higher level function unique to humans, the evolution process can only account at best

for humans from the outer in. There is a limited quality within the quantitative structure of outer in that neuroscientist Antonio Damasio identified in the evolutionary development of the organism's interior.[2] This does not distinguish the whole person but only defines a fragmentary person without the significance of being whole from inner out. So, then, what is the 'inner' of the person and how do we account for it with the human body to integrally constitute the whole person from inner out?

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

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

The qualitative inner of the person can be considered as the inner person. This identity implies an outer person, which certainly would employ a dualism if inner and outer are perceived as separate substances as in some frameworks of Greek philosophy (material and immaterial, physical and spiritual). In Hebrew thinking, the inner (center) and outer (peripheral) aspects of the person function together dynamically to define the whole person and to constitute the integral person's whole ontology and function (cf. Rom 2:28-29). One functional aspect would not be seen apart from the other; nor would either be neglected, at least in theory, but which was problematic throughout Israel's history as the people in God's context (e.g. Dt 10:16; Isa 29:13).

[2] Antonio Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010).

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

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

Without the function of the heart, the whole person from inner out created by God is reduced to function from outer in, distant or separated from the heart. This functional condition was ongoingly critiqued by God and responded to for the inner-out change necessary to be whole (e.g. Gen 6:5-6; Dt 10:16; 30:6; 1 Sam 16:7; Isa 29:13; Jer 12:2; Eze 11:19; 18:31; 33:31; Joel 2:12-13). Later in the strategic shift of God's relational response to our human condition, Jesus made unmistakable that the openness of the heart ("in spirit and truth") is what the Father requires and seeks in reciprocal relationship together (Jn 4:23-24).

The integrating function of the heart is irreplaceable. The mind may be able to provide quantitative unity (e.g. by identifying the association of parts) for the human person, as quantified in the brain by neuroscience. However, while this may be necessary and useful at times, it is never sufficient by itself to distinguish the whole person, nor adequate to experience the relationships necessary to be whole. Our heart must always remain primary in defining our person and must not be merely assumed in our theology and practice or taken for granted in our focus.

The priority of the inner person over the outer is illustrated in the selection of Saul's replacement as king. When God sent Samuel to Jesse's household to anoint one of his sons chosen to be king (1 Sam 16:1-13), Samuel thought for sure that Eliab was the chosen one. Yet, God clarified that Samuel based his conclusion on what he perceived of Eliab's person through the lens of a reductionist framework using an outer-in approach (v. 7, "appearance," *mar'eh*, signifying outward appearance). Samuel had shifted to an outer-in approach in contrast to God who "looks at the heart" using an inner-out focus of *personness*. By returning to God's perceptual framework, Samuel was able to perceive the deeper qualitative significance of the whole person from the inner out, thus understanding the significance of David's outer features (*'ayin* and *tob*) reflecting his inner person (v. 12). In contrast, the priority of the outer over the inner is illustrated in a subtle experience of Ezekiel, where his performance and reputation became the focus over the significance of his message (Eze 33:30-32)—an illusion that continues today, for example, where the medium becomes the message. His "audience" demonstrated a higher level function that is misleading, particularly when enhanced by intelligence and education (cf. Lk 10:21).

The qualitative significance of the heart is not composed in referential language and terms but only distinguishes the person in relational terms that God "breathed" into human persons. *Nephesh* may be rendered "soul" but its functional significance is the

heart (Dt 30:6; Rom 2:28-29). From the beginning, the heart and not the soul defined and determined the qualitative innermost of the person in God's context; the soul's prominence unfolded much later from the influence of philosophical thought, shaped by referential terms. The heart's significance only begins to define the image of God, yet the heart's function identifies why the heart is so vital to the person integrally in the image and likeness of whole-ly God. God's creative action, design and purpose emerge only in relational language, the relational terms of which are not for unilateral relationship but reciprocal relationship together. Therefore, the whole-ly God's desires are to be vulnerably involved with the whole person in the primacy of relationship—intimate relationship together. Since the function of the heart integrally constitutes the whole person, God does not have the whole person for relationship until it involves the heart (Dt 10:14-16; Ps 95:7-11).

This may bring up a question that would be helpful to address. If God constituted the physical body with the qualitative inner to distinguish the human person from all other animals, how does relatedness further distinguish human persons since most animal life subsists in relatedness also? Not only does the qualitative distinguish the human person from inner out with the quantitative according to the image of God, but at this intersection of God's creative action, relationship was now also constituted as never before (as in "not good to be apart," Gen 2:18)—conjointly and inseparably with the qualitative—to fully distinguish the human person as whole according to both the qualitative image of the uncommon God and the relational likeness of the whole of God (namely the whole-ly God's relational ontology and function as the Trinity). The primordial garden illuminates the integral dynamic of the qualitative and relational in its wholeness, as well as its reduction—the convergence of the physical, psychological, the relational, the social and the cultural, which together go into defining and determining both the human person and subsequent human condition. Paying attention to only one (or some) of the above gives us a fragmentary or incomplete understanding of what it is to be human. The creation narrative provides us with not a detailed (much less scientific) account of humans but the integrated perspective (framework and lens) necessary to define and determine the whole person, as well as the underlying reductionism of the human condition. Therefore, these contexts, expanding parameters, limits and constraints are crucial for theological anthropology to distinguish what and who only can be the whole person in God's context.

God acts only in relational terms and communicates only in relational language. Any person focused outer in does not make relational connection with God (as Job struggled, Job 23:3,8-9), and thus is unable to know and understand God merely by referential language, no matter the quantity of referential information about God (as the theological academy labors today). In reality, any such knowledge and understanding about God is simply self-referencing, whereby theological discourse becomes speaking for God from the cognitive level of the mind rather than receiving God's relational communication and expressing this relational knowledge and understanding of God from the depth level of the heart.

The human heart is irreplaceable to define and determine the wholeness of persons and relationships from inner out. Without the qualitative function of the heart to integrate the whole person, the only alternatives for persons are ontological simulations and functional illusions shaped by reductionism, as observed in the human context with

all their variations. For example, this reduces persons from their essential reality in likeness of the *personal* Trinity to a virtual-augmented reality, which is the prevailing identity of persons being defined by the Internet—notably determined by their function in social media. The heart's significance unfolds in relational terms for the relational outcome that we need to understand more deeply in the divine narrative composing the narrative of human being and being human: The face of the whole and uncommon God ongoingly pursues, solely in relational terms, the heart and wants our heart (as in 1 Sam 16:7; Prov 21:2; Jer 17:10; Lk 16:15; Rom 8:27; Rev 2:23); that is, God pursues only the whole person for vulnerable involvement in integral reciprocal relationship together in the integrity of the person's created likeness. The innermost person signified by heart function has the most significance to God and, though never separated from or at the neglect of the outer, always needs to have greater priority of importance for the person's definition and function to be distinguished in God's context.

This is the pivotal point in the gospel composed by the intrusive face of whole-ly God's presence and involvement, who responds for nothing less and no substitutes but the whole ontology and function of persons and relationships. Therefore, the gospel we claim and receive defines the person we are and determines the relationships we get. Yet, intruding further to complete this outcome is the presence and involvement of the embodied Word: First, the gospel we use will be the Jesus we get; and then the Jesus we use in both our theology and practice will be the persons and relationships we get.

The Intrusive Relational Path of Jesus

The reality of God facing us is that, on the one hand, the theology we use is the practice we get, nothing more. On the other hand, many Christians don't even practice their own theology; thus, their theology could be orthodox but their practice would then be unorthodox or heterodox rather than orthopraxy—which includes the practice just to be theologically correct (t.c.). In no other area of our faith is this more evident than in relation to Jesus, and this obviously then has far-reaching consequences for the disciples we get. This urgently raises a further question to add to God's two penetrating questions above; in his relational disappointment Jesus asks the confronting question that is crucial for all his disciples: "Don't you **know me**—even after I have *vulnerably shared my whole person with* you such a long time?" (Jn 14:9, NIV)

Yes, therefore, the Jesus we know is at most the Jesus we follow—nothing more in our theology and practice, though our practice can certainly be anything less and any substitute.

Most Christologies include the Word's improbable theological trajectory but do not embrace Jesus' intrusive relational path. This is problematic for theology and practice and leads to the diverse disciples and discipleship we, the church and the world get.

The evangelist in the Gospel of John provided a theological overview of the Word's improbable trajectory and intrusive relational path. In and from the beginning, the Word's ontology was nothing less than God—neither coming into being later as God and thus a subordinate deity to the Father (e.g. as proposed by Origen), nor only appearing to be divine but merely human (e.g. as Arius presumed). As God, the Word also functioned

as Creator, whose ontology constituted human persons in his image and likeness (Jn 1:1-4); and the embodied Word also enacted the whole function of God's image and likeness for human persons to understand its full significance (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15). Yet, even though the face of God vulnerably turned to shine on his own people "in the face of Christ" (2 Cor 4:6), "his own people did not accept him" (Jn 1:11) or receive his relational response of grace "to give new relationship together in wholeness" (as promised in God's blessing, Num 6:26).

Since the gospel we accept is the Jesus we get, we have to examine if the above narrative has also been consequential for the Jesus in our theology and practice. To amplify the issues at stake here, the evangelist reorders the chronology of events by inserting Jesus' cleansing of the temple near the beginning of John's Gospel (2:13-17, not during Holy Week, Mk 11:15-17). The relational context and process of God's house (family dwelling) had been reduced and fragmented; and persons and relationships no longer functioned in wholeness in order to communicate with God ("house of prayer for all the nations") in reciprocal relationship together. Therefore, Jesus forcefully intruded (invaded) their human relational condition to provoke the change necessary "to give new relationship together in wholeness." Hmmm, would Jesus take similar action with churches today?

What Jesus enacted was his vulnerable involvement in his relational response of love to our human condition, which unfolds by necessity against reductionism and its counter-relational workings—and thus unavoidably in all human contexts. Such response unfolds only on Jesus' intrusive relational path and cannot be minimized or ignored. This is the gospel that Simeon forecasted would unfold (Lk 2:34-35), and that Jesus fulfilled beyond most of our expectations (Lk 12:49-53; Mt 10:34-36). The depth of this gospel is difficult for most Christians to accept, choosing rather to simply ignore God's relational terms or to revise them with alternative facts. For example, the common Christian focus on Jesus' love is to idealize it and make the good news of God's love primarily pleasant and pleasing to hear. Indeed, the gospel we use is the Jesus we get.

For Jesus' whole person, however, the defining issue is only and always about whole ontology and function: First, involving the integrity of his whole ontology and function enacted in the human context; and second, in relational response of love to our human condition, to intrude, penetrate, provoke, encompass and integrate the ontology and function of persons and relationships in order to transform their ontology and function to wholeness in the image and likeness of God—the uncommon distinguished above the common and prevailing over it.

The involvement of his whole ontology and function was enacted, for example, when he approached Jerusalem on the first day of Holy Week: "he wept over it, saying, 'If you, even you had only recognized on this day the *terms* that make for *wholeness*'" (Lk 19:41-42)—intensifying what needs to be integrated with the primacy in Luke 13:34 for whole understanding of Jesus. The enactment of his whole ontology and function was fulfilled ultimately later that week, culminating painfully in "My God, my God, why have you forsaken met?" (Mt 27:46). There is certainly ontological mystery here about what happened to Jesus' whole ontology. But this was the unavoidable relational repercussion of Jesus' whole function, whose enactment clearly illuminates the deepest relational involvement of his whole ontology and function that his person vulnerably sacrificed in his relational response of love to our human condition. Nothing less and no substitutes for

his ontology and function could fulfill the involvement necessary to complete this relational response of love. Anything less and any substitutes for Jesus' ontology and function would have been insufficient to deconstruct the holy partition and remove the veil for face-to-face relationship together with God—just as the Hebrews manifesto integrated about Jesus the high priest for us to follow.

Earlier Jesus' intrusive relational response of love also was demonstrated, for example, when he jolted the religious status quo represented by Nicodemus, by giving primacy to whole ontology and function and the significance of whole theology and practice (Jn 3:1-16). Unlike many of his cohorts, therefore, Nicodemus learned: The presence and involvement of God's face in relational response of love that we experience is the gospel we claim in our theology and receive in our practice; and the gospel we embrace in whole theology and practice is the whole ontology and function of Jesus we experience in reciprocal relationship together. This is not a formulaic faith for us to conform to (as in the Rule of Faith) but *the relationship of faith* distinguishing the relational process that requires the vulnerable involvement of the whole person, both Jesus' and ours.

The intrusive relational path of Jesus' whole person further unfolds in John's Gospel. Integrated both with his invasion of the structure, system and institution of religious tradition, and with his provocation of the religious status quo, Jesus also unashamedly (significant in an honor-shame context) intruded on the prevailing sociocultural norms, in order to penetrate to the heart of human ontology and function with the vulnerable disclosure of God's strategic shift in relational response to our condition (Jn 4:4-26, to be discussed later). From this strategic shift will also unfold integrally the tactical and functional shifts of Jesus' increasingly intrusive relational path to compose the gospel of God's whole and uncommon face, present and involved in the primacy of reciprocal relationship together on the sole relational basis (*sola gratia*) of whole ontology and function. Jesus' nonnegotiable intrusive relational path involved nothing less and no substitutes.

Unfortunately, but not surprisingly because it is predictable in this age of reductionism, whole ontology and function become blurred in diverse Christologies. This diverse condition has created a theological fog engulfing Jesus' whole person—notably his intrusive relational path. Consequently, whole ontology and function have also become ambiguous, which reflects the hermeneutic door opening wide to the subtlety of human shaping of both Jesus' person and our persons, thus as well as shaping our relationship together. The relational consequence is that many Christians live, likely unknowingly, their faith on a different relational path than Jesus, whereby whom they follow subtly diverges from the full profile of the intrusive face of Jesus' whole person. Simply stated about our diverse condition: The truth and reality of the whole and uncommon God are fragmented and commonized, transposing our persons and relationships to epistemological illusions of the truth and ontological simulations of reality. Given our diverse condition, then, in relation to the truth of the whole gospel existing in Christian faith today, it is not unreasonable to ask: Has much of Christian faith essentially entered a post-truth period, in which theology and practice are composing what can be effectively considered a **digital Christianity** that is 'thinner and lighter'?

It predictably follows, therefore, the Jesus we use will define the persons we are and determine the relationships we get, and thereby will be the disciples we are and the discipleship we practice.

Jesus fully understands what's at stake here, and what we are all up against ongoingly in the prominent presence yet subtle influence of reductionism and its counter-relational workings in our lives and churches. On Jesus' intrusive relational path, he makes no assumptions about our condition—"no one can see…God without being born *anew in whole ontology and function*"—and, as Simeon predicted, "the inner thoughts of many will be revealed, and a sword will pierce your own *heart* too."

Jesus was particularly blunt directly with his disciples. In his definitive manifesto on discipleship (the Sermon on the Mount, Mt 5-7), Jesus emphatically declared: "For I tell you *without apology,* unless your righteousness [i.e. who, what and how you are] exceeds that of the *religious reductionists,* you will never *participate in my family*" (5:10). Just as he later magnified this reality with Peter at his footwashing (Jn 13:8), we should not, must not, cannot be comfortable, complacent or complicit with reduced ontology and function, and expect to be the disciples who "follow me *in my whole ontology and function*" with nothing less and no substitutes for our whole ontology and function. This is the depth of intrusive involvement that Jesus continually had to make with Peter in order to convict him of the relational imperative to be the whole of Jesus' disciple in the primacy of whole discipleship (Jn 21:19,22).

In other words—only relational words and not referential—when we claim the whole gospel, receiving the intrusive Jesus' whole ontology and function is neither optional nor selectively partial and negotiable. By being intrusive, Jesus' whole person is not obscure, ambiguous or in doubt as to who, what and how he is. When Jesus forcefully cleared out God's house of reductionism, his whole person was clearly displayed to distinguish who, what and how he was. The only question raised at that time was about the basis for his intrusive action (Jn 2:18). The question for us is whether we will receive the irreducible ontology and function of Jesus' whole person—no matter how intrusive and threatening—in order to determine the "me" we will follow in reciprocal relationship together, and on this relational basis alone (the whole significance of *sola gratia* and *sola fide*), be in our ontology and function **the disciples of whole theology and practice**.

Again, therefore, the whole ontology and function of Jesus' person we receive and thereby know in the primacy of relationship together is the Jesus we follow with the whole ontology and function of our person in the depth of involvement in ongoing reciprocal relationship.

Furthermore, what keeps unfolding with Jesus (not to be confused with process theology)—which further composes the whole gospel needing to be claimed and received—is the immeasurable depth of involvement of his relational response of love to our inescapable condition (a condition even in our churches). Nothing less and no substitutes define the ontology of Jesus' person and determine his function; and this experiential truth and relational reality integrally constitute his presence and involvement in the Trinity and the Trinity's presence and involvement in reciprocal relationship together with us—the experiential truth and relational reality of the whole gospel.

Therefore, the whole of Jesus' person unfolding whom we receive further and deeper is the intrusive gospel of the vulnerable presence and intimate involvement of the whole and uncommon God's face. The full profile of whole-ly God is the Trinity, whose persons together as One we embrace with our whole persons in the qualitative image of the Trinity in our reciprocal relationships together in the relational likeness of the Trinity—just as Jesus prayed to constitute his family (Jn 17:20-23). These are the persons and their relationships called and following in their transformation to wholeness—with nothing less and no substitutes in their theology and practice, even if reformed or renewed.

Chapter 3 Called to Be Whole

The Lord *communicated,* you are *concerned* and *preoccupied*
by *secondary matters*, but only *the primary* is needed.
Luke 10:41-42, NIV

And we, who with unveiled faces…are being transformed into his likeness.
2 Corinthians 3:18

During the first year or so after I became a Christian, the thought of being a disciple of Jesus never entered my mind. Then I started thinking about what I could do for him as both my Savior and Lord. Little did I realize at that stage how problematic this focus would be in my journey of faith.

The most misleading perception about discipleship prevailing among Christians is that it is primarily about serving (hence Lord as well as Savior). Jesus' disciples serve, and this lens reinforces many Christians to be satisfied (or complacent) with merely attending church and doing the minimum in their faith practice (hence only Savior). On the other hand, some Christians serve in sanctioned capacities (even as lead disciples), which ironically allows them to do perhaps not the minimum but the less demanding in their faith practice (hence a Lord in name). In either practice, the primary discipleship lens of serving is a critical issue that usually is unaddressed, because its underlying dynamic is propelled by a reduced theological anthropology defining our persons by the quantity of what we do.

The subtle dynamic of our theological anthropology is an ongoing issue defining his disciples that Jesus had to **p**ursue, **i**ntrude, **c**orrect (or clarify or convict) and **t**ransform (his relational involvement of PICT-ing). Such disciples were exposed in asking Jesus, "What must we do to perform the works [pl.] of God?" Jesus corrected this fragmentary lens defining persons with a prominently misinterpreted declaration: "This is the work [sing.] of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent" (Jn 6:28-29). *Sola fide*, right?—which reinforces the majority of church goers' practice above. But, this latter group would contend "that faith apart from works is barren…is also dead" (Jas 2:20,26). Such thinking persists today as our underlying theological anthropology goes unchecked.

In the PICT-ing of his relational involvement, Jesus integrates the relational significance of faith that defines his disciples and composes their discipleship—the only *sola gratia* that embodies *sola fide*.

Either Chosen or Called, or Both

In his declaration to the above diverse disciples, Jesus' manifesto for discipleship appears to indicate that disciples are first chosen by God in order to come to Jesus (Jn 6:37,44,65). Jesus makes this definitive to the twelve disciples with "Did I not choose you?" (6:70, cf.15:16). The idea of 'chosen' in referential language/terms would be similar to the doctrine of election; besides raising questions about reduced human ontology and function, a related issue is the use of narrowed-down terms that reflects the influence of reductionism. The transmission of this kind of information by its reduced terms has been influential in shaping diverse disciples and discipleship. We need to recognize that referential language in theology and practice has reduced God's communication to narrowed-down terms that fragment God's relational message from the relational process of choosing us, whereby what remains is merely information. How so? For example, referential language is the prevailing dominant language of the Information Age, which technology has used as the primary substitute for communication in order to be both efficient and convenient—thus counter to the relational involvement that is inefficient as well as inconvenient.

Jesus communicates, however, in relational language with whole relational terms, and his relational message is vital for us to understand, receive and respond accordingly—no matter how inefficient and inconvenient it is for us to process. His relational message here is composed by two integral components to the **relational work** of discipleship:

1. To "come to me" (*erchomai*, 6:65) means to come together, which is only possible on God's relational terms; contrary to common belief about believing him, coming together with Jesus is not possible by human terms, which are incongruous, incompatible and irreconcilable for relationship together; this relational connection, then, can be neither initiated by human persons nor brought into reality (not an alternative reality) by the work of persons, but only becomes an experiential reality by God's relational response of grace; yet the relational reality that God initiates is not a unilateral relationship, in which disciples merely conform to set parameters (e.g. a code of conduct or Rule of Faith); God initiates the relational response necessary to be bonded together in only **reciprocal relationship**, the responsibility of which requires the mutual relational work of both **subjects** in the relationship (composing **the Relationship of Faith**)—not a so-called subject merely conforming or Subject-God just as an Object of faith.
2. Since human persons are shaped by terms incongruous, incompatible and irreconcilable to engage reciprocal relationship with God, to follow Jesus' whole person is only possible on the relational basis of God's whole relational terms; these are the nonnegotiable terms that definitively compose **the primary relational work of believing** demanded (not just requested) and thus imperative in order for our person to be in function congruent, compatible and reconciled in reciprocal relationship with the vulnerable presence and relational involvement of God embodied in Jesus.

This integral relational work for discipleship emerges and unfolds only from the relational outcome of the intrusive gospel of God's face.

As the diverse disciples in this defining interaction learned decisively, they cannot respond to the call of "Follow me" except on the chosen basis of God's whole relational terms. This also means for all his disciples:

> The primary relational work of believing—that is, the relational involvement of the vulnerable trust of my whole person—the whole of Jesus' person cannot be composed, shaped or influenced by any other terms, which would determine reciprocal relationship together on our terms and therefore continue to be incongruous, incompatible and irreconcilable.

By necessity then, Jesus' disciples are both chosen and called, and this integral relational process is irreplaceable to receive and indispensable to embrace in order to unmistakably "Follow me, my whole ontology and function."

The definitive call from Jesus is composed from the composite declaration that integrates key communications from him in relational language, communications expressed both verbally and nonverbally. His call emerges, unfolds, converges, with this relational outcome as follows.

1. God's Call Emerges

Embodying the face of God, Jesus initiated his call with his distinct relational language that illuminates the depth of his relational message in "Follow me" (Mt 4:19; 8:22; Lk 5:27; 18:22). These defining relational terms are primary and, therefore, imperative even for those serving him (Jn 12:26). In Jesus' call, serving is never first, primary or foremost for defining his disciples and determining their discipleship, thereby clarifying and correcting the misleading perception of discipleship noted above. Rather "whoever serves me must, *by the nature of reciprocal relationship, first be relationally involved with my whole person*, and where I am, there will my servant be also *involved first and foremost*." Unmistakably then, what emerges from Jesus' call is nothing less and no substitutes for the primacy of reciprocal relationship together—the nonnegotiable terms for defining his disciples and determining their discipleship, which are not subject to any shaping by our terms.

If Jesus' call emerges only on the relational basis of his relational terms, what does this say for the diverse disciples and discipleship existing today? Many Christians may claim to follow Jesus, yet on the basis of what they have assumed or interpreted as "the work***s*** of God." These are common alternative facts that Christians use to compose their practice of faith, so-called legitimated facts (or interpretations) that get conflated with the relational terms of Jesus' call, which then transpose the depth of his relational message to "Follow me" into a behavioral code, program or system of discipleship. The subtle dynamic operating in lieu of Jesus' relational process is the workings of human effort to determine the achievement of one's faith—as in one's righteousness, which, as Jesus made unequivocal, needed to be beyond reductionist practice (Mt 5:20). This is the self-determination valued by the rich ruler pursuing Jesus (Lk 18:20-23), and on which religious leaders depended to define their stature (Mt 6:1, cf. 23:5)—the comparative

status measured by the achievement of what persons do and have. In his manifesto on discipleship, Jesus exposes the subtle dynamics of human effort engaged in self-autonomy (Mt 5:21-48), self-determination (Mt 6), and self-justification (Mt 7); these human efforts, even with good intentions of serving, all center on establishing our righteousness to define our person (i.e. our self-worth).

Jesus' call precludes such human effort and negates such human engagement, in order to penetrate to the depth of persons and relationships where they truly are. And this intrusive relational path and process is how his call unfolds—perhaps even as a wake-up call for us today (cf. Rev 3:2).

2. Jesus' Call Unfolds

In his manifesto Jesus makes unequivocal that the righteousness (the who, what and how) of his disciples must exceed the existing religious norms of reductionist leaders (Mt 5:20). On the other hand, Jesus clarified that his call unfolds on this unmistakable basis: "I have come to call not the righteous but sinners" (M 9:13)—that is, those who engage in sin as reductionism and thus live in reduced ontology and function. Given Jesus' definitive manifesto, how does his call unfold from how his call emerged in the primacy of "Follow me?"

First of all, when Jesus was challenged by those espousing the religious norms of not comingling with sinners (notably Levi and his so-called gang, Mt 9:9-11), Jesus prefaced the above call by quoting Hosea 6:6: "Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice'." By this rebuttal, Jesus illuminated two further vital matters for discipleship:

1. He corrects another misconception that discipleship is about sacrifice and his disciples live a life of sacrifice.
2. His relational response of love is directed to persons in the condition of *need* because their person and relationships are reduced or fragmented—that is, those occupying the human condition, the human relational condition "to be apart" from God's whole.

Certainly, this would include all sinners of reductionism—and does this exclude anyone?—but how does his call also encompass the righteousness of his disciples made unequivocal in his manifesto?

Those who participate in the human condition belong to an inclusive society that excludes no human person. Those who are righteous belong to an exclusive community that does not include just anyone; who is included depends on how righteousness is defined. Jesus came as the Great Physician and Savior, whose relational response of love was directed to the first group. Since this group includes all persons, Jesus doesn't exclude anyone from his call. Yet, that may or may not include all persons. On the one hand, there is a definite distinction between the two groups. On the other hand, there is no distinction if persons recognize who, what and how they truly are. Most persons would acknowledge not being perfect; many persons have difficulty recognizing their sin, much less admitting it—that is, sin as reductionism that defines who, what and how all persons

are, which means no one is righteous (as Paul made definitive, Rom 3:10,20). Recognizing and admitting our reductionism involves a vulnerability that is not inherent in the human condition; and this reality points to the heart of Jesus' relational response of love that transforms persons to the whole who, what and how (righteousness) distinguishing his disciples as simply persons called to "Follow me."

Jesus' call, therefore, unfolds in the basic identity formation of his disciples, which Jesus makes definitive at the beginning of his manifesto for all his disciples and their discipleship to be in righteousness beyond reductionism. This relational process is outlined in the Beatitudes (Mt 5:3-11), which I introduce here and expand on in chapter five.

Depending on our theological anthropology, it can be more than difficult to get to the depth of who, what and how we are. Jesus penetrates our person immediately in order to compose the heart of our identity.

First Beatitude: "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (5:3). In order for this identity to emerge, it must begin with the full acknowledgement of our human condition. When we honestly look inside at our person, Jesus said the natural effect would be realization of the condition signified by "poor in spirit" (v.3). This condition is deeper than an identity deficit from a comparative process—for example, feeling bad or less about our self. "Poor" (*ptochos*) denotes abject poverty and utter helplessness; therefore this person's only recourse is to beg. Just to be poor (*penes*) is a different condition from *ptochos* because this person can still, for example, go out to work for food. *Penes* may have little but *ptochos* has nothing at all. *Ptochos,* Jesus immediately identifies, is the true condition of our humanity, which precludes self-determination and justification generated from a false optimism about our self (Gen 3:4-6). This is human ontology after the primordial garden, yet not the full ontology of the whole person that still includes the viable image of God. Without the latter, *ptochos* would be a worthless person, and this is not Jesus' focus on the ontology of the person. Nevertheless, *ptochos* does prevail in human ontology, and this condition is inescapable with false optimism and clearly makes evident the need for God's relational work of grace. This juxtaposition is what we need to accept both about our person and from God—not only theologically but functionally because anything less than *ptochos* counters God's grace, for example, by efforts to measure up, succeed or advance on the basis of self-determination shaped by what we do and/or have. By necessity, however, the *ptochos* person vulnerably appropriates God's relational work of grace to relationally belong to the whole of God's family, as Jesus said, "theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Yet, *ptochos* only begins the process of forming this new identity.

This irreplaceable Beatitude forms the basis for answering God's question "Where are you as a person?"—with a response from our innermost, without deflection to or enhancement by secondary identity markers (notably idealized as Christians). Those markers keep our innermost unexposed in relational distance, just as the persons in the primordial garden—"I hid *and kept relational distance from you; the situation and she made me do it*" (Gen 3:10,12). Most of us are resistant to operate with the self-definition of *ptochos,* especially if we define ourselves by what we do or have and depend on these secondary markers for our primary identity. We may be able to accept this "spiritually" in an isolated identity but for practical everyday function in the real world, to live with this self-definition is problematic. While any alternatives and substitutes masking our true

condition may make us feel less vulnerable, we will never be able to dance completely around the truth of our condition and this reality of human ontology—despite any facts we can present to reinforce these illusions and simulations.

In this first critical step in the formation of the new identity distinguishing his followers, Jesus provided no place or option for self-determination. Who and what we are as his followers is determined only by the function of reciprocal relationship with him as whose we are; and how we are in relationship together is only on his whole relational terms, which constitute the relationship and thus our identity in God's grace. By this, Jesus discloses unmistakably that God's grace demands the vulnerability of *ptochos* existing in our person (the honesty of heart) for ongoing relationship together to be whole—the same honesty of heart he strategically disclosed to the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:23-24). Without this innermost vulnerability our person does not open and extend our heart to make intimate relational connection with the heart of God to belong to God's family ("kingdom of God is theirs"). This vulnerable connection goes deeper than a person with epistemic humility merely seeking more information, but it involves the depth of a person's ontological humility needing to be whole from inner out. The former posture of humility just reflects the self-definition and relational error that is often practiced inconspicuously, as demonstrated by the rich young ruler (Mk 10:17-22).

In this provocative first step for composing our identity, the vulnerable honesty of our heart only begins the integral process to distinguish the identity as his disciples. The next interrelated step naturally flows from the first.

Second Beatitude: "Blessed are those who mourn" (5:4). Since the ontology of the person (from inner out) is never static, Jesus extends its dynamic function in this next irreplaceable step. When we are indeed *ptochos*, our honest response to our true condition is to "mourn" (*pentheo*, lament, grieve, deep sadness, v.4). If we accept our condition as *ptochos*—and not merely perceive it as *penes*, that is, a deficit needing to be overcome—then mourning would be the natural response of our heart. This, of course, depends on not narrowing down *ptochos* to referential information to use or store in our Christian handbooks. Yet, too often we insulate ourselves from such experience, though unknowingly we may get depressed. The tension involves issues of self-worth, which revolve around *ptochos* in terms of how we see and feel about ourselves. We tend not to recognize this matter because our heart is unaware of experiencing *pentheo*, likely only feeling insecure of how others perceive us—perhaps preoccupied in self-consciousness. Of course, we can ignore or reject others' perceptions by our overestimated self-assessment, which renders these Beatitudes inapplicable to our identity.

In this second critical step in the process of identity formation, the person is taken further and deeper toward being redefined, transformed and made whole. This necessitates the functional ontology of the whole person, contrary to a reductionist practice that insulates the heart or keeps it at a distance of diminished involvement. The dynamic necessary is to open our heart and expose the *pentheo* by fully acknowledging, admitting and confessing our *ptochos*—which may not only be about one's own condition but also the condition of humanity in general. The extent of this vulnerability can not only depress but also create despair, that is, if left in this condition.

The ironic influence of reductionism on human ontology is the simulation and illusion to be strong, self-determined, self-sufficient, and accordingly not in need of redefinition and transformation. In contrast and conflict, persons who *pentheo* address reality without reducing the person, yet not in self-pity but by vulnerably opening their whole person to God and not just a fragmented spirit of feeling bad. In this vulnerable relational process, their whole person is presented to God for comfort, healing, cleansing, forgiveness, and deeper involvement, so they can experience God's intimate response—as Jesus assured "they will be comforted" (*parakaleo*, term used for every kind of call to a person that is intended to produce a particular effect). As Jesus further relationally disclosed ongoingly in his sanctified identity, the whole-ly God is relationally vulnerable to our humanity, and we must (*dei*) relationally reciprocate in likeness with what and who we are in our innermost. Functional intimacy in relationship involves hearts open to each other and coming together. Intimacy with God, therefore, necessitates by nature that our heart functions in its true humanity (as "in spirit and truth")—nothing less and no substitutes. The process from the first Beatitude to the second engages this qualitative relational involvement that Jesus calls us to experience *parakaleo* in intimate relationship together. And these two irreplaceable steps involve the relational moments we extend our person to God the most openly and hereby give him the best opportunity to be with us—*parakaleo* not from outer in but for our ontology inner out.

Since identity is rooted in **whose we are** (e.g. culturally or socially), its formation is contingent on the ongoing function of this relationship. Belonging to God involves an irreducible and nonnegotiable relationship for our identity's further and deeper growth. While *pentheo* defines only a degree of experience relative to each person—no set quantity of sackcloth and ashes—God does not let us remain in a state of gloom and perhaps fall into depression or despair. God's thematic relational action never unilaterally allows for human ontology to remain in reductionism but only functions to make us whole. As Jesus did with tax collectors, a prostitute and others lacking wholeness, he extends God's relational work of grace to us in our helplessness, pursues us vulnerably in the poverty of our humanity, redeems us (the *parakaleo* mainly from the common's enslavement of reductionism) back to his family (on the relational terms of the Uncommon), therefore transforms our whole person for intimate relationship with the Father, and formally by covenant (through adoption) constitutes us as his very own children permanently belonging to the whole-ly God's family ("theirs is the kingdom of heaven"). This relational process defines God's thematic relational response only as family love—the vulnerable process of involvement based on the whole-ly Trinity's relational work of grace, which continues as the basis for God's new creation family to experience now even further and deeper in whole relationship together as the church until eschatological completion of God's whole. This operationalizes the relational progression constituted by Jesus in his tactical shift (discussed further in the next chap.), the ongoing function of which he summarized in this major discourse to compose the new identity of the persons in his call. The relational dynamics converging here are essential to define the whole gospel and to determine its whole relational outcome.

If we indeed are involved in the depth of these first two steps, then the natural flow of this integral process will continue to lead inevitably to the ambivalent reality of the next step.

Third Beatitude: "Blessed are the meek" (5:5). The experiential truth of this relational reality is not usually functional in a linear process as it is reflexive (back and forth). God's thematic relational response and ongoing vulnerable involvement with our humanity, most vulnerably disclosed in the incarnation, demonstrate the faithfulness and righteousness of the whole-ly God whom we can count on to trust intimately in reciprocal relational process. This reciprocal response composes the primary relational work (sing.) of trusting him whom God has sent (Jn 6:29). As we go up and down, in and out in our *ptochos* and *pentheo*, the initial relational experiences of God's family love rightfully conclude with only one understanding of our person. This understanding forms **the core function** of the redefined self, the new identity of those transformed in Christ.

In the interrelated vital steps involved in this process of self-understanding, Jesus defined the core function forming the identity of his followers: "the meek" (*praus*, v.5). While the sense of meekness should not be separated from *ptochos*, *praus* (*prautes*, noun) denotes to be gentle—that is, not hard or resistant to live as one truly is. *Praus* involves heart function conjoined with overt behavior to demonstrate what and who one is from inner out. Contrary to most perceptions of "meek," this function is not timid weakness but humble strength and truth of character based on one's true condition (cf. David in Ps 51:16-17). How this specifically would be demonstrated or expressed can be defined best by the various behaviors of Jesus with others (see Mt 11:29). Whatever its form in a particular situation, the most significant issue is that there is no lie or illusion about one's person in being meek (including being humble). In this core function, ontological humility becomes experiential truth and relational reality.

Yet, meekness is not a mere characteristic of the Christian person by which to be defined and thus to behave, for example, as an identity marker. Though commonly seen and practiced in this way, this only simulates humility from outer in. Rather, most importantly for the whole person, it is a function of relationship both with God and with others. Being meek is a core function in relationship with God for two reasons, which are requisite for discipleship:

1. With no illusions about self-determination and self-justification (*ptochos*) and with response to one's *pentheo*, the only basis and ongoing functional base for the person's life and practice is the whole of God's relational work of grace—the depth of relational significance composing *sola gratia*.
2. On this basis, relationship together is only on God's terms, hence irreducible and nonnegotiable by human persons.

God does not work by any human agenda, notably for self-determination and self-justification. Being meek is this core function involving the relational process of turning away from the falsehood in self-autonomy and entrusting one's whole person to the grace of God—the depth of relational significance composing *sola fide*. This relational response is basic not only for conversion but for ongoing sanctification, yet not on the basis of unilateral relationship controlled by God but only for reciprocal relationship (discussed further in Chap. 5).

Furthermore, who and what this meek-humble person is and how this person functions also must by nature be involved in relationship with others in two qualitatively distinguished ways:

1. With God's grace as the basis for the person, there is no basis for comparison with others, for climbing any human ladder or one-upmanship, and accordingly no basis for stratified relationships that reduce the whole person to fragmentary distinctions, but rather a qualitative loving involvement with others (without employing reductionist distinctions) in the relationships necessary for wholeness.
2. Accordingly, this relational involvement allows no basis for the function of individualism, which gives priority to the individual agenda and reduces the primacy of the intimate relationships together necessary to be God's whole family.

Praus, therefore, is the clear function only of ontological humility, relational humility as well as epistemic humility (cf. Paul's critique of the church, 1 Cor 4:7; 8:1-2).

Meekness is a direct relational outcome of the first two irreplaceable steps (Beatitudes) that define the ontology of our persons and determine the above functions of relationships. There is no theological or functional basis for any other self-assessment, regardless of how much one does, has or accomplishes. Yet, we encounter difficulty when lies (e.g. alternative facts) or illusions (e.g. alternative or virtual realities) keep us from facing our *ptochos* or experiencing our *pentheo*. In strong contrast, being meek also signifies a functional admission of one's enslavement—that is, not being free from some form of self-sufficiency (even in a collective context), self-determination (even with a theology of grace), or self-centeredness (even in acts of service)—and one's need for the gospel's redemptive change of the old dying and the new rising. Obviously, if anyone cannot admit their limits and constraints, they would not acknowledge their need to change. The status quo in theology and practice reflects this bias and thus denial.

Jesus said the meek "will inherit the earth." This is not a result of what they do but only a relational outcome constituted in relationship with Jesus and by his relational work of grace with the relational outcome of belonging to God's family. These Beatitudes have roots in the promise from the OT covenant, yet Jesus was not taking us back into that context but extending and fulfilling God's relational response to our human relational condition. The meek's inheritance is not the earth per se (or land, cf. Ps 37:11), with a sense of redistribution for the poor and dispossessed. This inheritance is not about a place, situations or circumstances. This is about the distinguished context of God's whole and dwelling, the relational context in which their inheritance is the whole-ly God for relationship—just as it was for the OT priests and Levites (Nu 18:20, Dt 10:9). The meek (as the poor in spirit, and so forth) are "blessed" (*makarioi*), that is, fully satisfied, because God is vulnerably present and intimately involved in their life—the relational outcome of God's definitive blessing (Num 6:24-26). Therefore, this is about well-being and wholeness experienced as the relational outcome of God's covenant love and faithfulness, of Jesus' vulnerable grace and truth (Jn 1:14), that is, as with the Trinity who is intimately involved together in their "spirit and truth"—nothing less and no substitutes. This blessed relational condition cannot be reduced merely to happiness about one's situation and circumstances; everyday life is not reduced to our situations and

circumstances. In this redefinition of self, the irreducible importance of our whole person (from inner out) and the nonnegotiable priority of intimate relationship together become the perceptual-interpretive framework for what we pay attention to. And the full relational significance of being *makarioi* is the ongoing relational outcome of these and the rest of the Beatitudes in the integral process of the new creation's identity formation.

As Jesus' call unfolds ongoingly in the integral relational process of his disciples' identity formation, his call also converges deeper into the relational context and process that unexpectedly, yet not unhoped for, distinguishes his intimate reciprocal relationship with his followers.

3. Jesus' Call Converges

There is an irreversible relational progression that distinguishes the unique discipleship composed by Jesus' call (to be discussed further in the next chap.), which goes beyond and is set apart from the diverse discipleship existing today. Contrary to prevailing perceptions on serving (and/or sacrifice), Jesus declares resoundingly: "I do not call you servants any longer…but I have **called you friends**, because I have *intimately shared with* you everything that I have *intimately received* from my Father" (Jn 15:15). Is this just information that Jesus points to and highlights here, composing merely good news for our consumption, such as referential language transmits? Or does this relational disclosure involve us in the depth of reciprocal relationship with Jesus that is distinguished clearly by intimacy? Or perhaps Jesus' words are interpreted as the former in order to avoid the latter.

As Jesus disclosed earlier about the strategic shift of God's relational response and the intimate connection the Father seeks with us ("in spirit and truth," Jn 4:23-24), **intimacy** is defined by God's relational terms as *hearts vulnerably open to one another and coming together in reciprocal relationship*. This is the depth of involvement that Jesus enacted with his friends, which is likely distinctly different than the common practice among friends today (e.g. prominently as seen in the Western world and as prevails on social media).

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

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

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

As relationally significant as the intimate bond between friends is, the convergence of Jesus' call does not conclude in friendship—with "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" not without merit. If reciprocal relationship together as his disciples ends here, we are no longer following Jesus on his relational path because friends together is not what he saves us *to*.

4. The Relational Outcome of Jesus' Call

The experiential truth that Jesus saves us *from* sin only becomes a relational reality when it includes a two-fold relational outcome: (1) That we are saved from sin as reductionism (as emerged from the primordial garden) and its counter-relational workings, which has reduced our ontology and function; and (2) when we are saved from reductionism and reduced ontology and function, the only outcome that can unfold is then to be integrally **saved *to* wholeness in our ontology and function**. Without being saved to wholeness, we have not been saved from our sin of reductionism. The experiential truth of this theology (soteriology) only becomes an experiential reality when the significance of its relational outcome distinguishes the whole of who, what and how we are in reciprocal relationship with Jesus.

Therefore, though the function of friends is necessary in the relational progression, it is insufficient for the relationship necessary together to make us whole—that is, relational together in likeness of the integral relationship constituting the Trinity, the only outcome of what Jesus saves us to. The relational progression does not conclude in friendship with Jesus, which has become another contemporary misperception of Jesus shaped by the prevailing influence of reductionism to define our life and practice. In Jesus' tactical shift demonstrated with Zacchaeus for his involvement in the relational progression (Lk 19:1-10), Jesus alluded to both what we are saved to, and thus the relationship necessary to be whole.

Their relationship together went further than the friendship of table fellowship, and their relational involvement went deeper into the relational progression. Though Zacchaeus' salvation was not "because" of ancestry with Abraham, there was essentially relational connection as "a son of Abraham," as Jesus declared (Lk 19:9)—pointing to

vital connection with Abraham's wholeness in faith (as Paul's would later emerge). That is, "to the degree that" (*kathoti*) Zacchaeus' whole person from inner out—the shift Zacchaeus also made to be compatible with Jesus—was intimately involved with Jesus on the basis of God's relational response of grace, Jesus redeemed him from the outer in of the *old* (of the common's function) and transformed him in the innermost to the *new* as a son belonging in the family of God represented by Abraham. Therefore in their intimate involvement together Face to face, Zacchaeus was constituted in Jesus' very own relational context, the whole of God's trinitarian relational context of family by the trinitarian relational process of family love. In other words, the Son's Father would also become Zacchaeus' Father and they would effectively be brothers, the relational outcome Jesus indicated after the resurrection (Jn 20:17, cf. Mt 12:50). This was what Zacchaeus was saved to, and this was the relationship necessary by nature to make him whole in the innermost together in God's whole—the relational progression to the whole of God, the Trinity irreducibly as family.

Belonging to God's family is both a position and a function. As a position, belonging cannot be experienced by a servant (or a slave, cf. rich young ruler's error)—nor even by a disciple without full involvement in the relational progression—but only by a son or daughter as God's very own. As a function, belonging cannot be fulfilled by a disciple (even as friend), no matter how dedicated to serving or devoted to Jesus. Disciple and servant in effect become roles to occupy that are fulfilled by role players, that is, when involvement in the relational progression is not fully engaged. Belonging is only a relational function of those in reciprocal relationship together with the Trinity in the position as God's very own family. This is the relational outcome that intruded on the persons of Zacchaeus and Levi.

The call of Jesus emerges, unfolds, converges and has the relational outcome of only one, sole, irreducible and nonnegotiable purpose: **to be whole**. His chosen disciples and their discipleship are distinguished in the relational significance of nothing less and no substitutes.

A Defining Narrative for Whole Disciples and Discipleship

The ongoing involvement in the primacy of reciprocal relationship together is a continuous challenge for Jesus' followers. If you are as I am, I have to consciously work on not being distracted from this relational involvement. Whether in theology or practice, it is common for Christians to become preoccupied with secondary matters (not necessarily unimportant) at the expense of this primacy. The experiential truth and relational reality we have consistently failed to grasp are that we cannot conflate the secondary in our life with the primary in God's life and still experience the significance of relationship together. Perhaps this is most evident today in the context of modern worship, notably with the augmented reality used to enhance our worship experience.

What we need to learn and mature in is following Jesus with this relational imperative: To always integrate the secondary *into* the primary—not the converse, and also not to equate them—in order for our everyday, ongoing involvement to be in the primacy of reciprocal relationship together on God's whole relational terms. "Where are

you?" and "What are you doing here?" continuously face us with this challenge, so that in our discipleship we will not be faced with "Don't you know *my whole person* yet, after all this time *as my disciples*?"

The NT provides narratives of various disciples who struggle with this challenge (as noted above for Peter). There is one disciple in particular whose discipleship provides a defining narrative of the relational significance of being involved in face-to-face reciprocal relationship together with Jesus—whom Jesus magnifies to distinguish the good news for all his disciples.

This defining narrative begins with a pivotal interaction Jesus had with some of his devoted followers. This interaction demonstrates how imperative it is for disciples to integrate their secondary involvements into the primary of their reciprocal involvement with Jesus, and thus not to allow their discipleship to be distracted, occupied, defined, shaped, preoccupied and determined by anything less or any substitutes. Since this diversion is a common practice among Christians, it is indispensable for all Christians to integrate the secondary into the primary by ongoingly engaging the **process of integrating priorities** (PIP).

In human life and practice, including for most Christians, the surrounding context (namely culture) commonly establishes the priorities of what is important, thus what should receive our primary attention. To the extent that our identity (even as disciples) is shaped and our function (even in discipleship) is determined subtly by these priorities, we have to recognize that we are products of our context and times—and are not engaging in PIP. This subtle defining dynamic became a source of contention between two of Jesus' close followers (sisters Martha and Mary, Lk 10:38-42), whom he loved along with their brother Lazarus (cf. Jn 11:5).

When defined by what they do, these sisters are commonly characterized as different types: Martha oriented to a life of activity and service, while Mary by a life of contemplation and worship. We get a deeper and different understanding of their persons as Jesus interacts with them face to face in relationship. How they functioned in relationship together reveals where they truly are, and also deepens our understanding of the relational significance of Jesus' whole ontology and function.

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

For persons like Martha, thinking relationally is always more difficult when the surrounding context defines persons in fixed roles and confines them to the performance of those roles. The non-fluid nature of their sociocultural context made individuality outside those roles an aberration; consequently the norm not only constrained the person but also limited (intentionally or inadvertently) the level of involvement in relationships.

These barriers made the function of relationship critical for Martha since she was a product of her times—something we all can identify with in one way or another.

The person Martha presented to Jesus was based on her role and what she did, which she seemed to perform well. By defining herself in this way, she focused quite naturally on her main priority of all the hospitable work (*diakonia*) to be done, that is, her service or ministry (*diakoneo*, Lk 10:40). This work, on the one hand, was culturally hers to do while, on the other hand, it was an opportunity for her to serve Jesus. Yet, defining her person by what she did and the role she had also determined what she paid attention to and ignored (using the lens from her perceptual-interpretive framework) in others, and thus how she did relationships with them—the prevailing bias that predisposes all of us. More specifically, Martha stayed within the limits of her role in relationship with Jesus, whom she related to based on his role, all as determined by her local context. In other words, Martha did not engage Jesus and connect with him in the quality of relationship made accessible to her from his larger and thus primary context. Given her terms for discipleship, a controversy emerged as Martha enacted her discipleship of serving. She created the controversy with her terms, which she imposed on Jesus to center on for what's primary: "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the *serving* by myself? Call her then to help me" (10:40).

In a totally unexpected way, not only to Martha but also to the other twelve disciples with Jesus, Mary chose to follow Jesus on his intrusive relational path for the primacy of relationship together: "Mary has chosen the *primary*" (10:42) and she "sat *vulnerably involved* at the Lord's feet and listened *carefully* to what he was saying" (10:39). Perhaps for us today this seems reasonably the right thing to do, but it was shocking in her time. Her dynamics even for today are extraordinary; that is, Mary engaged in **uncommon function** that went beyond both what was common in her surrounding context and what was common in the other disciples' function. Past or present, Jesus' disciples are not distinguished until their function is uncommon from the common in their everyday life (discussed further in Chap. 5).

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

Moreover, household roles and expectations were only part of the pressure Mary faced in her surrounding context. Mary seemed to ignore the work (*diakoneo*) that was culturally hers to do and chose instead to engage Jesus in a manner not customarily available to women. That is, she also goes against the religious culture by sitting at Jesus' feet in order to be taught by the Rabbi (Lk 10:39); this is a privileged place forbidden for women and reserved only for men, particularly disciples (note also, that serious disciples usually were training for leadership). This takes place during an important period in Jesus' ministry when he has intensified his private teaching of his disciples in preparation of their forthcoming leadership. Imagine then what his disciples thought (or even said in

protest) when Mary sat next to them. Surely, at least, some must have said to themselves: "What is this *woman* doing? Who does she think she is?" On the other hand, if they accepted her actions, her person would have been defined at the bottom of their comparative scale—as the least among them since these disciples were concerned about "who was the greatest" (Mk 9:34; Lk 22:24).

Yet, Mary is willing to risk ridicule and rejection (even by Jesus) by going beyond any religio-cultural constraints in order to pursue the person Jesus. She effectively doesn't allow reductionism to control her life and merely do what is expected and comfortable—that is, to diminish her person and limit her relational involvement. By her uncommon choice, she clearly acts only on what is important and necessary: the whole person in the function of intimate relationship together. Jesus fully receives her person for this relationship and, in openly doing so, teaches his disciples not only a lesson on the relationship-specific priority of discipleship but also on the relationship-specific function of leadership—lessons noticeably absent in theological education today.

At this pivotal point in the tension and controversy, Jesus both clarifies the issue and corrects the practice of discipleship: "You are *concerned* and *preoccupied* by many *secondary* things, but only *the primary* is needed *for whole disciples and discipleship*"—the primacy of relationship together in face-to-face intimate involvement—and "Mary has chosen what is *primary over the secondary*, and it will not be taken away from her" (10:41-42, NIV). Not only will the primacy of intimate relationship together be neither taken away nor reduced, but with face-to-face involvement the relationship will grow more deeply together. This experiential truth and relational reality will unfold as the narrative continues.

As we follow the narrative of these disciples, it would be helpful to pause and consider which of them has received and is responding to the gospel. The most intrusive outcome of the gospel is the change it brings to persons and relationships. How much change it brings is directly correlated to how deep the gospel penetrates our persons and relationships. We commonly make assumptions about the gospel in our theology and practice, which bias how we see others theology and practice; and such assumptions with their biases are active in the diverse discipleship enacted in this total narrative. The gospel of God's whole face is vulnerably present and relationally involved; and the specific Jesus that disciples use will be whom they follow in their discipleship.

Since the person Martha presented to Jesus was based on her role and what she did in performing it, Martha didn't connect with Jesus in the depth of relationship made accessible to her from the primary relational context of Jesus' vulnerable presence and involvement with her—that is, in his intrusive relational path of the gospel. Since the gospel didn't change her limits and constraints, this person and her relationship with Jesus can be seen clearly in their second interaction when Lazarus died (Jn 11:1-40).

In this second interaction Martha quickly extends herself again to Jesus when her brother died (Jn 11:21); she appears not to lack in initiative. Her opening words to Jesus are exactly the same words (see Greek text) Mary would share with him in their encounter moments later: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died"

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

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

The primacy of relationship is inseparable from discipleship as defined and determined by Jesus, especially for those who are committed to serve him (Jn 12:26). This necessarily involves the call to be redefined from outer in to inner out, transformed from reductionism and made whole in relationship together—in other words, **the gospel of transformation to wholeness**.[2] For Martha, who shaped relationship together as a hospitable servant of Jesus, this implied her need for redemptive change. Though she

[2] An expanded discussion of this whole gospel is found in my study *The Gospel of Transformation: Distinguishing the Discipleship and Ecclesiology Integral to Salvation* (Transformation Study, 2015). Online at http://www.4X12.org.

took a small step to connect initially with Jesus in their second interaction, she needed to be redeemed (set free) to be involved in the primacy of whole relationship together with Jesus as Mary was.

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

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

Mary's discipleship emerged in this primacy and continues to grow in the depth of her involvement with Jesus. Her whole person functioning in intimate relationship with Jesus is even more evident as we see them in further interactions. Returning to Lazarus' death and their second interaction, Mary quickly goes out to meet "the Teacher" who has asked for her (Jn 11:28-29). When she sees him she says the same opening words as Martha earlier (vv.32,21). These are her only spoken words, but not all she communicates to Jesus. When she sees him, "she fell at his feet" (v.32) and says the above while "weeping" (v.33a). Mary makes her whole person vulnerable and fully shares her heart (likely including some anger) with Jesus, which Martha doesn't seem to do even with the same words. This points to the non-verbal relational messages qualifying their words that Mary communicates profoundly with Jesus, thus deeply moving his heart to make intimate connection with Mary (vv.33b,35,38). In those

relational messages about her person, Jesus' person and their relationship, Mary vulnerably opened her person from inner out, withholding nothing (even the negative) from Jesus, and simply laid her person bare before his person whether it was appropriate or not. This was not a time to be restrained or to be measured in her relational involvement in any way, but for their persons to make deep intimate connection. In these moments, she experiences her Teacher (*didaskolos*) more deeply and came to *know* him as never before—the relational outcome of intimate friends. Their intimate connection is qualitatively distinct from the connection between Martha and Jesus moments earlier. This is the relational outcome in redeemed relationship of the whole person functioning in intimate involvement together. This relational outcome is what Jesus saves and calls his disciples to.

The difference between Mary and Martha that unfolds in this defining narrative cannot be explained as the natural diversity among Jesus' disciples. That would assume a God-given diversity, which would be contrary to the disciples chosen by God and counter the relational significance of Jesus' call. Such so-called natural diversity, therefore, has opened the hermeneutic door to the diverse condition of existing disciples and their discipleship, the diversity of which reflects fragmentary persons and relationships in reduced ontology and function rather than signifying the change of the gospel reflecting the wholeness of God. Once again, *how much change the gospel brings hinges on how deep the gospel is allowed to penetrate our persons and relationships*, and that's why these interactions are pivotal.

Up to now the twelve disciples appear to be innocent bystanders in this defining narrative. A more accurate description, however, would identify the relational distance that the Twelve maintained during these interactions—in measured involvement characterizing their ongoing discipleship—likely to avoid their own discomfort with the relational issues involved. That is about to change in the next interaction the two sisters had with Jesus.

Martha continued to be conflicted in her discipleship, still remaining in the limits and constraints defining her person and determining her relationships. In their last time together at another dinner given in Jesus' honor, Martha continued to stay in her traditional place among the women to serve, even though the dinner was not in her home (Mk 14:3; Jn 12:2). Whether she was still occupied by the secondary is not clear; but she did not complain about Mary not serving, who was now even more uncommonly distinguished face to Face with Jesus in the primacy of relationship (Jn 12:3; Mk 14:6).

As further evidence of Mary's continued growth in the primary of relational involvement with Jesus, this narrative keeps unfolding in defining relational terms. Mary deepens her intimate connection with Jesus in a third interaction, which illuminates an immeasurable depth of how vulnerable her whole person is made to Jesus' whole person (Jn 12:1-8, par. Mt 26:6-13; Mk 14:3-9). We need to pay attention to the growth of her involvement as a distinguished disciple sitting at Jesus' feet with attentive listening of her whole person, to going beyond this level of involvement to the deepest relational connection imaginable with Jesus' whole person—beyond even the level of intimate friends in their second interaction. To enact this involvement Mary again makes another difficult choice. As she cleaned Jesus' feet, Mary's action might be considered customary for guests to have their feet washed at table fellowship; if this all it were, Jesus would not have magnified it (Mk 14:9). With the cost of the perfume (worth "a year's wages," v.5,

NIV) added to her decision, she again acts contrary to prevailing cultural form and practice to literally let her hair down to intimately connect with Jesus—inappropriate conduct for both of them—and humbly with love attend to his needs. Mary is engaged in the deepest relational work of a disciple, which Jesus defines clearly for his disciples as "a beautiful (*kalos*, in quality and character) thing (*ergon*, work of her vocation) to me" (v.6; Mt 26:10, parallel account) because her action unfolds in the primacy of relationship.

Mary's whole person from inner out, in distinct **person-consciousness** (not centered in self-consciousness) with its lens of qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness, perceives Jesus' whole person without distinctions of "Teacher and Lord" (cf. Jn 13:13)—which also demonstrated her *syniemi*, *synesis*, and *epignosis* of God's whole presence (as Paul clarified for the church, Col 2:2-4). Not restrained by self-consciousness (as many of us are) her whole person thereby responds to his innermost person (cf. Jn 12:27; Mt 26:37-38). In this relational context and process with Jesus, the whole of Mary's person from inner out, without the human distinction of gender and the secondary distinction of disciple, steps forth. Yet, her whole person could not be celebrated until she broke through the constraints of this dominant distinction and went beyond the limits of this secondary distinction in order to shift from self-consciousness to person-consciousness. Once again, her person further acts contrary to prevailing cultural form and practice to literally let her hair down to intimately connect with Jesus—inappropriate conduct for both of them that necessarily distinguishes the whole gospel's relational outcome and Jesus' call to be whole and live whole together.

Mary's action demonstrated the most relationally significant practice of *diakoneo*, in which she served Jesus while intimately involved with his person more than ever before. She gave her person to Jesus, and Jesus not only received her person but also received *from* her person. This continued to contrast with Martha's *diakoneo* (Jn 12:2), though not to diminish that kind of service. Yet, we need to understand the ongoing choice of function involved here.

The ongoing uncommon choice of how she was going to function was pivotal for Mary, as it is for all of Jesus' disciples. Mary grew further in her person and experienced more of this relational outcome, because she would not allow the counter-relational work of reductionism to prevent her—which is the common influence among Christians—from this opportunity to make intimate connection with Jesus face to face. Without the restraints of reductionism on her heart, she seized the opportunity of the vulnerable presence of Jesus' whole person (as he said, "you will not always have me," 12:8).

Love functions this way, it always makes the person and the relationship most important—regardless of the need and work to be done. That's why Jesus made it definitive: "I desire *the relational involvement of love*, not sacrifice," which was all need to learn (Mt 9:13). This is how Jesus functions with us and how he wants us to follow him and be with him. Thus, once again, the accessible Jesus not only received Mary's person for intimate connection in the priority of their relationship, but he also clearly makes this relational process more important than even ministry to the poor—though not reducing this ministry to outer-in serving because this involvement like Mary's is how poor persons (among others, including Jesus) need to be served. Apart from Judas Iscariot's motives (Jn 12:4-6), this was important to learn for the disciples who tried to reprioritize Mary's act (Mt 26:8-9).

It was critical for Mary to embrace person-consciousness of her whole person over a pervasive self-consciousness of merely parts of her, and to engage its lens of inner out instead of a prevailing outer-in lens in order to affirm person*ness* (not self or the individual) and celebrate whole ontology and function. Equally important, this was necessary for her own person to live whole and thus be able to perceive and respond to Jesus' whole person without distinctions—those barriers preventing intimate relational connection. If Mary doesn't embrace personness and celebrate her whole person, she doesn't embrace the innermost of Jesus and celebrate his whole person defined beyond those parts of what he does (even on the cross) and what he has (even as God). In other words, without Mary's conscious action in personness this interaction cannot unfold with the significance of the whole relational outcome distinguishing the gospel, that is, only the gospel of transformation to wholeness.

The common choice of function the twelve disciples made was not only contrary to but in conflict with Mary's uncommon choice. The choice of her function signified the change of the gospel that penetrated, encompassed and integrated her whole person and relationships, the change which had yet to become an experiential reality for the other disciples.

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

Jesus stops his other disciples from harassing her and defines clearly for them that Mary is engaged in "a beautiful thing to me" (Mk 14:6, NIV). It is misleading, if not inaccurate, to render Jesus' words "performed a good service for me" (NRSV). Jesus is not speaking in referential language focused on the secondary of servant discipleship. "Beautiful" (*kalos*, quality) and "thing" (*ergon*, work of vocation or calling) signify the quality of Mary's work. Yet, what is this work that Jesus deeply received and the other disciples rejected? First, Mary was not focused on the quantitative from outer in and thus not in self-consciousness about breaking cultural form or the expense of the perfume. Nor was she concerned about performing a good service. Her person-consciousness was focused on the qualitative from inner out, thereby focused on the whole person and the primacy of relationships. Her "beautiful thing" involved the quality of her relational work, which she engaged vulnerably and intimately not *for* Jesus or even *to* him but directly *with* the whole of Jesus in reciprocal relationship Face to face to Face.

As Mary celebrates the whole person (both hers and Jesus') without outer-in distinctions, she involved her person with Jesus' in what truly signifies being "naked and without shame" (as originally created, Gen 2:25), that is to say, vulnerable and intimate without the relational distance and barriers signifying the self-consciousness of "naked and covering up" (and related face-masks, as substitutes for being whole, Gen 3:7). Mary celebrates being "naked and without shame" in the relationship together constituted in the beginning, fragmented from the beginning and now being reconstituted to wholeness.

This celebration is not just a further taste of the new wine fellowship composed by Jesus but the celebration of its flow shared vulnerably and intimately as family together, the new creation family 'already' (Jn 14:18,23; 17:21-23). Therefore, the significance of her involvement and Jesus' response must be paid attention to because it initiates this relational outcome of new relationship together in wholeness without the veil—the veil (the holy partition) that Jesus is soon to remove to constitute God's new creation family from inner out without distinctions (2 Cor 3:16-18; Eph 2:14-22; Gal 3:26-28; 6:15; Col 3:10-11). And even though the theology had yet to be formulated for Mary, its functional significance was whole-ly embodied by her.

Mary's significance unfolds as she (1) celebrated Jesus calling her to personness, and (2) celebrated the relational work of her primary vocation with the qualitative depth of her whole person without distinctions, in reciprocal response to Jesus' whole person for the primacy of relationship together in wholeness without the veil, in order to (3) be vulnerable and intimately involved with the whole and uncommon God to celebrate life together in God's whole family—and therefore fulfilling the challenge *of* the whole profile of God's Face and *for* the face of our compatible response and congruent involvement in nothing less and no substitutes of Face-to-face-to-Face relationship together.

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

The contrast of the disciples in this narrative is, on the one hand, revealing of fragmentary (as in diverse) disciples and discipleship, and, on the other hand, defining for whole disciples and discipleship—both of which are directly correlated to how deep the gospel has penetrated our persons and relationships.

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

significance of the gospel's relational outcome of new relationship together in wholeness, necessarily in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the Trinity (as Jesus embodied and prayed): "Wherever the *whole* gospel is proclaimed, *claimed and celebrated* in the whole world, *her whole person's vulnerable and intimate relational work* will be told *as a reminder to illuminate the whole ontology and function that necessarily unfolds from the relational outcome of the gospel of transformation to wholeness*" (Mk14:9).

Disciples and Discipleship from the Gospel's Outcome

This defining narrative provides the whole understanding—the interpretation of syniemi for the full picture—for the integral truth and reality essential to compose our theology and practice in everyday life, with this ongoing understanding: (1) We don't choose to be Jesus' disciples but disciples emerge from the gospel's chosen relational outcome, whether we want it to be or not; (2) however, the disciples we are and the discipleship we engage are contingent on our choice of the gospel we claim and its outcome we embrace, whether we are aware of it or not. These direct, unalterable and thus unavoidable connections define the truth and determine the reality of our persons and relationships. In the competing influence of our surrounding context today, we are faced with if not shaped by post-truth and alternative facts, as well as alternative, augmented and virtual realities. The extent of this influence on our truth and reality will depend on the gospel we use.

Based on the whole relational terms that Jesus embodied in his ontology and function to compose the gospel, and that he made imperative in his call to "Follow me in my whole ontology and function," Mary is integrally distinguished beyond any other disciples hereby:

1. The experiential reality of Mary's person is that she embodied the whole ontology and function of the gospel's full outcome of inner-out change to wholeness.
2. The relational reality of Mary's everyday life is that she enacted the wholeness of the disciples and discipleship necessary, by the nature of Jesus' relational terms of "Follow me," to be intimately involved in reciprocal relationship together face to face—neither indirect nor veiled.

Both her experiential and relational reality integrally distinguished her person and relationships, which are indispensable for all disciples and discipleship to be whole as Jesus called.

Therefore, Mary is defining for all of us who claim the gospel. For this relational outcome to emerge, much less unfold, requires penetrating to the depth of our theological anthropology (the underlying basis defining our persons and determining our relationships) and encompassing the breadth of sin as reductionism (namely its limits and constraints on our persons and relationships). Penetrating and encompassing are required not as a duty or obligation but by the nature of who, what and how we are in truth and the whole of who, what and how we can become in reality—the intrusive relational path of the gospel and its provoking relational outcome.

Mary's significance is distinguished only in her whole theology and practice, which was constituted only by her whole ontology and function. It is not the name of Mary that Jesus magnifies but her person-consciousness integrally vulnerable and intimate in whole theology and practice, and thus her whole ontology and function integral to her personness transformed by the gospel. Mary is not mentioned in Paul's letters, but the significance of her whole person—engaged in whole theology and practice as the relational outcome of the gospel that composes the church in new relationship together in wholeness—this whole significance of her person is indeed magnified in functional clarity and theological clarity by Paul. With her whole person assuming the lead, she initiated the relational outcome of the gospel that became the experiential truth of the whole of Paul and the whole in his theology and practice. Jesus *into* Paul is inseparable from Jesus *into* Mary.

What unfolded in this defining narrative continues to unfold in the global church today. The contrast between Mary and the others illuminates the conflict between the whole gospel and its reduction, which is the significance of Mary that Jesus magnifies and that Paul fights both for and against. Yet, this significance has not been sufficiently embraced and this fight has not been adequately engaged by the church to celebrate God's whole. The church's theological anthropology and view of sin as reductionism are the central issues involved, for which we continue to remain accountable in our theology and practice and must give account in our ontology and function.

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

In Jesus' call for us to be whole, is it not compelling that Mary is *the* disciple he magnifies to embody this wholeness wherever the gospel is claimed? Moreover, in the diversity of our discipleship, is it not also significant that Mary's wholeness has not received due attention and been given the defining influence beyond what commonly defines disciples and determines their discipleship, and therefore to have the lead over all other disciples and their discipleship?

The face of God urgently wants to know *where we are in our ontology as persons* and *what we are doing here in our function of* "Follow me": following the diversity of reformation (and its counterparts) or the wholeness of transformation!

Chapter 4 The Essential Relational Progression

I do nothing on my own, but I *communicate* these things as the Father instructed me.

John 8:28

Therefore, let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and *progress* to maturity, not laying again the foundation of *our faith*.

Hebrews 6:1, NIV

Throughout the course of church history and in the global church today, the identity of God's face has not always been on the same theological trajectory. Likewise, the perceived identity of Jesus has often been on a different relational path. This obviously has repercussions on what composes the gospel we claim and follow.

The integral theological trajectory of God and relational path of Jesus emerged from God's distinguished relational context and unfolded in the irreducible relational process of God's whole relational terms. And their trajectory and path emerged and unfolded as the direct response to our human condition. The experiential truth of the trajectory of God's face and the relational reality of the path of Jesus' person are integrated to compose the whole gospel; and the gospel's relational outcome integrally emerges and unfolds in the essential relational progression of the whole-ly (both whole and holy/uncommon) God's trajectory and relational path.

At this point perhaps you wonder: As important as this theology is, do we really need to distinguish all this for our practice of discipleship? Only if we want to claim the whole gospel and follow Jesus in whole theology and practice.

Therefore, Christians who follow Jesus on this theological trajectory and relational path must also undergo this essential relational progression and thereby undertake its progress. This relational process and its progress, however, are impeded when Jesus' whole person is prevented from emerging such that the full profile of God's face does not unfold. Typically, Christians inadvertently impede the relational progression of Jesus by a biased interpretive lens from an incomplete Christology, which doesn't embrace Jesus' whole person due to their underlying reduced theological anthropology. Moreover, Christians conveniently impede the relational path of Jesus by the skewed effects from a truncated soteriology (saved only *from* partial sin), which doesn't encompass Jesus' whole relational response to our human condition due to their underlying weak view of sin that doesn't include sin as reductionism. Here again, our theological anthropology and view of sin emerge as inescapable issues, and their shaping of our existing diverse condition in theology and practice is critical to why and how Jesus' relational progression is essential.

Following Jesus is limited by constraining issues when discipleship is undertaken with a servant model and with related models such as of sacrifice. The issue, for example, with the servant model is not only *why* we serve (or sacrifice) but *how*—that is, with whom are we involved. When we serve, how relationally connected are we with Jesus' whole person, not just his name or merely with his teachings or example? To be relationally connected with the whole of Jesus requires the direct relational involvement with "where I am"; and this primacy is composed by his essential relational progression, which must be understood to determine "there will my servant be also" (Jesus' relational imperative paradigm for serving, Jn 12:26).

However, even though our theology may appear correct, more often than not our practice is incomplete (as practiced by the church in Sardis, Rev 3:1-2), misdirected (as practiced by the church in Ephesus, Rev 2:2-4), or misguided (as practiced by the church in Thyatira, Rev 2:19-23). Usually in inadvertent or unknowing ways, these diverse models of discipleship limit the direct relational involvement with Jesus on his relational path, whereby the relational progression essential for Jesus' whole person and his whole disciples either is not paid attention to or ignored. The accompanying bias of such models prevents meeting the hermeneutic challenge of Jesus, on the one hand. But, antecedent to this problem is neither addressing the underlying theological anthropology nor dealing with the influence of reductionism that, on the other hand, directs disciples on a different relational path from Jesus without the relational progression. Whether from these models or any other fragmentary frameworks, the relational consequence has been the diverse condition of disciples and discipleship, which currently prevails over any movement in the relational progression essential for all Jesus' followers in the image and likeness of the whole-ly God, the unmistakable Whole-ly Trinity.

Therefore, in our diverse condition and the fragmentary context of the church today, it is critical for us to draw the distinction between *the Christian faith as religion* and its Rule of Faith, and *the Christian faith as relationship* distinguished by the relational involvement of trust (the work[sing.] of God in Jn 6:29) and its **Relationship of Faith**. The former could be doctrinally sound/correct, but only the latter integrates the relational progression of the whole-ly God for its primacy in relationship together. The former may highlight the main information about God and the Rule of Faith, but only the latter experiences the relational involvement of God in the reality of the Relationship of Faith, the primary nature of which makes all aspects of the former secondary if not a barrier to the latter's primacy. The former may be able to describe the referential truth of the gospel, but only the latter unfolds both the experiential truth of the whole gospel in its essential relational progression and the relational reality of its whole-ly relational outcome.

All Christians are challenged today by the pivotal juncture of either the parts of *what* or the whole of *whom* we will follow to define our theology and determine our practice. More than likely, the diverse parts of what Christians follow will be confronted by the whole of whom we need to follow.

The Relational Progression of God's Face

The face of God illuminated God's presence and involvement in the human context (Num 14:14), which unfolded in God's definitive blessing to compose the good news of God's relational response to us for new relationship together in wholeness (Num 6:24-26). As John's Gospel summarized, the light of God's face unfolded the brightest in the embodied Word, so that the full profile of God's face was clearly distinguished and thereby was involved in face-to-face relationship together by "the face of Jesus Christ" (as Paul integrated, 2 Cor 4:6). In this integral relational process, the full profile of God's face unfolds in the essential relational progression of the irreducible whole of who, what and how God is. Without this full profile, God's face is incomplete or distorted, and thus often misidentified in theology and misrepresented in practice.

Following Jesus then necessitates following his whole person face to face on his unalterable invariable relational path in the relational progression. This discipleship was problematic for two of Jesus' disciples found on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-32). At this juncture, their gospel had evaporated into apparent fake news, despite coming face to face with the intrusive gospel of God's face (24:17-24). How could this happen to his devoted disciples who followed Jesus to the cross? The simple truth is that they failed to recognize the face of Jesus in his essential relational progression, thus they misinterpreted the events of his profile and journeyed in a different direction from Jesus' relational path.

This diverse direction may not be typical for the journey of most Christians but it is a common path for Christians to take. For example, a prominent challenge, desire or goal for Christians is to become and **be more like Jesus**. Yet, this has become a notion that essentially neither includes Jesus' whole person nor involves his ontology and function. To be like Jesus by necessity requires knowing who and what Jesus is and understanding how he is—that is, his whole ontology and function in contrast to fragmentary parts of Jesus. And to know and understand the whole who, what and how Jesus *is* unfolds only from his essential relational progression. This integral relational process is brought to the forefront in John's Gospel, which clearly distinguished the incarnation as not just an historical event but **the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes** of the whole-ly God's experiential truth and relational reality. The dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes always is in contrast and conflict with anything less and any substitutes, and therefore it always challenges and confronts us in our theology and practice. Given how essential this dynamic is to the incarnation of Jesus' relational progression, how much of our diverse condition of disciples and discipleship needs to be challenged and confronted by the same dynamic?

To provide the basis for whole theology and practice, John highlights his summary of Jesus' essential relational progression with "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us…the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, *whole in the relational response* of grace and truth *in relational terms*" (Jn 1:14, NIV). Jesus didn't appear just in his flesh from outer in and "lived among us" (NRSV) in the human context. Further and deeper, his whole person from inner out "dwelled" (*skenoo*) with us for this sole integral purpose: (1) to fully define (*exegeomai*, as in exegete) the whole profile of God's face that "no one has ever seen," which Jesus is able to reveal because "he is close to the Father's heart" (Jn 1:18); and (2) in order for human persons to have the experiential truth and relational reality of relationship together with this

whole of God, nothing less and no substitutes (1:10-13). On the one hand, all the *solas* of the Reformation converge in Jesus' sole relational purpose, yet, on the other hand, the sole purpose of his relational progression takes us beyond those *solas*—and this progression is essential for our theology and practice to be whole.

Thankfully, by going further than the other Gospels, John's Gospel helps us understand that the essential relational progression of Jesus' whole person is both an epistemological issue and a hermeneutic issue; and both these issues are compounded by a relational issue that kept emerging in those faced with following Jesus (as noted earlier, Jn 6:29-30; also in 5:16-30; 8:12-29 and 10:24-39). As the person "close to the Father's heart," he "came from the Father" because "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (Jn 3:16). Illuminated further and deeper in the primacy of their relationship, Jesus revealed in their integral bond together:

> "The Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise" (Jn 5:19). "What I speak, therefore, I speak just as the Father has told me" (12:50). In their essence, "the Father and I are one" (10:30), and with their persons "the Father is in me and I am in the Father" (10:38). Therefore, "whoever sees me sees him who sent me" (12:45), "…has seen me has seen the Father" (14:9); and in essential addition, "the Spirit descending like a dove on him…my Son, the Beloved" (Mk 1:10-11), with whose person Jesus was inseparably involved to enact the relational progression together (Lk 4:1,14,18; 10:21)—the persons essential with the Father to compose the face's full profile of the Trinity.[1]

What is essential for Jesus' relational progression and *how* is it significant for our theology and practice? This how and what converge in *who* Jesus is.

In the face-to-face encounter revealing the **strategic shift** of God's relational response of grace, the Samaritan woman said to Jesus with an open interpretive lens: "I see that you are a prophet, *revealing something new*.…I know that Messiah is coming…he will proclaim all things to us" (Jn 4:19,25). "I am he," Jesus vulnerably disclosed, "the one *communicating face to face* to you" (4:26). What's the new that's disclosed here, which can't be spiritualized—especially by common notions of theology and practice? Jesus focused on and disclosed in relational terms only the vulnerable presence and intimate involvement of the Father for the primacy of new relationship together, whose relational progression "has now come" (4:21-24, NIV).

Jesus didn't inform the Samaritan woman with theological discourse of God's strategic shift. In this highly counter-cultural encounter, he vulnerably presented to her the experiential truth and relational reality of the Father in face-to-face relationship. Jesus' intrusive relational path enacted the relational progression of the Father's person, because "the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing." Thus, she had an uncommon face-to-face encounter with the Father, because "whoever has seen me has seen the Father"—in contrast to who and what the other disciples experienced with Jesus (Jn 14:5-11).

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[1] The theological task for the Trinity is discussed in my study *The Face of the Trinity: The Trinitarian Essential for the Whole of God and Life* (Trinity Study, 2016). Online at http://www.4X12.org.

As the relational progression of his whole person unfolds, nothing less and no substitutes but the whole-ly Trinity unfolds for this new relationship together in wholeness—fulfilling the definitive blessing of the full profile of God's face, who has "put my name on *them as my own family*" (Num 6:24-27). Without this essential relational progression, the vulnerable presence and intimate involvement of the whole-ly Trinity is neither an experiential truth nor a relational reality. In such absence, therefore, there would be no new relationship together in wholeness to claim in the gospel, thus precluding its relational outcome whereby there would be the whole disciples following Jesus in whole theology and practice.

Jesus' embodying dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes continues to challenge and confront our diverse theology and practice. The experiential truth and relational reality of the relational progression essential for the Trinity are not rendered to theological notes, doctrine and the archives of our mind; and whatever is so relegated has lost its relational significance. And the key to unlocking any limits and constraints to the ongoing relational progression of the Trinity's presence and involvement is the Spirit's epistemological, hermeneutical and ontological work in reciprocal relationship with us (Jn 14:16-18, 26-27; 15:26; 16:13-15). By the person of the Spirit, the Word continues to be palpable, and with the Father "we will come to them and make our home with them *as family together*" (14:23)—which Paul also made the whole relational outcome for the church (Eph 2:22), not just for some churches but for the global church of Christ (Eph 1:22-23).

Believing the Relational Progression Essential to Jesus' Face

When Christians claim the gospel, we supposedly come face to face with Jesus' person. The only relational work that Jesus made imperative to validate this claim is "that you believe in him whom he has sent" (Jn 6:29)—involving not merely the assent of our mind but our heart's relational response of trust in his whole person. But, before we claim the validity of our relational work, Jesus clarified intensely: "When a *person* believes in me, *that person* does not believe in me only, but in the *Father* who sent me. When *persons perceive* me *from inner out*, *they* see the *Father's person* who sent me" (Jn 12:44-45, NIV). Jesus made unequivocal that "I have come as light into the world" to illuminate the full profile of God's face, and therefore to magnify the whole-ly Trinity "so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness" (12:46).

The light of Jesus and his gospel becomes hazy when it is refracted by a biased lens that is unable to focus on Jesus' whole person. The reality of relative darkness remains for Christians when they exist in a theological fog emerging from an incomplete Christology of merely parts of Jesus; this then locates them in an obscure outcome and ambiguous practice from a truncated soteriology (saved only from partial sin). In other words, the gospel encompasses not remaining in the relative darkness of our diverse condition of fragmentary theology and practice and its underlying condition of reduced ontology and function. These are critically urgent conditions that have not undergone the relational progression with Jesus as long as they undertake following a different relational path from the essential relational progression of his whole person.

It almost seems elementary to talk about believing Jesus at this stage of discipleship. In terms of Jesus' relational progression, however, this is the compelling challenge of the writer of Hebrews in his discipleship manifesto: "Therefore, let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and *progress* to maturity, not *remaining focused on* the foundation of *our faith*" (Heb 6:1, NIV). In this manifesto the writer pays close attention to God's communication in the Son (Heb 1:1-3) and our urgent need to follow Jesus' whole person—the person enacting the whole gospel in his essential relational progression in order to compose the relational significance of what he saved us whole-ly *from* and *to* (2:11-12; 8:13; 10:1-10). In God's whole relational terms, Jesus' relational progression presents the whole who, what and how of God that is essential to account for the experiential truth and relational reality of the presence of God's whole-ly face—without whom there is no valid basis to claim relationship together face to face, presumably the gospel of our faith.

In our theology and practice we have to distinguish between what Jesus presented as the main Object of *the Rule of Faith* (composing our faith as religion), and who Jesus presented as the primary Subject of *the Relationship of Faith* (composing our faith only as relationship). At the heart of the issues of the person presented is the integral reality of **presence**: that is, the person present beyond the fragmentary referential terms of the embodied Object—who can only be observed within the limits of those terms—to have the presence of Subject in whole relational terms, who is vulnerably involved to be experienced within the context of relationship, and therefore who is inseparable from the distinguished Face engaged in relationship Face to face (cf. *paneh*, presence, face, Ex 33:14). How the person Jesus presented is defined and how Jesus' person's presence is defined both directly involve a relational process that has issues needing to be clarified, which emerges with responses in relational terms to these interrelated questions:

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

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

certainty, or even just habit). Consequently the depth of his presence is often reacted to by attempts to reduce it to the probable, the logical, and to renegotiate it to familiar (and more comfortable) referential terms,[2] or reacted to simply by avoiding his presence—all of which refocuses the primary attention to secondary things about his person at the loss of his real presence. Openness to his presence requires a compatible interpretive framework and lens that are conjointly qualitative and relational, which are not the common practice found among Christians. Turning to the primary qualitative-relational focus on Jesus' presence necessitates ongoing engagement in the process of integrating the secondary into the primary (PIP).

On this basis then, 'presence' is least observed by those at a relational distance from the person observed, and is most experienced by those relationally involved with the person presented. The limited, constrained or absent experience of presence is evidence of the human relational condition, our relational condition. This is the reality that Jesus made definitive in Luke 10:21, which we need to take seriously for the epistemic process if we truly want to know and understand God.

The relational connection of those involved with his presence deepens ongoingly in this process:

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

In ongoing reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit in this relational epistemic process, the above process adequately minimizes the human shaping and construction of the person Jesus presents and, most importantly, consistently allows for the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction needed for any re-presenting (as in misrepresenting) of Jesus' person in our theology and practice. Does this speak to our existing condition, individually and collectively?

Christians have commonly depicted Jesus' face in diverse ways, notably with the bias of their dominant surrounding context (social, cultural, economic or religious, not to mention political). For example, there are idealized portraits of a white, well-groomed man (as by Warner Sallman in 1940), or different snapshots of Jesus' face in various situations—the most prominent, of course, is his profile on the cross. None of these faces, or their sum, provide the full profile of Jesus' face. In fact, the alternative facts composing the profile of these faces distort the reality of Jesus' face with the alternative reality of something less or some substitute. After Philip responded to Jesus' call to "Follow me," he told Nathanael that they found the Messiah, "Jesus of Nazareth." Based on that profile of Jesus' face, Nathanael rightfully questioned the significance of this portrait of Jesus' face: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (Jn 1:45-46).

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

Until Christians see the full profile of Jesus' face, we all need to question the significance of Jesus' portrayal in our theology and practice. If we do not have in our embrace Jesus' whole face, how do we have face-to-face relationship together? Without the full profile of Jesus' face, with whom can we claim to have relationship of any significance? Without Jesus' whole face, we are relationally not connected with the essential person of Jesus. And if we are relationally disconnected from his whole person—even though our theology could be doctrinally sound—how can we profess to follow Jesus and on what basis is our discipleship formed? All of Jesus' disciples need to answer these questions. Our discipleship is challenged to follow nothing less and no substitutes but the relational progression essential to the full profile of Jesus' whole-ly face.

When Jesus declares in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes that believing him is believing in the Father, the presence of the whole-ly God whom Jesus presents cannot be ignored, selectively received or misunderstood. The both-and of Jesus' person, therefore, has no options. At the same time, there is a critical either-or of what Jesus presents: Either Jesus presents nothing less and no substitutes for the presence of the whole-ly God, or this God is not present no matter what Jesus presents. What do we in effect believe if it is only the latter? And whatever the quantity or sum of those latter parts, how essential are they to Jesus' person, the Subject of our faith?

Given what Jesus discloses of his person and not what we may speak *for* him, there is no alternative for his embodying dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes. The unmistakable incarnation of who, what and how Jesus presents is nonnegotiable and not subject to our diverse terms, though this Good News certainly has been ongoingly subjected to our diverse condition. "Whoever truly believes me believes in the relational progression of the Father's and the Spirit's presence and involvement together—nothing less and no substitutes."

Furthermore, Jesus' relational progression is not only essential for the presence and involvement of the whole-ly Trinity but for the relational progression of our face-to-face relationship with the Trinity, the whole and holy Trinity. When Mary anointed Jesus in her intimate involvement with Jesus face to face, the depth of her relational connection anticipated the ultimate sacrifice behind the temple curtain made by Jesus' whole person: "By pouring this ointment on my body she has prepared me for burial" (Mt 26:12). In this relational progression, the temple curtain (the holy partition) was torn open to give intimate access to the whole-ly Trinity face to face (highlighted in Heb 9:11-15). The Hebrews manifesto makes it imperative for Jesus' followers to progress in following him into this intimate connection of ongoing face-to-face involvement (Heb 10:19-22)—in relationship together with the full profile of our face, intimately involved without any veil because "when one *is in relational progression with* the Lord, the veil is removed" (2 Cor 3:16).

Mary both anticipated the relational progression essential for face-to-face relationship together and also anteceded the intimate involvement necessary for new relationship together in wholeness for all of Jesus' followers in the Trinity's family. By already enacting the relational outcome of the gospel, Mary magnified the unveiled face of those who "are being transformed into the same image *and likeness of the Trinity*" (as Paul illuminated, 2 Cor 3:18).

The Relational Progression of Jesus' Disciples

Implied in the compelling challenge from the Hebrews manifesto is the call to follow Jesus' whole person beyond what in effect has become convenient in our faith (Heb 10:19-25). The comfort, certainty or security of **convenience in theology and practice** has been influential in misdirecting us to not be on the same intrusive relational path of Jesus' relational progression. Further, this misguided focus has been an instrumental distractor to maturing as the whole persons who constitute Jesus' disciples. Deeper still, it has been a common barrier to intimate involvement in reciprocal relationship together face to face, both with the whole-ly Trinity and with each other as God's new family.

Christians have been slow to recognize that the existing reality (whether real, alternative or virtual) of comfort, certainty or security from convenience in theology and practice has been consequential in both defining and determining ways:

1. Convenience in theology and practice is formulated with diverse alternatives, all of which become defining as fragmentary substitutes for whole theology and practice—most notably as a reduced theological anthropology and a weak view of sin.
2. Therefore, what these fragmentary substitutes determine are persons and their relationships in subtly reduced ontology and function, unable to be whole and live whole together among themselves, much less make whole in the human context.

These consequences are contrary to the distinguishing *faith of relationship* (not the *faith of religion*) as distinguished in Hebrews 11, and they counter the relational progression of God's purpose and outcome unfolding from the whole gospel: "God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would *we all* be made *complete—the new relationship together in wholeness*" (Heb 11:40, NIV).

The relational purpose and outcome of the relational progression—which is essential in order to complete the Trinity's relational response of love to us in our human relational condition—is face-to-face relationship together in wholeness as God's new family. The 'grace alone' (*sola gratia*) of salvation cannot be taken out of this relational context and process, or it reduces God's grace to a virtual commodity that God dispenses for our consumption. In God's relational response distinguishing grace solely, there is no other purpose nor outcome for the Trinity's relational progression, who transforms us to be whole in likeness of this essential relational progression. The relational purpose and outcome of the Trinity's progression further required the intrusive relational path of Jesus to penetrate deeper into our human condition; and this penetrating intrusion was neither convenient to receive nor comfortable to respond to in relationship together face to face. This depth of the gospel is seldom proclaimed, which should make us question the profile of Jesus portrayed in the so-called Good News (or perhaps fake news?).

As Mary anticipated, the transformation to face-to-face relationship with the Trinity was constituted by Jesus tearing open the temple curtain and removing the veil from human faces. Those who respond to Jesus' call to "Follow me" are distinguished

only by reciprocal relationship face to face with him in the relational progression together that destroyed the holy partition between them, whereby now they are distinguished in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes both for Jesus' person and for theirs. Contrary to what Mary distinguished, however, convenience in theology and practice was still the main issue for the other disciples in her presence, who had a measured response to Jesus' call, essentially remaining at a relational distance in front of the curtain with their veils still on. We need to account fully for what unfolds in the relational progression to distinguish his followers and what counters it. It is always more convenient and comfortable to keep relational distance from Jesus in relational progression, and thereby, in effect, remain in front of the temple curtain without having to intimately connect face to face with the whole-ly Trinity. Therefore, those who truly "Follow me in my whole person" have to undertake the relational progression to be on the same relational path together "where I am."

Strategic Shift:

As discussed previously, the essential relational progression emerged with the strategic shift of the Trinity's response in the whole-ly person presented vulnerably by Jesus to the Samaritan woman—who received him as she responded in the tension of face to face. The relational terms that only the complex Subject of Jesus' whole person made definitive in this interaction are neither optional nor idealized terms, and certainly cannot be understood as mere referential terms. Jesus' relationship-specific terms embody the whole-ly God's integral relational response of grace in the gospel and constitute the only terms by *what* and *how* God does relationships for the gospel's reciprocal relational outcome. Understanding the qualitative significance and relational significance of the gospel, however, does not stop with the strategic relational shift. Further shifts unfold in the relational dynamic of the gospel distinguished by the relationship-specific progression to deepen our understanding and to fulfill our experiential reality for its whole relational outcome—as Jesus made definitive in his family prayer (Jn 17:20-23,26).

And in a further shift by the irreducible Subject of the Word, this gospel will be characterized as more of the improbable and intrusive, thus neither a common nor popular gospel. For all who follow Jesus, this progression is essential to define their persons and to determine their discipleship.

Tactical Shift:

From the moment the Subject of the Word established the vulnerable presence and intimate involvement of whole-ly God—"I am he, the *person* who is *communicating face to face* to you"—the full profile of God's face was distinguished unmistakably for only new relationship together, never to be merely observed. What people *needed*, however, was often not what people *wanted* (as in Jn 6:60,66, cf. Mk 10:17,21-22); and the desire and pursuit of the latter continues even today to shape theology and practice, notably prevailing in a selective process of consumption (as in the commodity of grace). This was the human condition in Judaism that confronted Jesus to his face, and that the face of God embodied whole-ly in Jesus confronted in all our human condition.

As the whole ontology and function of Subject-God's relational work of grace (not as referential Object) made a strategic shift with the incarnation, Subject Jesus' relational work of grace makes a tactical shift for deeper engagement in the relational

progression. With this shift, only the whole ontology and function of Jesus makes evident the gospel further in the improbable, and deeply distinguishes his intrusive penetration into the human relational condition.

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

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

Jesus' whole person crossed social, cultural and religious boundaries to extend his relational work of grace to Levi, a contemptible low level tax collector who crossed those same barriers (for him) to respond to Jesus in order to connect in relationship together face to face. In this highly unlikely relationship (given Levi's status), Jesus made evident his tactical shift for deeper involvement in the relational progression to the Father and family, thus beyond Sovereign and kingdom. This was initially demonstrated by the significance of their table fellowship together (including the presence of other tax collectors and sinners) after Levi's response (Mt 9:10). Making evident the reality of redemptive change, Levi was not only redeemed *from* the old but freed *to* relationship together in the *new*: Dinner together was not a routine activity for pragmatic reasons (as is the Western tendency today, especially in families) but a social communion signifying a depth of relationship together involving friendship, intimacy and belonging[3]—that is, specifically in the primacy of whole relationship together in the relational progression to whole-ly God's own family. This relationship would transform Levi and make him whole, the relational reality of which Levi would experience even further in relational progression.

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

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

Past or present, the existing relational condition also deepens and broadens our understanding of sinners and the function of sin. In the trinitarian relational context and process vulnerably engaged by Jesus, sin is the functional opposite of being whole and sinners are in the ontological-relational condition "to be apart" from God's whole. When sin is understood beyond just moral and ethical failure displeasing to God, *sin becomes the functional reduction of the whole of God*, thus in conflict with God as well as with that which is and those who are whole. Sin as reductionism is pervasive; and such sinners, intentionally or unintentionally, reflect, promote or reinforce this counter-relational work, even in the practice of and service to church. This is the salvation people needed and yet didn't often want, because to be saved from sin as reductionism includes by its nature to be made whole and thus to be accountable to live whole—an uncommon life in contrast and conflict with the convenience of the prevailing common.

At Levi's house Jesus responded to the sin of reductionism in religious practice, both to expose its participants and to redeem his disciples for the relational progression. This involved his tactical shift, which was not about sacrifice and serving—that is, in the common function of the religious community or a reductionist reading of Matthew 20:28, which is common in Christian practice today that is based notably on a servant model.

In his relational work of grace, Jesus made clearly evident the importance of Levi's whole person and his need to be reconciled to the primary relationships necessary to be whole, thereby functionally signifying his tactical shift for further engagement in the relational progression. For his followers to go beyond sacrifice and service "and learn [*manthano*, understand as a disciple] what this means [*eimi*, to be, used as a verb of existence, 'what this/he is']" (Mt 9:13), they need to understand the heart of Jesus' person, not merely the meaning of these words in Hosea. That is, this is not the conventional process of learning as a common rabbinic student but the relational epistemic process characteristic of Jesus' disciples. This then must by nature be the understanding experienced directly in relationship face to face with Jesus' whole person, aside from any other titles and distinctions ascribed to him—which Peter struggled with and Mary progressed in. Sacrifice and service never supersede relationship (cf. Jn 12:26). For his followers to get reduced in life and practice to sacrifice or service is to stop following Jesus in the relational progression to the whole-ly Trinity, and therefore to be on a different relational path than the full profile of Jesus. Such reductionism needs to be

redeemed for the relationship to progress in the primacy of intimate involvement face to face.

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

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

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

Though Zacchaeus certainly was not lacking economically, he lacked by any other measurement. Most importantly, he lacked the wholeness of belonging to the whole-ly God. This was the only issue Jesus paid attention to—in demonstration of his perceptual-interpretive framework. By this qualitative lens, he didn't see a short rich sinner up in a tree but Zacchaeus' whole person needing to be redefined, transformed and made whole. Zacchaeus also becomes a metaphor for all such persons, whom Jesus must (*dei*) intrusively pursue in their innermost by embodying face to face God's relational-specific response of grace; this is how Jesus also pursued the rich young ruler in his innermost, without the same relational outcome as Zacchaeus (Mk 10:17-23). This metaphor for such persons, whom Jesus must "dwell with" (*meno*) by intimate relational involvement together as family, also signifies the qualitative and relational significance necessary for the gospel—which his tactical shift composes. Yet these are persons who will not be paid attention to, and thus not understood, without this qualitative lens. This is a metaphor that will not be understood, and thus ignored, without the new perceptual-

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

interpretive framework; and its absence is consequential even for how we see each other in church and do relationships as church.

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

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

It is this relational function of family that the full profile of Jesus' face made unmistakable, irreducible and nonnegotiable by the trinitarian relational process of family love. This points to the functional shift of Jesus' relational work of grace to constitute his followers whole-ly in the consummation of this relational progression distinguishing the gospel—the irreducible Subject composing in relational terms nothing less than its relational outcome transforming to wholeness. This shift and its outcome make it more inconvenient in our theology and more uncomfortable for our practice to "Follow me" in the relational progression essential to who we are and whose we are.

Functional Shift:

In the relational progression essential both to Jesus and his followers, the functional shift is inseparable from his strategic and tactical shifts. They are integral to the relational purpose and outcome of the gospel, yet the functional shift of the Trinity's relational response is often either commonly minimalized or simply overlooked.

The strategic and tactical shifts illuminated the face of only Subject-God, clearly distinguished from an Object. These shifts make evident the ontology of the Subject—the whole of who, what and how God is—which is inseparable from the Subject's function. As accessed in these shifts, the Subject's ontology and function are most notably distinguished in relationships, both within the whole-ly Trinity and with others. The

Trinity is not distinguished by each person's title or role, which would create distinctions causing stratification and relational distance between them. Rather the whole-ly God is always distinguished by the ontology and function of the trinitarian persons inseparably being relationally involved in intimate relationship together as One, the Trinity as family (Jn 10:30; 17:21-23). Subject-God's vulnerable self-disclosure constitutes the ontology and function in likeness that distinguishes his followers as whole, and his followers in whole relationship together as family (his church). This relational outcome will fulfill Subject Jesus' prayer above as his functional shift becomes an ontological and functional reality.

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

During their last table fellowship, Jesus intimately shared with his disciples-friends "I will not leave you orphaned" (Jn 14:18). While Jesus' physical presence was soon to conclude, his intimate relational involvement with them would continue—namely through his relational replacement, the Spirit (14:16-17). This ongoing intimate relational involvement is clearly the dynamic function of the trinitarian relational process of family love, which directly involves all the trinitarian persons yet beyond the sum of their persons (Jn 14:16-18,23,27). Yet, the full qualitative significance (in relational terms not referential) of this dynamic of family love is not understood until we have whole understanding (*synesis*) of the relational significance of Jesus' use of the term "orphan" and his related concern.

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

Orphans essentially lived relationally apart; that is, they were distant or separated from the relationships necessary to belong to the whole of family—further preventing them from being whole rather than living fragmented. Even orphans absorbed into their

extended kinship network were not assured of the relational function of belonging in its qualitative relational significance. The relational condition "to be apart" from God's whole and to not experience the relational function of belonging to the whole-ly God's family would be intrinsic to orphans. This prominent relational condition—the subtlety of which is also innermost to the human condition—defines the relational significance of Jesus' concern for his disciples not to be *relational* orphans but to relationally belong. And the primary solution for what addresses an orphan's relational condition is the **process of adoption**. Without adoption, distinguished in the primacy of whole relationship together as family, this relational condition remains unresolved and irremediable to all other alternatives (including church membership). Therefore, Jesus' relationship-specific work of grace by the trinitarian relational process of family love enacted the process of adoption, together with the Spirit, to consummate the whole-ly God's thematic relational response to the human relational condition (Jn 1:12-13, cf. Mt 12:48-50; Mk 10:29-30). Paul later provided the theological and functional clarity for the triune God's relational process of family love and its relational outcome of adoption into God's family (Eph 1:4-5, 13-14; 5:1; Rom 8:15-16, Gal 4:4-7).

The reality of adoption may appear more virtual than real experience, and that would depend on whether adoption is constituted by the experiential truth of the Trinity. In referential terms, adoption either becomes doctrinal information about a salvific transaction God made, which we can have more or less certainty about. Or adoption could be merely a metaphor that may have spiritual value but no relational significance. Both views continue to lack understanding of the qualitative and relational significance of the gospel enacted by Jesus' whole ontology and function, and further *mis*re-present the gospel's relational outcome in the innermost of persons and their **belonging in relationship together**. The qualitative relational outcome from Jesus' intimate involvement of family love constitutes his followers in relationship together with the Trinity as family, so that Jesus' Father becomes their Father (Jn 14:23) and they become "siblings" (*adelphoi*, Jn 20:17, cf. Is 63:16; Rom 8:29). If the functional significance of adoption is diminished by or minimalized to referential terms—or simply by reductionism and its counter-relational work—the relational consequence for our life and practice is to function in effect as 'relational orphans', even as visibly active members of a church. In the absence of his physical presence, Jesus' only concern was for his followers to experience the ongoing intimate relational involvement of the whole-ly Trinity for the experiential truth and relational reality of belonging in the primacy of whole relationship together as family (beyond church membership)—which the functional shift of his relational work of grace made permanent by adoption. This irreversible relational action established them conclusively in the relational progression to belong as family together, never to be "let go from the Trinity as orphans" (*aphiemi*, Jn 14:18) as Jesus promised.

Functional and relational orphans suffer in the human relational condition "to be apart" from God's relational whole, consequently they lack belonging in the innermost to be whole. While this is certainly a pandemic relational condition, it can also become an undetected endemic functional condition among his followers and in church practice—obscured even with strong association with Christ and extended identification with the church. This critical condition requires urgent response from the global church, with particular care directed to areas of expanding church growth today. Its seriousness among

participants is an undetected condition when it is masked by the presence of ontological simulations and functional illusions from reductionist substitutes—for example, performing roles, fulfilling service, participation in church activities (most notably in the Eucharist) and membership (including baptism), yet without the qualitative function from inner out of the whole person and without the face-to-face relational involvement of belonging together vulnerably in family love. When Christian life and practice is without this integrating qualitative-relational significance, it lacks wholeness because it effectively functions in the relational condition of orphans, functional and relational orphans.

This then suggests the likelihood that many churches today (particularly in the global North) function more like orphanages than family—that is, gatherings of members having organizational cohesion and a secondary identity belonging to an institution but without belonging in the primary relationship together distinguished only in the innermost of family, that is, the Trinity's family. This exposes the need to be redeemed further from the influence of reductionism in the human relational condition, most commonly signified by the human shaping of relationships together, which the relational function of family love directly and ongoingly addresses for relationship together as family in likeness of the Trinity. And the penetrating depth of the Trinity's response and involvement converge in the relationship-specific process of adoption.

Adoption, therefore, is indispensable for making accessible the Trinity and for helping to distinguish the ontology and function of the Trinity, which do not prevail in our diverse theology and practice. Adoption simply is irreplaceable in our theology and practice in order to be compatible with the functional, tactical and strategic shifts of the Trinity's ontology and function. This compatibility requires being on the same improbable theological trajectory and intrusive relational path as the Trinity, which then may require corresponding shifts (notably Jn 4:24) in our theology and practice—for example, a shift from a theological anthropology of reduced ontology and function, from an incomplete Christology and truncated soteriology, and essentially from the fragmentary religious traditions and reforms prevailing in our contexts. The experiential truth and relational reality of adoption cannot justify anything less and any substitutes in order for our theology and practice to be whole.

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

> The Father sent out his Son, followed by the Spirit (as in Jn 1:14; Mk 1:10-12; Jn 17:4), to pursue those who suffer being apart from God's relational whole, reaching out to them with the relationship-specific involvement of distinguished love (as in Jn 3:16; 17:23,26; Eph 1:6), thereby making provision for their release from any constraints or for payments to redeem them from any enslavement (as in Eph 1:7,14); then in relational progression of this relational connection, taking these persons back home to the Father, not to be mere house guests or to become household servants, or even to be just friends, but to be adopted by the Father and therefore permanently belong in his family as his very own daughters and sons (made definitive for the new creation church family in Eph 2:13-22).

This is the innermost depth of the Trinity's family love, which vulnerably discloses both the relational significance of God's relational work of grace and the qualitative significance clearly distinguishing Jesus' relational involvement from common function, even as may prevail in church and academy. This integral qualitative relational significance discloses the whole and uncommon God, who penetrates with an intrusive relational path that we must account for in our theology and be accountable to in our practice—as inconvenient and uncomfortable as it could be. This God, the whole-ly Trinity, is present and involved in no other terms, and thus can be experienced in no other way.

By the relational nature of the Trinity, the trinitarian relational process of family love is a function always for relationship, the relationship of God's family. These are the integrated relationships functionally necessary to be whole in the innermost that constitutes God's family. That is, distinguished family love is always constituting and maturing God's family; therefore, family love always pursues the whole person, acts to redeem persons from their outer-in condition and to transform them from inner out, and addresses the involvement necessary in the primacy of relationships to be whole as family together in likeness of the Trinity. In only relational terms, family love functionally acts on and with the importance of the whole person to be vulnerably involved in the primacy of intimate relationships together of those belonging in God's family. When the trinitarian relational process of family love is applied to the church and becomes functional in church practice, any church functioning as an orphanage can be redeemed from counter-relational work to function whole as God's family together. Then its members will not only occupy a position within God's family but also be involved from inner out and experience the relational function necessarily involved in belonging in the innermost of God's family that integrally holds them together—together not merely in unity but whole together as *one* in the very likeness of the Trinity, just as Jesus prayed for his church family (Jn 17:20-26).

In this functional shift enacted for the gospel, Jesus' relational function of family love vulnerably engaged his followers for the innermost involvement in the relational progression to the whole-ly Trinity's family. This integrally, as well as intrusively, involved the following relational dynamic: the shift of being redefined (and redeemed) from outer in to inner out and being transformed (and reconciled) from reductionism and its counter-relational work, in order to be made whole together in the innermost as family in likeness of the Trinity (as Paul made definitive, 2 Cor 3:18; Col 1:19-20). Theologically, redemption and reconciliation are inseparable; and the integral function of **redemptive reconciliation** is the relational outcome of being saved to the whole-ly Trinity's family with the veil removed to eliminate any relational separation or distance (as Paul clarified, Eph 2:14-22). The irreducible and nonnegotiable nature of this integral relational dynamic of family love must (*dei*) then by its nature be an experiential truth having qualitative-relational significance for this wholeness to be the relational reality of consummated belonging to the Trinity's family. Family love also then necessarily involves clarifying what is not a function of God's family, and correcting misguided ecclesiology and church practices, and even contending with notions that misrepresents God's family, which includes confronting alternative and virtual realities of the church. The integrity of God's whole is an ongoing concern of family love, and this relational

involvement certainly cannot be enacted without first experiencing its relational reality in face-to-face relational progression with the Trinity.

Also intruding, however, on Jesus' relational path specifically for the relational progression of his disciples, is reductionism and its counter-relational workings. The ongoing influence of reductionism is more commonly subtle, which imposes limits and constraints on our persons and relationships that counter the relational progression. Therefore, Jesus made this **relational contingency** for his true disciples:

> Integrated with the irreplaceable relational structure in John 15:1-11 for all his disciples, Jesus made nonnegotiable our reciprocal involvement in the primacy to "*dwell* [*meno*, abide] in my *relational terms for relationship together*; and you will know the *embodied* Truth *in face-to-face relationship*, and the Truth will set you free *from your limits and constraints*" (Jn 8:31-32).

There is no relational progression to belong in the whole-ly Trinity's family without redemption, and there is no redemption to be reconciled together as family without relationally receiving and responding face-to-face to Jesus' family love in his functional shift (Jn 8:35-36). This transformation, however, is the relational outcome only of following Jesus' whole person behind the temple curtain to have the veil removed for intimate face-to-face relationship together with the whole-ly Trinity and with each other as family in the Trinity's likeness (2 Cor 3:18; Eph 2:14-18).

Jesus certainly understood our human relational condition—specifically our tendency to labor in ontological simulations and functional illusions of God's family (as in Jn 8:33,35,39,42; 14:9), which he exposed in his post-ascension critique of churches (Rev 2-3). This further raises the penetrating questions: "Where are you?" "What are you doing here?" "Don't you know me after all this time?" They get to the heart of our condition and the status of its direction.

Progression or Regression?

To be relationally involved face to face with the whole Word (i.e. in relational terms, not referential terms), and thus to relationally know the embodied Truth only in relational terms, are both indispensable for the complete Christology necessary that constitutes the full soteriology of what we are saved *to*. Therefore, the relational progression does not and cannot stop at just being a disciple, or end with liberation as it did for many of God's people in the OT. The prevailing influences from the surrounding contexts—most notably present in the human relational condition shaping relationships together, yet existing even in gatherings of God's people—either prevent further movement in the relational progression or diminish deeper involvement in its primacy of relationship. God's salvific act of liberation is never an end in itself but an integral part of God's creative action for new relationship together in wholeness—the distinguished Face's relational work of *siym* and *shalôm* that brings this relational outcome (Num 6:26). Our human bias (contextualized and commonized) for the secondary preoccupies or embeds us away from the primary composed only by relationship together. This subtle

bias is evident where church practice overemphasizing deliverance and other liberation theories are found lacking in this primacy, and thus which promote, reinforce or sustain a truncated soteriology. For example, when the people of Israel were frequently seeking deliverance from YHWH, they usually pursued neither it nor God for the purpose of deeper involvement in the primacy of relationship together in wholeness. Then, for what purpose are we delivered or liberated?

The embodied Truth (of the Way and Life) in the trinitarian relational process of family love is the fulfillment of the whole-ly Trinity's thematic relational response, nothing less than the strategic shift and no substitutes for the tactical and functional shifts of the Trinity's relational work of grace. And the full profile of God's vulnerable presence and relational involvement distinguished within the Truth as Subject are solely for the primacy of this relational outcome. If our gospel is based on 'the Bible alone' (*sola scriptura*) but does not encompass this whole relational outcome, then the good news is selectively composed not on the basis of the whole Word (cf. Jn 5:39-40). From the beginning, liberation (redemption, *peduyim*, *pedut*, *pedyom*, Ps 111:9) was initially enacted by YHWH for the Israelites in contingency with the Abrahamic covenant's primacy of relationship together (the relational outcome of *shakan*, "dwell," Ex 29:46). To be redeemed was never merely to be set free as an end in itself (cf. Gal 5:13) but freed to be involved in the relational progression together. And all our secondary matters, however important, need to be integrated into the primary purpose and function of this primacy.

Moreover, redemption is conclusively relationship-specific to the whole-ly Trinity's family together on just this God's whole relational terms, which are the trinitarian relational context and process the Truth embodied. Jesus' relational words must be understood in the whole context of the Trinity's thematic relational action as well as in their immediate context. By the strategic, tactical and functional shifts of the Trinity's relational work of grace, the Subject of Jesus' person fulfilled whole-ly God's relational response to the human condition, thereby also defining the **contextual contingency** of the above familiar words of his relational contingency. Jesus' relational language is unequivocal:

> The embodied Truth is the only relational means available for his followers to be liberated from their enslavements to reductionism (or freed from a counter-relational condition, Jn 8:33-34), for the innermost relationship-specific purpose and outcome, so that they can be adopted as the Father's own daughters and sons and, therefore, be distinguished as intimately belonging to his family permanently (*meno*, 8:34-36; cf. *shakan* above).

Yet, and this is a crucial distinction for the church, belonging in family together has significance only in likeness of the Trinity; and the Word and Truth embodied the Way and the Life of the Trinity in order to intimately disclose in face-to-face relational progression this likeness for family together (Jn 14:6; 17:26), so that there would be no confusion about the nature and identity of the church family (cf. Jn 8:38-39,41,47).

Therefore, Christians and churches are faced with this provocative reality, which is jolting to our existing condition and its direction: With the Good News of this essential relational progression to wholeness together, there is only one exclusive whole relational

outcome that emerges and unfolds from the whole-ly Trinity's relational response to our human condition. Accordingly, we are accountable to be distinguished integrally in our theology and practice for **what we are saved *for* and *to***.

It is an ongoing issue and problematic for Jesus followers when the relational progression of these integral shifts is condensed into our theology, and thereby limits, constrains or prevents its function in our practice. Such condensed theology and lacking functional practice are subtle indicators of reductionism shaping our theology and practice. This was the critical issue for the doctrinally-sound church at Ephesus, whose primary focus on theology in the Rule of Faith rendered their practice without the primacy of relationship—thus "you have abandoned *the primacy of* the love you had at first" (Rev 2:4). Abandoned (*aphiemi*, to leave, let go or quit) is the relationship-specific condition of orphans, which directly counters the relational reality of adoption that Jesus constituted in the relational progression (Jn 14:18; Heb 2:11-13).

The relational reality of the whole-ly Trinity's family is the maturity that the Hebrews manifesto challenges us to embrace in the relational progression of the Relationship of Faith (as in Heb 11); this progression will require ongoing clarification and correction from the Father in order for his family to fight against reductionism and grow in wholeness together (Heb 12:1-11). Therefore, whenever church practice is not involved in the primacy of relationship together in wholeness (not any kind of relationship) as the Trinity's family, that church is engaged essentially in the counter-relational workings of reductionism. In the fragmentary condition of the church today—a misguided diversity in the global church on a variable relational path from whole-ly Jesus—we are faced inescapably with the church family's responsibility (as in Paul's *oikonomia*, Col 1:25) to account for what the whole-ly Trinity saves us *for*. Until we account for what we are saved for, we will not progress and mature in what we are saved *to*. In further reality, life is not static but dynamic, as is relationship. Accordingly, if we are not **progressing** in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes, then our persons and relationships are **regressing** in something less or some substitute. This is the hard reality facing us today that we cannot avoid by rendering it virtual—though we certainly can (and have) deny it with alternative facts.

As emerged and unfolds in the relational progression, the primacy of relationship essential to the Trinity and essential for us is composed only by face-to-face relationship together in the irreducible and nonnegotiable dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes. Face to face is the intrusive relational function that makes our persons uncomfortable at the least. The common response among Christians and churches is to diminish or minimalize such involvement—even if they know what God saves them for. The subtlety of this common response is to maintain relational distance—for example, in virtual or augmented ways that only simulate connection—which then essentially rejects Jesus in relational progression behind the curtain and remains engaged in practice in effect in front of the curtain. The reality of this subtle condition exists in the function of disciples with veiled faces who lack transformation—those followers likely laboring in ontological simulations and functional illusions of God's family.

This brings us back to convenience in theology and practice and to the distinguishing significance of Mary for us today. What did Jesus magnify in Mary, which also should continue to be magnified by all Christians in the global church today? In the relational progression of Mary (discussed previously), we see the face of Mary's whole

person unfolding to its full profile. She certainly had sanctioned basis to veil her face and to be measured in her relational involvement. Rather than maintain any relational distance, she seized opportunities to present her whole person in face-to-face relationship together with Jesus. Disregarding the common limits and constraints prevailing among the other disciples, she engaged the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes to be intimately involved without the veil, directly with Jesus' whole person as family together—even before this theology was composed for practice. In other words, Mary involved her whole person (nothing less) without the veil (no substitutes) in direct face-to-face relationship together with Jesus' whole-ly person; and she thereby enacted the relational outcome of the whole gospel even before Jesus completed his relational work in the relational progression behind the curtain to demolish the holy partition and remove the veil. Are you impressed yet with Mary as Jesus was?

The full profile of Mary's face progressed face to face only because the Good News of whole-ly Jesus penetrated to the heart of her person. Her relational progression, therefore, distinguished the gospel's whole relational outcome of what the whole-ly Trinity in the relational progression saves us for and to—in contrast and conflict with a gospel of truncated soteriology. The face of her relational progression, unfolding only from the relational outcome of the gospel, is the whole who, what and how of Mary that Jesus magnifies for (1) all who claim the same gospel, and thereafter (2) who follow his whole-ly person face to face in the same dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes. Is there justification, then, for Mary to be magnified today to distinguish whole disciples and their discipleship from the diverse condition of other disciples and their discipleship, just as the other disciples experienced in Mary's face-to-face presence?

The other disciples in Mary's narrative were influenced and shaped by the surrounding context, which biased their theology and practice in the disciples they were and how they followed Jesus. Mary was distinguished from them not because she was exceptional; Jesus expects from all his followers this relational outcome composed by the gospel. Her person and discipleship were distinguished, however, beyond what commonly existed and even prevailed in the surrounding context. That is, Mary embraced the **uncommon** composed by whole-ly Jesus, thus, unlike the other disciples, she was freed from the bias of the common. The effects of the others' bias on their theology and practice limited how they saw Jesus' person and their own persons, which was consequential for the state of their direction. Accordingly, with this skewed and fragmented perception, they constrained how they engaged their relationship together—most notably not giving primacy to face-to-face relationship together and thus not integrating their secondary matters into the only primary (as in PIP) that has significance to whole-ly Jesus (i.e. to the Trinity). Like the two disciples heading to Emmaus in a different direction than Jesus' relational path, the other disciples from Mary were on diverse paths that neither involved their whole persons nor connected with Jesus' whole person in face-to-face relationship together. Consequently, contrary to Mary, the other disciples (and all those in likeness) were not progressing in the primary but subtly regressing in the secondary.

The difference between progression and regression is immeasurable, and the gap distinguishing progression from regression cannot be quantified by referential terms in our theology and practice. This makes us susceptible to opening the hermeneutic door ("Did God say that?") to alternative facts and realities—as in diverse interpretations and

proof-texting—that are merely substitutes in subtle regression. For example, the subtlety of regression also emerges from a modern bias in discipleship today, which confuses progression with innovation—apparent especially in worship practice that gathers many in eventful celebration with little (if any) relational significance. Innovative alternatives are unique substitutes for the relational progression and have the same relational consequences experienced as if in front of the curtain.

As Jesus intimately told Peter face to face later at his footwashing, therefore, "Unless *you are relationally involved with me face to face*, you have no share with me *in my whole person and thus in relational progression with the whole-ly Trinity*" (Jn 13:8). Still a yet-to-be distinguished disciple in his discipleship, Peter was at the pivotal juncture of what relational path he would follow:

> Will he be involved face to face with Jesus in the primacy of the relational progression, and progress in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes? Or will he be engaged, occupied, even preoccupied in the secondary of his theology and practice, and thereby regress in the limits and constraints of anything less and any substitutes?

The pivotal juncture, in other words, is either progression in or regression from face-to-face relationship together, which is further defined by the essential question: **To be whole or not to be?**

This pivotal juncture is critical to the human condition and essential for the defining ontology and determining function of all persons and their relationships. The human condition, our human condition, is the basic relational condition "to be apart" from God's whole (as constituted in Gen 2:18); and this prevailing relational condition has become increasingly subtle and pervasive in the spectrum of human relationships—including among Christians and in churches. Therefore, all Christians and churches are confronted by the reality that, like Peter, we are all at the pivotal juncture of progression or regression, and what relational path we will follow either to be whole with nothing less and no substitutes, or not to be with anything less and any substitutes.

The inescapable reality also facing us at this pivotal juncture is provoking not only for the diverse condition of our theology and practice but for all those with good intentions practicing more:

> The focus on the secondary always relegates us to regression in anything less and any substitutes of wholeness. In ways not always recognized, understood or just ignored, the relational consequence for Christians and churches is "to be apart" from the whole-ly Trinity and from each other as new family together in wholeness. This relational condition "to be apart" in all its subtle diversity, then not surprisingly, reflects, reinforces and sustains the human condition of all persons and relationships, even as the gospel is proclaimed.

This reality is obviously difficult to accept in the context of our faith, but the burden of proof rests in our practice of faith to distinguish our persons and relationships beyond the human condition and thus deeper than what is common in our context.

"Follow me" certainly has been oversimplified in our theology and practice—even with affirming Jesus Christ as the only mediator between God and humanity (as in *solus Christus*, Christ alone). This oversimplification is reflected, reinforced and sustained in the diverse condition of disciples and discipleship. In his essential relational progression, Jesus integrates all his followers together by declaring "I will not leave you as orphans." His penetrating call to us today is to gather together all the relational orphans occupying, prevailing and serving in the global church to be adopted into the Trinity's whole-ly family by relationally belonging to nothing less and no substitutes.[5]

"Listen! I am standing at the *church* door, **knocking**…*with* the Spirit: (Rev 3:20,22). When our response to Jesus' call (1) integrates his essential relational progression with the whole-ly Trinity and (2) encompasses our relational progression to the new church family in whole-ly likeness of the Trinity, we then experience the relational outcome of the whole gospel to be transformed as his whole disciples following him in whole theology and practice by the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes. And like Mary, we progress in the uncommon identity of **whole-ly disciples**.

[5] An expanded discussion on the global church is found in my study *The Global Church Engaging the Nature of Sin and the Human Condition: Reflecting, Reinforcing, Sustaining or Transforming* (Global Church Study, 2016). Online at http://www.4X12.org.

Chapter 5 The Uncommon Identity of Whole-ly Disciples

You thought that I was one just like yourself.
Psalm 50:21

Instead, as he who called you is *uncommon,* be *uncommon* yourselves.
1 Peter 1:15

My wife and I live in the high-density earthquake zone of the Los Angeles area. Seismologists tell us that we are long overdue for the 'big one' to hit our area. When I think about the big one coming, I get concerned and even wish we lived elsewhere. The fact is that I rarely think about it happening. While we've made the usual preparations, the coming big one is an existing (imminent) reality that perhaps I manage with denial.

The subtle **process of denial** is a common practice among Christians who don't want to think about or face inconvenience, uncomfortable and contrary realities in life. One way to deny these realities is to re-form them with alternative facts, half-truths or biased interpretations—the big earthquake won't happen in my presence. Another denial method is to break up such a reality into untruths and false reports or fake news, thereby decomposing its significance to warrant our attention. For example, can you deliberate on the reality that in their discipleship Jesus' disciples have reflected, reinforced or sustained the human condition? To comprehend this reality is not trying to imagine an alternative or virtual reality. Rather this is the existing reality of disciples commonly living in reduced theology and practice.

Can you comprehend Peter being called Satan by Jesus because "you are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on *God's relational terms and purpose* but on human *terms*" (Mt 16:23). "Setting your mind" (*phroneō*) exposed Peter's mindset shaped by the common prevailing in Peter's surrounding context. Jesus unfolded his relational progression to fulfill the sacrifice behind the curtain to the Holy Place in order to tear down the holy partition to complete the gospel's whole relational outcome (Heb 9:12; 10:19-22). For Peter, however, "This must never happen to *the Messiah*" (Mt 16:22). In his bias shaped by the common of human contextualization, Peter had to deny the reality essential to make whole the human condition. Why would Peter engage in so consequential a denial, which even placed the blame on Jesus "to rebuke him" openly?

The importance of understanding our bias in defining who and what we are as disciples and its consequence for how our discipleship is can be neither overestimated nor overemphasized. Peter's bias was further exposed at Jesus' footwashing, which was clear evidence that his bias wasn't changed since being called Satan. But, in fact, Peter interpreted this new face of Jesus to support his old bias of what Jesus would never do; this involves a process of discrimination and stereotyping known as **confirmation bias**: the pattern to interpret or selectively remember information in such a way that confirms and reinforces what we already believe, without testing its validity. Even deeper, the bias

Peter engaged demonstrated how Peter functioned as a relational orphan in his discipleship—still "to be apart" from whole relationship together face to face. Therefore, Peter reflected, reinforced and to this extent sustained the human condition. And all those having a similar bias shaped by what's common—thus whose mindset (*phroneō*) is not set on the primary of God's whole relational terms—also function subtly as relational orphans. This condition should not be considered sympathetically, because like Peter, relational orphans essentially reflect, reinforce and/or sustain the deeper reality of the relational condition "to be apart" from the primacy of new relationship together in wholeness—in spite of ontological simulations and functional illusions appearing to the contrary. This reality is the common identity prevailing in our diverse condition of disciples and discipleship, which exposes where our mindset is set on.

How do we reconcile our existing condition with the gospel that we all claim? There is another reality in life that all of us encounter: When you are exposed to something long enough, it tends to be accepted as true even though originally it may not have been, or at least its validity was initially in question.[1] Likewise, when Christians have heard variations of the Good News long enough, it often becomes their accepted gospel even though the variation was in effect an alternative reality—perhaps fake news based on alternative facts. The reality we are faced with here is **the commonizing influence of human life** and its specific commonization of the gospel and its outcome of disciples and their discipleship. In other words, the common existing in human life in general and in our surrounding context in particular has become the prevailing determinant shaping our practice if not our theology.

Bias For or Against the Common

There is a growing trend in theology today that affirms the diversity of biblical views in the global church. For example, this affirmation is highlighted in the recent issue of Fuller Theological Seminary's magazine, which provost, dean and biblical scholar Joel Green introduced with the following: "we bring ourselves, with all of the textures and hues and flourishes of our humanity, to the Bible. We inhabit Scripture in different ways. Scripture challenges us and encourages us in different ways." Green embraces this diversity with the conclusion: "Taken together, though—by the church across time and around the globe—we are drawn closer to hearing and understanding the big picture of what God is saying and doing through his Word."[2]

One of the theological benefits of listening to global voices is the chastening effect it has on Western theology, and the corrective efforts made on the West's imperialism in Christian theology and practice throughout the global church. On the other hand, there is a clarification and correction also needed for this diversity in order not to reflect, reinforce and repeat the same epistemological, hermeneutic, ontological and relational shortcomings that commonly compose Western theology and practice, both

[1] See, for example, a recent study (working paper) from Yale University by Gordon Pennycook, Tyrone Cannon and David Rand, "Prior Exposure Increases Perceived Accuracy of Fake News". Online: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2958246.
[2] Joel B. Green, "Our Culturally Shaped Lenses" in *Fuller Magazine*, Issue #8, 2017, 3.

past and present. Before we can celebrate diversity in the global church, we must **(1)** be accountable for the biased influence we all exert from our particular surrounding contexts that has shaped us in the process of contextualization—**the contextualized bias**. Then, we must deeper still **(2)** be redeemed from the biased influence we all demonstrate from the common of reductionism composing the human context, which has had the subtle primacy to define our ontology and determine our function in the process of commonization—**the commonized bias**. The process of contextualization has been misunderstood in our theology and practice, and the process of commonization has been ignored or simply resigned to or accepted as an assumed reality. The consequence has been continued distortions rendered by our contextualized and commonized biases, the diverse views of which we cannot assume to be different angles of God's big picture.

In order to affirm any interpretation of Scripture emerging from a particular context, we must account for its contextualized bias and ensure that that bias has not gained primacy over God's relational context, and thereby gained hermeneutic (interpretive) control over the relational terms and process of God's Word. In God's communicative action disclosed by the Word, the text of the Bible has never composed apart from God's relational context; and the nonnegotiable primacy of God's context always renders interpretation of the text contingent not on the diversity of readers but on the whole relational terms of God's relational process to engage us in relationship together. The presumed primacy given to any form of our contextualized bias prevents this relational connection with God to understand what and who God discloses in the human context, and how God is involved both with us and in the big picture. Furthermore, our commonized bias either limits or prevents us from seeing the full profile of God's face, and from experiencing the presence and involvement of God face to face.

Contrary to Green's assumption above, understanding God's big picture—the integrating process of *syniemi* (cf. Mk 8:17-21)—does not emerge from the global quantity of diverse interpretations, nor is this understanding gained from the sum of global diversity. In his above introduction, Green uses Justo Gonzalez's metaphor of looking at a landscape for reading the Bible. Since we all see the landscape differently, seeing only parts of it without seeing the whole landscape, Green insists on the need to take all the views together for the big picture. Yet, I assert that a landscape is an incongruent metaphor for the face of God who is present and involved, and for what is necessary to have the full profile of God's face that composes the whole gospel. This big picture consists of neither various portraits nor a collection of snapshots that could be taken from the Bible. All of us see the same face if we indeed see God; we may not all emphasize or like the same features of the Face but we still see the same Face. As with viewing any person, if we don't see the same Face we are in effect viewing another God—whom we cannot count on to be "the same yesterday and today and forever *for all of us in the faith*" (Heb 13:8).

Moreover, the Face is not an Object merely to observe like a still picture but only the Subject whose full profile cannot be understood by the sum of mere partial views. The big picture of the whole gospel is composed by the Face's presence and involvement as Subject; and this whole picture in dynamic profile emerges from the relational outcome of whole understanding (*synesis* from *syniemi*) that integrates the specific knowledge (*epignosis*) of God disclosed by the embodied "face of Jesus Christ" (as Paul

illuminated, 2 Cor 4:6; Col 2:2-3). The early disciples lacked this integrated understanding of the full profile of Jesus, in spite of the quantity of their diverse observations of the Word (Mk 8:17-21; Jn 14:9). How could this disparity of interpretation and lack of understanding happen with Jesus' main disciples? And if this was the condition of their theology and practice, how can we have confidence in and affirm the diversity of theology and practice in the global church?

The Face once again faces all of us with what has subtly gained primacy in the theology and practice of our persons, relationships and churches. To be involved, however, in the primacy of face-to-face relationship together with God for the above epistemological and hermeneutic outcome, we must also be redeemed from the limits and constraints of our most basic bias, our commonized bias which has subtly defined our ontology and determined our function in the common terms of reductionism.

We all certainly are not alike and have distinct differences. This diverse condition nevertheless still involves only secondary aspects of our identity, aspects which are expressed by what signify **'the veil' of our identity**. To be involved in relationship together with the Face in the primacy of face to face requires the veil of all our secondary differences to be removed, so that "all of us with unveiled faces…are being transformed into the same image *and likeness of the Trinity for face-to-face relationship together*" (as Paul made definitive, 2 Cor 3:18). As long as the veil of our differences remains, we do not have the relational connection to know and understand the full profile of the Trinity's presence and involvement, nor are we in our persons, relationships and churches transformed into the Trinity's image and likeness. And, in spite of any avoidance or denial of the existing reality of the veil, the inescapable relational consequences are fragmentary theology and practice in the condition of reduced ontology and function. Even then, these consequences are likely engaged in ontological simulations and functional illusions that are presumed to be correct and significant but are not on the same relational path as Jesus, and thus that in effect reflect, reinforce and sustain the human relational condition.

In other words, therefore, we cannot affirm any interpretation of Scripture until this clarification and correction are made by the whole relational terms and process of the Word, whose ongoing relational outcome puts the process of contextualization into its primary context and exposes the process of commonization for its transformation to wholeness. What integrally unfolds to negate the bias *for* (as in affirming) the common is the distinguished bias *against* the common—that is, *the distinguishing bias* with-in *the uncommon.*

The bias for the common is most evident in an underlying theological anthropology that subtly defines our persons and determines our relationships by reduced ontology and function. Reduced ontology and function is the common condition prevailing in all human contexts, without exception, and this inclusiveness is seductive or at least susceptible to being accepted as the norm even among Christians throughout the global church. This bias has been able to be sustained because underlying our reduced theological anthropology is a weak view of sin that does not encompass what Jesus saved us *from*. This inadequate view, which is the same lens underlying diversity in the church, does not acknowledge or cannot recognize **sin as reductionism**. Therefore, this bias commonizes our ontology and function to the existing measure(s) of our human contexts.

Each diverse context has its own secondary variation of this reduced condition, but all contexts have in common this underlying reduced ontology and function that define their persons and determine their relationships in fragmentary terms contrary to whole terms. There is no basis for affirmation of diversity in the global church as long as this bias for the common exists; and there will be no celebration of the global church until this commonized bias has been transformed to the distinguishing bias *with* and *in* the Uncommon.

The Distinguishing Bias *With* and *In* the Uncommon

God declared, not to inform us but to clarify, correct and challenge us: "You thought that I was one just like yourself" (Ps 50:21). God exposed this alternative reality among his people, which continues to exist today not explicitly in our theology but implicitly in our practice. The essential reality is that "I am holy" (*qādôsh*, Lev 11:44), who is separate from what is common and thus distinctly set apart from the common. The whole profile of God's holy face is distinguished by nothing less and no substitutes. The alternative reality reconstructs this essential reality with what is common, thereby reversing the basis for the reality of God and his people in effect with alternative facts (as in Ps 50:9-13). That is, the issue in this effort is not necessarily to "be like God" (as in the primordial garden, Gen 3:5) but rather this two-fold dynamic: (1) Shape God and relationship together subtly in our terms (perhaps in our image), and (2) determine our person as Jesus' disciples and our life in discipleship indirectly through the bias of our terms. The insurmountable difference that God magnifies is that God is whole and uncommon (whole-ly) in ontology and function, while the terms of our ontology and function are fragmentary and common.

The whole-ly God's presence and involvement are distinguished only by the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes. Our terms subtly engage in **the reverse dynamic of anything less and any substitutes**, which is assumed by our underlying bias influenced by the common. This commonized bias, for example, was evident when Samuel picked out the successor to lead God's kingdom; but the LORD clarified and corrected him with the essential reality that "*whole-ly God* does not see as *humans* see *and give priority accordingly*" (1 Sam 16:6-7). In technical terms, our bias presumes that God sees and thinks analogous to a human algorithm, which we then can duplicate by our individual and/or collective efforts. This bias emerged from the beginning of human history and set into motion the reverse dynamic of anything less and any substitutes for God's whole (Gen 3:5-7). Our terms today are merely modern substitutes, which at best can only simulate God's dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes with illusions in our theology and practice. The difference in these opposing dynamics was clearly demonstrated between Mary and the other disciples, and this also clarifies, corrects and challenges the reality of our identity as disciples in our discipleship.

Therefore, God unmistakably distinguished the uncommon as incompatible with the common and thus as incongruent in the common. On this basis, it is imperative that we "be *uncommon* for I am *uncommon*" (Lev 11:44)—set apart from the common by being distinguished with-in the Uncommon. This clarification and correction critically

composes the distinguishing bias *with* and *in* the Uncommon, who challenges the identity of who, what and how we are in order to be incompatible with the common and incongruent in the common—rather than an identity "**just like yourself**."

To be compatible *with* the Uncommon and congruent *in* the uncommon of God is determined only by the whole relational terms of God's relational process. This means that to be uncommon (or holy) is not about *perfection*—as in spiritually, morally, ethically, and thereby to misunderstand sanctification—but *connection*, that is, relational connection that is compatible with the Uncommon because it is congruent in the uncommon of God. When perfection is integrated with being sanctified, it then has a place in our practice to be holy and also whole (inseparably whole-ly); but its theology must not be composed with a commonized bias of idealized notions.

The Hebrews discipleship manifesto clarifies that the relational progression of Jesus' relational work has sanctified us in the uncommon (Heb 10:10); and the relational outcome of this relational progression is to "make perfect" (*teleioo*) "those who are being made *uncommon*" (Heb 10:14, NIV). *Teleioo* means to complete the relational purpose of Jesus' relational work, which is fulfilled by wholeness in relationship together. The whole-ly relational process is the only way, truth and means to this relational outcome of *teleioo*. In his manifesto for discipleship, Jesus made imperative for our practice the relational work to "be *complete, mature* [*teleios*]" in likeness of how our whole-ly Father is present and involved in uncommon love (Mt 5:45-48). His relational imperative, then, for all disciples is to be whole and uncommon in our relational involvement of family love just as our Father is, in order to distinguish our identity as his daughters and sons in family together. Therefore, perfection is always secondary to the primacy of relational connection with the Uncommon. Yet, this relational connection only happens with-in the Uncommon, which composes the primacy of relationship together distinguished only by the integral relational terms, language, context and process of the whole-ly God.

When Christians are not misguided by misunderstanding perfection, there typically is a common assumption Christians make about relationship with God: Because of God's grace there is room for our imperfection, and thus there is space to exercise our personal interests, desires and other related terms; likewise, since God is loving and forgiving, there is flexibility in relationship together—if not presuming the relationship is negotiable. Jesus had a contrary approach to such differences. To Peter, Jesus said that he functioned as Satan, because he focused on the common at the expense of the uncommon (Mt 16:23). Jesus added later that Peter had no direct involvement in their relationship together, because Peter gave primacy to the common over the uncommon (Jn 13:8).

God's relational response of grace and relational involvement of love distinguished the uncommon in order for us to be transformed from the common to the whole-ly, without which the influence of the common will pervade and prevail in our persons, relationships and churches—even if by default veiled in our good intentions. The Good News of God's whole-ly presence and involvement is only for this whole-ly relational outcome (Heb 2:11; 10:10,14). Therefore, the Hebrews manifesto makes this relational imperative for discipleship: "Pursue *wholeness in your function* with everyone, and the *uncommon* without which no one will see the Lord *face to face without the veil in intimate relationship together*" (Heb 12:14, cf. 10:20-22).

Hebrews illuminates for all of Jesus' followers the holy partition in relationship with the whole-ly God, who is inaccessible to anyone or anything common. The holy partition signifies the pivotal juncture in relationship with God. If we haven't progressed past the holy partition, our relationship with God is influenced, shaped and occupied by the common, and thus subtly engaged in the reverse dynamic of anything less and any substitutes. Claiming the cross does not give us access to face-to-face relationship with the whole-ly God without embracing Jesus' relational work tearing down the holy partition. Since such a claim apparently is the prevailing condition among Christians, the common still existing in effect has become the acceptable practice to define disciples and determine their discipleship. This relational condition is unacceptable in the Hebrews manifesto, not to mention clarified, exposed and corrected in Jesus' manifesto definitive for all his followers (Mt 5-7).

Hopefully, the whole-ly relational outcome of the gospel clarifies, corrects and challenges us to change any common assumptions we have about relationship with God and being Jesus' disciples. This, however, requires a distinguishing bias that does not defer to the common's influence. As has been necessary for God's whole-ly family, "You are to distinguish between the holy and the common" (Lev 10:10, cf. Eze 22:26).

Nathaniel asked in his bias whether anything good (*agathos*, beneficial, significant, distinguished, thus whole and uncommon) can come out of *what's only common* (Jn 1:46). If Jesus were not clearly distinguished from the common, the answer would certainly be NO. Since Jesus' presence and involvement were enacted apart from the shaping influence of the common, his ontology and function were unmistakably distinguished by the uncommon, that is, distinguished whole and uncommon. This essential reality is the whole-ly who and what Nathaniel discovered in his bias. It is unlikely that Nathaniel exercised a bias in the uncommon; and more likely that he expressed initially a commonized bias but was open enough to allow the uncommon to be discovered, experienced and thereby be responded to beyond the limits and constraints of the common. What we witness forming for Nathaniel further compels our need for what we see being composed in the above discussion, which unfolds only on this basis:

> What is essential to follow whole-ly Jesus is for all disciples to openly have and ongoingly exercise in their discipleship the distinguishing bias emerging from face-to-face relationship *with* the Uncommon and unfolding unambiguously apart from the common and thus *in* the uncommon—**the distinguishing bias *with-in* the Uncommon**, which does not defer to the common's influence but integrally exposes any existing bias *for* the common and acts *against* it for transformation to the whole-ly.

Certainly Peter struggled with the influence of the common in his discipleship that composed his bias as a disciple. So, it is relationally significant that his own relational progression was complete and matured (*teleios*) to transform his ontology and function to be whole-ly, and thereby further illuminate the whole-ly theology and practice for persons, relationships and the global church (1 Pet 1:13-16; 2:9-12). And for this distinguishing bias with-in the Uncommon, we must thank the whole-ly Mary whom Jesus magnified for taking the lead in order for the gospel's whole-ly relational outcome to be the essential reality for all of Jesus' followers. Her everyday life functioned in the

dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes—in contrast to the others' prevailing function in the reverse dynamic of anything less and any substitutes—whereby she distinguished the uncommon identity for all disciples.

Changing to the New and the Uncommon

Change in human life can be natural, unnatural or uncommon. The change in Mary was considered unnatural by the contextualized and commonized biases of the other disciples. Perhaps today her change is considered natural and thus of no greater significance to highlight for the gospel and magnify to distinguish Jesus' followers. However perceived, change represents something different from what exists, and such change can be positive or negative—even a simulation of something new or an illusion of something better.

Like Mary, we all have opportunities to change, that is, to grow and mature in relational progression with Jesus, rather than avoid his essential progression and thereby resist change. When we don't resist change in our discipleship, the issue becomes the type of change needed that truly signifies the relational progression distinguishing his disciples. The so-called progress witnessed in human contexts has often been merely a simulation of something new or an illusion of something better, and such progress is typically duplicated by Christians. The maturity of *teleios* (the imperative of Mt 5:48), however, involves the change that is relationship-specific to the whole-ly God and, therefore, progresses only in what's whole and uncommon. This progress then requires the change to be **the new**, not a simulation of something new. To say the least, simulations and illusions of progress are alternative/virtual realities that regress under the common assumptions of progress. In real fact, they are regressions specifically in our relational condition, which emerge from, reinforce and sustain the human condition.

The pursuit of progress in human achievement is merely an effort in self-determination that defines persons and determines relationships based on reduced ontology and function. Even with good intentions to improve the human condition—for example, as observed in the excessive interventions of medical progress to prolong life—human intervention should not be confused with change to the new composed only by what's whole and uncommon. Such attempts to reconstruct our human condition are always faced with the limits and constraints of their underlying bias—that is, a condition shaped by the common's reductionism, which may achieve results that only appear to be new. This is where things become ambiguous in our theology and practice, and when it is critical for us to make distinctions. In the absence of whole ontology and function, two persistent and pervasive conditions converge for our human condition to prevail regardless even of good intentions: (1) the persistence of self-determination as the alternative for redefining persons and determining human life, and (2) the pervasive need for ontological simulation and functional illusion to support and maintain, even to justify, engagement in self-determination despite its limits and constraints. This creates a theological fog for our practice that obscures engaging in regression, which Jesus exposed and corrected in his manifesto for discipleship.

Therefore, all of Jesus' followers should not conflate 'seeking to be new' with 'pursuing progress of something new'; the former seeks his person in relationship (as in Mt 6:33) while the latter primarily pursues results in situations, making the relationship secondary (as in many innovations of ministry and worship). Our discipleship needs to maintain this distinction in order to be distinguished in the new and the uncommon for our persons, relationships and churches.

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

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

Reduced human ontology and function can never achieve wholeness because the reality of its irremediable (not irreversible) condition, however variable, can never be whole. Human intervention, whether at the systemic level or interpersonal level, cannot go beyond the limits and constraints of its context and its defining ontology and function.

Thus, human intervention is embedded in a contextualized bias and commonized bias that skew its efforts. This is indispensable to understand for the tower of Babel and for parallel efforts today to construct unity, wholeness and the whole. In relational response to the human condition, God deconstructed Babel in order to clarify their illusion and correct their simulation, and thus to expose the influence of reductionism composing their human condition in reduced ontology and function. Throughout human history—from Egypt, Babylon through the Roman empire, Great Britain to the United States and former Soviet Union, and now likely China—we have witnessed the recurring dynamic of Babel unfold, with God continuing to clarify and correct our illusions and simulations in relational response to our human condition in reduced ontology and function. As long as we don't pay attention to our condition and consequently do not respond to God's pursuit of us, then human development in our persons, relationships and churches will not grow and mature in wholeness; and we remain enclosed epistemologically, hermeneutically, ontologically, functionally and relationally within the limits and constraints of our condition. Can we justify this state among us, in all its diversity, as the gospel and simply accept it as sufficient for our faith to experience?

Just as Babel confused their efforts for all humanity to progress with the change of what's new and uncommon, our modern history has evolved to further embed us in this confusion. The so-called progress in the present foretells perhaps an ominous future, namely in technological achievement. Advancement in computer technology has emerged prominently with robots to simulate, substitute for and replace human activity, which is certainly something new in the human context and uncommon to human make-up. What compounds this progress and complicates its change is the enigma of artificial intelligence (AI). This technology is becoming increasingly sophisticated such that AI is soon anticipated to achieve artificial consciousness to supplement, compete with and perhaps dominate human consciousness. In considering this outcome, this so-called progress in what's new and uncommon can change the world, yet not to improve the human condition but at the expense of humans who become expendable. How this scenario unfolds will depend less on AI and more on the essential reality of those truly changing to the new and the uncommon—that is, real persons who are transformed from inner out (not programmed from outer in) to be new and therefore whole and uncommon.

Whether we recognize it in humanity in general or acknowledge it in ourselves as Christians in particular, the human condition thirsts for change. When the focus is on changing to the new and the uncommon—not merely something new and uncommon—it centers on the change that Jesus enacted for the human condition, our human condition. Yet, Christians have struggled with embracing this change and to have their identity distinguished by this change. In bringing change to the new, on the one hand, Jesus was welcomed because expectations were high for the Messiah (or Savior) to fulfill this change. However, on the other hand, the change to the new enacted by Jesus was both whole and uncommon, and this change to the new was too uncommon for many to claim, much less have their identity distinguished in. This resistance or struggle even for Christians is not surprising, since Jesus said "no one *can* put *the* new into old *and common ways of thinking, seeing and doing things in their theology and practice*"—as in "putting new wine into old wineskins" (Lk 5:37-39).

Jesus introduced his disciples to the change he brought by giving them a taste of the *new wine*. In a defining table fellowship, Jesus led his disciples in the relational involvement that initiated the change to the new. He and his disciples celebrated in relationship together rather than engage in the common practice of fasting with all the other diverse disciples in the surrounding context (Lk 5:33-36). Their relational involvement distinguished the primary from and over the secondary. The change Jesus established for the new integrally composed his disciples in a different identity in two significant ways:

1. Traditional disciples in those days were rabbinic students, whose central focus was on the teachings of a rabbi. This information formed their way of thinking, seeing and doing what was important for them to become teachers also. Jesus changed the identity of his disciples to a new discipleship that was distinguished uncommon from the prevailing common and ordinary way.
2. The new discipleship was more than uncommon in the sense of being out of the ordinary. What Jesus established was neither innovative nor necessarily anti-Establishment. Jesus enacted his whole person from inner out—beyond merely his teachings but not apart from them—in order for his disciples to experience the primacy of their whole persons in relationship together with his person. This primacy was never enacted by other rabbis, thus it was never experienced by their disciples nor engaged in their discipleship—all of whom were preoccupied with the secondary without integrating it into the primary (PIP-ing). In contrast for Jesus' disciples, this taste of new wine was beyond what his disciples could have imagined to "Follow me." The change to the new, therefore, is integrally whole and uncommon, and the relational progression of this **uncommon identity of whole-ly disciples** only unfolds in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes.

In spite of Jesus' early disciples having a taste of the new wine, they obviously struggled with being distinguished in this uncommon identity. The common kept reemerging because their contextualized and commonized biased ways of thinking, seeing and doing things in their theology and practice still needed to be transformed. Unlike the others, the new composed by the whole was not a point of contention for these disciples. But, because this new was undeniably uncommon—that is, so out of the ordinary—they didn't take it seriously enough to stand out unambiguously in this identity, just as light in the darkness does (Mt 5:14-16; Jn 8:12). Likewise, since the identity of Jesus' disciples is different from all other disciples—composed by **the essential difference**—our identity has to be both uncommon and whole.

The difference of our identity that Jesus changed to the new was not about being innovative, and was more than unique. The new identity counters an **assimilated identity** shaped by the common of the surrounding context, which included the norms of religious tradition and of culture. In its depth, what the new identity counters is the human condition of reduced ontology and function. When Jesus was confronted about his disciples not following the traditional norms of their religious identity, he clearly defined the whole person from inner out as the essential identity of human ontology and function—which countered the common identity from outer in (Mt 15:1-20). Even after

the taste of new wine, Peter still didn't understand the essential difference distinguishing the identity of who, what and how they were as Jesus' disciples (15:15-16). Essentially, the whole of this new identity was too uncommon for those in any assimilated identity, with the issue always revolving around the condition of our ontology and function.

This essential difference also raises the subtle issue of inconvenience for our theology and practice, which puts further pressure on our bias to use old wineskins (as Peter did). This is why Jesus said that many will conclude "the old is good, *good enough, or even better*" (Lk 5:39). Old wineskins are the relational consequence of becoming embedded in an ontological lie from reductionism that imposes an identity deficit, in which a person (or together as church) struggles to erase any deficit by efforts of self-determination in what one can do (e.g. fast). The more control one can exercise over this process, the more certain the results of one's efforts can be expected. The pursuit of certainty, however, requires a reduction epistemologically, ontologically and relationally in order for the control needed to succeed in self-determination—notably narrowing the epistemic field to the probable and minimizing vulnerability in relationships. This is how God's terms for covenant relationship outlined in the *torah* have been reduced to a behavioral code, how persons seek to become justified by what they do, how Jesus' teachings become disembodied to mere principles to follow, how the new wine gets put into an old wineskin. The nature of old wineskins, therefore, is the nature of the human condition *in* its reduced ontology and function, seeking self-determination and self-justification *by* its reduced ontology and function in order to overcome the deficit *for* its reduced ontology and function—a vicious cycle enslaving human persons. And, accordingly, old wineskins emerge from an ambiguous or shallow identity necessitating the veil in relationships, because such an identity fails to engage the integral identity formation outlined by Jesus in the Beatitudes (Mt 5:3-10), and as a substitute pursues a reduced righteousness from outer in rather than whole righteousness from inner out (contrary to Mt 5:20 in Jesus' manifesto for his followers).

Given the change that Jesus embodied, enacted and established, however, all his disciples are faced with this irreducible and nonnegotiable reality: For our identity to be distinct from the common—with its fragmentary condition and its reductions of human ontology and function—requires our persons, relationships and churches to be the whole distinguished only with-in the Uncommon. This is the whole-ly identity of the persons whom the Father seeks for face-to-face relationship together in him family (Jn 4:23-24). Engaging in anything less and any substitutes is the reverse dynamic of regression, which always impedes or prevents the relational progression of his whole-ly disciples who are relationally involved in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes.

The primacy of changing to the new converges in the new covenant for persons and relationships with the whole-ly God. At their pivotal table fellowship together, Jesus made this new covenant definitive for all his disciples (Lk 22:20). This change enacted by Jesus tore down the holy partition and removed the veil for the primacy of face-to-face relationship with the whole-ly God (Heb 8:6; 9:15; 10:19-20; 2 Cor 3:16). In the antecedent new wine table fellowship, Jesus addressed the juxtaposition of "eat and drink" (the new) and "fast and pray" (the old), which gave his disciples the functional taste of the pivotal change unfolding to its whole outcome. The shift from the old to the new is more than a paradigm shift but the transformation that emerges from Jesus' anticipated sacrifice behind the curtain for the relational outcome of new relationship

together in wholeness with the veil removed. Their new wine table fellowship anticipated their new covenant relationship without the veil such that they could enjoy the vulnerable presence and intimate involvement of Jesus without the constraints of the old. The veil can be understood as follows: the gap between the universe and that which is beyond, the barrier between human limits and the transcendent God, the qualitative distance between the human heart and the heart of God, and the relational distance between the human person and the whole-ly God. The absence of the veil, then, is critical for new covenant relationship together; and any new wine table fellowship today must continue to be solely a function of this new creation. Any other *solas* (i.e. grace alone, faith alone) only have significance as functions of the new creation alone.

Therefore, this relationship-specific primacy is constituted only by the new, and thereby integrates the relational involvement of changing to the new that is whole integrally with and in the uncommon Jesus (with-in the Uncommon). Changing to the primacy of this new relationship together—constituted without the holy partition and veil by the relational response of the vulnerable face of whole-ly God (Num 6:26; 2 Cor 4:6)—would be good news for all in the human condition to claim, especially relational orphans in the church, or so it would seem. After all, who wouldn't want their persons and relationships to be whole rather than fragmentary?

Regardless, this primacy of the new has been a difficult change for Christians to make or progress in, because the primacy of the new covenant (1) involves whole persons in face-to-face relationship together with the whole-ly God that (2) requires persons and relationship together to be also uncommon for compatibility with whole-ly God. Even if you want to be whole, since the new is so out of the ordinary are you still willing to sustain changing to the new in order to be whole (cf. Lk 13:34; 19:41-42)? Taking on this whole-ly identity has been a **circular problem** composed by this reality: On the one hand, to be whole requires by necessity (not by obligation) to be uncommon like Jesus (as Jesus prayed, Jn 17:16-17); on the other hand, to be uncommon by nature necessitates to be whole like Jesus (as Jesus prayed, Jn 17:19-23, and promised, 14:27). This understanding creates a circular problem—being whole *as* living uncommon and living uncommon *as* being whole—that demands more than many Christians want to give for involvement in the primary. In other words, this circular problem subtly influences Christians to substitute for the primary by directing their focus and investing their practice in the secondary matters of faith. The relational consequence is that even though they may have illusions of relational progression in the new, in reality they are only simulating what amounts to regression in the old.

The subtlety of shifting from the primary to the secondary is obscured when engagement in the secondary is justified as primary for our faith. Reflect again on what Jesus magnified in Mary. Mary was vulnerably involved in relational work (*ergon*), which should not be confused with being occupied in "a good service" (Mk 14:6). In discipleship, when following Jesus is shaped by human terms, the line between the primacy of relationship and the primacy of the secondary becomes indistinguishable. In Jesus' paradigm for serving, however, he is clearly definitive that the work of serving him (*diakoneo*) must by its nature emerge from and thereby be secondary to "follow me" (*akoloutheo*) in the primacy of face-to-face relationship together (Jn 12:26). The subjunctive mood of *diakoneo* is contingent on the imperative of *akoloutheo*. *Diakoneo* by itself is focused on giving primacy to the work to be done (as in Martha's *diakoneo*),

which, however important the work may be (or perhaps perceived to be), is always secondary to the primary involvement of *akoloutheo* with the person in relationship (as in Mary's *akoloutheo*). When Jesus unequivocally defined the "need for only one" priority (Lk 10:42), the ongoing involvement in relational work based on the primacy of relationship became irreplaceable and nonnegotiable. All other work is secondary, and the (pre)occupation of anything less and any substitutes for relational work shifts the primary to the secondary, even inadvertently and with good intentions as evident with Martha. These are the qualitative and relational aspects of the human person and function, with which Jesus integrally impacts human contexts from his deeper relational context in order for persons to make the connection to God's whole that holds together the integrity of both persons and relationships in their innermost, thereby transforming them from fragmentation to wholeness.

The shift to the primacy of the secondary must further be understood in the underlying quest for certainty and/or the search for identity. This process engages a narrowing of the epistemic field to better grasp, explain and have certainty, for example, about what holds persons and relationships together in their optimal condition. Functionally, the process also necessitates reducing the qualitative-relational field of expectations from inner out (too demanding, vulnerable with uncertain results) to outer in for quantitative- referential terms that are easier to measure, perform and quantify the results of, notably in the search for identity and finding one's place in human contexts (including church and academy). In other words, the shift to the primacy of the secondary and its preoccupation are not without specific purpose that motivates persons even in the theological task and the practice of faith. Yet whatever certainty and identity result in secondary terms can only be incomplete, ambiguous or shallow. Jesus further critiqued this secondary certainty without the primacy in relationship (Jn 5:39,42) and the substitute identity without the qualitative depth of relational involvement (Mt 5:13-16; cf. 15:8-9).

After Paul's own epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction, he further extended the ongoing fight against the primacy of the secondary and its counter-relational work in the church. This is evident notably in his Corinthians and Galatians letters. The shift from inner out to outer in, and the preoccupation with the secondary over the primacy of relationship together, can be summarized in Paul's relational words: "So let no one boast about *persons from outer in*…so that none of you will be puffed up in favor of one against another. For who sees anything different in you *from inner out*? …But when they measure themselves *from outer in* by one another, and compare themselves *accordingly* with one another, they do not *understand the whole* [*syniemi*]" (1 Cor 3:21; 4:6-7; 2 Cor 10:12, cf. 5:12); "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for *the primary*; the only *primary* that counts is *the relational work of* faith working through *the relational involvement of* love" (Gal 5:6).

The shift to the outer in and the secondary is always made at the expense of the qualitative and relational, as evident in Jesus' and Paul's critiques. Moreover, the qualitative and relational are interdependent and integral to the process to be whole, both for the person and persons together in relationship. The reduction or loss of either also results in the reduction or loss of the other. That is, they are inseparable. We cannot function in the qualitative from inner out apart from the involvement in the primacy of relationship; and we cannot be involved in the primacy of relationship without the

function of the qualitative from inner out. The focus on and occupation with the secondary are consequential for reducing, if not preventing, the primary by (1) the focus narrowed to referential terms of the quantitative having primacy over the qualitative, and (2) the occupation reduced from relational terms to functional terms of what essentially becomes counter-relational work. In addition, when the primacy is given to the secondary, there are certainly repercussions theologically and for the gospel, as further evidenced in the critiques of Jesus (e.g. Mk 7:5-8, 14-23) and of Paul (e.g. Gal 1:6; 3:1-5). What all the above urgently bring out is our vital need to have ongoing involvement in the process of integrating priorities (PIP).

Changing to the new that is the whole distinguished only with-in the Uncommon is the only means all of Jesus' followers have to compose their identity as his whole-ly disciples, whose ontology and function are in likeness of the whole-ly Trinity. Therefore, the integrity of the diverse identity of Christians individually and collectively as the global church is urgently challenged, if not confronted, by the new that Jesus embodied, enacted and fulfilled by Jesus for the only gospel available for our human relational condition.

The Integral Integrity of Our Identity

It is apparent, perhaps obvious, that Christian identity has struggled in the human context to be distinguished in its whole identity—notably today in its diverse condition. The taste of the new-wine identity is no longer a foretaste of Jesus' whole-ly disciples emerging, but it has become an aftertaste of this whole-ly identity that has not unfolded. Whatever variations of the new-wine identity exist today, their integrity has not been integrally the whole distinguished with-in the Uncommon; and this lack of integrity leaves that identity in a regressing condition unable to progress in the new creation of persons and relationships to wholeness in likeness of the whole-ly Trinity.

Jesus' encompassing family prayer to the Father (Jn 17) centered on their whole-ly ontology and function, with the focus on those whose identity emphatically does "not belong to the *common*, just as I do not belong to the *common*" (17:13,16). The function of his followers' uncommon identity, however, is not to be separated from the common but instead to not be reduced in the function of their whole identity (17:15), in order that the integrity of their identity's ontology and function will be distinguished uncommon in the very context of the common. That is, uncommon identity intrudes in the common, while not belonging to it, in distinct likeness of whole-ly Jesus (17:17-19) and in essential likeness to the whole-ly ontology and function of the Trinity (17:20-23). So, then, would you affirm that the integrity of Christian identity can be variable, and perhaps even negotiable according to the context? And would you say that Christian identity today exists as Jesus prayed and unfolds in the context of the common in likeness of the whole-ly Trinity? The integral integrity of our identity is directly dependent on the relational reality that it will unfold just as Jesus prayed definitively for his whole-ly disciples as his family together.

What Jesus saves persons *to* was tasted at that new wine fellowship together and is summarized in his relational prayer, which includes making definitive the relational work necessarily involved to live whole ontology and function into the common's human context. This relational work by necessity includes integral identity formation that is distinguished, on the one hand, in God's relational context and, on the other hand, from the human context. Practically speaking, how do Christians live in God's context now while living surrounded in the human context? That is the issue at hand that we all need to be addressing today because we are accountable for this living now. Identity distinguished from the human context is critical for whole ontology and function because it is not shaped by the limits and constraints of the human context, notably by secondary or false human distinctions. Accordingly, this relational work requires being able to live in the human context by the primacy of God's context—that is, by an indispensable process of **reciprocating contextualization** (RC) , wherein ongoing interaction with the primacy of God's context determines function in the person's primary identity while in the human context. This function involves having a new visibility in our surrounding context (think about *light*) and a deeper relational involvement (think about family love), both of which may not be welcomed because of being out of the ordinary.

Since the taste of new wine relationship together in wholeness was initially experienced at a pivotal relational connection in new wine fellowship, it unfolds with significance only on God's terms. In God's relational action there are complex theological dynamics that converge in Jesus' theological trajectory and relational path to constitute the whole-ly God's integral relational response of grace to the human condition. The roots, growth, outcome and maturing of the new creation were integrally signified in a metaphor used by Jesus about the new wine (Lk 5:33-39). The focus of new wine provides us with a whole understanding of the priority of person-consciousness from inner out and its primacy of relationships together, in contrast to a self-consciousness of secondary matter.

The parable of new wine tends to be used incorrectly to emphasize new forms and practices, innovations focused more on the secondary and shaped more from outer in, all of which signify a common lens of referential language and terms. Part of misinterpreting or inadequately understanding the new wine involves, again, Jesus' relational language. Jesus was not focused on situations and circumstances in life and, for example, being innovative in what we do in those situations and circumstances to maximize them. The seeds of the new wine are planted in the innermost of human life, not in secondary matter. Jesus' primary concern is not about *what* we do but for *who* we are and *how* we live. Therefore, in relational terms Jesus engages the ontology and function of those present (even his critics) and unfolds the whole ontology and function of the new creation—in contrast and conflict with reduced ontology and function. This contrast in ontology and function was demonstrated in this context by Levi's transformation for the relational outcome of the new wine table fellowship together as family (Lk 5:27-32), further constituted later with Zacchaeus (Lk 19:1-10) in the relational progression of Jesus' tactical and functional shifts (discussed in the previous chap.). The new wine emerges only from the inner out of ontology and function made whole in the innermost of persons and relationships coming together intimately. When the new wine emerges from redefined and transformed persons, then its whole relational outcome is unmistakable in the intimacy of family relationships together with no veil.

The taste of new wine, however, turns sour, or new wine escapes, within the context of old wineskins. Old wineskins are implied in the alternatives of anything less and any substitutes, which are used especially to minimize being so out of the ordinary in the surrounding context, not to mention being vulnerable with our person. Certainly then, old wineskins both constrain the flow of the new wine and reduce it of its qualitative and relational significance. The nature of old wineskins emerges with any reduction of our ontology and function, thus from an ambiguous or shallow personal-collective identity with relationships still having the veil—for example, who we are without *what* and/or *whose* we are in the primacy of God's context—in contrasting and conflicting function with Jesus' new wine table fellowship that simply functioned in *essential difference*. Following Jesus in essential difference without the veil, of course, makes our person vulnerable to comparative scrutiny in the surrounding context. The alternative is to not be as intrusive as Jesus, which would mean for our visible face (presence) to be ambiguous and our involvement to be more shallow. That is to say, anything less and any substitutes subtly transpose the identity of our persons from their wholeness inner out to fragmentary outer-in parts, whereby the full profile of the identity of who and whose we are is veiled in ambiguity if not obscurity.

Paul revealed about his identity that "I have become all things to all people" (1 Cor 9:22). He didn't imply, however, that the integrity of his identity varied with his surrounding context. All his various contexts were secondary to the primary context of his salvation, whose belonging defined his person and determined his function. Paul was redeemed and belonged to none of those contexts (9:19)—signifying not belonging to the common, as Jesus prayed—yet he chose to be relationally involved in family love with each of them in order for them to be saved to wholeness together in the relational outcome of the gospel (9:20-23). Not only did Paul maintain the integrity of the identity of his whole person, but the integrity of his whole function in who, what and how Paul was in relationship with each of them could be counted on by them to be true, complete and thus whole, rather than variable, partial or fragmentary. The latter is common in human contexts to minimalize vulnerability of persons in relationships, yet how satisfying is it to be involved with persons on that basis? The relational function demonstrated by Paul is vital for the integrity of all Jesus' followers in their primary identity.

When some Pharisees tried to entrap Jesus to indict him, they ironically identified Jesus with his description: "you are *a person of integrity*, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality *to their differences*" (Mt 22:16). The integrity (*alethes*) they identified extended from the way of God's covenant relationship, in which Abraham's relational function was to have the integrity of *tāmiym* (blameless, complete, whole, Gen 17:1). In his relational involvement in covenant relationship, on the basis of *tāmiym* (i.e. being whole, not perfect), Abraham's identity was distinguished as "righteousness" (Gen 15:6; Gal 3:6), whereby his integrity was established with God. How so?

Abraham's relational response and involvement in covenant relationship could only be whole according to God's terms for the relationship. Righteousness, to emphasize, is not about being perfect but identifies the whole of who, what and how a person is. Because of righteousness, this person can be counted on by God (and others) to function in relationship together as that whole person, nothing less and no substitutes.

Even for whole-ly God, as the psalmist illuminated, "Righteousness goes before him and makes the *relational* path for his steps" (Ps 85:13). Therefore, the person's righteousness safeguards the heart of that whole person's integrity (Prov 13:6). Without righteousness, that person's integrity in relationship is always in doubt, making the identity of who, what and how that person is questionable if not in dispute.

This is the background for the ironic claim that the above Pharisees made about the integrity of Jesus' identity. Moreover, they not only identified the whole of Jesus' person, but they also claimed paradoxically that Jesus' identity was uncommon—without being influenced or shaped by the common of human contexts ("defer to no one…with partiality"). In other words, however dubious, they distinguished Jesus' whole-ly person and affirmed the integrity of his identity as whole and uncommon; in so doing, they exposed their own so-called righteousness and the variable integrity of their own identity in their practice of covenant relationship, which they didn't engage vulnerably with their whole persons. How many Christians live in their irony and function in their paradox?

In his definitive manifesto for discipleship, Jesus corrected the ambiguity or shallowness of the identity of his followers, without partiality or distinctions for their diverse condition (Mt 5:13-16). Whatever their diversity, Jesus made it imperative that their righteousness has to be clearly distinguished beyond the so-called righteousness of those in the faith (Mt 5:20). That is, their righteousness cannot be influenced or shaped by reductionism, in order for the integrity of their identity to distinguish (as in transformed, not re-formed) the whole-ly in their ontology and function (as the Beatitudes compose). Reductionism underlies the variable integrity of Christian identity by subtly composing its diversity with secondary matters (such as contextualization) over the primary of whole-ly identity. The integrity of the identity of Jesus' whole-ly disciples is integrated by necessity with righteousness, so that the whole of who, what and how they are without the veil integrally functions distinguished with-in the Uncommon, and thus distinguished from and beyond the common.

All of this converges in relational terms for Jesus' disciples and has relational progression in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes. Our identity cannot have integrity without the righteousness composed by God's relational terms. Jesus made definitive the pivotal fourth Beatitude to integrate the seven Beatitudes of our identity formation: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for *their persons and identity* will be filled *whole-ly*" (Mt 5:6). Therefore, unequivocally, integrity integrated with righteousness is the primary priority for all his disciples, distinguishing this relational progression:

> The integrity of his disciples' identity is based only on the relational response of those who "seek first *to be relationally involved in the relational context of God's family* and *the relational process of* his righteousness *in family love*" (Mt 6:33), whereby their **integral identity** as whole-ly disciples emerges with nothing less than **the *whole* who they are** and unfolds with no substitutes for **the *uncommon* whose they are**. And this relational progression unfolds in the ongoing change to the new distinguished whole with-in the Uncommon, the integral integrity of which "will be given to you *whole-ly*."

The relational progression of Mary's relational response and involvement as the whole-ly Jesus' disciple unmistakably distinguished her integral identity beyond the contextualized identity of all the other disciples, and distinguished her person deeper than their commonized identity. In her ongoing change to the new, her integral identity magnified the *whole* who she was and the *uncommon* whose she was as his whole-ly disciple. This is the relational outcome of the whole gospel *with-in* which Jesus wants all his disciples to experience progression. This essential relational progression, however, does not unfold unless his disciples contend with the ongoing influence of reductionism in the common's surrounding context. The most prominent source of the common's influence is culture, which Mary consistently countered while the others accepted.

The Belonging Identity of Culture

The identity that Jesus embodied and enacted for the gospel, and that Mary embodied and enacted to follow him, was always in contention with the surrounding culture as well as in conflict with its anthropology defining persons and determining relationship in reduced ontology and function. That is the nature of human culture, which many Christians assume to be neutral at least, or even positive at best. If that were the reality, why did Jesus always have to contend with the surrounding culture?

Jesus stated unequivocally that he doesn't belong to the common in the human context, and that the identity of his disciples also doesn't belong to the common in their surrounding contexts (Jn 17:14,16). Identity signifies where it belongs, and our identity signifies either to whom or to what we belong. This belonging converges within the scope of culture to identify its attachment, and we have to understand the dynamics involved here.

Culture is present in every human context, however culture is defined and whatever is the shape of a human context. Culture also has a particular identity, and, depending on your definition of culture, culture promotes an identity for the participants (active or passive) in that context (either belonging to or by association). When culture generates the identity of its participants, this becomes an ongoing issue of identity formation and maintenance—particularly as contexts intersect, which is the norm in human life and practice. This has become an intense issue as the world's population has increasingly migrated and globalization has become dominant.

I define culture as inseparable from identity and use the following working definition in our discussion:

> Culture is the life and practice (in its various expressions) of a collective group (formal or informal, large or small) of persons, which relatively both defines who and what they are and determines how they function, thereby being a primary source of their identity. Culture is not about an individual person but a social dynamic of persons who belong and/or identify in a context together.

At its earliest stages of development, culture emerges from the life and practice of those persons gathered together, thus culture is defined and determined by them. As that culture is established, its shape remains consistent or firm, with ongoing minor modifications. In

the subsequent process of its life and practice, culture essentially takes on a functional "life" of its own to shape its participants; that is to say, those persons become defined by their culture, and thus how they function is also determined by their culture. To be contrary is to go against the norms of culture, or, in other words, be counter-cultural. Immigrants to a different culture, for example, face the decision to assimilate into the new surrounding culture or to remain different and incur the consequences. Christians are faced with the same decision, only on a deeper level and with greater consequences, because we belong to a different culture than our surrounding contexts.

Moreover, since we all participate in some type of collective group, we are all part of a particular culture that defines our person and determines how we function—relatively speaking, of course. To this extent we are never free of culture and always apply our culture to our activities, even in biblical interpretation and in following Jesus and practicing church. This possessing influence, with its enveloping bias, emerges as the significant issue of Jesus' engagement with culture, which we will discuss with the need to understand the particular cultural lens we bring to this discussion.

Jesus Intruding Culture in the Surrounding Context

If we follow Jesus not merely as believers but as his whole-ly disciples, we have to embrace how Jesus engaged culture to be "where I am" (Jn 12:26) so that our identity will belong to "just as I belong" (Jn 17:14,16). Our identity will reveal where we belong, and how we function in our identity will determine to what and whom we belong. And if we belong to Jesus, we also have to embrace the difference that Jesus' identity had with the common. This immeasurable difference composed his **minority identity** in essential difference with the common majority—the unavoidable identity that always distinguishes his uncommon identity in all human contexts. In our discipleship as whole-ly disciples, we cannot follow Jesus without embracing deeply how Jesus engaged culture in distinct ongoing function; and we cannot embrace deeply how Jesus engaged culture without embracing in our heart the difference of his minority identity.

His Purpose: Shedding Light on Reductionism and the Whole of Creation

How Jesus engaged a culture in a particular context was always first with his own culture. Put in relational terms, Jesus always looked at culture theologically because that was his identity: who, what and how he is in the context and process of the whole-ly Trinity. This was not unusual since engaging another culture from one's own culture is an assumption by which all persons engage a different culture. Thus, these are assumptions of our own that we have to understand and account for, even as we seek to further understand and more deeply follow Jesus (along with his culture).

To say that Jesus looked at culture theologically should not be separated from the function of his identity. Foremost, his theological lens was not about doctrine, propositions of static truth or systems of beliefs and values; though his lens was certainly theologically orthodox (not in a gospel-speak, salvation-speak sense), it was always in conjoint function with orthopraxy (i.e. whole-ly life and practice) in the trinitarian

relational context and process for relationship together. Jesus functionally engaged culture not only in orthodoxy but with orthopraxy, with the latter at times appearing to contradict the former, which was an ongoing source of controversy in many of his interactions—notably in a so-called orthodox religious context since his practice was perceived often as counter-cultural. Yet, Jesus' theological engagement of culture was not for the end result of orthodoxy, or even orthopraxy, but only for this relational purpose: *the whole outcome of new relationship together and being whole distinguished from the common*. Thus, his engagement was always as communicative action of God's thematic relational response to make whole the human condition (cf. Jn 12:46-47). In other words, he saw culture through the lens of God's perception and desires, and this primacy defined and determined his response. For Jesus, any other engagement with culture was secondary and should neither define nor determine what is primary or its shape—as Jesus demonstrated at the wedding in Cana (Jn 2:1-11).

By embodying God's communicative action in the contexts of the world, Jesus did not engage culture "to condemn" (*krino*, to discriminate between good and evil) the identity it generates "but *to make whole*" (*sozo*, Jn 3:17) its life and practice influenced by reductionism. By the nature of its source, reductionism has always functioned against God's whole and all wholeness in the human context since creation in the primordial garden. The reductionism in culture specifically involved fragmenting the ontology of the whole person created in the image of the whole-ly God for the relationships together created in likeness of the relational ontology of the Trinity, therefore which are necessary to restore to integral function to be whole. In all its diversity, culture in the surrounding context cannot cultivate this wholeness even though it may promote it in diverse ways.

Along with his identity as the light, Jesus' full humanity as the Son of man also fully affirms this creation. By the earthly human life made evident in Jesus' whole person, human life is sanctified (made uncommonly distinct from the common) in a qualitative distinct practice that is imperative for all his followers to live and experience to be whole as God's family (as he prayed, Jn 17:19). Furthermore, their sanctified life and practice is necessary to be able to live whole in the surrounding cultural context for the world to "believe" (trust) and "know" (experience) the whole-ly God extended to them to be part of, and thus no longer "to be apart" from (as he further prayed, Jn 17:21-23). Only the intrusion of this ontology and function distinguish God's whole-ly family in the world.

Any reduction in life and practice of the whole person and those persons' relationships together need to be made whole to fulfill who, what and how they are as God's new creation. Therefore, the reduction of what defines human persons (e.g. in a comparative process of human performance to stratify human worth or value) needs to be redefined (by transformation, not re-formation) for persons to be made whole. Likewise, the reduction of human relationships from qualitative function and significance (e.g. by diminishing intimate relational involvement or promoting barriers to relational belonging) needs to be transformed for the relationships together necessary to be whole. We need to recognize how these reductions are directly composed by the surrounding culture.

The uncommon whole of Jesus' person, accordingly, functioned to engage culture

in the surrounding context only on his uncommon basis for this whole purpose: (1) *redeem* its defining influence from reductionism, (2) *transform* its counter-relational work of reductionism, and (3) *reconcile* persons in transformed relationships to make whole the human relational condition "to be apart" from God's whole. These three interrelated dimensions were enacted by Jesus in his ongoing approach to engaging culture, for the relational progression to this whole relational outcome.

His Approach: Three Qualifying Issues

Jesus' engagement of culture for his purpose to be, live and make whole involved a relational process; conjointly, this relational process was specific to the relational context of his identity and ontology in the whole-ly Trinity. The dynamic involvement of this relational process cannot be categorized by typologies of the relation of Jesus and culture. The classic typology of Richard Niebuhr, for example, is of initial interest, yet this is a static framework insufficient to account for Jesus' intrusion into culture.[3] This includes variations or refinements of his typology.[4] The dynamic relational involvement of Jesus in the surrounding contexts of the world was an ongoing process of engaging culture both to be whole and to make whole, which integrally required being vulnerable with his person and intrusive in his relationships.

A different framework is needed to account for the variable nature of this process and to understand the whole of Jesus' various actions engaging culture. This involves three issues that Jesus ongoingly addressed to help us define why and how he engaged culture and aspects of it. Basic to his approach, Jesus vulnerably involved his whole person in the life and practice of a culture to function to be whole and to make whole. Therefore, the integrating theme "to be whole" defined his actions engaging culture, and that meant his actions were contingent on one or more of *three qualifying issues* involving a particular culture's life and practice:

1. *Compatibility, or congruence*, "to be whole"—thus, when a culture has this, there is no tension or conflict with the life and practice of that culture, and further relational involvement is for deeper development of the whole.
2. *Partial overlapping areas* "to be whole"—some areas and/or practices in a culture are affirmed as part of God's general revelation and God's initial grace already possessed by everyone, and what is basic to humanity as God's creation; thus this acceptance allows room for flexibility in some cultural differences to cultivate and nurture the whole, though other areas and practices are in tension or conflict "to be whole" that are nonnegotiable matters still needing to be redeemed, transformed and made whole.
3. *Incompatibility* "to be whole"—when a culture's identity exists in this condition, there is conflict, not merely tension, thus with no room for flexibility in differences; the situation/condition is nonnegotiable and needs to be redeemed to be made whole.

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[3] H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* 50th-anniversary ed. (N.Y.: Harper San Francisco, 2001).

[4] See, for example, Glen H. Stassen, D.M. Yeager, John Howard Yoder, *Authentic Transformation: A New Vision of Christ and Culture,* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), and also Gordon Lynch, *Understanding Theology and Popular Culture,* (Australia: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 93-110.

Only Jesus' own culture has complete congruence in wholeness. Aspects of other cultures, however, may involve more than one of these qualifying issues, and thus engaging various aspects of a culture's life and practice tends to involve an interaction of these qualifying issues. Culture then cannot be responded to in its surrounding context with a predetermined set of behavioral responses—for example, to presume assimilation or to assume counter-culturalism—but only addressed predisposed with the relational involvement to be whole and to make whole. This is how Jesus engaged culture and why.

In the process of cultural engagement, Jesus demonstrated the following: In his whole identity Jesus appears to transcend culture (cf. Niebuhr's categories, "Christ against culture"), yet while relationally involved in the surrounding cultural context (cf. "Christ in paradox" or "Christ of culture") distinctly with his minority identity (cf. "Christ above culture") in order to make it whole (cf. "Christ the transformer of culture"). The relational interaction of his whole identity with his minority identity (signifying his whole-ly identity) constitutes the qualitative distinction necessary to be distinguished whole in the surrounding cultural context, without which there is neither the basis to make whole any culture's life and practice nor the significance to be compelling for the human condition.

The ongoing process of engaging culture both to be whole and to make whole involves the process of vulnerable and intrusive relational involvement enacted by Jesus. This was made evident in his various encounters for us to "Follow me." Our discipleship is challenged to make the distinctions of where our identity belongs and to what or whom our persons, relationships and churches are in likeness. If we want to "Follow me" whole-ly, we have to understand Jesus' practice with culture in order to "be where I am."

His Practice: Triangulation and Reciprocating Contextualization (RC)

How Jesus dealt with culture in everyday life was crucial for what would determine how functioned in that context. His uncommon relational path illuminates the way for us to follow him. Our first glimpse of Jesus engaging culture in the surrounding context during his public ministry was at a wedding in Cana (Jn 2:2-11). Reviewing that situation in terms of culture, Jesus made evident the practice of his whole person (who, what and how he is). This demonstrated how he functioned in the surrounding human contexts and in those public social interactions.

In this particular human context, Jesus was involved in three interrelated areas: (1) relationship with his mother Mary, (2) the sociocultural context, and (3) relationship with his Father. The consequence of these areas of involvement helps us understand how Jesus engaged culture: first, "to be whole" in the identity of his own culture in the common's surrounding context, then "to make whole" in response to some aspect of the human condition existing "to be apart" from the whole—both of which unfold from ongoing involvement in RC. He quickly established distinction from his surrounding cultural identity defined with Mary by simply addressing her as "woman" (*gyne*, general term for woman with no other significance). This distinction is specific to the relational context that defined his whole person, which always remained primary over any secondary context such as their relationship in this situation. Accordingly, Jesus

redefined the nature of his involvement with Mary from the human cultural context to his trinitarian relational context of family.

While Jesus had tension with Mary's human cultural context of family earlier at age twelve (Lk 2:11-52), he still affirmed its life and practice (v.51) since it was at least compatible or overlapped with him "to be whole" (as in qualifying issue 1, above). As he began his public ministry, however, further qualitative distinction was necessary for the clarity of his identity to be whole in the surrounding context. This distinction fully progressed when Jesus publicly made definitive his family in the trinitarian relational context (Mt 12:46-50)—which no doubt created "culture shock" for both his biological family and the surrounding Jewish context by redefining a basic foundation of their culture based on birth and descent. To say the least, the function of his identity was out of the ordinary and thus contended with the surrounding context shaped by culture as well as by its anthropology defining persons and relationships.

Jesus further clarified the function of his whole person with his question to Mary: "What is that to you and to me?" (Jn 2:4) What defined Jesus was always in tension with efforts in the surrounding context to redefine him by reducing his whole person. Mary merely acted in who and what she was defined by based on that cultural context's norm for participation in its extended family-community identity. That in itself was not the issue in their interaction. Her request for Jesus' participation in this cultural practice was compatible (not congruent) for Jesus only on a secondary basis, the terms of which would be acceptable as long as they didn't take away from or substitute for the primary defining his whole-ly identity by his own culture. Jesus' tension with Mary was not about her specific cultural practice in this situation (his room for flexibility) but about her attempt to redefine him in her secondary terms. By adding "My hour has not yet come," Jesus wanted Mary to know that even in what may appear to be a neutral participation in culture, what his priorities were, and what and who defined him, were determined by his Father. Critical for being distinguished in the surrounding context, "what is that to me" cannot be defined and determined by "what is that to you." This illuminates a functional paradigm by which Jesus engaged culture in the surrounding context—engagement which consciously required ongoing involvement in the process of integrating priorities (PIP), namely integrating the secondary into the primary.

This is a necessary function in order to be whole and not to be reduced in identity and ontology by a culture in the surrounding context. Jesus maintained the whole of who, what and how he is—the integrity of his identity integrated with righteousness—by the primacy of ongoing relational involvement with his Father, and with the Spirit in the whole-ly Trinity. His ongoing relational involvement with his Father served as the crucial reference point for his involvement in sociocultural contexts (like the wedding culture and the necessity of wine) and with relationships in those contexts (like with Mary). This composes **the triangulation process** for us to follow in order to navigate culture in our surrounding contexts: Jesus used his reference point in the Father to define and determine his engagement with culture and his involvement in the surrounding contexts of the world, so that he could be whole in order to make whole. *Triangulation* served to give clarity to his identity as the light of the world and relational significance to "his glory" (as in Jn 2:11) vulnerably disclosed in the world in response to the human condition for the outcome only of relationship together in God's whole family, for which participation in extended family-community as above can never substitute.

This relational process of triangulated engagement of culture is further demonstrated as Jesus was involved with a pluralized identity of Judaism in Jerusalem. When Jesus addressed the identity of his followers in the Sermon on the Mount, he made it imperative that who, what and how they were needed to function beyond the reductionists and their practice of reductionism (as noted earlier, Mt 5:20). Those particular reductionists were various teachers of the law (scribes) and Pharisees, neither all of the Pharisees as commonly assumed nor the sum of Judaism. Thus, as the above three qualifying issues involving Judaism's complex life and practice emerged and interacted, Jesus accordingly engaged their "pluralistic" culture in Jerusalem. Yet, tension and conflict with reductionism was notable, which will always happen in the presence and function of the whole. And Jesus' function in his whole-ly identity demonstrated this life and practice as he engaged those reductionists in the culture of their surrounding context.

Similar to the existing diversity of Christian identity today, the Judaism Jesus would engage lacked a united identity. Some focused mainly on a religious identity, others more so on an ethnic identity, with neither being mutually exclusive and both interrelated with social and economic factors. While Israel's national identity was underlying (even a source of national pride), this tended to fragment or pluralize identity in Judaism (e.g., Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots).[5] Thus, life and practices in the cultural context of Judaism lacked wholeness—namely specific to its historic roots in the whole of the covenant, which can also be said of the global church. Rather than a monolithic Judaism, its variable condition was the shape of the context that Jesus engaged with his whole-ly person in the triangulation process (e.g. Jn 5:19; 8:28; Lk 4:14), and thus he vulnerably involved the whole-ly God to make it whole.

Jewish culture obviously was not foreign to Jesus the Jew, yet his engagement of Judaism's life and practices was a unique intersection as if it were. This would be expected for anyone bearing a minority identity, as the source of belonging for Jesus' identity becomes distinguished. Thus, the three qualifying issues provide us with the basis for Jesus' various actions as he engaged Judaism in Jerusalem. John's Gospel includes most of the narratives of these encounters in Jesus' later Judean ministry, in order to provide the understanding of their importance in the big picture of the whole-ly God's thematic action both in covenant fulfillment to Israel and in relational response to the human condition to make them whole.

Jesus was certainly in congruence with covenant life and compatible with some practices in Judaism that notably observed the major pilgrimages to the Jerusalem temple. That is, congruent with covenant relationship and its compatible relational function to come before the Lord—not as obligatory religious code but in response to covenant relationship together, namely in the covenant of love. For Judaism as God's people, this was its culture's life and practice "to be whole," which Jesus both affirmed and participated in, as we find him going to Jerusalem to observe Passover (and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Jn 2:12-25). In this critical encounter with culture that Jesus neither took for granted nor assumed to be positive, the fragmentary practice he saw at the temple was not an isolated incident and needs to be seen in its full context.

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[5] For an overview of this historical development, see Bruce D. Chilton, "Judaism and the New Testament" in Daniel G. Reid, ed., *The IVP Dictionary of the New Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 603-616.

The current system of sacrifice had become an economic enterprise reflecting the prevailing priestly leadership, though not the sum of Judaism—and should not be used to stereotype Judaism and discriminate against it. On the one hand, Jesus' involvement in the temple signified the compatible nature of Judaism's covenant practice. What had emerged at the temple, however, was incompatible practice with religious, social and economic repercussions: access to God was subtly restricted, a social system of stratification created inequitable participation with some having a deficit identity, comparative relations for those with less economic resources were marginalized, and even denied access to participate in God's house. This was incompatible with being whole, thus in conflict with Jesus, and had to be responded to with no room for flexibility or negotiation; it was a condition not only apart from God's whole but countering "to be whole," therefore that had to be decisively redeemed.

Clearly and accordingly, on the other hand, Jesus' action in the temple constituted his involvement necessary to redeem it (Jn 2:14-17) to make the house of God's dwelling whole for covenant relationship together for all persons without false distinctions (par. Mk 11:17, cf. the church in Acts 15:8-9). At the same time, he remained in ongoing tension with certain segments of Judaism (the reductionists) who challenged the source of his minority identity, thereby the validity of his action (Jn 2:18). Their demand, in one sense, had some merit given the radical extent of Jesus' action; yet, the main issue focused only on what was perceived to be counter-cultural—even that apparent contradiction with orthodoxy noted earlier. Moreover, his intrusive engagement in this context, integral to his vulnerable relational involvement to make whole, was also in tension with those receptive to him because of their reductionism; thus, Jesus did not allow his person to be defined and determined by them (Jn 2:23-25).

This temple encounter demonstrated Jesus' intrusive and vulnerable engagement of the cultural context of Judaism with various actions based on one or more particular qualifying issues. He demonstrated how these issues interact to preclude a predetermined set of behavioral responses but only to constitute predisposed relational involvement to be whole and to make whole. This provides us with a working understanding of Jesus' relation to culture, and further helps us fully understand the significance of his subsequent engagement with Judaism. This is especially important for how we need to address the diversity in Christian practice today, and to account for how congruent we are as his disciples and to be accountable for how compatible our discipleship is with his relational involvement in and for wholeness.

In the next encounter sometime later, Jesus returned to Jerusalem for another feast of the Jews (unspecified, possibly Feast of Tabernacles, Jn 5:1-47). Once again, his involvement reflected the compatible covenant practice of Judaism. Yet, they needed to understand further and more deeply that covenant practice is not an end in itself (namely for the self-determination of their identity) but only for covenant relationship together to be whole. To clarify this distinction for them, Jesus engaged their culture with his own culture, that is, with his whole-ly identity composed by the integrated function of his full identity of belonging and his minority identity in their context. Consequently, his practice to make whole by healing (*hygies*, vv.6-9) appeared to contradict orthodox life and practice in Judaism, and this became a major controversy among certain Jews since he practiced wholeness on the Sabbath (vv.10-16).

For the reductionists, it was clearly simple: Jesus broke the law basic to the cultural life and practice of Judaism. On the limited basis and from the biased lens of the letter of the law, they had a valid point to raise but insufficient basis for their position. God's law was the terms for covenant relationship together to be whole and should not be reduced to a code for national identity, self-determination or justification. Yet, in terms of Jesus' engagement of their cultural life and practice, unlike the temple cleansing earlier, there was partial overlap present "to be whole" allowing room for flexibility to at least discuss the significance of the Sabbath to be whole as well as to make whole (see his polemic about the same issue, Jn 7:23). For the current situation, Jesus vulnerably responded to their attacks by making definitive his own culture and whole-ly identity: to make whole is his Father's ongoing relational work and his also (Jn 5:17); he disclosed the source of his identity and ontology (5:19-23) and the significance of his salvific work (5:24-30); and he clearly delineated the alternatives for their life and practice to the choice between the whole-ly God or reductionism (5:31-47, noting v.39). Any variation of the whole, even well-intentioned or inadvertently, is a form of reductionism; and this form exists in subtle diversity. With that being said, he gave them the responsibility to decide.

After his ministry in Galilee to purposely create space from the reductionists in Judea, Jesus returned to Jerusalem for the specific Jewish Feast of Tabernacles (associated with the period in the wilderness living in tents, Jn 7:1-38). His return, however, was not determined by his biological brothers' misguided challenge; his involvement in the surrounding context was always defined and determined by the triangulation process with his Father (7:2-9). Partial overlap continued to allow room for flexibility to extend his dialogue with Judaism, even as the tension grows in this cultural context. Yet, his purpose and function to make whole appears more directed and urgent. As his Father determined for him, his involvement in this compatible covenant practice did not emerge until mid-week of the week-long Feast (7:10,14). While this has the appearance of caution, triangulation provides guidance only by his Father's purpose ("who sent me," 7:16,28-29) to make whole. This involved God's communicative action, which also necessitated intensifying his intrusion into this context of partially overlapping Judaic life and practices—that is, specifically intruding on the aspects of life and practice needing to be made whole.

This intrusion into Judaism's "pluralized" culture (i.e. among themselves) involved God's communicative action in Jesus' teaching. Yet, Jesus taught not for the issue of orthodoxy but for the relationship to be whole (7:15-19). Again, he compellingly clarified the Torah as only God's terms for covenant relationship together to be God's whole (7:21-23) and made definitive his basis to disclose this relationship together necessary to be whole (7:27-29). And this dialogue in Jesus' intrusive engagement of Judaism further precipitated the growing tension between reductionism in their culture and God's whole: "How…such learning without having studied" (v.15, NIV); "you have a demon" (v.20); "we know where this man is from, but when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from" (v.27)—all accusations made in juxtaposition to Jesus' imperative "Stop judging by mere appearances and make a right judgment" (v.24, cf. Jn 8:15).

As this dialogue continued and the tension escalated, Jesus further impressed on them the urgency of their choice between the diverse substitutes in reductionism and the whole-ly God (7:30-38). On the last day of the Feast, Jesus deepened his involvement to vulnerably make his person accessible directly to them for the intimate relationship to be whole (7:37-38)—pointing to the fulfillment of God's covenant promise for relationship together and the living water associated with this Feast to end the wandering in the wilderness of reductionism (Zech 14:8,16-21). In God's communicative action, the whole-ly God was vulnerably present and intimately involved—indeed, whole-ly embodied only by Jesus' intrusive relational path.

Jesus engaged culture in his uncommon identity and function to be whole, and thus in his purpose to make whole. By the nature of his function and purpose, notably as the light, it was inevitable that the heightened tension with reductionism would result in conflict with the dogmatic reductionists prevailing in the religious culture. This was the fluid condition of Jesus' engagement with Judaism, which nevertheless neither defined nor determined who, what and how he was in this cultural context. His priorities were always integrated into the primary by his ongoing relational involvement in triangulation with the Trinity to distinguish his whole-ly identity with RC illuminating the difference. Therefore, his further engagement with Judaism even intensified his whole-ly identity and function as the light of the world.

When Jesus engaged them again at another time, there was still room for dialogue in this fluid condition of Judaism's partial overlap toward the whole (Jn 8:12-59). In his vulnerable involvement Jesus openly shared in dialogue the following: his identity and function as the light (8:12), thereby further engaging this context in his whole-ly identity—which certain Pharisees challenged him about his life and practice (8:13); this then necessitated identifying the source of his life and practice (8:14-18)—whereby they challenged the source of his cultural identity and ontology (8:19a,25a); to which his identity and ontology were vulnerably disclosed (8:19b,23,25b-26) and the purpose of his life and practice (in word and deed) made clearly evident (8:27-29). This room for flexibility by Jesus to dialogue nurtured some in that context for the relational outcome to be whole (8:30). To them, and any receptive reductionists, he made conclusive the need to be redeemed to be made whole (8:31-32). This further precipitated the relational consequence of the clear distinction and dynamic between the two alternatives: the whole intrinsic to God or the reductionism inherent of Satan, and therefore their incompatibility and conflict (8:33-59); and any subtle variation from the whole always signified a form of reductionism. Here we see the distinct difference between the essential dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes and the reverse dynamic of anything less and any substitutes.

Even under difficult conditions, the light continued to intrude on the cultural context of Judaism to be whole and to make whole (see Jn 9:1-7,35-39; 10:22-39) for covenant relationship together in the whole-ly God's family (fulfilling the covenant of love, Dt 7:9)—Jesus' distinguished vulnerable involvement even to the dismay and misperception of his disciples (Jn 11:7-16). This relational outcome, or even relational consequence, is the effect on reductionism in a culture's life and practice that the whole-ly identity and function as the light of the world has. Whatever the qualifying issues may be about a culture, this is ongoingly the light's identity of uncommon belonging to be whole and its function to make whole. All his disciples need to embrace in "Follow me"

that the identity of the light has clarity only as a function of whole-ly identity triangulating with his Father to determine his involvement—nothing less and no substitutes, just as his Father sent him into the world. Without this vulnerable intrusion specific to the culture of the surrounding context, the light becomes ambiguous or is extinguished and thus not distinguished—just as churches were critiqued in Jesus' post-ascension discourse for church wholeness (Rev 2-3, notably in Thyatira). In the absence of his minority identity for all his disciples, their identity as the light of God's whole-ly family is obscured and thus assimilated, co-opted or embedded in the surrounding culture of the common (Mt 5:14-16).

This is the bigger picture into which John's Gospel contextualizes the narratives of Jesus' relational involvement with the life and practice of culture as the embodied whole of the Word of God's communicative action. As the embodied Word, Jesus engaged culture not by merely contextualizing his involvement in a culture's life and practice, but with uncommon significance he contextualized a culture within his relational context of the Trinity and into his context's relational process of intimate relationship together in family love—the qualitative relational significance of his own culture composed by the Trinity, the *what* and *who* of his belonging. This is the indispensable process of reciprocating contextualization integrated with the irreplaceable process of triangulation, the integral function of which needs to correct the diversity of our discipleship and clarify the current missiological practice of contextualization.

It is simply vital to understand the application of RC in our surrounding contexts, and to embrace this as a relational process in necessary integral function with triangulation. This integrated relational process is necessary for the qualitative distinction in the surrounding common's context in order not to be defined or determined by the common's function; and culture is its most subtle and seductive influence on the ontology and function of persons and relationships in the church. Irreducibly and nonnegotiably then, the relational process of triangulation with RC converges with the three qualifying issues for the functional involvement necessary both to be whole and to make whole in a culture's life and practice.

If we cannot distinguish our whole-ly identity in the surrounding culture, then there are two relational consequences that determine the make-up of who, what and how we are:

1. We are not relationally involved in the primacy of "where I am," and therefore we do not relationally belong "just as I belong"—locating our persons at a relational distance from whole-ly Jesus (even as we claim the gospel), functioning with the veil of the holy partition without progressing together on his intrusive relational path (even as we proclaim the gospel).
2. Accordingly, we have shifted from the primary to become, at best, occupied by the secondary shaped by our surrounding culture, which then defines where we belong (even as members of a church) and determines our ontology and function (even as his servants) in reduced terms of the common—composing our persons as relational orphans and our churches as functional orphanages.

This is the reality of the common's influence through culture, which we either counter like Mary to "Follow my whole-ly person" or accept like the other disciples keeping relational distance from "where I am whole-ly."

Identity Composed in the New Relational Order

When Jesus' biological family wanted urgently to speak to him, he shockingly said that his family does not belong to the common but includes his whole-ly disciples (Mt 12:47-50). Later, he disclosed that "My *family* is not of *the common*…my *family* is *of the uncommon*" (Jn 18:36). On his intrusive relational path, Jesus consistently distinguished his family as uncommon from all common notions of family, most notably defined by its surrounding culture and determined by its sociocultural norms. He more than intruded on the common notions of family but also fought against their relational order in order for the family of his whole-ly disciples to emerge, progress and mature together (Mt 10:34-39, par. Lk 12:49-53). This is the family that Jesus promised his disciples who "left everything, *including their families*, and followed you" (Mk 10:23-30)—his whole-ly family in the here and now (Jn 14:23). This promise fulfilled presently by Jesus composes his disciples' identity in the new relational order, which further unfolds from his family prayer (Jn 17:20-26).

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 present 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 ontology and function of persons was originally created whole in likeness of the whole-ly Trinity (Gen 1:26-27, including Jesus, Jn 1:2-3), and thus not "to be apart" in their relationships (Gen 2:18). Their relationships were fragmented when their ontology and function were reduced. The wholeness of persons and relationships had to be newly created by their transformation (as in Eph 2:14-15), which now unfolds in the whole-ly Trinity's new creation family (2:18-22). 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 variations of the human relational order. 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 (just as 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.

Therefore, persons are whole only with relationships together, and relationships are whole only with whole persons together. Persons and relationships are whole only together in his church family, and churches today are whole only with whole persons and relationships together—without anything less or any substitutes for either. These integrated dimensions of wholeness compose the new relational order enacted by Jesus *with-in* the Trinity, which contends with the diverse human orders in surrounding contexts. Thus, this new of what and who challenges the diversity of all of our persons and relationships in the global church today. In relational reality, 'the new of what' challenges us, and 'the new of who' confronts us with "Where are you in your persons and relationships?" and "What are you doing here in the church today?" And given how our persons and relationships occupy our churches, Jesus keeps knocking on our church doors and pursuing us in our persons and relationships for "how well do we truly know him?"—not in the quantity of referential terms (e.g. as dispensed in the academy) but in the depth of his relational terms, which eludes many church sermons and Bible studies.

In Jesus' post-ascension critique of churches (Rev 2-3), the majority of these churches were shaped in diverse identities, and their persons and relationships functioned contrary to the new relational order of his whole-ly family. His and the Spirit's critique is indispensable for our theology and practice today to be whole with-in the Uncommon, by *what* and *who* our identity is distinguished as his whole-ly disciples belonging to whole-ly churches, integrated together in his global church family.

Belonging Based on 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. 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 family members are accountable for to each other.

Additionally, in his summary illumination of the big picture of Jesus' relational progression, John's Gospel helps us understand the whole relational outcome for all of Jesus' disciples by recording Jesus' defining statement on the cross that composes the new relational order, which his disciples are transformed in and thus have relational responsibility for: 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. Building with the persons who truly constituted his family (see Mt 12:47-50), Jesus demonstrated the functional significance of being his family in what needs to be understood as an interaction defining 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 reductionism, which he expected also of his followers in order to participate in his new covenant family (Mt 5:20).

Jesus' full 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 *agape* involvement, 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 *agape* involvement and affection (*phileo*, cf. Jn 5:20, Dt 7:7): *"Here is your son," "Here is your mother."* How was he telling them to see each other? How was he saying to be involved with each other? How was the individual person affirmed in submitting to him?

Jesus gave his followers *new* eyes 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 building it.

This 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 present.

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 relational outcome in the present for each individual who submits to him to participate in his family. No greater satisfaction of being accepted, no fulfillment of the individual's self-worth, no certainty of one's place and belonging can be experienced by the individual person without the relational significance of the whole of his new covenant family composing his new creation church in the new relational order.

As the functional key, Jesus' action here 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 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 present 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' family prayer (Jn 17). Based on his prayer, the global church is *one*, not a diversity 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, which 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. Belonging in this condition then, 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, but not according to the existing order of those contexts, 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. 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. 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 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 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 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. Yet, intimacy in relationship together cannot unfold until persons emerge whole by being equalized from their distinctions; 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' relational work on the cross to remove the veil from our hearts. As long as persons do not progress vulnerably behind the curtain in their relational involvement with Jesus on the cross to have their removed veil, 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.

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.

As a likely extension of the early disciples' biased lens in a comparative process, the early church strained also in a comparative process that put Hellenists in a deficit position compared to others in the church (Acts 6:1, cf. 4:34-35). The church's identity struggled in the distinctions made between Jews and Gentiles in the church, which put Gentiles in a deficit condition that could only be improved by conforming to the majority Jews. (Sound familiar in the modern Western church?) This relational barrier precipitated change in the church because God "made no distinction between them" (Acts 15:9). And Jesus' relational work on the cross "is our *wholeness*" and "has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall" that separates persons in a comparative system of distinctions (as Paul illuminated, Eph 2:14).

The inescapable reality facing all of us in the church today is this:

> Distinctions (individual and collective) made and used inevitably engage a comparative process that (1) stratifies the relational order and that (2) fragments persons and relationships, whereby they are unable to be whole in the new relational order enacted by Jesus for his church family to be transformed in relationships together both equalized and intimate in likeness of the whole-ly Trinity (as Paul made definitive, 2 Cor 3:18).

Therefore, Paul made it imperative for the persons and relationships of the church to be determined from inner out solely by "the peace [wholeness] of Christ…to which indeed you were called *and belong* in the one *church family*" (Col 3:15, cf. Jn 14:27). The wholeness of Jesus as our *sole determinant* is the critical *sola* missing from the Reformation, **the missing *sola*** which has opened the hermeneutic door for all our diversity and rendered us fragmented from what and who are essential for our wholeness.

The New Relational Order of Church Identity

Whether human distinctions used in the church are individual or collective, they impose on persons and/or groups of persons an identity incompatible with the new creation church family. Making distinctions, for example, based on race-ethnicity, socioeconomic class, gender, and personal abilities and resourcefulness only fragment persons and their relationships; and they counter the transformation of belonging to the new creation of God's family (as Paul magnified, Gal 3:26-27; Col 3:10-11). The defining and pivotal reality of the new relational order composing those truly belonging to the new creation family confronts our churches today and holds our persons and relationships to be accountable for our transformation to the new with nothing less and no substitutes.

A theological assumption Paul makes in the practice of his whole theology is that the new creation is 'already' (a present reality), even though not yet totally completed (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; Rom 6:4; Col 3:10; Eph 2:15b; 4:23-24). The breadth of Paul's theology and the depth of his practice are often overlooked when not seen in his total context.[6] For example, this is evident when key statements in his letters are interpreted apart from his total context (such as Eph 2:8-9; Rom 1:17; 3:28; 2 Cor 12:9). Paul's whole theology and practice clarify and correct our theology and practice today. For us to embrace this assumption with Paul is to be accountable for the new creation's functional significance and implications both for the person and persons together as church, and for their witness and mission in the world—all of which assumes wholeness.

Directly as a result of the new creation 'already' for Paul, the outcome emerges with having a qualitative new *phroneō* (mindset and lens) from a whole new *phronēma* (framework for thought, Rom 8:2,5-6; cf. 12:2). It is from this whole interpretive framework with its qualitative lens that life is perceived in the innermost of qualitative *zoe* (inner-out life not in the limits of quantitative *bios* narrowed to outer in), and that peace is understood with the presence of wholeness (not the absence of conflict). Paul clearly distinguishes that this new interpretive framework with the Spirit is "life and peace" (v.6), and its interpretive lens determines the qualitative depth level of life discerned and its wholeness realized inner out. When the new *phronēma* and *phroneō* function by the Spirit, what emerges in the church is distinct qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness that are vital for church practice to be whole—including being vital for all its persons. Yet, this qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness have been diminished and minimalized in the global church by both its contextualized bias and commonized bias.

[6] I discuss Paul's breadth and depth in *The Whole of Paul and the Whole in His Theology: Theological Interpretation in Relational Epistemic Process* (Paul Study, 2010). Online at http://www.4X12.org.

This new interpretive framework is critical for Paul in his discourse about peace throughout his letters and is essential for his readers to know and understand the whole in his theology. When Paul addressed the church at Corinth in their disputes, he illuminated "God is a God not of disorder but of peace" (1 Cor 14:33). This may appear to illuminate the obvious, but that depends on our interpretive framework. The term for disorder (*akatastasia*) involves being without a fixed or settled condition. Since Paul added that their church life and practice should be "in order" (*taxis*, v.40), that is, according to a set of guiding principles or an established framework, there are various conditions of church life and practice that would appear sufficient to establish order in the church—even by maintaining tradition or the status quo (cf. Jesus' interpretive lens, Mt 15:8-9). If Paul understood peace as just the absence of conflict, then these various church conditions (including the status quo) would qualify as sufficient ecclesial order.

A deeper tension and conflict emerge because this is not the peace of God that Paul illuminates. As urgent as disorder may be in some churches and around the world, Paul is deeply focused both on the quantitative of *bios* and the qualitative of *zoe*, with *zoe* always primary; and the absence of conflict does not adequately address the existing disorder, nor does it fulfill the order needed for the human condition, the inherent human relational need and problem that neuroscience also points to in the human brain.[7] Before existing church denominations applaud Paul's position, they need to pay deeper attention to what Paul illuminated. The juxtaposition of disorder (*akatastasia*) with Paul's peace reveals a critical distinction: Paul's use of *akatastasia* is not merely about being in a fixed or settled condition of *taxis*—for example, according to the Rule of Faith—but that this condition of *akatastasia* is a function of fragmentation, that is, practice that fragments the whole; and that God is not a God of reductionism but the God of wholeness, who therefore does not fragment but who makes whole (cf. Jesus' practice of peace, Mt 10:34). Moreover, what Paul further illuminates for his readers is that any ecclesial order (even with an established framework) without wholeness has no significance to God—as Paul further clarified later for the new creation church (Col 3:15; Eph 4:3). In what condition would your particular church order be considered by Paul today?

Paul's *synesis* (full understanding and depth of meaning) of peace emerged with the Spirit in a new *phronēma* with a new *phroneō* that deepened his focus. His *synesis* of wholeness included the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction from *tamiym* (cf. Gen 17:1), which helped him to integrally understand God's relational work establishing the new relationship (*siym*) of wholeness (*shalôm*, peace only as wholeness) in God's definitive blessing of his family (Num 6:24-26), and to relationally receive the wholeness that only Jesus gives (Jn 14:27) to embody the gospel of transformation to wholeness for the human condition (Eph 6:15). What Paul illuminated above about God and peace, and extends in relational discourse throughout his letters, made definitive this wholeness: the whole ontology and function of God, the whole-ly God's thematic relational response to make whole the human condition, the new creation of human ontology and function in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole-ly triune God, and the embodying of the whole ontology and function of the church as God's new creation family—the relational outcome of wholeness 'already' in the midst of reductionism. Therefore, Paul was not engaged in mere theological discourse for us to

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

consider, or to recommend some practice, but rather to make conclusive what is imperative to distinguish who we are and whose we are.

While Paul assumes the new creation 'already' and its relational outcome with the Spirit to embody the church's whole ontology and function as God's new creation family, he never assumes the church will live whole in its new relational order, and thereby make whole in the surrounding context of reductionism. To live in wholeness is the continuous challenge for the church because its ontology and function are ongoingly challenged by and susceptible to reductionism. The tension and conflict between wholeness and reductionism is ongoing with deep repercussions, which is why Paul settles for nothing less and no substitutes in his whole theology.

In Paul's transformed ecclesiology, for the church to live in wholeness is for the church to be ongoingly involved relationally with the Spirit for its belonging together "in the bond of wholeness" (Eph 4:3). This bond (*syndesmos*) is the whole relationships binding the church together from inner out as one interdependent body, which Jesus embodied 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 the church—again, even with pervasive ecclesial order. When Paul illuminated "God is not a God of fragmentation but the God of wholeness," he also made unequivocal that this new church relational order is neither optional nor negotiable. The challenge for Paul's readers, then, becomes both about his assumption of the new creation 'already' and if God's new creation family is truly the church. Paul's transformed ecclesiology clearly defines these as inseparable and irreducible. Reductionism would renegotiate church order as sufficient alternative, perhaps even with its reification as the peace of God with irenic identity markers serving to promote the mere absence of conflict. The wholeness of the global church does not emerge from such theology and practice.

In Paul's ongoing fight for the gospel, wholeness is a theological given for the truth of the gospel, just as Peter, Barnabas and other church leaders certainly experienced this truth from Paul (Gal 2:11-14). They learned a difficult lesson about the experiential truth of the gospel (distinguished from only having a referential or doctrinal truth) that whole relationships together are a theological imperative for the functional significance of the gospel. The polemic Paul framed around the issue between the works of the law and faith alone is more deeply focused on the underlying conflict between reductionism and wholeness, either reduced ontology and function or whole ontology and function (Gal 2:19-21); and the issues of grace, faith and works have usually not been seen in our theology and practice within this total context that includes the missing *sola*. Even though some of Paul's readers may not affirm the relational outcome of the gospel until the future of 'not yet' for whole persons and persons together in whole relationship, they still must account for the persons and persons together now in the image and likeness of God. Past, present and future, God is not a God of fragmentation but the God of wholeness. Even now, therefore, human terms and shaping of church life and practice are insufficient to be of significance to God—despite the certainty of a church's guiding principles (e.g. the *solas* of the Reformation) and the long-established tradition (as in the Rule of Faith) of its framework.

Any form of reductionism is never an option or substitute for the whole-ly God and God's relational whole embodied in the face of Christ, who has "shined on you and been gracious to you…and established the new relationship of wholeness." This peace—from the God of peace embodied by the 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).

Within the reductionism-wholeness issue is the tension between the already and the not yet, both of which Paul engaged in his relational discourse with the church at Philippi in what is likely one of his last prison letters. Paul raised some interrelated conditional (or factually implied) statements about their experiential truth of relationship with God in the present (Phil 2:1). They evoke reflection on the existence of the following: encouragement being in relationship with Christ, intimately experiencing his family love, having reciprocal relational involvement ongoingly together with the Spirit, and being affected in one's persons from inner out. From Paul's interpretive lens (*phroneō*), if these exist (or since they exist), then this defines their new mindset and interpretive lens (*phroneō* in likeness, 2:2,5) to determine their reciprocal involvement in relationships together, first based on their experiential truth of the whole of God and thereby in relational likeness to this whole-ly God (2:2-4). This new *phroneō* is not the result of human effort but emerges from a transformed *phronēma* constituted by the experiential reality of relationship together with the whole-ly Trinity, notably with the Spirit (Rom 8:5-6; Eph 2:22).

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 Thes 5:19). The Spirit's present concern and function is relational involvement for constituting whole ontology and function, for making functional wholeness together, and for the embodying of the whole-ly God's new creation family in whole relationship together as the church, 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 God and in likeness of how God 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 God 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 now in the church. This is the pivotal breakthrough in human relations that will transform the church to the new creation of persons redeemed and relationships reconciled in the new order uncommon for all persons, peoples, nations and their relations since 'from the beginning'. "Christ's *relational* purpose was to create in *his wholeness* one new *humanity* out of *their fragmentation*, thus making *them whole in uncommon* peace" (v.15). When this identity composed by the new relational order becomes the experiential reality for the persons and relationships of the church, they can claim salvation *from* sin as reductionism and salvation *to* wholeness together; and by only this experiential reality, they can proclaim and whole-ly witness to the experiential truth of this good news for human relations. Without this essential reality, persons and relationships in the church regress in what amounts to fake news based on alternative facts.

Furthermore, and most important, this pivotal breakthrough in relationships also includes and directly involves relationship with the whole and uncommon God. "In *their wholeness together* to reconcile *all* of them *having distinctions* to God through *his relational work on* the cross, by which he *redeemed their fragmenting differences*" (v.16). It is indispensable for us to understand what Paul unfolds for the church here is that reconciliation is inseparable from redemption. Redemption is integral for reconciliation in order for relationships (including with God) to come together at the heart of persons in their ontology and function from inner out, which then requires persons 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 face to face without the veil.

Therefore, the integral relational significance of *redemptive reconciliation* is for the heart of persons now to be vulnerable to each other (including God) and come together in intimate relationships. Intimate relationships are the relational outcome distinguished by the redemptive reconciliation of uncommon peace. 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 experiential reality of the whole person vulnerably involved ongoingly with "God in boldness and confidence" (Eph 3:12), rooted in the experiential truth of being redeemed from human distinctions, from their fragmentation and the deficit condition of reduced ontology and function, and then reconciled in wholeness together belonging in God's family—"the *intimate* dwelling in which *the whole-ly* God lives by his Spirit" (Eph 2:22, NIV cf. Jn 14:23). Accordingly and indispensably, to have this relational outcome with God and with each other requires existing relations to be transformed from the relational distance of their distinctions to intimate relationships composed by the redemptive reconciliation of uncommon wholeness. This whole outcome is the 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 relational outcome of the 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 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 God included removing the veil to transform relationships both with God and with each other to intimate relationships together (2 Cor 3:16-18).

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' 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 God.

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 God'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 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 God (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).

The Church's Whole-ly Identity as Equalizer

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 as Jesus equalized, and by (2) living equalized together 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 of Jesus and 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.

Common peace is not the peace of wholeness that Paul made imperative to solely determine the church from inner out (Col 3:15) to be new in uncommon likeness of the whole-ly Trinity (Col 3:10; Eph 4:24). Only the uncommon wholeness of Christ distinguishes the church family of Christ (Jn 14:27, cf. 16:33) and composes the church family to be differentiated acutely from common peace (clean-cut by Christ's sword, Mt

10:34-38). Moreover, his uncommon peace exposes the simulation and illusion basic to common peace, and causes its division to expose its real fragmentary condition of persons and relationships in its existing reality (Lk 12:51-53). Contrary to common peace, uncommon peace is not a comfort zone or a place of convenience for the church family to practice its faith, because the wholeness of uncommon peace conjointly fights for the whole gospel and fights against its reduction to anything less and any substitutes, even if the latter is doctrinally correct. As embodied by 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.

Only uncommon peace kisses righteousness (as in Ps 85:10). That is, uncommon peace is integrated with the righteousness composing the whole who, what and how the church and its persons and relationships are to be in their primacy of wholeness, and thus "to *live* their primacy integrally with righteousness" by the faithful relational involvement of family love—singing with the psalmist and dancing with Jesus and Paul. Therefore, the church family of Christ emerges and unfolds only *in* the relational significance of uncommon peace, *with* its uncommon relational process composed *by* its whole relational purpose *for* its uncommon relational outcome distinguishing persons and relationships together in wholeness as the whole and uncommon God's church family. This whole-ly identity of the church cannot be a variable identity of persons and relationships contextualized and/or commonized, or else their identity will no longer be whole and uncommon.

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. This uncommon peace needs to compose the church's theology and practice today both in the fight for this primacy of persons and relationships and against their reduction in any way, the subtle reductions of which by secondary matters have eluded our understanding and fogged our perception—notably by a contextualized bias and commonized bias. 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?

The whole relational terms of uncommon peace are always subjected to a narrowed-down lens of reduced terms that both referentialize the truth and fragment the reality of the significance of what the church is and the outcome of how the church is. The latter terms shift uncommon peace to common peace, which is no longer compatible with the relational significance of the peace of Christ nor congruent with the relational outcome of his peace.

When Jesus, as the palpable Word with the Spirit, transformed (not converted) the divisive Jew Paul, his purpose was not for common peace to negate the conflict of Paul's power relations against the church—which Jesus received personally, "why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9:4-5) Jesus' complete purpose in whole relational terms was for Paul's redemptive reconciliation from his fragmentation as a member of God's people to

his wholeness as a person-child belonging to God's whole and uncommon family. And on the relational basis of this experiential truth, Paul's whole witness would help unfold with the palpable Word the 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 embodied inner-out function of whole persons who relationally submit to one another in family love to be intimately involved in relationships together without the limits, barriers or comforts of human-shaped distinctions—signifying relationships without the veil. This relational process of equalizing from inner out needs to be distinguished in the experiential truth of church ontology and function, and not remain in doctrinal truth or as a doctrinal statement of intention, or else its 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 absorbed 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—that is, without **the reducing dynamic of *diakrino*** confronted the church by Paul (1 Cor 4:7)—which is congruent with Christ's relational work of wholeness (Eph 2:14-17) and is in relational likeness to God (Acts 15:9; Col 3:10-11).

The issue of access is deeply rooted in human history. Peter himself struggled with his interpretive framework (*phronēma*) and lens (*phroneō*) shaped by his tradition, whose making distinctions treated persons differently (*diakrino*) that denied access to those of Gentile distinction. Even after Jesus changed his theology (Acts 10:9-16), Peter struggled to change from the practice of his tradition because of his emotional investment and likely perception of losing something related to the privilege, prestige and power of having access. Such loss may not become apparent until one is placed in a lower position. Human-shaped distinctions signify having advantage in comparative relations, the absence of which precludes that advantage. After the primordial garden, the human relational condition "to be apart" became an intentional goal of human effort to secure advantage and maintain self-preservation—the 'survival of the fittest' syndrome masked even by religious faith. The specific resources for this relational advantage may vary from one historical context to another (cf. even the works of the law and justification by faith). Yet, privilege, prestige and power are the basic underlying issues over which these relational struggles of inequality are engaged—whether the context is family, social, economic, political or even within or among churches. 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. Inescapably then in church practice, by their very nature human distinctions are an outer-in dynamic emerging from reduced ontology and function, which in itself already diminishes, minimalizes and fragments God's relational whole (cf. the disparity in the early church, Acts 6:1). Access, however, is an inner-out dynamic signifying the relational dynamic and qualitative involvement of grace. That is, the functional significance of access is for all persons to be defined from inner out and not to be treated differently from outer in (including church leaders), in order to have the relational opportunity to be involved with God for their redemption from the human struggle of reductionism, and thereby to be equalized and intimately reconciled together to fulfill their inherent human relational need in God's relational whole (as Paul clarifies in his polemic, Gal 3:26-29). Equal access does not threaten personness 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 God'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 and the reality of valid distinctions given by God, without the church engaging in the reducing dynamic 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 ontology and function (as Paul made conclusive, Col 3:15). This purposeful relational involvement necessitates a major contextual change in the church, especially for a homogeneous gathering, yet this change should not be confused with 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.

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 multicultural church). The relational process of family love extends relational involvement to those who are different, takes in and vulnerably embraces them in their difference to relationally belong integrally to the church family. This is the dynamic made essential by Paul for the church's "unity of the Spirit in the bond of 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.

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. 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 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.

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 lens (*phroneō*)—likely formed with a contextualized or commonized bias—to understand the significance of differences to the whole-ly God 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-interpretive framework influenced by contextualized and commonized biases and shaped by culture 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.

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 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 each person must address as an individual and be accountable for, on the one hand, while the church community must account for these in practice at the same time.

Paul demonstrated the person's inner-out response to others' differences that is necessary both to be a whole person and to be involved in whole relationship together. In his fight for the gospel, Paul is also always fighting against reductionism. One aspect of the relational outcome of the gospel is the freedom that comes from being redeemed. Yet, for Paul the whole composing the gospel is not a truncated soteriology but the whole relational outcome of the full (*pleroma*) soteriology—what we are all saved *to* and not just *from*. This is a crucial distinction that we have yet to clearly distinguish in our theology and practice. 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 reductionism (Gal 5:1,13; 1 Cor 8:9). From this interpretive framework and 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, 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). Yet, 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 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 who 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 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. In this relational process, he also illuminated the relational need of the person and persons together as church to have contextual sensitivity and responsiveness to others 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 God'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). 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 God's new creation family.

Change always raises issues, especially if it intrudes on our freedom to live as we want. 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 merely conform. Freedom itself,

however, becomes reductionist when it is only the means for self-autonomy, self-determination or self-justification, because these are subtle yet acceptable substitutes from reductionism. Paul clarified that God never redeems us to be free for this end (Gal 5:1,13; cf. 1 Cor 7:35). God frees us from reductionism to be whole 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.

Paul's exercise of freedom in submitting his whole person to others in family love was constituted by his whole theology and practice. This first involved the convergence of the theological dynamics of his complete Christology in full soteriology with whole pneumatology for transformed ecclesiology. This whole theology then unfolds in practice in order to be involved in the relationships together necessary to embody the church as equalizer from inner out. This whole theology and practice are what Paul condenses in the gospel of transformation to wholeness vulnerably embodied and relationally enacted in the full-profile face of whole-ly Jesus, which has the relational outcome 'already' of only whole persons *agape*-relationally involved in whole relationships together both equalized and intimate.

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 interpretive 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 reductionism (cf. his personal assessment, Phil 3:7-9; also his challenge to Philemon).

Later, Paul appeared to qualify the extent of his vulnerable involvement in relationships by stating "I try to please everyone in everything" (1 Cor 10:33). The implication of this could be simply to do whatever others want, thereby pleasing all and not offending anyone (10:32)—obviously an unattainable goal that doesn't keep some persons from trying, Paul not among them. Paul would not be vulnerable in relationships with this kind of involvement. *Aresko* means to please, make one inclined to, or to be content with. This may involve doing either what others *want* or what they *need*. Paul is not trying to look good before others for his own benefit (*symphoros*, 10:33). Rather he vulnerably engages them with the relational involvement from inner out that they need (not necessarily want) for all their benefit "so that they may be saved *to whole relationship together in God's family*." In his 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 our surrounding context but shaped by the common. 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 ontology and function as equalizer from inner out. In ongoing tension and conflict with the church in the bond of wholeness is reductionism seeking to influence every level of the church—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 God (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. God is vulnerably present and relationally involved for intimate relationship together. While we cannot be equal with God (perhaps the purpose for some in the practice of deification), we have to be equalized to participate in and partake of God's life in his family together. That is, we cannot be intimately involved

with God from the basis of any of our outer-in distinctions, 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 God's whole and uncommon family. 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 God'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, nations and their human relations. The relational reality of this uncommon equality unfolds from the relational progression of this whole-ly church family as it is ongoingly involved in equalizing all persons, peoples, nations and their relationships—equalizing in whole relational terms composed by the redemptive reconciliation of uncommon peace.

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*. This is the gospel of wholeness Jesus enacted to constitute the uncommon trinitarian church family as **the intimate equalizer**.

Those in the global church have to examine the gospel we have claimed, and should wonder in the midst of our diverse condition: Do we have a different gospel and outcome determining the function for the church and its persons and relationships than the uncommon peace of Christ?; for "he came and proclaimed peace to you *in a deficit position distinction* and peace to those *in a better position of distinction yet still in a reduced condition*" (Eph 2:17)? Common peace affirms a variable gospel in diverse theology and practice.

The Uncommon Whole for All Disciples

The relational progression of Jesus transforms us to wholeness beyond the individual person to the whole of his family. His relational progression integrates whole persons involved in transformed relationships equalized and intimate into new family together in order to complete this wholeness in likeness of the Trinity. To be whole in likeness of the Trinity means for our persons together to function not only like Jesus but integrally also like the Father and the Spirit, all of whom are whole persons belonging to each other in relationship together as one Whole to constitute the Trinity. We can only be whole persons in likeness when we belong to each other in the new relational order of transformed relationships together as one Whole composing the church family (including as the body of Christ). Likewise, the church can only be whole when its persons and relationships are transformed to belong equalized and intimately to each other in relationship together as one Whole. There is no option for variance in God's whole—which should not be confused with the doctrine of election or assumed to preclude free will. The unalterable reality is that anything less and any substitutes are no longer whole, whether for the Trinity, the church, our persons or relationships.

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, which integrally is irreducibly whole and nonnegotiably 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" (Jn 12:26):

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 into the primary, the distinction of which may become ambiguous if our contextualized bias is not addressed; or the primary could be distorted and inverted with the secondary if our commonized bias is not negated.
3. Embracing the distinguishing bias *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. 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 condition of all persons, peoples and nations.

Who will "Follow my whole-ly person" and "be my whole-ly disciples where I am"?

Chapter 6 Sent by Jesus' Whole-ly Commission

Peace be with you *as uncommon wholeness*!
As the Father sent me *whole-ly*, so I send you.
John 20:21

Therefore, make *whole-ly* disciples of all nations *without distinctions*,
baptizing them *to be transformed from the old to the new*
in the *likeness* of the *whole-ly Trinity*.
Matthew 28:19

Pursue *uncommon wholeness* with everyone *at all levels of human life*.
Hebrews 12:14

The twenty-first century world is globalizing and getting smaller every day, especially in the realm of the Internet, while cyberspace is growing and the universe appears to be increasing well beyond the Milky Way. We live within the tension of this contextual interaction, which converges with what is common in the human context to further fragment the human condition. The ambiguity of its outcome either challenges us to adapt to existing conditions for as good an outcome as we can under the circumstances. Or it motivates us to take action to change existing conditions from fragmentation to wholeness. For many, the latter seems idealistic and perhaps unrealistic, but for Jesus this is how his disciples "Follow me" and are involved "where I am."

Is the twenty-first century church globalizing? And is the current surrounding tension causing the church and its persons and relationships to adapt to existing conditions, hoping for the best outcome? Many would observe the fact of the majority of Christians having shifted from the West to the Two-Thirds World as evidence that the church is adapting to become the global church. The ambiguity of this current outcome, however, leaves unresolved the fragmentation of the church's diverse condition—in spite of joint ventures and other efforts at mission conferences to compose a global mission for all nations.[1]

Looking beyond the quantity of change in Christian demographics, what kind of change is taking place in the global church depends directly on the measure used by the church and its persons and relationships. That is, as Jesus made absolute in his paradigm (Mk 4:24), this *measure* is critical:

[1] Allen Yeh examines close-up these mission efforts in *Polycentric Missiology: Twenty-First-Century Mission from Everyone to Everywhere* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016).

> The measure of Jesus' person we use in our theology and practice will be the measure of the gospel we claim; this gospel we claim will be the measure of the gospel we proclaim; and this gospel we proclaim will be the measure of this gospel's outcome. Therefore, the outcome we get from this gospel claimed and proclaimed will be the measure of change the church and its persons and relationships undergo other than maintaining the status quo—which either merely re-forms/re-news their theology and practice, or transforms all of them together to *be* whole and, on this uncommon basis, to enact to live whole-ly together and thereby make whole the human condition of all persons, peoples and nations in this fragmentary globalizing world.

Perhaps more urgent than ever in human history, the twenty-first century presents conditions needing to be changed, for which Christians have both the opportunity and responsibility. To meet this opportunity face to face and to fulfill this responsibility in its primacy, we need to understand our purpose in life and what we are here for.

Clarifying and Correcting Our Commission

Even before I was a Christian, I was aware that Christians shared about Christ with others. After I became a Christian, it seemed natural for me to share about Christ with other colleagues in the U.S. Air Force. My actions didn't seem forced or artificial. Later, when the Great Commission became visible to me, the main theme I heard revolved around "Go into the world." Since I had global exposure to the world while in the air force, the world didn't seem like a big thing to me but I felt the responsibility to do something more to fulfill this commission. After all, it was imperative to "go." Much later, it was clarified for me that "go" wasn't the imperative of Christ's commission, even though that's the imperative that prevailed among Christians in their theology and dominated their practice. Little did I realize, even during my early period of theological study, that correction was also necessary if his commission is going to be fulfilled—a depth of correction.

Part of this depth of correction involved my view of the world itself. My previous exposure to the world shifted as the shrinking globalized world "came" to me. This shift faced me with the need to explore deeper into the world and get to the depth of the diverse persons, peoples and nations composing the world now in my neighborhood, at my doorstep. Clarification of this depth unavoidably exposed me to their human condition, and thus made me vulnerable to my human condition. This depth has been further corrected in my theology and practice to provide the understanding of the human condition (starting with my own condition) necessary to address the world with whole theology and practice. Such clarification and correction continue to be needed in the global church, which faces challenges in a globalizing world that require the church's response to the depth of the human condition at all levels of life.

Clarification of the Great Commission with the real imperative of "make disciples" doesn't appear to have made a significant difference in his followers' practice. This apparent lack of change is likely the direct outcome of their theology lacking the

change from being corrected. So, what exactly is Jesus' commission for all his disciples, and how is it fulfilled beyond what exists today?

In the Great Commission directed to us in relational terms (Mt 28:18-20; Lk 24:45-49; Jn 20:21), Jesus implies that he counts on the identity of all his disciples who belong to his new creation church family, and who are living in relational progression of the new relational order. He counts on them only in these relational terms because this is the whole relational outcome of the only gospel that he enacted and thereby fulfilled for them to be whole and uncommon in likeness of the whole-ly Trinity. This is implied by Jesus since only those who claim this gospel have the necessary basis to proclaim his whole gospel in response to his commission. Here again we are faced with the reality of the measure we use:

> The type of gospel (whole or partial) we use will be the measure of the outcome we get; the measure of the outcome we experience in our life, as persons and in our relationships and churches, will be the identity of the disciples and the extent of discipleship we get.

Therefore, we cannot expect to engage the Great Commission beyond the gospel we embrace and the disciples we have become.

The only relational imperative in his commission is for us to "make disciples of all *persons, peoples and* nations—*without distinctions between and among them*." To make such disciples whole without fragmentation, however, would be uncommon, and thus this relational outcome requires us first to be whole-ly disciples in order for this outcome to emerge. The reality, in other words, is that the disciples we are will determine the disciples we make—nothing more no matter how dedicated we are to fulfill the Great Commission. This reality is pivotal for the global church, and all its churches, persons and relationships, to distinguish in its theology and practice.

Accordingly, the Great Commission sending us into the common context of the changing world is based on the validity of presuming that we have responded, embraced and progressed in his nonnegotiable call to us to be whole and uncommon. If this is a false assumption to make about us—despite any of our good intentions—then whatever effort we make in the Great Commission cannot make whole-ly disciples but is limited to make only disciples in likeness as we are. Such an outcome unfolds subtly conforming to be like us (e.g. as Western Christian mission composed the Great Commission) rather that transforming to be whole in likeness of the Trinity. And even though Two-Thirds-World Christians have been refuting Christian colonialism from the West, their outcomes from the Great Commission (even as postcolonial) are still ambiguous and also in need of clarification and correction.

The indisputable fact that the disciples we are (no matter what or where) will determine the disciples we make is the ongoing reality for all missions in the global church. In the midst of the growing diversity of churches and their persons and relationships, this pivotal issue remains significantly unaddressed, basically ignored, or essentially unrecognized in their theology and practice.

Our purpose in life is integrated with Jesus' commission for all his disciples, and how his commission is fulfilled beyond what exists today determines the primacy of what

we (together individually and collectively) are here for. How do they integrally converge and unfold?

To distinguish the irreducible breadth and depth of his commission, Jesus first identified his person as the source of all life (Mt 28:18), who also constituted the new creation of life (Lk 24:44-47). In relational response to our fragmentary human condition, this new life is constituted whole. Wholeness distinguishes the new life of his disciples, nothing less. Therefore, as he communicates to his disciples their commission, he embraces them in new life with "Peace be with you" (Jn 20:21). That is, beyond the significance of a warm greeting or traditional blessing (cf. 20:19,26), Jesus interjects this **irreducible and nonnegotiable qualifier** to distinguish their new life together in the bond of "My peace is with you to determine your wholeness." Equally important, this is not merely the peace defined in the human context (common peace) but only his uncommon peace, no substitutes (as in Jn 14:27, cf. Mt 10:34)—all based on "as the Father sent me." "My uncommon peace determines you in wholeness." His qualifier is irreducible because it constitutes us in nothing less than whole, and is nonnegotiable because it distinguishes us in no substitutes for the uncommon.

Integrally then, the new life of his disciples is distinguished whole and uncommon. It is only to his whole-ly disciples that Jesus directs his commission: "As the Father has sent *my whole-ly person into the world*, so I send you *my whole-ly disciples into the world*" (Jn 20:21; and as Jesus prayed, 17:18)—composing his commission in the dynamic of nothing less than wholeness and no substitutes for the uncommon.

Our purpose in life is to live the new life in uncommon wholeness, both vulnerable together in the new creation church family and vulnerably in the world to make whole-ly disciples of all persons, peoples and nations. Making whole-ly disciples is not by mere reforms (even postcolonial) or renewal (limited to the Spirit) but by the transformation of trinitarian baptism (the old dies and the new rises, Mt 28:19). Furthermore, as these whole-ly disciples emerge, then nurture them to grow and mature together in the new creation church family according to all that whole-ly Jesus embodied, enacted and fulfilled in the primacy of relational together both in the present and age to come (Mt 28:20). When his commission is fulfilled by these whole relational terms according to the primacy of this relational process, it becomes integral to define our purpose in life and to determine the primacy of what we are in the world for.

As our commission becomes clarified and corrected, there is more to embrace and enact together in Jesus' whole-ly commission.

Continuity and/or Discontinuity into the World

In his qualifier distinguishing his whole-ly disciples "as the Father sent me," Jesus reveals an essential truth and reality for his commission sending us into the world, which is lacking in the prevailing understanding of the Great Commission. "As you, Father, have sent me into the world" (Jn 17:18) composed the experiential truth and relational reality of the incarnation as neither the initial nor unique expression of the whole-ly God's presence and involvement in the world; but the incarnation certainly was the most vulnerable.

The incarnation embodied the most vulnerable presence and enacted the most vulnerable involvement of God in the world to distinguish the full profile of God's face; and this full profile could only emerge and unfold by the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes. Yet, what Jesus also reveals is the continuity of his face with the face of God disclosed in the Old (First) Testament, whose presence and involvement in covenant relationship together face to face unfolded in God's definitive blessing for new relationship together in wholeness (Num 6:24-26) and is now fulfilled by the face of Jesus' whole-ly person (2 Cor 4:6).

Jesus' whole-ly commission has continuity with the face of whole-ly God within covenant relationship together (profiled in Gen 17:1-2), and this continuity is essential for the integrity of our wholeness sent into the world. The gospel can only be whole when the incarnation has continuity with the gospel initiated by the face of God within covenant relationship. Our wholeness sent into the world is contingent on the whole outcome of the whole gospel, which is whole only in continuity with the face of God's whole-ly presence and involvement from the beginning. While this further clarifies our theology, perhaps you wonder what significance this has for our actual practice.

Without this continuity, our presence and function in the world become shaped by the diverse conditions in our surrounding contexts, and thus no longer are following Jesus' intrusive relational path from the Father. In this subtle process, our discipleship separates Jesus from his defining ontology and function with the Father, whereby (1) he has no functional continuity with the whole-ly God and (2) his person has been reduced to the quantitative framework of the incarnation. Thus, in contrast and conflict with John's Gospel, the embodied Word may still be God in our theology but limited in continuity with being also the Creator (Jn 1:1-4), and further constrained in continuity of vulnerable function also as the whole-ly Trinity (1:18). Moreover, this limit and constraint imposed on whole-ly Jesus also denies him from having the authoritative basis and means (*exousia*) to make whole the human condition—the claim he made to introduce his commission (Mt 28:18, cf. Jn 1:4-5). Therefore, as John summarized, this is the continuity of Jesus' whole-ly person in relational progression from the beginning that we, by the necessity of his irreducible and nonnegotiable qualifier, must follow into the world in order to be distinguished whole-ly "as the Father sent me." This is the continuity that Jesus prayed for all his disciples to embody and enact distinctly in the world (Jn 17:13-19).

The continuity issue is certainly essential to fulfill Jesus' commission, notably beyond the diverse ways existing today. Yet, the issue of continuity is often less obvious in our discipleship than the presence of discontinuity. Any discontinuity with the whole-ly God's presence and involvement from the beginning reduces our persons and function and thereby fragments our relationships. This indicates that our practice is shaped by a reduced theological anthropology that defines our persons and determines our function and relationships accordingly. This is what emerged from the primordial garden to compose the human condition, and how our practice (if not also our theology) can reflect, reinforce and even sustain the human condition. This raises further and deeper issues of continuity and discontinuity.

When Christians are sent into the world on the basis of Jesus' commission, their presence and involvement in the world are distinguished to be whole and uncommon in distinct contrast to fragmentation and conflict with the common. Accordingly, their

persons and function should not be ambiguous if they understand their purpose in life and what they are in the world for. Such ambiguity has prominently existed among active Christians, however, and a major cause for the ambiguity of those serving in the world is the false dichotomy between evangelism and social action—not necessarily as an either-or but of defining priorities, which in practice has been usually at the expense of the other. The artificial distinction between a so-called salvation gospel and social gospel has been generated by proponents (even opponents) of both in the reverse dynamic of anything less and any substitutes for the whole gospel of Jesus' relational progression from the beginning. Even though significant efforts have been made to resolve this dichotomy and remove this distinction, the fact of having this difference at all evidences the underlying issue of not progressing with Jesus from the beginning—nor do efforts for resolution appear to be progressing either.

As God, Jesus' essential progression—again not to be confused with process theology—unfolded from being the Creator of human ontology and function to enacting that whole ontology and function created in the image of whole-ly God (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15). His sole purpose and what he was in the world for was for humanity to be redeemed from the human condition of its reduced ontology and function—the condition existing at all levels of human life—and thereby be transformed to the new creation of whole-ly ontology and function in the image and likeness of the whole-ly Trinity (2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10).

Evangelism supposedly proclaims this Good News, yet it can only proclaim what it has claimed. To make an artificial distinction with a social gospel and the false dichotomy with social action means having both claimed a gospel of truncated soteriology (not saved *to* uncommon wholeness together) based on an incomplete Christology of Jesus' whole-ly person—i.e. Good News that hasn't been fact-checked with the Source who composes the experiential truth and relational reality of the whole gospel. Conversely, and likewise, social action supposedly claims the good news of Christ, yet what it proclaims is not the whole-ly Jesus whose peace is uncommon—peace neither defined by the human context (Jn 14:27) nor determined by existing situations and circumstances (Mt 10:34). Its good news becomes the alternative news of a virtual reality. Consider this reality, social action works for the common good but, more often than not, that "good" has been commonized (as from the beginning, Gen 3:5). Thus, social action's artificial distinction with a salvation gospel and false dichotomy with evangelism means not understanding the extent of the human condition and the whole-ly Jesus' encompassing depth of relational response to make it whole in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes.

Therefore, the presence and involvement of both sides of this dichotomy and distinction are ambiguous (at best) in the world. More critically, in their mutually reduced theological anthropology underlying their diverse identity, their persons and function reflect, unintentionally reinforce, or unknowingly sustain the human condition rather than make it whole. That is, in contrast for them to live and to make the uncommon wholeness with-in which Jesus sent his disciples into the world as the Father sent him. In continuity *with-in* Jesus, these are the disciples of whole theology and practice uncommon to the existing diverse condition of disciples and their discipleship.

Our presence and involvement in the world will be ambiguous until we have continuity with the whole-ly Jesus in relational progression from the beginning. This

gospel of Jesus is not a common gospel and thus is not the gospel usually claimed and proclaimed today. It should not be surprising, then, when the identity of his disciples as "the light of the world" (Mt 5:14) becomes ambiguous even though they are responding to the commission to proclaim the gospel. Our identity in the world as the light becomes ambiguous when it doesn't have continuity with "the Light of the world" from his beginning (Jn 1:4; 9:5). The gospel is a key to our identity formation, thus the gospel we have and use will be the identity we get. Yet, whatever its variation, that identity is always ambiguous when it is not the gospel of Light we have. How so?

Illuminated Continuity

The Light from the beginning as Creator constituted human identity in a distinct ontology and function, and thereafter the integrity of this anthropology was compromised. The Good News (summarized in John's Gospel), of course, is that the original constitutor of life, "the light of all people," came into the world to restore human ontology and function. This is where our perception and understanding of the incarnation have to extend beyond the embodiment of Jesus in history in order to have continuity with whole-ly Jesus from the beginning.

Jesus, the Word from God, integrally embodied the whole-ly God and enacted the whole-ly Trinity. Having the vulnerable presence and relational involvement of the Trinity was essential to illuminate the uncommon whole of who, what and how God is in order to distinguish God from all human shaping, which includes how Christians have shaped God in their diverse terms. Equally important, and perhaps more so for understanding our purpose in life and what we are here for, since Jesus created human ontology and function in the image and likeness of whole-ly God, the Trinity, he also enacted this "image of God" (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15) to illuminate unmistakably the whole-ly who, what and how of human ontology and function created in that image and transformed to the new creation in likeness of the Trinity. What emerges from this experiential truth is the fact that Jesus illuminated human ontology and function as the relational purpose of his earthly life as "the Light of all people." And what unfolds from this relational reality is the fact that his illumination of the condition of human ontology and function needing wholeness by "the Light shining in the darkness" enacted what he was in the world for. In the distinguished ontology and function enacted by Jesus in his whole-ly identity, there is no ambiguity for who, what and how we are to *be* in the likeness of the Trinity, whereby we can *live* whole-ly in the world.

What emerges from the embodied image/likeness of whole-ly God enacted by whole-ly Jesus is **our purpose in life** to live this whole-ly ontology and function in our own person and inseparably with other persons together as the church family, in continuity with who and what whole-ly Jesus is and congruent with how Jesus lived in his person with the Father and the Spirit together as the whole-ly Trinity. And how this whole-ly likeness unfolds in our whole-ly ontology and function *together* will illuminate the uncommon wholeness of all life "so that the world may know that you *Father* have sent me *for this relational purpose* and have loved *my church family* even as you loved me" and thus "may believe" to be made whole also, as Jesus prayed (Jn 17:21,23). Therefore, while we are in the world, living vulnerably our uncommon wholeness together just as Jesus was sent will fulfill **what we are in the world for**.

The whole-ly Jesus, neither diversely contextualized nor subtly commonized, composed as the Light only this gospel from the beginning in order to transform the existing ontology and function of all human persons and their relationships to uncommon wholeness. Yet, this whole and uncommon gospel has not been the defining key for the identity of Christians both in the church and in the world. As diverse substitutes, the whole-ly gospel has been frequently fragmented by a contextualized lens and/or consistently reduced by a commonized lens. This is evident in the results from the gospel used instead, results which have lacked qualitative relational significance; though these lacking results are not observed if focused on the quantitative results. For example, for evangelism merely to gain decisions for Christ is an incomplete gospel that does not fulfill Jesus' commission, even if they increase church membership to new heights. Likewise, for social action merely to improve human situations and circumstances—as good as that may be—is an insufficient gospel that doesn't fulfill what we are in the world for. Whether the gospel is constrained to traditional evangelism or limited to conventional social action, how Christians are present and involved in the world bear the identity of their gospel and its breadth and depth.

It is crucial, therefore, to understand the implications of continuity and discontinuity with whole-ly Jesus. The whole-ly outcome of the whole-ly gospel of the Light is the essential transformation of common secular anthropology to the uncommon theological anthropology (neither contextualized nor commonized). When the gospel we claim is not the Light from the beginning, the anthropology we get is not clearly distinguished from the prevailing anthropology in our surrounding contexts. Consequently, the identity of our persons and relationships based on a so-called theological anthropology becomes assimilated into or co-opted by a common anthropology, or we form a hybrid identity with a common anthropology, all of which defines our persons and determines our function by a reduced ontology and function. That renders us ambiguous in the world, perhaps even a contradiction, unable to be distinguished in the whole-ly ontology and function restored by the Light. Rendered to what has become a subtle condition of reductionism due to a weak view of sin underlying a reduced theological anthropology, there is no illuminated continuity with the Light of whole-ly Jesus but, at best, a mere association of the Light with the name of Christ.

Illuminated Discontinuity

As the Light of all persons, peoples and nations, Jesus' only purpose to be sent into the world was to redeem all life from the compromised integrity of their ontology and function in the condition of reductionism. With redemption they can be transformed to the new condition of whole-ly ontology and function in likeness of the Trinity and, therefore, be reconciled (as in redemptive reconciliation) in relationships together both equalized and intimate as the Trinity's whole-ly family. The relational outcome of this redemptive reconciliation of all life also encompasses all of physical creation: "For the creation waits with eager longing for the *unambiguous* revealing of the family of God…in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the *uncommon wholeness* of the family of God"—as Paul illuminated the gospel of whole-ly Jesus (Rom 8:19-21).

Our purpose in life as Christians is not merely to be like Jesus. We are to follow the whole-ly Jesus in his essential relational progression from the beginning, which involves nothing less and no substitutes of the whole-ly Trinity. Our purpose as disciples requires our reciprocal relational involvement with the full profile of God's face in intimate relationship together face to face without the veil (notably of human shaped distinctions), so that our persons and function will be in likeness of the Trinity revealed whole-ly to us. To be in this whole-ly ontology and function together is our purpose in life, not merely as an individual person but only as persons together in uncommon wholeness just like and with the Trinity—which is composed only in relational terms with the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes. Anything less and any substitutes stop short of Jesus' essential relational progression and are in discontinuity with his relational purpose.

In addition, integrally just as the Father sent whole-ly Jesus into the world, Jesus commissions his whole-ly disciples to be sent into the world to be nothing less and to live in no substitutes. His whole-ly commission involves also not merely making *individual* disciples because that is inadequate to meet his terms for a whole-ly commission. Each disciple is to be baptized in the transformed new life together of equalized and intimate relationships with all other disciples in likeness of the Trinity, according to the whole-ly terms of Jesus (Mt 28:19-20). The depth of his commission is irreducible by anything less and its breadth is nonnegotiable by any substitutes. Only whole-ly Jesus together as the Trinity and his whole-ly disciples together as family in the Trinity's likeness distinguish the ontology and function necessary to respond to the human condition existing in reduced ontology and function. Our whole-ly condition is necessary in order for our response to have the relational outcome of nothing less and no substitutes of the qualitative relational significance of uncommon wholeness—all of which composes the ongoing relational process of making whole-ly disciples of all persons, peoples and nations. This integral function, integrated with our whole-ly purpose in life, fulfills what we are in the world for.

Following Jesus in his relational progression unfolds as our relational reality only when in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes. Anything less and any substitutes always shift us to a reverse dynamic that regresses subtly in reduced ontology and function. This counters progressing distinguished in whole-ly ontology and function, and this discontinuity makes ambiguous our purpose in life and what we are in the world for. Therefore, continuity with whole-ly Jesus is no mere theological issue for the global church, because discontinuity illuminated in the practice of the church and its persons and relationships exposes deep issues. His gospel from the beginning gets to the heart of the identity of who we are and whose we are, and then this whole gospel confronts the diverse condition of our churches and their persons and relationships to determine "Where are you in your purpose in life?" and "What are you doing here in the world?" And the gospel we have in our theology and use in our practice will make evident how well "you know me even after I have been among you such a long time" (as exposed in the early disciples, Jn 14:1-11).

The ambiguity of our presence and involvement, most notably as "the light of the world," will only have clarity when we are in continuity with whole-ly Jesus, and therefore congruent with "the Light of all persons, peoples, nations and life" sent into the universe to "shine in the darkness (i.e. all aspects of the human condition)." Until the

Light has clarity in his whole-ly disciples, locating our light in the darkness will be an ongoing issue—no matter how doctrinally correct our theology and dedicated our practice in his name.

Having said all this about the need for our continuity with Jesus in relational progression, there is an essential given about whole-ly Jesus in which we must also have congruence for our light to shine in the darkness. Jesus didn't belong to the world into which he was sent. Thus, to be distinguished as the Light of all persons, peoples, nations and life, he had to have discontinuity with their way of life—just as Jesus intruded on culture (discussed in chap. 5)—in order for his light not be absorbed in its darkness and thereby be rendered ambiguous or lost (as he prayed, Jn 17:16-19). This is analogous to black holes in the universe engulfing stars by their gravitational force and extinguishing the life of those stars, or at least being lost in the black hole. Whole-ly Jesus, by the nature of who he is and whose he is, could not be and did not become assimilated, absorbed or co-opted into the gravitational influence of their way of life in order that the integrity of his identity as the Light not be compromised.

Therefore, this illuminates the experiential truth and relational reality that whole-ly Jesus has **discontinuity with their (including our) common way of life** at all levels: personal, interpersonal, collective, institutional, structural and systemic. His whole-ly disciples, sent into the world that we also don't belong to just as whole-ly Jesus does not, engage in his same discontinuity as we are relationally involved in his continuity—the illuminated continuity and discontinuity integral to who we are and whose we are. Without this discontinuity also, our light in the world becomes assimilated, absorbed or co-opted by the gravitational influence of any or all of these levels of life in the human context, and thus rendered ambiguous or lost, unable to impact the darkness and make the essential difference needed at all levels of human life.

The Ethics of Wholeness and the Morality of the Uncommon

To make whole-ly disciples together of all persons, peoples and nations requires them to be equalized without the distinctions that keep them "to be apart." For all of us to be equalized in our persons and relationships necessitates being equalized based on a theological anthropology that defines our persons and determines our relationships beyond the reduced ontology and function of human contextualization, whose underlying basis in all its human diversity is from commonization. Yet, having a theological anthropology that gets us beyond any contextualized and commonized biases is only possible (1) when our view of sin goes beyond the knowledge of "good and evil" that emerged from the primordial garden (Gen 3:5), and (2) when our lens gets to the depth underlying all sin definitively as reductionism.

Sin as reductionism is the ongoing pervasive and prevailing counter-relational process of reducing whole ontology and function by explicit and implicit conflict with the whole relational process of living, making, growing and maturing in whole ontology and function. The breadth and depth of this view of sin is not the common view existing among Christians today. Having the existing view is problematic for the light to be distinguished in the darkness, and a contradiction for those claiming and proclaiming the gospel. Only sin as reductionism envelops the spectrum of the human condition at all its

levels of human life. This human condition is inescapably our human condition also, which we either maintain or change—depending on having discontinuity with its common way of life.

Can you grasp a discipleship that follows a narrative of Jesus wielding a sword (as in Mt 10:34) in your surrounding contexts? This seems hard to imagine, especially since Jesus chastened sword-wielding Peter with "all who *wield* the sword will *be reduced* by the sword" (Jn 18:10; Mt 26:52). Implausible also would be trying to justify such action and reconcile it with loving others, which is the primary relational purpose for all his disciples that unmistakably distinguishes their identity as "my disciples" (Jn 13:34-35). This nonnegotiable commandment by Jesus illuminates the whole relational terms of relationship together both with God and others that distinguishes his disciples in the world. Though the terms are nonnegotiable, his commandment has been diversely interpreted and practiced by our contextualized and commonized biases, thus having a view of love that essentially only idealizes our presence and involvement in the world. Therefore, his terms require the clarification and correction from Jesus in order to compose our moral presence and ethical involvement in the human context as his unmistakable disciples.

Being disciples and making disciples are never merely an individual matter, though they certainly involve individuals. The reality of the individual person, however, is a social reality that includes the convergence of all the levels of human life into the personal—converging the interpersonal, collective, institutional, structural and systemic levels. Jesus' interactions with individual persons also engaged their social reality, and he was never involved with them in isolation, as if each lived in a human vacuum. Sociology provides a lens for this social reality, which helps each of us understand how all of us are part of a larger context and a life and practice greater than our individual self.[2]

This rightly points to the relational design of humanity and the need for certain character qualities and conduct to optimize function of human persons together. Contextualization, however, cannot stop at the social level, as tends to happen in various biblical studies (e.g. new Paul perspectives) and missions; when it stops here, this contextualized bias hinders or prevents going deeper to the underlying issues of commonization. While sociological contextualizing provides useful descriptive information of collective behavior, this is insufficient to understand the significance of humanity's relational design, and thus inadequate to explain what is necessary for relationships together to be optimal. As much as our knowledge of human life has advanced, it is still based on a limited epistemic field that is unable to complete our understanding of the human person and relationships. We need an encompassing epistemic field that takes us beyond current limits.

Our *theological* anthropology should take us deeper into the human life of persons and relationships, but this requires having a view of sin composed beyond "knowing good and evil" that itself is composed from its source of reductionism. Having this theological anthropology is indispensable and applying this view of sin is irreplaceable for our moral presence and ethical involvement in the world to be distinguished from this

[2] Biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann and his son John Brueggemann, a sociologist, engage each other in an important dialogue that examines this social reality facing Christians in the U.S., in *Rebuilding the Foundations: Social Relationships in Ancient Scripture and Contemporary Culture* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017).

social reality. This is necessary to fulfill our purpose in the world and to make an essential difference in the reality of existing social orders surrounding us, whose operating mode labors in ethical contradiction or relativism and struggles in moral disorder. The sword Jesus wields focused on the biological family as just an example (Mt 10:35-38), because our family of origin represents only one of the levels of our social reality that his disciples' moral presence and ethical involvement need to address in the human context—that is, to fight against all reductionism in the human condition that prevents, diminishes and minimalizes uncommon wholeness.

Christians make assumptions that our presence and involvement in the world don't contradict our identity as the light in the darkness, unless of course we've done something bad or evil based on the knowledge of "good and evil." This self-appraisal presumes that our moral presence and ethical involvement have not been compromised, based on further assumptions about ethics or morality. Few would deny that ethics is the correct thing to do, even though many may not practice it. We assume that ethics is right for everyone (e.g. for the common good) without considering if that moral code is simply the common's function of the world—the function that routinely composes an illusion that does not result in wholeness for persons and relationships (e.g. that peace should constitute). Such an assumption renders ethics to an end in itself, or perhaps a means for self-determination that may serve some quantitative end (e.g. less tension or better reputation) but have little or no qualitative and relational significance.

In this regard, Jesus may in fact be part of the minority who disclaim that ethics is the right thing to do. His conduct was a cause of much discord among his religious counterparts, who objected to Jesus not following the moral code of the law. The issue Jesus consistently raised was distinguishing the primary from the secondary, thereby exposing what had become merely an end in itself and a means for self-determination—as he exposed conclusively in the Sermon on the Mount (discussed shortly). Directly underlying this issue is the plenary issue of theological anthropology and the ontology and function used for their/our person and relationships. We make assumptions involving these issues, which then create illusions about our ethics and for its practice. For the light to be illuminated clearly, we have to eliminate any fog in our theology and practice; or, perhaps, this light simply needs to be turned on.

When we become functional followers (not in name only) of whole-ly Jesus, we are relationally connected and involved "where I am" (nonnegotiable in Jesus' paradigm for discipleship, Jn 12:26). By sending us into the world as the Father sent him, he involves us conjointly in the primary relational context and process of our *belonging* with the whole-ly Trinity while living in the human social context—our secondary social reality limited by human contextualization and constrained by its commonization. We certainly need help in fulfilling this function, with clarification and correction along the way to be distinguished unmistakably as "his disciples."

The dynamic of reciprocating contextualization is critical for our whole understanding of life and practice in the surrounding contexts, whether for Jesus' life and practice or ours. With reciprocating contextualization Jesus connects us to an even greater context and an even deeper process of life and practice beyond the limits of sociology, that is, to the theological anthropology that is integrated to the embodied light. As the Light, Jesus functioned to embody the relational design and purpose of the human person created in the image of (and his relational context in) the whole-ly God, and he

embodied the function of the relational ontology of human persons together created in likeness of (and his relational process with) the Trinity. Following Jesus on his relational path involves going further than moral ideals, values and virtues, and deeper than ethical character and conduct, to intrusively engage human persons together not only for optimal function but for the ongoing relationships in everyday life and practice necessary together to be whole, God's irreplaceable whole. This is where morality and ethics converge with his sword.

This ongoing life and practice in qualitative distinction was neither a static framework for engagement nor a program of ethical involvement, no matter how useful such ethics may be conceived to be. This was a process of the vulnerable presence and relational involvement of the *zoe*-life of the embodied whole-ly Word as communicative action of the whole-ly God. Thus, involvement in his relational context necessitates more than character, and function in his relational process necessitates more than conduct—that is, as character and conduct are commonly perceived in ethical studies.

Ethics in general involves a moral philosophy of how persons should live in a certain context and/or in the presence of others, thus establishing a system or code of moral values, standards and principles for character and conduct. This tends not to be directly associated with identity, yet in function ethical practice (or its absence) does indeed relatively define who, what and how persons are. Christian (biblical) ethics should signify Christian identity and, moreover, needs to be composed by the identity that is both relationally compatible and congruent with whole-ly Jesus. Otherwise, as good as our ethics are perceived, we will be on a different path than Jesus and will not be distinguished as "my disciples."

Jesus' whole-ly life and practice in his kingdom-family and the surrounding context, and in relation to persons in those contexts, went beyond a system of ethics and a predetermined code of conduct. This is not to say that situations determined his ethical practice (as in situation ethics, situationalism), nor to only emphasize principles (as in principalism). Ethics, in specific practice, require a forensic framework that is applicable for all situations and circumstances, or else ethics become merely situational. The three qualifying issues involved in his engagement of a culture continue to inform us of his ethical practice: compatibility, partially overlapping, or incompatibility with wholeness (discussed in chap. 5). His whole-ly life and practice, in both his kingdom-family and the surrounding context, was a predisposed relational involvement of his whole person guided by triangulation with the Trinity to fulfill his relational purpose and function in the world for relationships to be whole, and was thereby necessary to make whole. This is *the integrating theme of Christian ethics*, to which practice adheres ongoingly. This relational context and process are only on God's terms, which defined and determined Jesus' identity and function, and thereby defined and determined his ethical practice—all of which cannot be reduced to referential terms or negotiated to our terms.

Jesus was sent into the world by his Father in congruence with God's terms for the relational context and process to be whole and to make whole. This purpose of living and making whole in the new covenant relationship together as God's family is the end (*telos* in Greek) of this relational process—the teleological focus guiding all life and practice in his kingdom-family and the surrounding context. Yet, this *telos* does not justify the use of any means to this end (e.g. using force) or disregard the nature of all means used (i.e. its commonization), even if compatible with existing ethical practice.

Any means from reductionism is incompatible to be whole or to make whole. This *telos* by its nature necessitates congruence of its means, thus the *telos* to be God's whole also constitutes what means are compatible for this end.

The focus of means to balance a teleological focus in ethical studies is defined as the obligatory (*deon* in Greek) means necessary to an end, or refraining from the wrong means—known as a deontological focus.[3] Yet, the pivotal issue for ethics in terms of character and conduct is when ethical practice becomes the primary focus. That is, as ethical means become separated or blurred from their particular end, ethical practice is problematic in clearly understanding its significance to that end, tending to become an end in itself, at least in function if not also in purpose. This also reduces the significance of such character and conduct, whose attributes and right behaviors tend to become the end subtly revolving more around oneself, for example, for self-determination or even self-justification.

Deontological ethics (based on the obligation and duty to do what is right) is synonymous with the biblical term *opheilo*: morally obligated to (e.g. do something) or by virtue of personal obligation. *Opheilo* in the practice of God's law easily becomes the fulfillment of covenant obligation rather than the reciprocal relational response to God on God's terms (relational not referential) for covenant relationship together. In contrast to *opheilo*, Jesus consistently made a matter definitive and/or imperative (as noted in the course of this study) with the term *dei*: must, necessary by the nature of things. Yet, for Jesus, a matter was necessary not by the nature of some principle, value or virtue; that subtle focus would be reductionism, notably of the whole-ly God. For Jesus, *dei* involved only by the nature of who and what he is in relationship together with the whole-ly God (e.g. Lk 2:49; Mk 8:31), thus defining and determining the nature of how he functioned (e.g. Lk 19:5).

In relational compatibility with Jesus, Christian (biblical) ethics implies a transition from *opheilo* to *dei*, the nature of which necessarily involves a transformation to *dei* by redemptive change from reductionism to be made whole with Jesus in new covenant relationship together. In relational congruence with Jesus, this process of forming Christian ethics is following Jesus in the relational progression to the Father, which (1) defines and determines who and what we are in relationship together with the whole-ly Trinity, and which (2) thus defines and determines the new nature of how we function. Being relationally compatible and congruent with Jesus will then by its nature reconstitute deontological emphasis and fully deepen teleological significance. While Christian ethics may still be considered a teleological type, it is foremost functionally significant as the relational process to wholeness on God's terms—the relational outcome of the gospel of transformation embodied by Jesus' whole-ly person and enacted by his whole-ly function. Therefore, the practice of Christian ethics can be summed up as *the uncommon process of living in relationships to be whole only on God's relational terms*. And getting on whole-ly Jesus' ethical path is the only way this relational outcome unfolds.

[3] For a discussion on teleological and deontological reasoning, see Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2003), 119-122.

How Jesus lived and practiced emerged ongoingly from the who and what of his identity and function to be whole and to make whole—based only on God's relational terms defining and determining identity, function and practice. The forensic framework—required for ethics to go beyond being merely situational—emerges from God's terms of wholeness, which Christian ethics must have as its basis to constitute the integrity and significance necessary to be compelling in all human life and practice. This is the sum of Christian ethics that Jesus enacted whole-ly, and the definitive terms of his whole-ly ethics he vulnerably disclosed as the communicative action of the whole and uncommon God and the Trinity's thematic relational work of grace. These uncommon terms, only for relationship together to be whole, compose the specific relational involvement necessary in his kingdom-family to be whole and in the surrounding context to make whole—which contrasts with and is contrary to what is common. To understand integrally the uncommon terms for ongoing relational life and practice disclosed by Jesus' communicative action, we have to correctly understand both his words and his actions, that is, his whole person within his relational context and process.

As Jesus declared in the Sermon on the Mount, his coming adhered to and integrated with the collective word of God in the OT, not to abolish but to fulfill (Mt 5:17-20). The Sermon on the Mount is framed in the larger context of the OT and thus in the full context of God's thematic action. What his life and practice adhered to and integrated with, however, was not a mere list of demands of the law, nor a system of ethics and moral obligations (*opheilo*). The law specifies God's desires and terms for covenant relationship together, which cannot be limited to a contextualized lens of 'the rule of law' or constrained by a commonized lens of the Rule of Faith but composes the Relationship of Faith. In his relational context and process, Jesus paid attention not merely to the oral and written word of God but to those *words from* God—that is, the communication from God. Unlike much of human communication, God's communicative action is not merely informative for a cognitive purpose, nor was it to announce terms for ethics. God's communication composes distinct relational purpose and function to which Jesus' life and practice adhered and integrated with: God's thematic relational action in response to the human condition for the purpose only to be whole in relationship together. His incarnation was indeed Emmanuel, God's uncommon moral presence and whole ethical involvement *with us* for relationship together in uncommon wholeness.

His Definitive Terms for Ethics

As we focus on the definitive terms for Christian ethics that Jesus disclosed, we need to pay attention to the whole of his relational context and process—namely, that Jesus' teaching was communicative action, and that he used relational language to disclose (not merely *apokalypto* but *phaneroo*, signifying relational context and process) God's desires and terms for the function of relationships together to be whole. To fully understand his relational language is to receive the whole-ly Jesus extended to us in the context of relationship, which necessitates reciprocal relational involvement and further engaging him in the relational process of discipleship.

Jesus' definitive manifesto distinguishes us in our social reality with our presence in uncommon morality and our involvement by the ethics of wholeness. This also clarifies and corrects when this whole-ly identity has been compromised, which is the

indispensable help we need to be his disciples indeed. Therefore, we need to listen carefully in relational terms to all his words, which make definitive the measure to use for our theology and practice in order that this is the measure we get in our ontology and function in the world (as Jesus declared imperatively, Mk 4:24).

The definitive terms Jesus disclosed for the integrity and quality of their functional involvement in relationships—composing "righteousness" ethics if you wish—are also a necessary function of his followers' identity based on the ontology of the person from the inner out. This ontology of the person underlies his discipleship manifesto and points to *the integrating theme of God's terms*: the function of whole persons (constituted by the involvement of the heart, yet not in dualism) in relationships together (signified by the primacy of intimate involvement) necessary to be whole and to make whole, the function of whom are defined and determined only by the whole-ly God and not shaped by human terms in the surrounding context.

The ontology of the person is a key variable in understanding God's terms disclosed in this discourse. The lens through which we perceive the person, thus define human identity and determine human function, is ongoingly challenged or influenced by reductionism. This then urgently addresses our perceptual-interpretive framework, thus our contextualized and commonized biases, and holds us accountable for two basic issues: one, how we define our person, and as a result, two, how we do relationships. God's terms will have either more significance or less depending on our assumptions. Revisit the first part of his manifesto as necessary.

As we discussed previously, Jesus clearly defined the process of identity formation for his followers (Mt 5:3-12) and the identity issues of clarity and depth necessary to have qualitative distinction from the common's function of reductionism, and to distinguish who, what and how we are with others in the surrounding context (5:13-16). This necessitates by its nature (*dei*, not *opheilo*) the ontology of the whole person created in the image of God and those persons in relationship together created to be whole in likeness of the relational ontology of the Trinity; moreover, this is the theological anthropology that integrates with the light. This composes the relational compatibility and congruence necessary to function as whose we are, those not belonging to the world as his disciples. Thus, the remaining sections of Jesus' summary teachings (the manifesto for all discipleship) for all his followers (5:21-7:27) distinguish unmistakably the function of this new identity integrated with relational righteousness and the ontology of the uncommon whole—the whole-ly enacted by Jesus and unfolding in his disciples.

His defining teaching for all of us is nonnegotiable to define our presence and determine our involvement in the world at all levels of our social reality. Just as he wielded the sword directed at the pivotal level of the family, in this teaching his focus is narrowed to the religious institutional level of practice, yet it encompasses all levels of human life that should not be ignored. His teaching is further integrated throughout with the progression and interaction of three critical concerns: (1) self-autonomy, (2) self-determination, and (3) self-justification. It may seem like a modern or Western bias to say Jesus addressed something self-oriented in a non-individualistic setting. As noted previously, however, in this collective-oriented sociocultural context, self-autonomy was not the modern self-autonomy of individualism in the West but rather the self-autonomy of persons (individually or collectively) who self-determined function in relationships

together "to be apart" from the whole—for example, by the absence of significant involvement while in relationship together, or by merely keeping relational distance in those contexts (cf. Martha and Mary). This variable condition pervades in a collective context as well (even in churches in the East and global South), though due to ontological simulation and epistemological illusion it is less obvious than in the individualism of the modern West. The subtlety of self-autonomy (as an individual or a collective) involves the work of reductionism, which signifies its counter-relational influence. Jesus disclosed the terms to be whole, and thus ongoingly confronted common life and practice reducing the whole in each of these terms. In the process, he broadens and deepens our understanding of sin, and its functional implications and relational repercussions. Therefore, these three concerns illuminate the general applicable character of the Sermon on the Mount, which should be neither idealized nor considered impractical for our practice in order to avoid its inconvenience. Thus, the urgent need in particular is for all his followers in the present to respond to his manifesto in order to follow him on his ethical path of, to and in uncommon wholeness together. Jesus' relational words are neither for the future nor unattainable ideals for realistic practice today.

First Functional Key: Matthew 5:21-48

In this section, Jesus began to define specific terms for the function of the new identity formed by the interdependent process of the Beatitudes—the new identity redefining the person and transforming persons to be whole-ly. Since he already disclosed his complete (*pleroo*) compatibility with Torah (5:17-18), his focus remained on the law of the covenant in terms of this issue: either essentially reducing (*lyo*) these commandments (*entole*) or acting on (*poieo*) them (5:19). This issue precipitated Jesus' definitive statement to his followers about the nature of their new identity (righteousness, what and who they are) determining how they function, thus acting on the relational righteousness necessary to go beyond the reductionists (5:20). This involved the interrelated issues outlined above, which necessitate going beyond the mere practice of ethics.

The commandments (*entole*) Jesus focused on was not a specific list of demands, code of behavior, system of obligations or rules of ethics—all denoted by the term *entalma*, a synonym for commandment. While *entalma* points directly to its content and stresses what to do, *entole* stresses the authority of what is commanded, that is, its qualitative relational significance. These commandments didn't converge in their Rule of Faith to conform to a rule of law. In other words, with *entole* Jesus focused on the law beyond merely as the charter for the covenant, but he went further to the whole of God's desires for covenant relationship together in love (cf. Ex 20:6, Dt 7:9) and deeper to God's necessary terms for relationship together to be whole in likeness of the Trinity (signified by his emphasis on the Father). Jesus' teaching engaged this communicative action to compose the Relationship of Faith.

This is not to say that Jesus did away with the *entalma* of the law. Jewish ceremonial law, for example, served to maintain purity as a key identity marker, and thus to have clear distinction as God's people. Whole-ly life and practice serves this same purpose on a deeper level to have qualitative distinction from the common's function and to be defined only by God as God's—that is, the whole-ly identity of who they are and whose they are. Yet, Jewish practice (post-exilic Judaism in particular) of the law often

fell into ethnocentrism and national protectionism—maintaining the law was a symbol of this—thereby essentially reducing God's terms for covenant relationship and making their collective self-determination an end in itself. This shift became a subtle substitute that served foremost for themselves rather than as "the light to the nations" for the wholely God and the primacy of relationships necessary to be whole together. This is how the practice of the law deteriorates when seen only as *entalma*.

When *entalma* is the dominant focus, the qualitative relational significance of the law is diminished by this misguided priority, creating an imbalanced emphasis on what to do whereby secondary matters displace the primary. Consequently, even with good intentions, the law's purpose for relationship together is made secondary, ignored or even forgotten—pointing to concerns from or for self-autonomy, self-determination and self-justification. When the law is reduced, God's primacy of this relationship is lost and thus also the priority we give it. The practice of the law then becomes a code of behavior to adhere to, not about the terms for involvement in the covenant relationship together God desires. Moreover, this conformity signifies that the person presented has been redefined by an outer-in human ontology focused on what one does; and this reduction of the person raises the issue of the quality of one's communication, while at the same time reducing the level of relationship that person engages, if at all.

Such reductions have relational consequences both with God and with others, the counter-relational implications of which Jesus contrasted with God's terms to be whole and to make whole in new covenant relationship together. This is the ongoing tension/conflict between reductionism (and its counter-relational work) and God's whole (and the relationships necessary to be whole) that Jesus addressed in his nonnegotiable manifesto by placing in juxtaposition the following six examples of the law (or its tradition) with God's desires. These six examples should not be seen separate from each other but seen together.

When Jesus interjected God's desires by declaring "But I tell you" (5:22,28,32,34,39,44), his intrusive juxtaposition made evident the substantive meaning of the law and the prophets. The focus of *entalma* on the 'letter of the law' was a prevailing norm in his day. That practice, however, operated essentially as a system of constraints to prevent negative acts, without any responsibility for further action: "Do not murder" (v.21), "Do not commit adultery" (v.27). Based on the ontology of the person from the outer in, which is defined primarily by what one does, this kind of system invariably focused on outward behavior as the main indicator of adherence to the law. No physical murder and adultery meant fulfilling those demands of the law, without consideration of the significance of that behavior. This opened the way for God's law to be reduced and its function to be shaped by self-autonomy, self-determination or even self-justification. To formulate practice based only on the letter of the law is to reduce the integrity of human ontology in the divine image and to redefine the significance of human identity based on merely the quantitative aspects of what we do. Furthermore, this self-definition also determined how others are perceived and how relationships are done—which filters how church is practiced. All of this converges in the social reality of the human comparative process that measures persons, peoples and nations as 'better or less', 'good or bad', in a stratified structure of relations, which formalize in a system of inequality. The examples used by Jesus involve all these levels in one way or another, such that one level should not be separated from the others or our focus gets skewed.

For Jesus, this was an inadequate human ontology and an insufficient response to God's purpose for the law. More specifically, it was contrary to both. In contrast, he disclosed what can be called the 'spirit of the law' (not to be confused with spiritualizing) for which to be responsible, thus deepening the involvement necessary on God's terms. This must by its nature (*dei*, not *opheilo*) involve the conjoint function of both the following: (1) the ontology of the whole person from inner out, thus the words (vv.22,37), thoughts and feelings (v.28), as well as the overt behavior, constitute actions; and (2) based on this ontology of the whole person, other persons also need to be so defined and thus engaged for the relationships together to make and to be whole (5:23-25,32,34-36,39-42,44-48). By embodying our whole person and enacting our function for the involvement in the spirit of the law, Jesus essentially restores the person and their relationships to their created ontology of God's whole. Conjointly, the spirit of the law restores the primacy of covenant relationship together and makes definitive its priority in life and practice. In other words, the spirit of the law demands that persons and relationships go further and deeper than the limited (if not constrained) ethics of the letter.

The law signifies God's desires and terms for covenant relationship together. This is neither about merely avoiding the wrong behavior nor about a code of merely the right thing to do, neither about not making mistakes nor about trying to be right—that is, about mere ethics. Such action becomes legalistic, and its preoccupation is legalism, which we engage even unintentionally when our focus revolves around what we do. Rather these are terms for relationship together and how to be involved in this primacy over any secondary, thus *the positive action to live whole necessary to make relationships whole*; this cannot be fulfilled by merely re-acting to others in situations and circumstances but only by the involvement implemented by the response of our person regardless of those situations and circumstances (as in 5:38-48). Accordingly, the specific correctives Jesus presented to these six examples should not be taken as an end-practice for ethics; they are only provisional steps in the relational process to uncommon wholeness. For example, merely clearing up something someone has against you is not the sum of reconciliation—nor all that peace involves—yet is a provisional step to that end to be uncommonly whole. When Christian ethics stops at provisional steps, its practice will not function to be whole and make whole but function only as a reductionist substitute in an incomplete or fragmentary process—functioning in a reverse dynamic of regression in anything less and any substitutes. Such substitutes have not been significantly reversed in Christian ethical practice to be congruent with whole-ly Jesus' relational progression in nothing less and no substitutes, despite the fact that clarification and correction are highlighted in his manifesto.

Jesus clearly countered the underlying concern of the reductionists about doing the "right" thing by the letter, which did not serve to lead them to this positive action. While refraining from negative behavior certainly has some value, the absence of positive action is of greater importance to God—distinguishing the deeper significance of God's design and purpose for those relational terms involving murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, an eye for an eye, and love for enemies. As the counterpart to legalism, even moralism is not the righteousness that God expects and that Jesus constitutes in his followers.

Moralists and legalists are misguided in thinking that such conformity is congruent with, and even compatible to, God's desires and who, what and how God is. We should not be thinking in the limits of mere conformity to God's terms, which would tend to become merely about doing the right thing.

Conversely, since the law signifies God's terms for relationship together, the practice of God's law is irreducibly the function only of our whole person, thus making practice vulnerable (vv.44,46-47), threatening (vv.39-42), if not even demanding (vv.29-30) for us. Yet, the further relational responsibility of God's desires in the spirit of the law is not given to burden or constrain human persons, and thus should not be considered negotiable to make it more convenient for us. It was disclosed only for relationships together to be whole; and the various terms of this deeper responsibility signify positive relational opportunities to grow in the new identity of our whole person to make relationships together whole, as uncommon and inconvenient as this may seem. The interrelated focus and conjoint function between the whole person and relationships together always emerges in whole-ly Jesus' words and action because they embody the essential relational ontology and enact the essential relational function of who, what and how the whole-ly Trinity is. In his definitive manifesto, Jesus is giving us understanding of the heart of God's desires for human persons and the integrating purpose for God's relational terms vital for his whole-ly disciples together, therefore irreducible and nonnegotiable. As we reflect on these six examples taken together integrally in this section, they clearly disclose the loving purpose God has for us: to relationally belong in the relationships together as the whole-ly God's family, nothing less and no substitutes.

Without the spirit of the law, we have no whole understanding of God's law and God's integrating thematic purpose for the law in response to the human condition "to be apart" from God's whole. Without the spirit of the law, Christian ethics has no basis to compose the integrity and significance necessary to be compelling for even Christian life and practice, much less for all human life and practice. His manifesto integrates the spirit of the law into the law to qualify the application of the letter of the law. Yet, Jesus disclosed that this forensic interpretive framework is composed both further in the qualitative relational context and deeper by the intimate relational process of the whole-ly God in order to complete this whole-ly relational purpose and outcome. This composition signifies the relational language by which his teaching needs to be received in order to be understood, and constitutes how it must by its nature (*dei*) be responded to in order to be experienced, enacted, matured and fulfilled.

The relational dynamic underlying the spirit of the law goes beyond merely a greater flexibility (than legalism) and application (than moralism) of God's law. Its whole function is to lead persons into involvement in their relationships with others—namely, to care for and to love persons not merely in their situations and circumstances but foremost in relationship together. Jesus is taking us to a further and deeper level of relationships, beyond our prevailing ways of doing relationships. With the spirit of the law he made undeniable: (1) what it means to love, (2) the intimate relational process of love, and (3) the integrity and dignity of the persons involved in this process. This necessitates the inner-out human ontology signified conjointly by the importance of our heart and the primacy of relationships in which our hearts open and engage others for relationship together. This practice is qualitatively different than the letter of the law and uncommonly more vulnerable, thus the more inconvenient if not threatening practice.

The depth of the spirit of the law defines and determines the relational involvement necessary to be whole *in* the whole-ly God, *with* the whole-ly Trinity and *for* the irreducible whole and nonnegotiable uncommon of God.

The function of this human ontology and its qualitative relational process, however, are ongoingly challenged by reductionism and its counter-relational work. Each of the six examples represents a situation or circumstance that has this either-or: either redefine our person and let that determine how we function in that relationship; or, instead, be an opportunity to grow in being our whole-ly person and to function in that relationship to live whole-ly and make uncommon wholeness. The former alternative involves a contrary dynamic that regresses in anything less or any substitutes for uncommon wholeness. For these situations and circumstances to gain primacy to redefine who and what we are, and to determine how we function, implies that we react to other persons in these contexts essentially out of a concern for self-autonomy. We are reduced to merely *reactors* by pursuits in self-autonomy pursuing self-determination, thus ironically indicating an absence of freedom to be our true person. This focus preoccupies us with secondary matters rather than being free to function as *respondors* by the relational involvement of love for the sake of God's whole. As reactors, we become more like objects shaped and measured by a human comparative process, while respondors require being distinct subjects determined by our whole-ly identity of who we are and whose we are in the primacy of relationship together.

This self-autonomy emerges in the priority or dominance given progressively to these reactions: (1) self-interests, for example, signified in acting on anger or sexual desires (involving issues of how the person is defined and how relationships are done); (2) self-concerns, for example, signified by unwarranted divorce (overlapping in self-interest), or depending on oaths for validation (involving issues of the significance of the person presented, integrity of one's communication and level of relationship engaged); and (3) self-centeredness, for example, signified by seeking restitution/revenge (overlapping with self-concern), or keeping relational distance from those who contest you, are different or are simply not in your social network (involving issues of how the person is defined and level of relationship engaged). In other words, the concern for self-autonomy overlaps into self-determination and interacts with the major and basic issues outlined above.

Each of these six expressions of self-autonomy can find some justification, yet at the expense of reducing persons and their primary function and thereby reinforcing reductionism's counter-relational work "to be apart" from the wholeness of relationships together. The persons involved are reduced to less than whole persons, and relationships become self-oriented in relational distance instead of relationships together—even in a collective context. This is the contrary dynamic Jesus confronted in his juxtaposition of the qualitative relational significance of the whole-ly God's terms necessary for relationships together to be whole, and to be made whole as needed. In the process, he deepens our understanding of sin by clarifying for us the functional workings of the sin of reductionism. His definitive manifesto exposes the sin of countering (knowingly or inadvertently) God's desires, as well as God's created relational design and purpose, by reducing one's own person and then reducing other persons to reinforce the human condition "to be apart." This is how the limits of ethics can reflect, reinforce and even sustain the human condition in spite of intentions to improve it.

The relational terms Jesus made definitive in this discipleship manifesto restores this fragmentation, and thereby functions for his followers as the definitive *call to be whole*. His major teaching counters, confronts and transforms the human shaping of persons and relationships, with the relational outcome of distinguishing his followers in uncommon wholeness. Even his apparent severe injunction in 5:29-30 serves this purpose. This is not a mere injunction to prevent sexual sin, thus not about self-mutilation—which in effect would be reductionism. (Remember, Jesus used relational language in his teaching.) This action was about decisively not letting one part of our body or human make-up (thus "eliminating" its use to) redefine and determine our whole person, and likewise not looking at other persons in only certain parts of their body or make-up as a consequence of fragmenting and dishonoring their person (cf. 1 Sam 11:2). His strong corrective paradoxically is about restoring such fragmentation to be whole and to engage others to live whole—involving the issue of the depth level of relationship engaged based on the issue of how the person is defined.

The only alternative to function in anything less or any substitute of our whole person is to function in nothing less and no substitute of who, what and how we are in our new identity formed through the Beatitudes in relational involvement with whole-ly Jesus as his whole-ly disciples together. Following Jesus in his relational context and process involves us in the relational progression to his Father for relationship together in the whole-ly Trinity's family, thus constituting us to relationally belong as his very own daughters and sons by the redemptive process of adoption (as discussed previously). The function of this relationship together in this new identity (whole-ly identity) is only on the whole-ly God's relational terms that Jesus made definitive in his manifesto. Therefore, these terms for function are irreducible to any alternative or substitute—notably to common human ontology and relationships together—and are nonnegotiable for all self-autonomy, self-determination and self-justification.

To provide clarity and depth of function for this new identity on God's terms, Jesus concluded this section with the functional key (the first of three for the entire manifesto), with which the six examples converge and whole-ly identity's life and practice is integrated.

First Functional Key: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (5:48).

Jesus directed this to those who have been adopted by his Father into God's family. Moments earlier he said essentially "Love *others (even those against you) to be in the uncommon wholeness of your identity,* that you may *begin to function* [*ginomai*, begin to be] as the *sons and daughters* of your Father in heaven" (5:44-45). It was a recognized responsibility in the ancient Mediterranean world for adopted children to represent their new Father and to extend his name. Jesus defined this responsibility here but qualified it essentially with this key: *"You are to be involved with others* as your heavenly Father *is involved with others, notably with you."* This is the relational significance of *agape* love, which Jesus enacted to fulfill God's thematic action to make us whole in relationship together. Now he calls his followers to enact this love in relationships together to be the whole-ly God's family and to make whole for God's family—to enact, however, not merely as his disciples but further and deeper as their Father's very own sons and

daughters. The seventh Beatitude (5:9) integrates directly with this key to give depth of meaning to the practice of peace (wholeness).

Once again, Jesus' emphasis here is not on what to do but on how to be involved with others. Certainly, we cannot be involved with others to the extent in quantity or quality as God is involved. That was not what he stressed in this key. Quantity, like ethical or moral quantity, is not the goal of "be perfect," although many misguided Christians strive for perfection. Jesus' purpose is focused on involvement with others according to "how" (*hos*) God is involved; this is not an unrealistic ideal since God created us "to be" (*eimi*, verb of existence) in the image and likeness of the Trinity, to which the identity as the light points. While "perfect" can never be the outcome of what we do and how we do it, "perfect" (*teleios*)—describing persons who have reached their purpose, *telos*, thus are full-grown, mature and complete—can indeed "be" (*eimi*) the growing function (i.e. *ginomai* in v.45) of who, what and how we are as the very daughters and sons of the whole-ly God's family.

Thus, **the first functional key** becomes: "Live to be (*eimi*) uncommonly whole and then make uncommon wholeness as your Father is whole-ly in the Trinity and is vulnerably present and intimately involved to make us whole-ly in relationship together as his family."

Jesus does not want his followers "to become" reduced to mere *reactors* to this or that situation or circumstance and to these or those persons, even with ethical intentions; that would be counter-relational work, even on an ethical basis. He calls us "to be" persons who live in relationships to be whole-ly and are sent to function to make relationships whole-ly, thus free to be *respondors* in love. His call-commission and its function are ongoingly challenged to be redefined and determined by reductionism, notably with subtle self-autonomy apart from God's relational terms or by substituting referential terms. This first functional key begins to form the basis necessary for the *process of triangulation* with the Trinity to navigate the depths of human of human life in relational congruence with the triangulation Jesus used to engage the surrounding contexts and relationships with persons in those contexts without being redefined or determined by reductionism. Just as it was for Jesus, the main aspect of this triangulation process is ongoing intimate involvement in relationship together with our Father and the whole-ly Trinity. In this relational involvement, the three major issues for all practice—the person presented, the quality of communication, the depth-level of relationship engaged—are also addressed ongoingly. Hereby also, the primacy of relationships together is conclusive to define ethics and determine the primary function of its practice.

Relational involvement with our Father, which also embraces the Spirit, is the guiding point of reference for the function of our whole-ly identity in the surrounding contexts and in relationships with persons in those contexts, including in his whole-ly family together as the church. Furthermore, this involvement is the dynamic necessary for Jesus' followers to enact the reciprocating contextualization needed to clearly both be whole-ly and make uncommon wholeness. This is an ongoing relational process involving the Trinity, our involvement with whom is indispensable for any needed clarification and correction about becoming contextualized and commonized (illuminated also in the Hebrews manifesto, 12:4-6), in order for our light to shine in the darkness clearly as whole-ly Jesus' (who embodies the Trinity) whole-ly disciples.

In the next section, Jesus takes this relational process even further and deeper.

Second Functional Key: Matthew 6:1-34

In this discipleship manifesto, frequently preempted by assumptions (either assumed for the future or as unrealistic ideals) about the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus constitutes his followers in the relational righteousness (not a mere attribute) that by its nature functions beyond reductionism. Relational righteousness is the process to ensure that the integrity of our identity of who, what and how we are as his followers functions unambiguously in ongoing life and practice. It is crucial for our identity to be in integrated function with relational righteousness in order to present whole persons in congruence with the nature of our full identity, thus as those *respondor* persons who can be counted on to be those unreduced persons in relationships—both with God and with others, in his kingdom-family and in the surrounding context, composed by the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes. In this section Jesus illuminates (or exposes) that Christian identity without righteousness is problematic and merely righteousness without wholeness of identity is equally problematic (cf. 5:20), both of which are consequential for ethics. This addresses deeply two of the three major issues for all practice: (1) the significance of the person we present to others and (2) the integrity and quality of our communication—underlying issues that determine the significance of ethics.

Jesus began this section immediately focused on righteousness with the imperative to his followers that shifts their focus to the essential: "*Pay attention to (prosecho) how your righteousness functions*" (6:1). Righteousness is neither a static attribute nor a function in a vacuum, so Jesus is not pointing to mere introspection or related spirituality to enhance the individual. The significance of righteousness is not isolated to the individual but only as it affects relationships in some way. In what way it does directly depends on the person presented. All relationships are affected by the specific presentation each participant makes, thus the quality of any relationship depends on the accuracy of that presentation. This is where righteousness needs to have congruence with who and what a person truly is, or else others cannot have confidence in what to expect or count on from how that person functions. Christian identity without righteousness is acutely problematic, rendered by Jesus earlier in his manifesto as insignificant or useless (5:13).

The incarnation clearly demonstrated God's righteousness since Jesus (the *pleroma*, complete, whole, of God, as in Col 1:19) presented the embodied whole-ly God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement. For the embodied God in relational progression, "Righteousness will go before him and will make a path [the intrusive relational path] for his steps" (Ps 85:13). How we present our person to others involves this issue of completeness and the function of righteousness, thus what others can expect and count on from us—including what God expects (cf. Jn 4:23-24, discussed previously). Ethics must, by its nature, be composed in this relational process to have validity and thereby distinguish our whole ethical involvement.

How we function in the truth of who and what we are emerges from the depth of significance of the person we present. In this section of his irreducible manifesto, Jesus continued to expose the workings of reductionism and disclosed the deeper process of relational righteousness, specifically in direct relationship with God. Paying attention to how our righteousness functions involves examining not only the person presented, this also further involves understanding our perceptual-interpretive framework and the human

ontology by which we live and practice—namely as influenced and shaped by our contextualized and commonized biases.

To make definitive what God expects in relationship together, Jesus focused specifically on three important areas of religious practice and prevailing methods of enacting them: giving to the needy (6:2-4), prayer (6:5-15), and fasting (6:16-18). In each of these relational contexts, Jesus interjects relationship with "your Father" (with the emphasis on *your* Father, not merely the Father, 6:1,4,6,8,14,15,18) and also intrudes by his conflict with prevailing methods signified by the term *hypokrites* (6:2,5,16). I prefer not to use its English rendering (hypocrite) because of its limited connotation. Jesus broadens our understanding of this term and takes us deeper into the process behind it. This is crucial to embrace since it not only involved a prevailing norm in his day, it also involves a prominent mindset and practice today. While sincerity is an issue of *hypokrites*, it is not the main issue. The primary issue involves the function of the whole person verses the enactment of a fragmentary version of the person in reduced life and practice (cf. our previous discussion contrasting *metamorphoo* and *metaschematizō*, as in Rom 12:1-2).

Besides the particular lens we use and our operating human ontology of the person presented, other issues emerge to interact with this part of his teaching: two life-determining issues of how we define our person and thereby do relationships, which directly determine the integrity and quality of our communication, and the level of relationship engaged. And the overriding issue throughout this section of his inconvenient teaching is the concern for self-determination. What follows in this section is a progression from self-autonomy in the previous section, because self-determination is always in ongoing interaction with self-autonomy and directly interrelates with that section's teaching.

As noted previously, *hypokrites* involved playing a role or taking on an identity different from one's true self—for example, by projecting or using an enhanced image that veils the whole person. Just like an actor, this presentation of a person was made to a crowd, an audience, observers, that is, before others with interest, or anyone who took notice, since that is the purpose for creating an image about our self. When Jesus focused on righteousness, he was specific about "paying attention that you do not live your righteousness before others *in order to be seen by them*" (6:1). The term for "to be seen" (*theaomai*) denotes to view attentively, deliberately observing an object to perceive its detail. In other words, this is a presentation intended to be observed and noticed by others. Moreover, *theaomai* (related to *theoreo*) involves more than merely seeing (as in *blepo,* to be discussed shortly); the observer regards the object with a sense of wonderment (maybe even imagination) in order to perceive it in detail. This implies that there is a certain effect, image, even illusion, that the "actor" seeks to establish about one's presentation of self, which will result in a response "to be honored," "be praised" by observers, and ultimately by God (6:2). The term *doxazo*, from *doxa* (glory), denotes to recognize, honor, praise. This is what they seek in the prevailing comparative process of human life; and shaped by contextualization and commonization, this is all they will experience, as Jesus said unequivocally: "they have received their reward" (6:2,5,16) with "no reward from your Father" (6:1).

Whether performed overtly (as Jesus illustrated) or enacted simply in performing a role of service (as commonly seen in Christian ministries), this subtle yet common image-projecting points to the self-determination motivating the act; and the practice of ethics is not immune to this dynamic. Consider in all this these critical, pivotal, essential issues: how the person is defined, how relationships are done and the level of relationship engaged.

Such practice was addressed further when Jesus exposed such efforts to "be seen by others" in their praying (6:5, consider the wordiness of public prayers) and "to show others" their acts of fasting (v.16, consider any visibility given to spirituality). The same term (*phaino*) is used for both, which denotes to appear, be conspicuous, become visible—that is, essentially to be recognized by others for one's presentation of self, and, of course, ultimately be recognized by God. Both of these acts were accentuated to elevate (v.7) or dramatize (v.16) the effects for greater attention, thus greater recognition and honor. Whether elevated, dramatized or performed simply in religious duty, the effort for self-determination underlying these acts is clearly exposed; and for some persons, this effort also overlaps into self-justification—all of which exposes a reduced theological anthropology and weak view of sin.

While the term *phaino* comes from *phos* (light), there is no clarity of light in this practice, even if punctuated with correct doctrine or accentuated with the right ethic and spiritual discipline. The identity of light in this presentation of the person is ambiguous at best, and mainly just reduced to outer simulation and inner illusion. In the absence of relational righteousness, there is no basis for completeness of the person presented or of the integrity and quality of the person's communication whereby to distinguish their whole ethical involvement. This is how we need to understand *hypokrites* and perceive its operation today—not so much as a blatant lie or subversion of the truth but as the reductionist substitute (sometimes even enacted unintentionally) for authenticity of the whole person, and thus for the function of one's full identity with others, notably with God. When the pursuit of recognition and affirmation is left to self-determination, it invariably becomes reduced to being seen by others and how others perceive what one does, thereby easily compromising the complete presentation of the person in order "to be seen in a better light." Obviously then, to be "better" takes place in a comparative process with others, whether in the church or the surrounding context, which results in stratified relationships based on false distinctions. What is also exposed here is the reality of relational orphans who seek the approval of others and to *belong*, even as they are members serving in the church.

This is Jesus' purpose for making imperative the ongoing need to pay attention to how our righteousness functions. It has direct relational implications for determining the level of relationship we engage. In highlighting these three important areas of religious practice, his concern is foremost our relationship with *our* Father and the level of relationship we engage with him. The major implication of merely performing roles in Christian duty is the significance of the specific relational messages we communicate to God implied in such practice: (1) about how we see ourselves—with an outer-in human ontology and the responsibility for fulfilling obligations by self-determination; (2) about how we see God—that God is similar to us, and thus sees us as we see ourselves, holding us accountable to fulfill our obligations by self-determination; and (3) about our relationship together—it functions neither on the basis of grace nor on the intimate

relational involvement of *agape*, which would be on God's terms, but rather it functions on the basis of obligation (*opheilo*) and fulfilling those expectations (from *entalma*, not *entole*), thus the preoccupation with what we do, reducing the relationship to our terms. There are assumptions about God made in these relational messages that we have no legitimate basis to make—assumptions that Jesus corrected with the relational truth of the Father (discussed below). Ethics practiced on this basis becomes in reality unethical treatment of God. And 'faith alone' (*sola fide*) and 'by grace alone' (*sola gratia*) become merely alternative facts of the Good News that we use to enhance our image doctrinally before others—which composes much of the diversity from the Reformation.

These are pivotal relational messages implied in such practice constituted by self-determination in all its diverse expression. Their communicated meaning emerges from a lens contextualized and/or commonized and an outer-in ontology of the person that reduce life and practice to quantitative (over qualitative) function embedded in reductionism. This existing reality among Christians appears to elude our awareness, which Jesus is clarifying and correcting in his manifesto. How self-determination emerges in this process that reduces life and practice to quantitative function and how it unfolds in the church involve a two-fold dynamic:

1. Self-determination (of whatever variation) reduces function and practice to what a person can both control (overlapping with self-autonomy) and thus manage to accomplish for success in determining one's self, identity and worth—which is conveniently in contrast to inner-out qualitative relational function that necessitates more from the whole person.
2. Yet, this desired result cannot be determined in a spiritual vacuum or in social isolation, but by necessity of its outer-in quantitative approach can only be determined in comparison (and competition) with others, thus requiring the use of distinctions (the components of image) among them as quantitative indicators to ascribe "better" or "less" to self-definition, identity and worth, and, unavoidably, to establish higher and lower positions in their relationships together to establish subtly a stratified order—which some would justify as merely the unequal differences composing the body of Christ, or would justify as the application of the standard of measurement necessary in the church (the self-justification discussed in the next section, cf. 7:1-5).

This reductionist focus, reinforced by a contextualized bias and sustained by a commonized bias, becomes the preoccupation (even compulsion or obsession) in practice with the relational consequence implied in the above relational messages. The accompanying reality is that ethical and moral practice alone does not address this but indeed can reflect, reinforce and sustain this, as existing practice makes evident.

In contrast and conflict, Jesus disclosed the intimate relational messages from his Father, both in these three areas of religious practice and the rest of this section. He made eleven references to "your Father" (6:1,4,6,8,14,15,18,26,32)—vital relational messages about how *our* Father feels toward us and defines the nature of our relationship with him. In conflict with self-determined pursuit of recognition and validation, Jesus enacted God's relational work of grace, and in his teaching he communicated the holy and transcendent God's vulnerable uncommon presence and intimate whole involvement to

distinguish the uncommon and whole righteousness of the whole-ly Trinity. From the midst of this apparent litany of prescriptions and injunctions emerged his relational language clearly divulging the intimate involvement and response of our heavenly Father. Contrary to the reductionist effort to be seen, he fully disclosed that "your Father sees" (6:4,6,18). The term for "sees" (*blepo*) is the most basic of a word-group having to do with sight and observation; others include *horao, theoreo* and *theaomai* discussed above. *Blepo* simply denotes exercising one's capacity of sight, to look at with interest, to be distinctly aware of—suggesting an intentional or deliberate act (cf. 5:28, the implication of *blepo* as a relational act). The significance of his relational language that your Father simply *blepo* is vital to what Jesus taught about these practices.

Jesus did not compartmentalize various acts (like giving to the needy) to different areas of function, thus fragmenting the person ("…do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing," 6:3). Nor, in this, was he suggesting to be *sub*conscious in practice ("so that your giving may be in secret," v.4). Rather he was directly addressing the issue of practice becoming *self*-conscious, that is, self-oriented (for recognition) instead of giving one's self in relational involvement with the person(s) receiving. Jesus rendered such practice unfulfilling and unnecessary, despite any benefit from such mere practice. Likewise for praying (6:6-7) and fasting (6:17-18), Jesus was not suggesting these practices be inconspicuous, neither inward nor detached. These are relational acts of involvement for relationship together—namely, prayer as a means for greater intimacy with God, and fasting as a means of submission to God for deeper relationship. And Jesus targeted the completeness of the whole person in intimate relational involvement together with our Father—nothing less and no substitutes, just as "in spirit and truth" (Jn 4:24)

Therefore, Jesus declared the experiential truth for relationship together: our Father *blepo* us because he is relationally involved with us; such giving of our whole person to others (in service) and to God (in prayer and fasting) is relationally compatible with his involvement and is relationally congruent with how he sees us, as well as both defines our relationship together and functions in it. Jesus used the term "secret" (*kryptos*) to describe this relational involvement together. In an apparent play on words, *kryptos* (6:4,6,18) is in juxtaposition to *hypokrites* (6:2,5,16). *Kryptos* means hidden and *hypokrites* functions essentially to hide the whole person. Yet, in function they are contrary and in conflict. *Kryptos* ("in secret") signifies the qualitative relational function of the whole person (constituted by the heart) in intimate involvement in relationship together; *hypokrites* avoids and/or precludes this deeper involvement by the quantitative function of reductionism. Since this involvement signifies the relational truth of how God functions, our Father *blepo* intimately "what is done in secret," that is, what has qualitative relational significance from the inner out of the person. Our Father neither needs to use wonderment or imagination (as in *theaomai*) to see *what* we are, nor does he need deep contemplation (as in *horao*) to experience *who* and *how* we are, as we need to experience him. Our Father simply *blepo* the truth of the person presented, thus he intimately knows what, who and how we are, including what we need (6:8). The relational reality of this experiential truth eludes many Christians yet always awaits us on his whole relational terms.

In this relational process, then, he "will reward you" (*misthos*, wages, recompense received, 6:4,6,18), which needs to be understood in his relational context and process and not by a reductionist perceptual-interpretive framework. Jesus is using only relational language to build reciprocal relationship together. "Reward" involves our Father's relational response to us—not with quantitative things, secondary matter, or on our terms—by giving his intimate Self further and deeper (including some things or matter, yet not on our terms). In this intimate relational outcome and experience, we are clearly being recognized for *what* we are and affirmed for *who* we are as persons belonging to his own family. This not only challenges but confronts our self-determination to be recognized and to belong.

On the relational basis of the Father sending his Son into the world, Jesus whole-ly embodied and thus vulnerably disclosed our Father's intimately relationship-specific involvement with us—which is the basis for his Father's imperative "Listen to my Son." This is the experiential truth of their complete presentation of their whole persons, with nothing less and no substitutes for what, who and how the whole-ly Trinity is. In this teaching as the whole-ly Word of God's communicative action, Jesus called his followers to be whole in what, who and how we present of our person in relationship together with him, our Father, the whole-ly Trinity, so that we can also be sent into the world in the congruence with how the Father sent him.

Yet, self-determination continues its urgent call also. Situations and circumstances in life and practice always emerge seeking to define who we are and what our priorities are, and thus to determine how we function. The ongoing issue is whether those matters (however large or small) need both to have priority and to be determined by our own efforts, which overtly or covertly constitute self-determination—however normative the practice, even in Christian culture. This function becomes our default mode until essential change takes place. Or, "therefore" (*dia*, on this account, for this reason) as Jesus said (6:25-32)—given our Father's involvement with us and the nature of our relationship together—we can entrust our person ongoingly to our Father to define who we are and what our priorities are, and thus to determine how we function in whatever situations and circumstances because our Father is both intimately involved (both "sees" and "knows," 6:32b) and lovingly responsive (6:26,30) with us in reciprocal relationship together.

This relationally penetrating polemic led to the second functional key to provide clarity and depth for the intimate relational involvement of our whole-ly identity in relational righteousness with our Father.

Second Functional Key: "Seek first his kingdom-*family* and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (6:33).

"Seek" (*zeteo*, actively pursue to experience) in Jesus' relational language is not about obligatory striving (*opheilo*) to belong to God's kingdom-family, which becomes self-determination overlapping into self-justification. Likewise, "seek" is not about striving for an attribute of righteousness, and thus to be righteous in likeness of his righteousness to justify and/or ensure receiving "all these things." Nor is this about practicing mere "kingdom ethics." In his relational language, the imperative of *zeteo*, by the nature (*dei*) of God's relational terms, is the qualitative pursuit of the whole-ly God ("his

righteousness") for intimate relationship together in his family ("kingdom"). This qualitative pursuit necessarily (*dei*) involves the vulnerable presence and intimate involvement of the whole person, constituted by the heart from the inner out, nothing less and no substitutes; such a pursuit, then, provides the clarity and depth for both who we are and whose we are in relationship together as his very own daughters and sons. The intensity of this pursuit expands on the pivotal fourth Beatitude in our identity formation (5:6), which unfolds in this relational outcome to complete our identity.

This intimate relational process of belonging to his family and participating in his life has the relational outcome of ongoingly experiencing the whole-ly Trinity further and deeper, as well as receiving what belongs to our Father in his family. The benefits of belonging is the qualitative relational significance of "all these things" that is included in this relational outcome necessary to be made whole-ly, to live whole-ly and to make uncommon wholeness. Thus, this integral relational process of belonging and its relational outcome are the only basis and means for ethics in God's family and in the world. Anything less and any substitutes render us to our default mode, which redefines who and what we seek and sustains how we seek the results.

This functional key also provides the relational process by which our Lord's summary prayer (6:9-13) needs to be submitted to our Father and from which it will be fulfilled in his reciprocal relational response. Moreover, this key relational process integrates with the interrelated process between the fourth and sixth Beatitudes (5:6,8). The second functional key of pursuing our Father on his terms further composes—integrally with the first functional key of living by how our Father loves us—the basis for the process of triangulation by making functional in our life and practice the main aspect of this triangulation process: ongoing intimate involvement in relationship together—face to face, without the veil of our images and distinctions—with our Father and the whole-ly Trinity as family. Guided from this intimate relational point of connection, we are defined in the surrounding context by the trinitarian relational context of family, and how we function in relationships and in all our situations and circumstances is determined by the trinitarian relational process of family love for relationships to be together in uncommon wholeness—the whole relational process and outcome by which our uncommon moral presence and whole ethical involvement distinguish our identity as his whole-ly disciples, the light in the darkness of the human condition at all its levels.

Third Functional Key: Matthew 7:1-27

Self-determination is never an individual action (or an individual group action) done in isolation from others (or other groups). Self-determination is a social phenomenon requiring a process of comparison to others to establish the standards of measuring success or failure in self-determination, which is embedded in the social reality of human life at all its levels. Invariably, as noted above, these comparative (and competitive) differences lead to "better" or "less" social position (historically, even ontological nature, as seen in racism), thus the operation of stratified relationships together (formalized in systems of inequality). When relationships become separated, partitioned or fragmented, there is a basis of justification needed either to access a "better" position or to embed/maintain others in a "less" position. The pursuit of this basis is the effort for self-justification (by individual or group); this was the underlying process of Christian colonialism and its forceful use of manifest destiny. That is to say,

the effort for self-determination inevitably becomes the function in social context for self-justification; and the results of this effort invariably come at the expense of others, even unknowingly or inadvertently. Accordingly, our ethics cannot be distinguished with relational significance as long as it emerges from such a practice. On the contrary, ethics becomes contradictory or relativized, along with promoting moral disorder if only by complicity. The testimony of persons, peoples and nations, such as persons of color and Native Americans, expose this social reality in churches and among Christians.

Jesus continued to expose the dynamics of reductionism, its counter-relational work and the functional workings of the sin of reductionism countering the whole of God's desires. In his initial teaching here, the subtle shift of self-determination to self-justification emerged from an invalid application of "righteousness"—or an inadequate practice of ethics and morality—to effectively create distinctions ("with the measure you use") of "better" and "less" for relational position in religious and social context (7:1-2, cf. Mk 4:24). This so-called righteousness was not merely about "the holier the better" but about "holier than thou." Judgment based on an outer-in human ontology exposed their reductionism, with the relational consequence from counter-relational practice diminishing relationship together to be whole (7:3-4). This mere role performance of righteousness (even with good intentions, e.g., by church leaders) is characteristic of *hypokrites* and is a function of the sin of reductionism lacking the inner-out practice of the whole person constituted by the heart (7:5). In addition, to be whole is the outcome of God's relational work of grace, not self-determination, thus humility precludes self-justification—for example, humility in ethical and moral practice, or in spiritual development, which would involve epistemic humility. Yet, this humility should not be confused, for example, with being irenic and thereby diminish Jesus' intrusive relational path of his uncommon wholeness that even wields a sword against reductionism.

The dynamic of reductionism in religious/Christian life and practice is embedded in ontological simulation and functional illusion of God's whole. Yet, Jesus exposed the efforts of self-autonomy, self-determination and self-justification as insufficient (not to mention unnecessary) to be whole. Reductionism and the whole are obviously incompatible, yet less obvious is the ongoing conflict between them. Consequently, they cannot be conjoined in any pluralistic or syncretistic way, and any attempt to do so will fragment the whole, thereby reducing the new (cf. Lk 5:37-38)—which hasn't stopped Christians from constructing hybrid theology and practice. It is the integrity and significance of this whole that Jesus pointed to in a vivid illustration of the issue of whom/what we will pursue (7:6). This verse is not merely an added injunction thrown into his manifesto but needs to be directly integrated into this issue at hand. Given the full identity of his family in relationship together in uncommon wholeness, to function in anything less is to pursue an alternative substitute of reductionism, even with good intentions. The dynamic Jesus described is consequential:

> The integrity ("sacred") and significance ("pearls") of your whole person and relationship together in essence are thoughtlessly thrown (*ballo*) to reductionists, who treat with disdain (*katapateo*) anything whole, and even turn (*strepho*) on you to break down your wholeness and leave you fragmented (*rhegnymi*).

While this may appear as hyperbole, the regressive nature of this reverse dynamic is rightfully described because of the essential violence reductionism exerts on the whole—although the influence reductionism exerts, notably in its counter-relational work, tends to be a very subtle process, appearing even in Christian roles (cf. 2 Cor 11:14-15) or as the Christian norm, for example, in ontological simulation and functional illusion of God's whole.

The choice of whom/what we will pursue is really quite simple, as Jesus' unvarying manifesto made definitive: God's whole or anything less and any substitute—the former progressing in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes and the latter regressing in the reverse dynamic of anything less and any substitutes. The results are profoundly consequential, as Jesus fully disclosed in this concluding section of his most compelling communication to his followers.

The whole-ly word enacted by Jesus to communicate the whole-ly God's desires is declared simply: self-autonomy, self-determination and self-justification are insufficient and unnecessary, no matter how their practice is punctuated and accentuated to enhance their self-image. The whole-ly experiential truth embodied by Jesus to fulfill the whole-ly God's thematic relational response to the human condition "to be apart" is profoundly simple: God does not define our person based on what we do and have, thus the whole-ly God's vulnerable involvement and intimate response is fully based on the Trinity's relational work of grace for relationship to be together in uncommon wholeness—the whole-ly Trinity's family.

These are the uncommon God's whole relational terms and the only way the Trinity does relationships. Since this precludes self-autonomy, makes self-determination unnecessary and renders self-justification insufficient, Jesus invited his followers to partake of God's relational work of grace (7:7-8). Yet, God's grace constitutes involvement only on God's whole terms, not to partake for self-determination (or indulgence) on our reduced terms. Integrally, then, "ask…seek…knock" signify only our reciprocal relational work of involvement to be whole together in intimate relationship with our Father and his relational work of grace. His vulnerable involvement and intimate response can be counted on because of his relational righteousness (7:9-11), and participating in his life in this reciprocal relationship together necessitates by its nature (*dei,* not *opheilo*) our relational righteousness. On the basis of God's relational work of grace for this relational experience together—our Father's intimate involvement and response of love—Jesus disclosed the third functional key, commonly known by its reductionist title, the Golden Rule.

> **Third Functional Key:** "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (7:12, NIV).

This teaching tends to be reduced by interpreting it only in the limited context involving us with others. This bases how we do relationships with others on the self-orientation formulated from two basic issues, which Jesus addressed throughout his manifesto: (1) how we define our person, and thus, on this basis, (2) how we do relationships. If this self-orientation has been influenced by reductionism, then "in everything we do to others" will not go beyond and deeper than a reductionist practice of

how we do relationships based on a reductionist self-definition. In other words, what we desire others to act on (*thelo*) in relation to us will always be seen through this lens—influenced by contextualized and commonized biases—which in turn will determine how we function with them. This use of self-orientation, even with the best of intentions as the Golden Rule, is insufficient basis for our life and practice "in everything"—for example, even for Christian ethical decisions and practice. Moreover, the practice emerging from this approach is inadequate to be the sum and substance (*eimi*, what is) of the law and the prophets (i.e. God's communicated Word), which Jesus vulnerably both embodied in his teaching and enacted in his involvement for relationship to be transformed together in uncommon wholeness. Any reduction, therefore, would diminish his intrusive relational path with more comfortable and less demanding relationships, and this would make ambiguous our moral presence and ethical involvement with others even if that's what they want.

The alternative to this reduction is the whole. The third functional key cannot be limited to only the context involving us with others, which would then take it out of its whole context, as the Golden Rule does. Its whole context involves us further and deeper than this. This functional key can only be understood in the relational context of "your Father" and embraced by his relational process in intimate relationship together, which is the relational context and process Jesus disclosed and made definitive in his encompassing manifesto. That is to say, in our Father's relational context and process we have engaged vulnerable relationship together and have been intimately involved to experience the whole-ly God's mercy, grace and *agape* involvement to be made whole. In his relational context and process, we ongoingly experience being redefined as whole persons, redeemed from reductionism and its sin, transformed necessarily in human ontology from the inner out and reconstituted in the relationships necessary to be whole. From this vulnerable experience we know: (1) how we need and thus want to be seen (from the inner-out human ontology), (2) how we need and thus want to be treated by others (as whole persons, nothing less), and (3) what we need and thus want to experience in relationships (the intimacy together to be whole, no substitutes).

Therefore, on the basis of this uncommon relational experience together with our Father, Jesus calls those made uncommonly whole to live whole-ly "in everything," namely with others in relationships to make uncommonly whole. In other words, to **paraphrase his third functional key**:

> "Use what you are intimately experiencing in your relationship with 'your Father' as the basis for defining and determining how to function with others, both in his kingdom-family and in the surrounding context—'in everything' live to be whole-ly and make uncommon wholeness, as summarized in God's whole terms for relationship."

This points to the triangulation process. The third functional key completes the basis for the process of triangulation by making definitive the relational experience of being made whole-ly in relationship together with our Father. In integral function with the second functional key (of pursuing our Father in relationship together as family on his terms), the third functional key uses what is being experienced in that intimate relationship to interact in integrated function with the first functional key (of living how

our Father loves us). Functioning together, these three functional keys provide this intimate relational point of connection by which to be guided in the world in order to be defined in any human context by the trinitarian relational context of family and to function in any human relationship and at any human level by the trinitarian relational process of family love. Triangulation with our Father (including the Spirit) takes us further than the right ethics and merely doing the right thing, and engages us deeper than acting in life and practice as mere *reactors* to others in situations and circumstances in order to navigate the depths of their human condition as *responders*. As Jesus functioned and calls us to function in likeness, triangulation with our Father takes our whole person and engages us to be vulnerably involved with others just as he is involved with us for relationship together necessary to be whole, that is, nothing less than God's whole and no substitutes for God's uncommon wholeness.

Without ongoing relational function in these three functional keys (all focused on our Father) and the triangulation process, Christian life and practice is left with only alternatives to the whole—alternatives that may mislead us in ontological simulation or misguide us in functional illusion of wholeness. To pursue, settle for or be resigned to anything less and any substitutes for the whole is to engage in reductionism, which only renders us to a default mode needing to be transformed. Jesus clearly illuminated in the juxtaposition of reductionism with the whole throughout his manifesto that there is no other alternative in-between. Consequently, in each moment, situation, circumstance and relationship encountered in our life and practice, we are faced with the decisions of what is going to define us and what will determine how we function, most notably with others in relationships. And we have only two alternatives (7:13-14): God's whole, which is irreducible and nonnegotiable, thus imperative to only one function ("narrow gate and road"); or anything less and any substitutes, which is amenable to any variation away from the whole, thus adaptable to various functions ("wide gate and road"). "Gate" is a metaphor for what defines and determines us, while "road" is a metaphor for the ongoing function in our practice emerging from that "gate." The wide one leads away (*apago*) from the whole of life (*zoe*) to loss (*apoleia*, i.e. reduction) or ultimate ruin, while the narrow one brings before (*apago*, same word for opposite dynamic) the depth of *zoe* (not the limits of *bios*, common life) of the whole-ly God and to the qualitative relational function of *zoe* in God's whole.

With a contextualized bias Christians have narrowly rendered the "wide gate and road," and with a commonized bias have widely assumed who lives the "narrow gate and road." Jesus corrects such latitude among his followers and clarifies this reality: The former in all it variations only regresses and never remains static, but only the nonnegotiable terms of the latter progresses. This either-or in Jesus' manifesto is an inconvenient reality for many of his disciples to accept—inconvenient for self-autonomy and thus impractical for self-determination—who render it to a virtual reality in their theology and support it with alternative facts in their practice to justify their diversity.

The depth of *zoe*, however, is irreducible and thus invariable to human shaping, because it signifies the qualitative relational function of the whole-ly God and the Trinity's relational action in the trinitarian relational context of family by the trinitarian relational process of family love. *Zoe* involves the practice of this qualitative relational work made definitive in Jesus' teaching, which is contrary to prevailing practices and

norms (as implied above) and in conflict with quantitative outer-in presentations of a reduced human ontology (7:15-20). In other words, Jesus distinguishes the life of *zoe* as both whole and distinctly uncommon in the human context; and those who "Follow me" in his *zoe* on the intrusive relational path ("narrow gate and road") also bear his minority identity, and their uncommon wholeness intrudes on human life at all its levels.

Moreover, the authentic relational work of his whole-ly disciples is not about doing something (like performing ministry, 7:22), nor about beliefs, associations or having intentions with "Lord" (7:21) that reflect not really knowing whole-ly Jesus (as in Jn 14:9) or being known by him (7:23). This qualitative relational work is only about involvement in intimate relationship together to be whole, experienced first with the whole-ly God—contrary to "I don't know you" to the reductionists. This is the qualitative relational work of those being made whole in relationship together in God's family, and thus who are able to live whole as their Father's very own daughters and sons—those "who do the will of my Father" (7:21b). This whole function is distinguished only as uncommon, which means being invariable to human contextualization and the common of all levels of human life. Thus, does his manifesto clarify and correct the diversity of disciples and discipleship existing today?

As Jesus vulnerably embodied and intimately disclosed the whole-ly God, he made definitive what constitutes completeness of God's whole. In his closing communicative action to all his followers (then and now), he conjoined completeness with accountability (7:24-27). We are accountable for all his words communicated to us in his manifesto of discipleship, which was not merely to inform us but only God's terms to make whole our relationship together and its relational significance to be and live whole with others in his kingdom-family and to live and make whole with persons, peoples and nations in the surrounding contexts at all levels. The completeness of how we live and practice emerges directly from the completeness of who and what we are in our whole-ly identity (see contingency of the sixth Beatitude, 5:8), which inseparably involves whose we are. And what validates completeness are all his words and our relational involvement with him on those whole relational terms ("the foundation on rock"). This accountability is relationship-specific, and thus being accountable not for the self-orientation of what we do but rather for our vulnerable involvement in intimate relationship together—that is, accountable for this qualitative relational work of who and what we are in reciprocal relationship together with the whole-ly Trinity. To separate how we live and practice from the function of our whole-ly identity renders how we live and practice to reductionism—namely defined by only what we do, which does not go beyond the righteousness of the reductionists (5:20).

The global church in all its diversity is faced with the reality that not all who claim "Lord, Lord" belong to whole-ly Jesus and accordingly belong to his whole-ly family. Given the manifesto of the Word, his disciples and their discipleship together as the church are distinguished integrally whole and uncommon in likeness of the whole-ly Trinity. Therefore, the global church and all its churches, persons and relationships must examine their diversity, because they are accountable for their moral presence and ethical involvement in the world.

As Jesus unfolded the truth for relationship in his teaching, he clarified for his followers:

> In reality, the function of self-autonomy is not free but only an ironic form of enslavement—namely because of the outer-in human ontology that defines it and determines its practice—which self-determination reinforces by being constrained to the limits of ontological simulation, and which self-justification then embeds even deeper in functional illusion.

The events, situations, circumstances and relationships ("rain…wind," 7:27) experienced in life and practice will expose their lack of uncommon qualitative substance to be whole, of uncommon qualitative significance to live whole, and lack of uncommon qualitative function to make whole. This is a reality check for those engaged in any form of reductionism (even inadvertently or naively), which extends our accountability with the clear need to ongoingly account for what defines us and what determines how we function—notably in what we specifically characterize as our Christian practice to define our moral presence and to determine our ethical involvement.

As the manifesto for discipleship, nonnegotiable for all his disciples, Jesus' words to his followers made conclusive that discipleship is following him only in relational progression to his Father for relationship together as his very own to be whole in the Trinity's family (cf. Jn 12:44,49-50). This clearly involves discipleship and frames discipleship formation in only the whole-ly Trinity's relational context and process. While there are more than a few variations of discipleship and approaches to discipleship formation, his closing metaphor of building a house warns us that this diversity may only appear to be authentic to define his disciples and valid to determine discipleship. Jesus was unequivocal that the completeness and validity foundational for all his followers is grounded in the inner-out functional practice of all his words. All his words, communicating our Father's terms for relationship together, are what his Father also made imperative for us to "Listen to my Son." Therefore, all his words communicated to us from our Father are not optional, negotiable, nor can his serious followers be selective about which of his words to practice (cf. Lk 6:46). His whole-ly words integrate inseparably as the whole-ly Trinity's terms necessary for relationship together to be uncommonly whole.

When we get past our contextualized and commonized biases, the Sermon on the Mount emerges accordingly:

> As the manifesto of Jesus' irreducible relational purpose and nonnegotiable relational terms for his disciples to be distinguished whole and uncommon, in order for their identity to have the uncommon moral presence and whole ethical involvement of *light* in the world, so that he could send out whole-ly disciples as the Father sent him to relationally respond to the human condition and make uncommonly whole all levels of human life.

And as Jesus made unavoidable in the Beatitudes, being whole-ly disciples will not be the experiential truth of our persons and the relational reality of our function, until we first in vulnerable humbleness admit our own human condition in reduced ontology and function whereby we are transformed to uncommon wholeness.

The Paradox of Jesus' Sword and Making Peace

The twenty-first century world is increasingly in conflict at all levels of human life, with global terrorism only the most apparent. The Hebrews manifesto for discipleship makes it imperative to "Pursue peace with everyone" (Heb 12:14). This is not a mere challenge but defines our purpose in life as Jesus' whole-ly disciples and determines what we are in the world for. Yet, this purpose and function have also become ambiguous, misguided and/or distorted in our theology and practice.

In his manifesto, Jesus made complete the identity formation of his disciples with their function as "the peacemakers" (the 7th Beatitude, Mt 5:9). The issue continues: How do we respond to these manifestos in our discipleship while following Jesus wielding the sword that counters peace—which Simeon anticipated for us (Lk 2:34-35)? The related question that will emerge with the answer is 'how can we respond without asserting his sword?' Both questions involve the apparent paradox of Jesus' sword regarding peace.

This Beatitude of peacemaking integrates with the sixth Beatitude ("pure in heart," 5:8) to outline the process to wholeness. This integral process of our identity formation is also conjoined with the fifth Beatitude ("the merciful," 5:7) for the person made whole to function in the relationships necessary to be whole. As the process of the new (new creation and new wine in contrast to the old) identity formation engages others in relationship, there emerges a distinguished presence and involvement that is neither ambiguous nor shallow. Yet this peacemaking Beatitude is often not fully understood or integrally enacted, because the peace of Jesus is misperceived through the lens of a contextualized or commonized bias.

Peace is generally perceived without its qualitative significance and with a limited understanding of the relational involvement constituting it. As discussed previously about Jesus approaching Jerusalem in his triumphant entry, he agonized over its condition: "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace" (Lk 19:41-42). "The things that make for peace" is a critical issue focused on *what belongs to peace*, and thus by necessity involves the persons who bring this peace, not just the work of peace.

Reviewing previous notes on peace, in the classical Greek sense peace is perceived as the opposite of war and the tension in conflict. The NT, however, does not take its meaning of peace from this source; its concept of peace is an extension from the OT and of the Hebrew *shalôm*. The opposite of *shalôm* is any disturbance to the well-being of the community. That is, biblical peace is not defined in negative referential terms by the *absence* of any conflict but in positive relational terms by the *presence* of a specific condition of ontology and function, which also goes beyond any comfort or pleasantness from the absence of conflict. Throughout the Bible the primary concept of peace is well-being and wholeness. Peace is a general well-being that has both an individual dimension and a corporate/collective dimension. This wholeness extends to all aspects of human life (including physical creation) and by necessity includes salvation and the end times, but it certainly is insufficient to limit it to the latter. Going beyond the mere absence of negative activity, all of this involves what must be present for peace; this is what belongs to peace—and constitutes more than commonly understood or even wanted. Yet, uncommon peace is what Jesus distinguished from common peace to compose nothing less than uncommon wholeness.

The gospel is clearly composed by and affirmed as this uncommon peace (as in Acts 10:36; Eph 6:15). This is the only peace in which Jesus constituted his followers, and distinguished from conventional peace common to human contexts (Jn 14:27). It is thus insufficient to signify the gospel of peace with a truncated soteriology (only what Jesus saved us from) without the relational outcome of what he saved us to. The whole gospel's salvation necessitates the relationships together of the whole-ly God's family in which Jesus constituted his followers to be whole-ly as the new creation. Uncommon wholeness is intrinsic to this peace, and to be whole-ly is a necessary relational condition for those who bring this peace. Who then are the peacemakers?

Their identity is clearly defined by Jesus as the sons and daughters of God (Mt 5:9), not God's servants but the Father's very own children (as in 5:44-45, cf. Jn 15:15). This tells us not only who and what they are but whose they are and how they are as peacemakers.

The adopted children of God have been made whole in God's family and partake equalized in the new wine communion together with the whole-ly God, no longer separated by the holy partition and without the veil of human distinctions. As whole persons receiving the whole-ly Trinity's relational work of grace, it is insufficient for God's children merely to share mercy (compassion) with others. It is also insufficient for them merely to engage in the mission (however dedicated) to reduce violence, stop war or create the absence of conflict—the insufficiency of the model commonly used from Micah 6:8. On the basis of the ontology of who they are and whose they are, how they function to clearly reflect the depth of their uncommon wholeness—thus the relational responsibility to represent the Father and to continue to extend his family—involves a deeper level of relational involvement. "Peacemakers" (*eirenopoios*) denotes reconcilers, those who seek the well-being and wholeness of others, just as they experience (cf. 2 Cor 5:17-18). The reciprocal nature of the process of peacemaking is both a necessary and sufficient condition for peacemakers. This means not only to address the conflict increasing in the world today but to restore relationships in the human condition to wholeness uncommon to the human context, just as God's thematic relational action and the relational work of the Trinity engage. Such involvement can only be vulnerable by the whole person from inner out not defined by outer-in distinctions, and thereby renders any participation in peacemaking with relational distance (created also by bearing enhanced images, e.g. a loving or sacrificial person) "to be apart" and consequently insufficient, inadequate and even contrary to peace.

This brings us back to Jesus' sword that he wielded to expose the reductionism underlying common peace. The illusions from common peace mask the existing reductionism of persons and their function in relationships at all levels of human life composing social reality. For example, racism is not merely a personal prejudice expressed at the relational level; racism is a distinct pattern of discrimination reducing human ontology and function, whose framework is composed at the collective, institutional, structural and systemic levels—which is why racism (and other major forms of discrimination) has not been eliminated from our social reality, notably in the U.S. but also in the global church.

All reduced ontology and function needs to be confronted (including our own)—which Jesus did initially at the level of the biological family (Mt 10:34-35, cf. 12:48-50)—in order that the fragmentary condition of human life (even in the church) can be transformed to the depth of uncommon peace. Common peace, at best, can only simulate uncommon peace, yet it creates the illusion that there is no difference, and that Christians can use common peace to make a difference in the world. This has to be exposed in order that the uncommon truth and reality of peace can be illuminated, which for common peacemakers would be an inconvenient truth for their theology and inconvenient reality for their practice. The apparent paradox of Jesus' sword is that he wasn't against peace but fought against the reductionism composing common peace; and this doesn't exempt common peacemakers (as in Lk 2:35). His sword was not optional but necessary, so that uncommon peace could be made in the human condition at all its levels. On this essential basis, how else could we be peacemakers without asserting his sword against reductionism?

Jesus' peacemakers, accordingly, are not only those persons who "pursue uncommon wholeness with everyone," but whose own persons have been transformed to uncommon wholeness (Heb 12:14). This inner-out change of transformation was necessary for them first, so that "uncommon peace be with you…*the basis on which* I send you *into the world only as whole-ly disciples*" (Jn 20:21)—those fighting against reductionism to make uncommon peace for "everyone." In the identity formation of his whole-ly disciples, this refocuses us on the necessary antecedent integrated with the seventh Beatitude of peacemakers: "the pure in heart *who* see God *in face-to-face relationship together*" (6th Beatitude, Mt 5:8). These persons, who are being further redeemed and transformed, are engaged in the process of becoming whole by vulnerable involvement necessarily both from their whole person and in the relationships together constituting the whole. This Beatitude integrated with the seventh outline what is involved in this process to wholeness, and therefore the maturation of our identity.

The tendency in a context pervaded by reductionism, even though not enslaved by it, is to pay more attention inadvertently to the behavioral/activity aspects of our life and practice. We readily make assumptions about the qualitative presence and involvement of our person in that behavior or activity. A relational context and process make deeper demands on our person; the whole-ly God's relational context and process hold us accountable for nothing less and no substitutes than our whole person—the demands of grace. Accordingly, we should never assume the ongoing condition of our heart nor the state of our relationship with the whole-ly God. Wholeness is contingent on their qualitative function in vulnerable relational terms, which referential terms cannot account for in its default mode with relational distance.

A shallow identity lacks depth. A shallow person lacks the presence and involvement of heart (cf. Mt 15:8). Persons lacking heart in function (even inadvertently) lack wholeness. Intimate involvement with the whole-ly God (i.e. who is unreduced to common terms) necessitates an ongoing process of our hearts open and coming together—God's nonnegotiable terms. As discussed previously about the significance of holy, the Uncommon and the common are incompatible for relationship, further necessitating our ongoing transformation to "the pure in heart" (*katharos*, clean, clear, Mt 5:8) to be compatible. This *katharos* is not a static condition we can merely assume from

God's redemption and forgiveness. God's relational acts of grace are always for reciprocal relationship, thus "pure in heart" is a dynamic function for deeper involvement in reciprocal relationship to be whole together. This involves a heart functioning *clear* of any relational barriers or distance, functioning *clean* of Satan's reductionist lies, substitutes and illusions—signifying *the catharsis of the old* to be constituted in the whole of the new. Yet, any subsequent turn from the heart interjects gray matter, making our function ambiguous.

An ambiguous identity lacks clarity. An ambiguous person lacks clarity of one's ontology. Christians lacking ontological clarity lack the qualitative distinguishing them from the common's function in the surrounding context, notably from reductionism existing in all levels of human life. Being distinguished includes from the mindset, cultural practices and other established ways prevailing in our contexts and social reality, which we assume are compatible with God but effectively shift relationship with the whole-ly God to our common terms (cf. Rom 8:5-6). When the identity and ontology of the Uncommon cannot be clearly distinguished from this common function (even in a Christian subculture), this generates ambiguity in our identity and counteracts wholeness for our ontology—which increasingly becomes life and practice without the whole person and without the primacy of intimate relationships necessary to be whole (cf. Col 3:15). The theological implication is that the Uncommon and common can neither coexist in functional harmony nor can their functions be combined in a hybrid. The functional implication is that the tension between them must by nature always be of conflict, the nature of which is ongoing and, contrary to some thinking, irremediable. Therefore, "pure in heart" also signifies *catharsis of the common* to be constituted with-in the whole of the Uncommon.

The function of the depth of this person's heart will have the relational outcome to more deeply "see God." The significance of "see" (*horao*) implies more than the mere act of seeing but involves more intensively to experience, partake of, or share in something, be in the presence of something and be affected by it. This depth of significance in "seeing" God in the substance of relationship is the intimate process of hearts functionally vulnerable to each other and further coming together in deeper involvement to be whole—the purpose of Jesus' whole-ly life and practice and formative family prayer (Jn 17:19-26). When our ongoing experience (not necessarily continuous) with God is not *horao*, we need to examine honestly where our heart is and address any assumptions. If, for example, we don't dance around our *ptochos* ("poor in spirit," 1st Beatitude, 5:3) and *pentheo* (mourning about it, 2nd Beatitude, 5:4), our heart will respond with greater functional trust and vulnerable intimacy—the relational posture of submission to God's whole relational terms signified by meekness (the humbleness of the 3rd Beatitude, v.5). It is only when we assume or ignore this inner-out aspect of our person that we essentially keep relational distance from God, hereby impeding the process to be whole and the relational outcome of the new wine signifying the whole ontology and function of the new creation.

The early disciples' struggles were essentially with heart issues, and consequently they had difficulty seeing (*horao*) God even in Jesus' vulnerable presence (Jn 14:7-9). Mary enacted this heart to illuminate the difference that intimately connected with whole-ly Jesus. Without a clean and clear heart there will be shallowness in our identity formation and ambiguity in the ontology and function of our person (both individually and together) in ongoing relationship with the whole-ly Trinity. The catharsis of both the old and common make the sixth Beatitude essential as **the contingency function** in the process to be integrally whole and uncommon, and for the maturation of our identity as the whole-ly persons composed in Jesus' call and for his commission. Whenever his disciples, however, are not in ongoing engagement of the contingency function, like the early disciples we also can expect the growth of our persons to be stunted and the maturity of our whole-ly identity to be underdeveloped.

In these seven Beatitudes Jesus defined the natural relational flow from repentance to redemption to reconciliation to wholeness. Jesus functioned vulnerably in this essential relational progression and ongoingly engaged the relational work necessary to be whole. While peace describes interpersonal relationships only in a corollary sense, the condition of wholeness and well-being is the new relational order of the new creation as the whole-ly Trinity's family (as Paul made definitive, Eph 2:14-22; Col 3:15). Uncommon peace, therefore, is a necessary condition for the whole relational outcome of the gospel, the whole gospel, thus the missing *sola* that integrates all the other *solas*. Moreover, each emerging act of reconciliation and peacemaking must function in the same natural relational flow to become whole. This will advance the relational process in progression to wholeness for others and will deepen the wholeness of those so engaged, and therefore the maturation of the distinguished clarity and depth of their identity integrating their uncommon moral presence and whole ethical involvement as unmistakable light in the world.

Those who think they can make peace without asserting Jesus' sword have a weak view of sin that doesn't encompass the reductionism in all human life (including theirs) at all levels (including their relationships and churches). Thus, they are unable to distinguish uncommon peace from common peace, which ironically means their efforts to make peace could in reality reinforce or even sustain the human condition. **Uncommon peacemaking** is the assertive action of those who are maturing in the identity distinguishing them only as whole-ly disciples living in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes—foremost in face-to-face relationship together with the whole-ly Trinity in the church family and then vulnerably facing all others in the world (Ps 149:6).

For those who don't assert his sword, Jesus weeps further with the lament: "If you, even you *serving, would* only recognize on this day the *depth* that makes for peace! But now *this depth* is hidden from your eyes *with the lens of your contextualized and commonized biases*" (Lk 19:41-42).

Changing the Human Condition into Nothing Less and No Substitutes

Jesus embodied God's relational response to the human condition, yet the incarnation of whole-ly Jesus cannot be reduced to merely a historical event that we reference in our theology. This incarnation was always in relational progression on Jesus' intrusive relational path. In his relational purpose, Jesus vulnerably enacted God's relational response of love for the human condition; yet, we cannot merely idealize his intrusive action of love, for example, with references to John 3:16 or by just acts of love for humanity. Jesus whole-ly embodied and enacted God's relational response of grace by his uncommon moral presence and whole ethical involvement, which intrusively impacted human life at all levels and thereby changed the human condition. This is the experiential truth and relational reality of the whole gospel, the gospel of whole-ly Jesus. Thus, the composition of the gospel we possess, measured by the Jesus we use, is essential for what we claim for our own human condition, and thereby for the light we bring to the darkness. Therefore, this composition is essential for what Good News we bring to the human condition of all life.

Just as the Father sent him into the world, this is who, what and how Jesus sends us into the world to embody and enact. Our congruence with Jesus' commission, however, emerges only from our compatibility with whole-ly Jesus (no one less) and thereby in likeness of the whole-ly Trinity (no substitutes). This compatibility has been in ongoing conflict with subtle variations that are incompatible to be whole-ly—variations that are consequential for the outcome of our presence and involvement in the world and, therefore, for the human condition (obviously including our own).

Reductionism would have us believe that "knowing good and evil" and making that distinction in the human context would "be like God"; and to believe that to function on this basis, our human condition "will not *be reduced in ontology and function*"—as reductionism has claimed from the beginning of human life (Gen 3:4-5). This claim from reductionism has constructed secular anthropology in variable forms of reduced ontology and function, yet it has also shaped theological anthropology in a hybrid that defines persons and determines their function under the same original assumption of not being reduced in their ontology and function—or at least not reduced to the extent that emerged from the beginning. Such a hybrid theological anthropology has rendered ambiguous not only Christian identity as undistinguished in the world, but interrelatedly it also has made ambiguous the human condition in its breadth of all levels of human life and in its depth in the heart of persons' ontology and at the core of their function. Hybrid theological anthropology in the modern world, notably assimilated with developmental biology and neuroscience, still assumes that human ontology and function have not been reduced to the extent that encompasses the breadth and depth of the human condition (and our human condition as Christians).[4]

This assumption and related thinking and positions about existing conditions in human life have become a recipe for making merely reforms (re-formulations) to the human condition. Re-forms of the human condition focus primarily on changing its existing condition from outer in; that is, re-formulations primarily address the situations and circumstances of those conditions without getting down into the primary issue of

[4] I engage this discussion more extensively in *The Person in Complete Context: The Whole of Theological Anthropology Distinguished* (Theological Anthropology Study, 2014).

their underlying cause, which then merely re-forms its existing condition without deeper change. Thus, how far "in" of 'outer in' such re-forms penetrate the human condition depends on the operating theological anthropology generating these reforms. Yet, regardless of the theological anthropology operating in an outer-in approach, as much as it may appear to encompass the breadth of the human condition it is insufficient to get down to the depth of the existing human ontology and function underlying the human condition from inner out.

Reforms, with all good intentions, don't change the underlying human ontology and function, which are composed from inner out by the sin of reductionism. The depth of the human condition can be addressed only when its reduced human ontology and function is exposed from inner out; and this condition can only be changed by transformation from inner out—never changed by mere reforms from outer in, no matter how "in" it goes. This change also applies to the human condition of churches and their persons and relationships, for whom reforms (and related renewals) have become seducing ontological simulations and functional illusions of their human condition supposedly changed from inner out.

Our theological anthropology is the key determinant in our theology and practice for knowing and understanding the human condition as God sees it. In Jesus' indispensable paradigm for our clarification and correction, the theological anthropology we use will be the measure of the human condition we get. And our theological anthropology and its related human condition are directly contingent on our view of sin that either incorporates reductionism or omits it. The latter weak view of sin doesn't assert Jesus' sword to expose the reductionism at the depth of the human condition, nor does it confront the reduced ontology and function in variable theological anthropologies without asserting his sword. So, where do this weak view of sin and variable theological anthropology leave the human condition and our efforts to change it?

Some would argue strongly that many significant accomplishments have been made for the common good, and thus have benefitted multitudes and made an impact on the human condition. The juxtaposition of the common good and the human condition is a typical counterpoint that Christians frequently use to qualify their efforts. However, when Jesus' sword is asserted, a deeper understanding emerges about the dynamics involved here. First of all, the human condition from the beginning was propagated by the joint assumption of "knowing good and evil" and that its condition "will not *be reduced*." Secondly, efforts benefitting the common good are (1) based on "knowing good and evil" and therefore (2) assume that what is common is good for all and thereby helps change the human condition. And lastly, when these assumptions are exposed and their underlying reductionism of human ontology and function is confronted by asserting Jesus' sword, then the common good is not in reality a counter*point* to the human condition but perhaps more of a counter*part*—a critical distinction between merely virtual and real. That is to say, despite the extent of its efforts, serving the common good does not change the human condition at its depth, and any relief or comfort it brings only makes the human condition more palatable and enduring. This also applies to common peacemaking, not to mention evangelism that only serves to save persons from sin without including reductionism and what they are saved *to*.

Therefore, the argument in favor of serving the common good and related reforms to the human condition don't measure up to integrally changing the human condition in its breadth of all levels of human life and in its depth in the heart of persons' ontology and at the core of their function. Where does this change measure up and how does it emerge?

Jesus' sword involves asserting the strong view of sin that incorporates reductionism in all its subtle forms and counter-relational workings. Asserting Jesus' sword (not any sword even for the sake of peace) also integrally involves the intrusive action of whole persons and function enacted from the whole theological anthropology composed in likeness of whole-ly Jesus enacting only uncommon peace. When the human condition is put into juxtaposition with both this strong view of sin and this whole theological anthropology, the only change to the human condition that would measure up in significance is **transformation**: the inner out change of the old condition in reduced ontology and function to the new condition in whole ontology and function in likeness of only the whole-ly Trinity, the ongoing relational process and outcome of which unfolds in the essential dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes.

When Jesus commissioned his whole-ly disciples and sent them into the world just as the Father sent him, our congruence with him specifically involves (1) asserting his sword on the human condition in order to (2) enact uncommon peace at all levels of human life, so that (3) in the uncommon moral presence and whole ethical involvement of our whole-ly identity we (4) will make whole-ly disciples of all persons, peoples and nations in the human condition by their transformation from the old to the new on the basis and in the likeness of the Trinity. Whole-ly Jesus sends us only as whole-ly disciples, only for this whole-ly relational purpose and this whole-ly relational outcome. Anything less and any substitutes are no longer whole-ly.

"Uncommon wholeness be with-*in* you…as I send you" to fulfill your *sole* purpose in life and to complete what you are in this world *sole*-ly for—the *solas* for the global church needing urgent response in uncommon wholeness, the missing *sola* integrating all the other *solas* so that they will be nothing less and no substitute.

Chapter 7 Normalizing, Reforming or Transforming

I am the *uncommon* Way, the *inconvenient* Truth and the *whole* Life.
John 14:6

I know your successful ministry; you have a *popular* reputation of being alive.
…Wake up *to reality*…for I have not found your *discipleship* complete.
Revelation 3:1-2, NIV

Jesus made paradigmatic for our theology and practice: "The measure you *use* will be the measure you get" (Mk 4:24). Our discussion has revolved essentially around this paradigm, with the relational imperative to "Pay close attention to *the whole-ly Word* you hear" in order for our theology and practice to have the clarification and correction necessary to be whole and uncommon like the Word. His relational imperative challenges our contextualized bias and/or our commonized bias, while his paradigm confronts our diverse theology and practice. At this intersection, "Where are you as a disciple?" and "What are you doing here in your discipleship?" "Do you know me whole-ly yet?"

The Integrity of the Word

Where we are as disciples and what we are doing in our discipleship supposedly was clarified and corrected by the Reformation. The claims made by the magisterial Reformers for all theology and practice were based on Scripture alone, the defining principle of *sola scriptura*. Christians and their churches, emerging directly or indirectly from the Reformation, also claim the basis for their theology and practice in *sola scriptura*—notably evangelicals-neoevangelicals who are identified as 'people of the Book'. Ironically, though not surprisingly, there are lacking, missing, misrepresented or distorted essential disclosures in Scripture that compose their theology and practice. The most notable variable centers on the profile of God's face, whose full profile is disclosed by the Word in the vulnerably embodied face of whole-ly Jesus—whose uncommon wholeness is the *missing sola* (as in Jn 14:27 and Col 3:15) in the Reformation and in those Christians and churches emerging directly or indirectly from the Reformation. The Word alone disclosed the full profile of the whole-ly Trinity.

Therefore, this is the only Word that Paul made conclusive to "dwell in you *in relational terms*" (Col 3:16) as the irreducible and nonnegotiable, thus invariable, basis for our theology and practice to be distinguished in uncommon wholeness. The variable condition of anything less and any substitutes, observed in the diversity of theology and practice since the Reformation, is no longer distinguished because the integrity of the Word has been compromised by the assumed bias and presumed use of Scripture alone.

In Jesus' paradigm established for his disciples' whole theology and practice, the Word we claim is what and who we get; and our persons, relationships and churches should not expect anything more, nor assume that we don't have anything less and any substitutes in our theology and practice.

At a pivotal juncture for his early disciples—which would be defining for all his disciples—Thomas correctly stated: "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" (Jn 14:5). Despite Thomas' commonized bias—which focused on the quantitative of whole-ly Jesus over the qualitative (epitomized in Jn 20:24-29)—his logic asks the right question that all of us need to be asking at this pivotal juncture today: If we do not know the relational progression of whole-ly Jesus, how can we know the way to "Follow me" and thereby to "be where I am" in order to fulfill our purpose in life and to complete what we are in this world for?

In the familiar words of Jesus, the Word disclosed in relational terms to Thomas and all his disciples: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6). These consummate words have been commonly rendered to referential terms, fragmented from each other and interpreted with a latitude that has made ambiguous the Word and compromised his integrity. In other words (contrary words), with our biases we have made assumptions about what and who the Word disclosed and have presumed to know how to live accordingly to them. Who, what and how whole-ly Jesus ongoingly disclosed "I am" always clarifies and corrects us in order to maintain the integrity of the Word. Thomas obviously didn't pay close attention to the words Jesus communicated throughout his interactions, especially with his disciples.

When other disciples learned from Jesus where his relational progression was going, his way was too uncommon for them: "'This *Word* is difficult [hard, harsh, *skleros*]; who can accept it?'…Because of this many of his disciples turned *off* and no longer *walked* [lived, conduct one's life, *peripateo*] with him *on his uncommon way*" (Jn 6:60,66). At least these disciples were honest, whereas other disciples diversely redefined the way to make it more palatable, without having to digest distasteful elements of it (as in Jn 6:53-58). Jesus openly disclosed to them his way, without trying to disguise it for their comfort or to embellish it for their convenience. Disclosing that he was *the uncommon Way* is essential to the integrity of the Word and simply nonnegotiable to any other terms by his disciples.

When other disciples heard from Jesus the experiential truth of his uncommon way, their experience went beyond what they expected—likely beyond what most disciples would expect to hear today. Those disciples learned that the truth of his uncommon way was inconvenient, even divisive in social terms and simply impractical in reasonable terms (Lk 9:57-62). The reality of the Word to the above diverse disciples was that his uncommon way was just too out of the ordinary for their discipleship and an *inconvenient Truth* to embrace. His uncommon way and inconvenient truth, however, constitute the integrity of the Word and therefore are nonnegotiable and irreducible to anything less and any substitutes. As Jesus defined for Thomas and all his disciples, "I am the uncommon Way and the inconvenient Truth."

When Jesus disclosed his purpose in this life and what he was in the world for to Pilate, Pilate was faced with the inconvenient Truth about whom he had to make a decision. Like many Christians, Pilate thought he could avoid the inconvenience of the Truth by shifting the focus to secondary matters—in his situation, turning philosophical

with “What is truth?” (Jn 18:37-38). In apparent contrast, yet still similar in approach, Peter faced the relational progression of the inconvenient Truth in a head-on collision to deny the reality of the Truth in his uncommon way to the cross (Mt 16:21-22). In diverse ways, his disciples have transposed the inconvenient Truth to be without relational significance in their theology and practice, such that common observers can question “what is truth?” and legitimately conclude the absence of the reality of truth for them to experience—in contrast to Jesus’ prayer (Jn 17:21-23). This is the unavoidable relational consequence when the integrity of the Word as the uncommon Way and the inconvenient Truth has been compromised. Yet, when we don’t compromise the integrity of the Word, “you are truly my disciples; and you will know the inconvenient Truth and the inconvenient Truth will make you free” (Jn 8:31-32). This is the intrusive relational significance of the Truth, who composes “the Truth of the gospel” in whole relational terms, which many disciples in the early church still considered too inconvenient a truth (as Paul contended, Gal 2:5,14).

As composed in Jesus’ family prayer above, the most essential measure of the Word’s integrity is the complete life of the Trinity in whole ontology and function. This is the whole life (*zoe*) that the Word embodied and enacted for our persons, relationships and churches to be whole together in likeness of the Trinity. Nothing less and no substitutes can fulfill Jesus’ prayer, because anything less and any substitutes cannot be (1) *the whole Life* of the Word and thus (2) the whole life of the Trinity, therefore (3) the whole life of his family in likeness of the Trinity, who is disclosed by the integrity of the Word’s whole Life and inconvenient Truth and uncommon Way.

We can only distinguish where we are as disciples and what we are doing in our discipleship by “Following my whole-ly person” and “being where I am whole-ly.” Whole-ly Jesus composed the Word solely with the uncommon Way and the inconvenient Truth and the whole Life. In the ongoing hermeneutic challenge, our persons, relationships and churches are responsible for maintaining the integrity of the Word, and we are accountable to the Word alone and to each other in likeness for any compromise. When we don’t meet this responsibility and be accountable, we open the hermeneutic door wide to allow the diversity of disciples and discipleship to define who we are and to determine whose we are, whereby our whole-ly identity is converted to a diversified identity of common formation.

Normalizing Our Faith, Reforming Our Theology and Practice

The prevailing faith of God’s people by the time of Jesus had become **normalized**—that is, not engaged as the relational work of trust in the primacy of relationship together but practiced as the secondary work of meeting the obligations or conforming to the requirements of a Rule of Faith, not the Relationship of Faith. The prevailing faith of the church in much of its history also became normalized, notably evidenced in the churches of Jesus’ post-ascension critique (Rev 2-3), and with the establishment of Christendom and its variations since the fifth century. The Reformation in the sixteenth century sought to correct the normalizing of faith by reforming the existing theology and practice. Yet, since this juncture in church history, the prevailing

faith among many Protestants and their churches has become normalized in spite of efforts to correct it. Why so?

Normalizing in general happens when our worldview and interpretive lens (*phroneō*, cf. Rom 8:5-6) are influenced and shaped by the limits of our human context. When our sphere of knowledge (epistemic field) is narrowed down to and limited by, for example, conventional wisdom, philosophy or the physical universe of science, then the limits of this contextualized bias have a primary influence in shaping how we function. Under this influence the practice of faith shifts from the intimate involvement in the primacy of reciprocal relationship with God to subtle ontological simulations and functional illusions of faith's primacy.

Reforming (or renewing) our theology and practice doesn't sufficiently change this condition. Regardless of the major emphasis on the vital *solas* (Scripture alone, Christ alone, by grace and by faith alone), reforming efforts still lack the missing *sola* (the uncommon wholeness of whole-ly Jesus), which keeps them from getting to the depth of this condition, our default human condition. When reform efforts are undertaken without the missing *sola*, their sphere of understanding human persons and their function is limited by a reduced theological anthropology and constrained by a common view of sin and the human condition. *Sola gratia* (grace alone) and *sola fide* (faith alone) become insignificant claims that don't really change the depth of this condition. Rather, the constraints of a commonized bias subtly direct re-form efforts to promote changes that in effect merely recycle ontological simulations and functional illusions of the primacy of faith in the wholeness of relationship together with God and each other.

Contextualized bias keeps us from seeing the ontological and functional consequences of normalizing. Commonized bias prevents us from understanding the ontological and functional consequences of merely re-forming. The dynamics of normalizing and reforming are interrelated in the global church today, and they interact to cultivate its diversity and thereby generate its fragmentation.

When Nicodemus pursued Jesus in the night, he was shrouded in the normalized faith of God's people. He obviously wanted more than this in seeking out Jesus, "a teacher…from God" (Jn 3:2), but whether he had reforming on his mind is uncertain. What is certain is that he encountered whole-ly Jesus, beyond his contextualized bias of who he could have imagined and beyond his commonized bias of what he expected to receive: transformation from inner out to uncommon wholeness, and nothing less and no substitutes! This outcome cannot emerge from the prevailing normalizing of John 3:16, nor can it unfold from the prevalent reforming based on the change of merely "born again." The outcome that whole-ly Jesus composed illuminated the missing *sola* that eludes much of our theology and practice today.

Therefore, the most compelling question facing all of us today, with inescapable results from our response, is: **To be or not to be whole-ly**. We cannot be changed from inner out and thus *whole*—that is, experiencing the reality of the whole gospel's transformation—without being different from who and what commonly exists. Equally, we cannot be distinguished different from inner out (not mere outer-in differences) and thus uncommon (holy) without being transformed to wholeness only inner out. In this inseparably integrated process, the absence or loss of either our wholeness or our uncommonness compromises our integral integrity, resulting in our identity as Jesus' disciples becoming ambiguous or obscured—just as Jesus exposed in his manifesto for all

his disciples (Mt 5:13-16). The contrasting result unfolds from living in our integral integrity, because the uncommon wholeness composing the integrity of our identity is essential to distinguish uncommonly the whole of who, what and how we are as his whole-ly disciples.

Anything less of our wholeness and any substitutes for our uncommonness are no longer whole-ly, which render us as disciples in a life and our discipleship on a way that becomes a normalizing of the truth. Reforming this way, truth and life do not result in the change embodied and enacted by whole-ly Jesus in the uncommon Way, the inconvenient Truth and the whole Life. What is the truth of the gospel you use in your theology and practice? Also, what is your life as a disciple and your way of discipleship? How do they compare to the uncommon Way, the inconvenient Truth and the whole Life?

The General Relativity of the Gospel

John's summary of the gospel reflected the illumination of the Word that "in him was life and the *whole* Life was the light of all people" (Jn 1:4). The whole Life who composed the gospel had no difficulty shining his light in the darkness but the human context has difficulty seeing the Light. The difficulty is twofold: (1) not seeing the Light because of commonized bias from reductionism, which fractures the light to obscure the whole Life; (2) not recognizing the Light because of a contextualized bias shaped by Christians, who have refracted the Light and rendered ambiguous the gospel composed by the whole Life. This contextualized bias shaped by Christians is what others observe of our theology and practice. Consider, for example, most observers of the global church don't see a rich diversity but a fragmentation of diverse parts that lacks unity, much less wholeness. The reality simply stated, the gospel that Christians claim and proclaim commonly does not reflect the whole Life of the Light; instead the gospel re-presented has become relative, which makes it difficult for the Light to be recognized, known and understood.

Our Christian light in the darkness is not necessarily what it appears to be and how it would be expected to shine. Sometimes light only appears to shine in the darkness when in fact there is no real source located in that appearance. Consider further this analogy from the observing world. Albert Einstein's general theory of relativity describes how gravity can distort the path of light, altering its trajectory; for example, the sun's gravity bends the light from other stars, and thus their light is distorted on a different path that alters their light's trajectory, making those stars appear to be in a different location than they actually are—sometimes misrepresenting that they still exist. How much the light is deflected by such gravitational pull will determine the relative location of its source, the reality of which may remain ambiguous or a mystery, unobservable in its true form.

This relativity also parallels what happens to the light of the gospel. Our contextualized and commonized biases create a gravitational influence that distorts the uncommon Way of the Light and alters the relational progression of its whole Life, whereby the inconvenient Truth of its source is relegated to ambiguity by the relativity of a gospel in diverse conditions. The general relativity of our gospel has emitted light from

a diversity of disciples and discipleship that has deflected their definitive essential source in whole-ly Jesus in likeness of the whole-ly Trinity.

Our existing theology and practice face clarification and correction by coming face to face with the integrity of the Word, who faces us with normalizing, reforming or transforming in our theology and practice. His relational purpose is to uncover the relativity of our gospel, so that the light of the gospel's Source in the uncommon Way, the inconvenient Truth and the whole Life can be known unmistakably face to face, then responded to in the primacy of relationship face to face, and, therefore, followed in reciprocal relationship together face to face. Since Jesus reconstituted the temple by tearing down the holy partition and removing the veil, we have direct access to the whole-ly God face to face. The new temple has become essentially the new template (contrary to old templates) for the new covenant relationship together face to face without the veil—temple into template for the new intimate involvement with the whole and holy God (summarized in the Hebrews manifesto, Heb 8:5-6; 10:19-20).

Therefore, only **face to face** in the primacy of relationship together composes **the whole-ly template** for theology and practice (1) that is congruent with the integrity of the Word, and (2) that unambiguously illuminates the Light of the invariable gospel, and thus (3) that provides the sole template for all disciples to be compatible in their discipleship with whole-ly Jesus.

The global church in its diverse condition is in critical need of this urgent face-to-face care for its correction. As Jesus' followers, if we are not relationally involved face to face with the whole-ly Word in the Light of the gospel, what does this indicate about our theology and practice? This interrelated, interdependent process of clarification and correction then necessarily extends to verifying the condition of existing disciples and discipleship.

Vetting Disciples and Discipleship

As we continue to deliberate on our clarification and correction, there is a standard process that is typically not found in Christian contexts: vetting. Today, vetting has become much more visible in the global context of politics and economics, which is increasingly needed as old assumptions are challenged and no longer can be counted on as reliable or even valid. Yet, the global church and its sub-churches are noticeably absent in the vetting process, even though judgments and related accountability have been exercised through the years. They have either ignored or at least lacked vetting the integrity of their disciples and the veracity of the disciples they make. These unvetted disciples have quantified the majority shift of the latest Christian composition from the West to the Two-Thirds World, without any other measure qualifying the veracity and integrity of these followers of Jesus.

The intrusive reality of whole-ly Jesus throughout his earthly life and function was that he consistently vetted any and all disciples claiming to "Follow me." His ongoing relational purpose was to vet the qualitative relational significance (not quantitative) of their discipleship in his paradigm for discipleship (Jn 12:26), so that they would truly "be *face to face* where I am" in whole theology and practice. Without this

vetting process, the hermeneutic door is opened "wide" and interpretations made "easy and more convenient" (as in Mt 7:13), which results in a diversity of disciples who misrepresent "Follow me" in a diverse condition of discipleship that distorts "being where I am." These so-called disciples have replaced the whole-ly template of face to face with Jesus in the primacy of relationship together, so the inconvenient truth is "I never knew you" despite the claims of their dedicated discipleship (Mt 7:22-23).

The vetting by whole-ly Jesus was the uncommon way with the inconvenient truth for the whole life. The integrity of his disciples and the veracity of their discipleship can only be vetted on this basis, using the measure of the whole-ly template face to face. In lieu of this uncommon inconvenient whole process of vetting, Christians and their churches cannot appeal to traditional efforts at accountability as long as their theological anthropology is reduced and their view of sin is not centered on reductionism. Without this whole-ly basis, such accountability has its primary focus on what we do behaviorally from outer in, making secondary who and whose we are face to face; thus it focuses on measuring up to Christian standards, conforming to a code of ethics (or old templates), to the Rule of Faith and/or to the normative practices of a church, denomination or viewpoint. With all good intentions, this all comes at the expense of the primacy of relationship together face to face foremost with the whole-ly Trinity and, inseparably, with the church family in likeness of the Trinity. Holding Christians accountable on the basis of a reduced theology and practice leave them in a default mode of their ontology and function, which are unable to account and be accountable for the whole theology and practice of Jesus' whole-ly disciples.

Moreover, in a theology and practice revolving around 'by grace alone' (*sola gratia*), the diversity of disciples today ironically testify to a variable condition of ontology and function that has not fully received God's relational response of grace to their reduced condition. Their underlying condition subtly remains unchanged due to either (1) having that pervasive weak view of sin that doesn't encompass the depth of their condition that God's grace responds to, or (2) taking advantage of a common view of God's grace by exercising liberties in variable practice and/or by assuming that grace allows latitude in practice. This all emerges from an inconspicuous underlying dynamic implicitly assumed that, in effect, God's grace can or has to be earned by Christian practice. This is one of the old and present assumptions made by Jesus' followers that needs to be vetted.

Obviously, such a subtle practice counters *sola gratia* based in the whole-ly template of face to face, but it also subtly overlaps with *sola fide* (by faith alone). The sole relational work of faith that Jesus made conclusive for his disciples (Jn 6:29) is the primacy of relational trust in face-to-face relationship together. This *sola fide* in its whole-ly template is countered by disciples who get into diversifying the primacy of relational work face to face with secondary works (e.g. works of serving and ministry). The occupation, likely preoccupation—for example, engaged by the other disciples in contention with Mary—are works used to define their persons and determine their value (evident in the early disciples, Lk 22:24). *Sola fide* face to face is always countered when our theological anthropology defines us in reduced ontology and function, which then justifies Christian practice that always counters *sola gratia* face to face. Accordingly, all

this emerges and unfolds when the Word face to face (the face-to-face integrity of *sola scriptura*) is not the sole determinant of our persons, relationships and churches in uncommon wholeness (as Paul made nonnegotiable, Col 3:15). This missing *sola* clarifies and corrects the other *solas* and provides the whole-ly basis to vet face to face the integrity of all disciples and the veracity of all their discipleship.

The Integrated Measures for Whole-ly Disciples

One reason that vetting is not considered an urgent need is how *routine* discipleship has become. By routine I mean that discipleship is not distinguished in following the relational progression of whole-ly Jesus but has replaced this whole-ly template with anything less and any substitutes, and is thus unable to be distinguished beyond that routine. The common thread intertwined in the existing diverse condition of Christians today, even among postmodern Christians and the emergent church movement, is the **routinization of discipleship**. In all these differences, the reality is that discipleship has not emerged distinguished with whole-ly Jesus.

The measures for distinguishing whole-ly disciples are integrated *by* and *in* these claims:

Based on the inconvenient Truth of the gospel, embodied in the whole Life and enacted in the uncommon Way by whole-ly Jesus,

- we can only claim his gospel (not other variations) by claiming fully its relational outcome;
- we can only claim his gospel's whole relational outcome by claiming the cross of whole-ly Jesus (not *any* Jesus);
- we can only claim his cross (not as event or doctrine) by claiming Jesus' relational progression behind the temple curtain to destroy the holy partition;
- we can only claim his relational progression having destroyed the holy partition by claiming our relational involvement with him in his pivotal action behind the curtain for the sole purpose to transform (not reform) us to the *new* in wholeness from inner out in only relationship-specific involvement face to face without any veil;
- we can only claim transformation to the new of our wholeness without our veil by claiming face-to-face relationship together with the whole-ly Trinity (not *any* Trinity), who is vulnerably and thus intimately accessible without the holy partition;
- we can only claim the relational reality of face-to-face relationship together with the whole-ly Trinity by claiming the experiential truth of our identity as whole-ly disciples in the Trinity's likeness;
- we can only claim our distinguished identity as whole-ly disciples in the Trinity's likeness (with no substitutes) by claiming face to face the transformed relationships integrally equalized and intimate that embody together the whole-ly church family of the whole-ly Trinity.

Accordingly with nothing less and no substitutes, these integrated whole-ly disciples together unfold distinguished without ambiguity in relational progression intrusively into the human context at all levels to make whole (not merely reform) the human condition. This uncommon wholeness is the who and the what Jesus prayed for all his disciples together *to be*, and *not to be* anything less and any substitute.

Whole-ly Leadership

The integrated measures for whole-ly disciples apply with foremost significance to leadership, both in the church and the related academy. The leadership the church and the academy use will be the disciples and discipleship they get, which certainly has far-reaching influence on the shape of Christian identity. If the church uses ordinary leaders trained by the academy—not to be confused with the opposite of extraordinary—the church gets ordinary disciples and routine discipleship. If the church uses leaders in reduced ontology and function learned from, reinforced in and sustained by the academy, the church will get fragmentary disciples and discipleship rather than the wholeness needed for the essential condition of the church and its persons and relationships.

The *primary* function of leaders is to fulfill their calling to be whole (like all disciples) in the primacy of relationship together face to face. The primacy of this whole-ly template for leaders was illuminated by Jesus intensively for Peter in their summary interaction: "Do you love me? …*Lead* my sheep" (Jn 21:15-19). In Jesus' relational language, love is not about what a leader does for Christ, notably sacrifice in serving, but the intimate depth of relational involvement face to face. This is the primary function of leaders to be fulfilled before they can "lead my sheep." The role of the latter is their secondary function, which can only be fulfilled when the secondary is integrated into the primary (PIP). Unfortunately, for many leaders the secondary of what they do in their role becomes their primary focus, the occupation of which diminishes, minimalizes and renders without significance the primacy of face-to-face involvement in relationship together of whole-ly love.

The (pre)occupation with the secondary becomes *professionalized* as a vocation, in which having a job and keeping it becomes a common self-concern among leaders. Consider, if the academy were both centered on whole theology and practice and involved in the Word's relational language and terms, how many teaching positions based on referential information would be of significance and still exist? In contrast to face-to-face involvement in the relational progression of the primary, such self-concern subtly regresses into self-interest of creating an image or a brand that promotes their style of leadership. That self-interest also revolves around the concern to be *relevant*, which shapes relevance by the secondary over the significance of the primary. Since this self-interest unavoidably engages a comparative process between leaders, as it was with the early disciples this self-interest requires the individual's abilities and resources in the secondary to determine their person's self-worth and leadership value. This self-determination inevitably regresses into self-justification by leaders asserting contextualized and commonized biases (exposed in Jesus' manifesto, Mt 6-7), in explicit and implicit conflict with Jesus' sword against reductionism.

The pressure to be relevant and to be productive is ongoing for leaders. This pressure comes from within church leaders and also from those they lead; yet, the latter source is likely the result of the former's leadership. Without clarification and correction of this condition, what composes church leaders will compose those churches. Nicodemus, an elite religious leader and teacher, was shocked to learn from Jesus that he essentially was obsolete (Jn 3:10). By not understanding the transformation to uncommon wholeness and its primacy for "the kingdom-*family* of God," everything else Nicodemus knew and taught was irrelevant and thus obsolete. This condition is exposed for leaders when clarified and corrected by the whole-ly Word. Paul further clarified and corrected what leaders need.

How is a minister of righteousness unmistakably distinguished from others appearing as "ministers of righteousness" (e.g. 2 Cor 11:15)? Not by their gifts, resources, role-performance or any other outer-in measure (as in *metaschematizo*, 11:13-15). Based on outer-in perception and assessment, Paul said the *telos* (end, goal or limit) of ministers will be determined by the workings of how they define themselves and thereby determine their function, specifically in how they do relationships and lead in church ("Their end will match their deeds."). Church leaders defined from outer in cannot be distinguished from others in a comparative process, no matter what credentials they have; even Jesus had difficulty being distinguished among Jewish leaders when subjected to a comparative process rooted in outer-in terms. In other words, Paul makes the theological anthropology of church leaders a basic issue in church leadership and a basic antecedent needing to be congruent from inner out for leading the new creation church family (cf. Phil 2:1-5; 1 Cor 12:12-13). This builds on Jesus' new relational order for leaders (Mk 10:42-44) and points to what in churches is always primary to Jesus (Rev 2:23).

This theological anthropology of whole ontology and function for the person and persons together as church is nonnegotiable for Paul (1 Cor 4:6). The new creation is not open to be defined and determined by human terms and shaping (Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:9-10; 2 Cor 5:16-17). Only the uncommon wholeness of Christ *brabeuo* ("rules" as the only determinant) for the whole person and relationships composing the church (Col 3:15). Just as Paul holds himself accountable for his wholeness (cf. 1 Cor 15:9-10), he firmly holds church leaders accountable for theirs because, for all of them, their wholeness is inseparable from the embodying of the church in whole ontology and function (Col 3:15; Eph 2:14-15; cf. 1 Cor 3:21-23). The new creation functions only in the inner-out dynamic in the qualitative image and relational likeness of whole-ly God, the transformation which emerges from *anakainoo* (restored to being new again in one's original condition, Col 3:10) and *ananeoo* (being made new from inner out, Eph 4:23). The responsibility for engagement in this process of transformation is reciprocal in only relational terms—not conceptual in referential terms, even with concern for the notion of sanctification. On the one hand, all persons being transformed by the Spirit are responsible for their ongoing relational involvement. On the other, church leaders are further responsible for what they share and teach (as Paul implies, Eph 4:20-22) since their definitive purpose and function is the *katartismos* ("to equip, prepare," from *katartizo*, to restore to former condition for complete qualification) of church members to embody the whole ontology and function of God's new creation family (Eph 4:12-13).

The role of equipping and preparing is perceived in secondary terms, which is fulfilled in diverse ways by leaders in diverse condition. But the function of restoring to a whole condition cannot be assumed by church leaders without their reciprocal involvement in the process of *anakainoo and ananeoo*, no matter how "gifted" they are; nor can the former be assumed as an experiential truth and relational reality for church leaders simply because they are engaged in the role of equipping.

Paul assumes for church leaders in their purpose and function in *katartismos* that their own persons have been and continue to be *anakainoo* and *ananeoo*. If their ontology and function are not whole, then their theological anthropology has shifted (even by default) to a reduced ontology and function incongruent with the new creation; consequently they no longer have functional significance for the embodying of God's new creation family and the experiential truth of the gospel of wholeness, much less to assume a leadership function. Church leaders (including in the academy) need to understand that *katartismos* has functional significance only in dynamic interaction with their *anakainoo* and *ananeoo*, and that this ongoing interaction is requisite for their ministry to be integral for embodying the church as the *pleroma* of Christ, the whole-ly God's new creation family. On no other basis can ministers of righteousness be distinguished.

In Paul's transformed ecclesiology, church leadership in the new creation family is a new creation of those who are defined and determined by whole ontology and function, not by their roles and resources. These prominent gifts of the Spirit cannot be claimed apart from direct relationship with the Spirit. Thus, these persons are in reciprocal relationship face to face with the Spirit for the ongoing involvement together necessary to build (*oikodome*) God's new creation family in embodied whole (*pleroma*) ontology and function, which integrally involves their own person with persons together in transformed relationships face to face both without distinctions and the veil. With this leadership the church is alive in the new relational order and grows in wholeness to maturity (*teleios*) as the *pleroma* of Christ (Eph 4:12-13). Therefore, Paul both expects this uncommon wholeness in church leaders and holds them accountable to be transformed persons who are *agape*-relationally involved in transformed relationships together that are conjointly equalized and intimate (Eph 4:14-16; Gal 5:6; 6:15).

In what condition do we locate leaders today, and what they are doing in their leadership? Churches and the academy need to be complete in vetting their leadership, along with vetting those training for leadership under the assumption that they have been called to such a role.

The early disciples struggled to establish the primary function of their leadership that integrated all the secondary into the irreducible function of the nonnegotiable primary. They would have progressed much more readily if they had followed the lead of Mary. To review for our deeper attention:

> In her last recorded interaction with Jesus (Jn 12:1-8, par. Mk 14:3-4), Mary took the lead among all the disciples present by opening her heart for the full profile of her person to make intimate connection with Jesus in the involvement necessary for face-to-face relationship together without the veil, in its primacy of nothing less and

no substitutes. By her leadership with the whole-ly template, she illuminated the relational reality of the whole relational outcome from the gospel of whole-ly Jesus, which Jesus amplified as the practice vital for all disciples proclaiming the gospel. By her uncommon leadership Mary also demonstrated that discipleship is composed by this primary function of face-to-face relationship together in uncommon wholeness; her intrusively inconvenient lead action clarified and corrected the servant model used by the other disciples that gave priority to serving over relationship (countering Jesus' paradigm for discipleship, Jn 12:26). In their contextualized and commonized biases, the other disciples represent any leaders who would compose discipleship both without the relational reality of "Follow whole-ly me face to face" and thus with a veil at relational distance from "where I am whole-ly," thereby reduced and common leaders who are not the whole-ly disciples who could "make whole-ly disciples."

Does our diverse condition of disciples and discipleship make evident that we follow the lead of the other disciples over Mary, and thereby have leaders preoccupied with the secondary over their primary function? Jesus keeps asking them "do you love me?"

Whole-ly Disciples for the Reduced and the Common

Recently, the two main characters in the comic strip "Prickly City" anxiously reflected on the current political fragmentation in the U.S. and the world. As they look up into the dark sky of night, one asks the other, "What do you suppose God is thinking of us at the moment?" The other replies nervously, 'I'm praying that He's not paying that much attention."[1] Obviously, ashamed of our divisive condition, they are hoping for change without looking for clarification and correction. If Christians today seriously reflect on the fragmentation (misleadingly considered diversity) of the global church and its persons and relationships, I wonder how many implicitly or unknowingly also hope that God is not paying much attention to our existing condition, instead of seeking his clarification and correction; or perhaps are hoping that Jesus isn't weeping over us about "what would bring you wholeness" (Lk 19:41-42).

In 2017, the anniversary of two pivotal events are observed that have had defining influence for our fragmentation, the 500th anniversary of the Reformation and the 10th anniversary of the iPhone. This theology and technology, respectively, have preoccupied us in the secondary at the expense of the primary function of face-to-face relationship in wholeness together. As a substitute for this whole-ly template, an expanding diversity of expression has found opportunity to shape persons, relationships and their churches into old templates composed by reduced ontology and function, all of which result in their fragmentation under the guise of a misleading unified nameplate of global or Internet. The iPhone (including all other smartphones), for example, has become the primary mode for interaction, generating simulated relationships and creating illusions of involvement; moreover, it has become a primary source for information, identity formation and opportunities promoting differences—whose use fragments the scope of everyday life

[1] Created by Scott Stantis, *Los Angeles Times*, June 3, 2017.

and becomes addictive as intended by its developers. How has the iPhone changed your church and its persons and relationships?

What has emerged from this pivotal theology and technology, and continues to unfold in our persons, relationship and churches, is our routine fragmentation, which many Christians would consider to be cultivating our diversity and giving opportunity for differences to have visibility and be heard. Before we celebrate diversity in the global church, however, we need to understand that the notion of diversity is shaped by contextualized and commonized biases. Diversity emerges when our persons and function are defined and thus determined with outer-in differences by a reduced theological anthropology, which relegates our condition and relationships to a comparative-based value without wholeness, embedded in these outer-in differences made primary for who, what and how we are. These are the contextualized assumptions subtly made from a commonized bias, which ignores or prevents seeing whole persons from inner out. Diversity, therefore, affirms this reduced ontology and function, and forming diversity (e.g. by race) thereby sustains this fragmentary human condition in stratified relational order (as in race discrimination or racism). This makes diversity part of the problem for the human condition rather than a solution; and Christians should not continue to affirm diversity to add to the problem and contradict what we are in the world for. We must address this reality of diversity used as a convenient substitute for making whole all persons, peoples and nations.

The misleading diversity of human differences veils the differences that still compose the human condition, which then exposes the ontological simulations and functional illusions from reductionism that the misguided effort for diversity serves. The diversity of persons, peoples and nations—in the church's composition and its mission—does not get to the heart of their ontology and function in the image and likeness of the whole-ly Trinity. Consequently, the essential relational consequence, the diverse condition of our ontology and function becomes a substitute for the whole ontology and function of the global church family, in which "there is no longer Jew or Greek, *or any other racial-ethnic differences*, there is no longer slave or free, *or any other socioeconomic class differences*, there is no longer male and female, *of any other biological, intellectual and related resourceful differences*, for all of you *together* are *whole-ly* in *whole-ly* Jesus" (Gal 3:28).

In this critical period of fragmentation in our world, therefore, all Christians are faced with this urgent question: Is our own diverse condition in the global church today the likeness of the whole-ly Trinity that Jesus prayed definitively for (Jn 17:20-23) and that Paul declared conclusively we would be transformed into (2 Cor 3:18; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10-11)?

Our purpose in life and what we are in the world for as whole-ly disciples emerge, unfold and mature as we "Follow me" to *the reduced* and are involved "where I am" in the depth of *the common*, whereby we are distinguished whole-ly. Following the uncommon Way must be by the inconvenient Truth of his intrusive relational path, and thus following his whole Life must be according to the whole-ly template face to face in the primacy of relationship together—the first priority into which all the secondary is

integrated without variation, as if negotiable. For whole-ly Jesus, righteousness—composing the whole who, what and how the person is—and peace are invariably integrated ("kiss") from the innermost to the outermost, and his righteousness determines the path for his steps (as in Ps 85:11,13). His steps must not be reduced to referential quantitative terms from outer in but compose his vulnerable presence and relational involvement only in relational terms from inner out; thus for us today "your footprints *are* not seen *from outer in*" (Ps 77:19). This is the irreducible relational reality of discipleship and the invariable experiential truth of the gospel, both of which are constituted whole-ly by the Word.

Though we cannot see his footprints from outer in, the palpable Word (inseparably and irreducibly integrated with the Spirit) continues to be present and involved in their intrusive relational path only by whole relational terms. In spite of their footprints not seen, their post-ascension critique of diverse churches was disclosed to us for the relationship-specific purpose for our churches and their persons and relationships needing to "Follow me face to face" in the primary of the new whole-ly template, which composes the new covenant relationship together only by whole relational terms from inner out without the veil. The full profile of the face of the Trinity has been disclosed, and continues to be disclosed (as Jesus made definitive, Jn 15:26; 17:26), in the primacy of relational terms face to face and thereby distinguished only whole and uncommon. His true disciples follow only the whole-ly Jesus as his whole-ly disciples—those also distinguished uncommon in their whole theology and practice. When his disciples are distinguished as whole-ly, they will also "testify *along with the Spirit* [*martyreo*] because you have been *involved* with me *face to face*" (Jn 15:27); and, therefore as direct participants, their witness will make the significant difference needed for the transformation of those who are reduced and can impact the depth of the common for its redemption at all levels.

In explicit contrast and implicit conflict, the gospel of whole-ly Jesus has been variably interpreted by diversifying contextualized bias and fragmenting commonized bias. The relational consequence for whole-ly Jesus is to conflate the gospel with secondary (even tertiary) variations—presumed to be primary and thus vital—that have reduced the whole gospel to a fragmentary condition. On the basis of such relative gospels, a diversity of disciples in diverse discipleship now compose the identity of Jesus' followers, even with various reforms and renewals. All these variations have inconspicuously displaced his whole-ly disciples (such as Mary) who are transformed to nothing less and no substitutes of his new creation church family. It is no surprise then that Mary is not highlighted in these diverse compositions of the gospel. Rather than being the disciples *for* the reduced and the common, this diverse condition has relegated them as disciples *of* the reduced and the common.

Reformation and renewal, past and present, at best have only simulated transformation and function in subtle illusions of wholeness, which is the missing *sola* in the original Reformation. Whole-ly disciples are involved face to face in relational progression with the whole-ly Trinity, while all other disciples relatively engage only various parts of Jesus or the Spirit that are not in distinct relational progression with

whole-ly Jesus and the Trinity. The unavoidable reality for these other disciples—like the other disciples in contrast to Mary—is that they don't remain static in their discipleship but are regressing in "Follow the whole-ly me" and being involved "where I am with the whole-ly Trinity."

Therefore, before we say anything positive or think favorably about the diversity of the global church, we have to pay closer attention to the palpable Word and be accountable to their presence and involvement with the following inconvenient Truth:

1. How many doctrinally correct churches, who resist false teachings and persevere through hardships and/or persecutions for the sake of Jesus' name, does he (with the Spirit) critique for "forsaking your first love face to face" in what's primary together over any secondary matter no matter how urgent—as he clarified and corrected the church in Ephesus (Rev 2:4)?
2. How many popular churches, who have established an esteemed identity, does he critique by finding their "brand" insignificant, incomplete, lacking the wholeness distinguished "in the *relational terms* of my *whole-ly* God"—as he clarified and corrected the church in Sardis (Rev 3:2)?
3. How many inclusive churches, who are active in the broader community, does he critique because they tolerate the diverse practices of persons and relationships shaped by reductionism, and thereby form hybrid theology and practice in the church—as he clarified and corrected the church in Thyatira (Rev 2:20ff)?
4. How many resourceful churches, who depend on the amount of what they have to define their identity, does he critique for having a 'thinner and lighter' gospel (or some variation of a prosperity gospel) that determines the significance of their practice as neither hot or cold, thus which is useless even in prosperity terms—as he clarified and corrected the church in Laodicea (Rev 3:15ff)?

If this is how the palpable Word assesses our diversity today, on what basis do we in any way celebrate the global church's diversity? More important, can we continue to justify in any way this diverse condition, except by exposing our diversifying contextualized bias and our fragmenting commonized bias?

The palpable Word continues to be vulnerably present and relationally involved for our ongoing clarification and correction in order to "Follow me ***whole-ly***." Yet, for us to follow *whole* cannot be diversely fragmented by contextualization, and to follow *uncommonly* cannot be reduced to human variations by commonization. To follow whole-ly, by necessity of its integral nature, involves the relational progression that has been de-contextualized and de-commonized, and thereby transformed to the new in whole relationship together equalized and intimate, face to face without the veil. The distinguished face of the whole-ly Trinity requires in likeness the unveiled face of whole-ly disciples for their discipleship to be distinguished unmistakably in the whole-ly template's primacy of relationship together face to face that composes the Trinity's whole-ly family. This whole relational outcome emerges, unfolds and matures distinguished beyond all the contexts of the common by the relational progression of disciples in whole theology and practice, not distinguished in the diversity of reformation and renewal but solely in the uncommon wholeness of transformation—nothing less and no substitutes.

In ongoing contrast to and conflict with anything less and any substitutes, there only are the whole-ly disciples who "Follow *whole-ly* me" transformed in their ontology and function from the innermost to the outermost, thus who are relationally involved face to face "where I am" to compose the primary in their theology and practice, so that they are truly distinguished in their whole-ly identity as "my disciples." For all other disciples, to his manifesto he adds intrusively, "I know your dedicated service and successful ministry; you even have a popular reputation of being alive.…Wake up to reality…for I have not found your discipleship complete in my uncommon wholeness" (Rev 3:1-2). For them, the hermeneutic challenge continues to need urgent response.

For the epistemological, hermeneutical, ontological and relational work still needed urgently today, "Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit *of inconvenient Truth* is saying to the *diversity of* churches *and all their persons*" (Rev 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22). Be transformed in relational progression with the missing *sola*!

Appendix: Songs for *Who* to Worship and *What* to Celebrate

"Come," my heart says, "seek his face!" Your face, LORD, do I seek. Psalm 27:8

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Face to Face

Ps 67:1, Num 6:24-26, 2 Cor 4:6 ©2010 T. Dave Matsuo & Kary A. Kambara

1. Your grace turns to us,
always turns to us
You meet us Face to face.
Your grace turns to me
always turns to me
You look me in the eye.

Chorus A: Face to face, face to face
Eye to eye, eye to eye
You shine on us
to bless and hold, and give us peace.

2. Your grace never turns
away from us now
nor turns your face from us.
Your grace never turns
away from me here
nor shuts your eye from me.

Chorus A: Face to face, face to face
Eye to eye, eye to eye
You shine on us
to bless and hold, and give us peace.

3. Your grace is your face
always turned to us
Your face connects with us.
Your grace has your face
always eyed on us
Your face communes with us.

Chorus B: Grace with face, grace with face
eyed by grace, eyed by grace
You shine on us
face to face, yes, eye to eye.

4. Your face is with grace
always here with us
Your grace sufficient.
Your face is with grace
always shares in us
Your grace sufficient.

Chorus C: Grace with face, grace with face
Eyed by grace, eyed by grace
You shine on us
face to face, yes, eye to eye
to bless and hold, and make us whole.

Righteous God

Intro Note: When you focus on God's righteousness, think beyond an attribute of God. The righteous God is not static, nor is God righteous in a vacuum. That is to say, God is righteous always in relationship. That means the righteous God is always one who can be counted on in relationship together to function in the way God *is*, and in what God says and promises—nothing less and no substitutes. Therefore, sing of God and to God as who, what and how you can count on God to be—O righteous God!

Chorus:

O righteous God, righteous God
true to your nature
true to *who* you are.
O righteous God, righteous God
with us you are, with us you are

Verse:

Your righteousness stands alone
yet never acts apart,
it's *what* you are with us,
we all can count on—

(*reflective*)
trustworthy, righteous God
is *how* you are, yes, how you are.

Repeat: chorus, verse, chorus

Ending:

Trustworthy, righteous God
with us you are, with us you are,
yes, how you are.

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The Whole of God Embodied

Transcendent God, holy God
vuln'rably present
is who you are (who you are) [*words in parentheses optional*]

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

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

O-- Praise be to God, embodied God
only for relationship (with us)
the whole of God (whole of God)

Thanks be to God, embodied God
relationship together
with the whole of God (embodied God)

Reflectively

Hmm-- who you are, yes--
relationship together
with the whole of God
Hmm-- what you are, yes--
relationship together
with the whole of God
Hmm-- how you are, yes--
relationship together
with the whole of God

O-- Praise be to God, embodied God
vulnerably present
the whole of God, whole of God

Thanks be to God, embodied God
intimately involved
the whole of God

(Repeat song)

(Descending slowly)
The whole of God
the whole— of— God

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Whole-ly Communion

Mt 9:10-13; Heb 10:19-22; 2 Cor 4:6
This song is composed to be sung during Communion.

Heartfelt and heart-filled

1. Here at your table
   you call us from afar
   You, O Jesus, to you

2. Here behind the curtain
   we join you, old to new
   You, O Jesus, in you

3. Now without the veil
   we see God, Face to face
   You, O Jesus, with you

4. In your very presence
   whole of God, O, whole of God
   Father, Son and Spirit

Bridge:

Here at your table—
Here behind the curtain—
Now without the veil—

Final verse:

In your very presence
whole of God, O—whole of God
Father, Son and Spirit!

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‘Singing’ the New Song[1]

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

Note: [ ]s hummed (or the like); no words aloud, no instruments played

Sing the new song to the Lord
Sing the new song to *our* Lord
—you are holy
you are whole
—we’re uncommon
we are whole
[embrace the whole of God]

Sing the new song to the Lord
Sing the new song to *our* Lord
(Passionately) —you compose life
in your key
—life together
intimately
—no veil present
distance gone
[embrace the whole of God]

Sing the new life with the Lord
Sing the new life with *our* Lord
—you are present
and involved
—we *be* present
now involved
[embrace the whole of God]

Sing this new song to *you* Lord
Sing this new life with *you* Lord
(Joyfully) —the veil is gone
the veil is gone
[embrace the whole of God]

[embrace the whole of God]

[embrace the whole of God]

[1] Composed in the key of Jesus with the Spirit and sung with Paul (2 Cor 3:16-18), Kary A. Kambara and T. Dave Matsuo, ©2011.

The Spirit of the Word

Taken from Jn 14:15-27; 16:13-15; 17:20-23; Gal 4:6; Eph 2:22; Nu 6:24-26

1. ‘I will not leave you as orphans’
   ‘I do not leave you apart’
   ‘The Father gives you the Spirit
   the Father gives you the Spirit
   in my name, in my name.’

Chorus:
   ‘The Spirit lives with you’
   ‘We make our home with you’
   dwelling whole as family
   “Abba Father, Abba Father”

2. ‘I’ve sent you the Spirit of truth’
   ‘I’ve left you the Spirit of Truth’
   ‘You know him within you’
   ‘He guides you and tells you
   what is mine, what is mine.’

3. ‘My peace I leave you, my family
   My peace I give you, be whole!’
   ‘The Lord shines his face on you,
   the Lord turns his face to you
   and makes you whole, makes you whole.’

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

End: O my Father, O my Father!

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The Global Church Celebrating

Note: “uncommon” is the meaning of “holy” that distinguishes God in the Bible

1. You God are whole and uncommon,
   Distinguished beyond all the common,
   None to compare, none to compare
   You God are whole and uncommon.

2. Your Word is whole and uncommon,
   Distinguished from all in the world,
   Here to transform, here to make whole
   Your peace is whole and uncommon.

   Chorus 1:
   Praise— the whole and uncommon *(“Praise” is shouted)*
   God beyond all that is common,
   You have transformed, you make us whole *(shout freely with beat)*
   Your family whole and uncommon.

3. We are not parts of the common
   Fragmented apart from God’s whole,
   We are transformed, we are made whole
   Peace together whole and uncommon.

4. We are God’s whole and uncommon
   Distinguished family from the common,
   No longer old, raised in the new
   Now together like the Trinity.

   Chorus 2:
   Praise— Father, Son and Spirit, *(“Praise” is shouted)*
   Thank you for family together,
   You equalized, you reconciled *(shout freely with beat)*
   All persons, peoples and nations.

5. We shout with joy in our hearts,
   Clapping, dancing inside to out,
   No longer apart, no more orphans
   God’s family whole and equal.

6. We sing the new song from within,
   Proclaiming joy to all the world,
   Here is your hope, here is your peace
   Wholeness together beyond common

   Chorus 2:
   Praise— Father, Son and Spirit, *(“Praise” is shouted)*
   Thank you for family together,
   You equalized, you reconciled *(shout freely with beat)*
   All persons, peoples and nations.

   [*everyone shouting, clapping, dancing to the Trinity*]

   Yes! Yes!! Yes!!! *(shouted, and repeat as desired)*
   All persons, peoples and nations.

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The Whole-ly Trinity

Holy *denotes to be set apart from the ordinary, to be separated from the common, and thus to be distinguished as the uncommon from the common world. God is certainly uncommon, but our God is also whole—that is, the whole and uncommon Trinity.* Whole-ly *is the combination of whole and holy that distinguishes only the whole and uncommon Trinity.*

Note: underlined words to be chanted, rapped, shouted, or any other style, in this rhythm but not sung; tempo increases after Bridge 1, then slows down after verse 6 to the end.

1.
Praise God whole and uncommon
Father, Son and Spirit,
  Praise God whole and uncommon
  Father, Son and Spirit,
together as One
You are, are, are
the whole-ly Trinity.

2.
Praise You Father, Son, Spirit,
Your persons together
  Praise You Father, Son, Spirit,
  Your persons together
whole and uncommon
You are, are, are
the whole-ly Trinity.

Bridge 1:
O, O, O, O praise! O, O, O, O praise!

3.
Glory be Father, Son, Spirit,
all present together,
  yes, present together
  yes, present together,
whole persons as One
You are, are, are
the whole-ly Trinity.

4.
Thank You Father, Son, Spirit,
all involved together,
  yes, involved together,
  yes, involved together,
in relationships
with us, You are
the whole-ly Trinity.

Bridge 2:
O, O, O, O praise! O, O, O, O thank!
O yes, O yes, O yes, O yes!

5.
Praise You whole-ly Trinity,
all present and involved, O
  Praise You whole-y Trinity,
  all present and involved,
Your persons together
whole relationship,
You're whole and uncommon.

6.
Thank You whole-ly Trinity,
distinguished above all, O
  Thank You whole-ly Trinity,
  distinguished above all,
yet here for us all
to make us whole
and uncommon like You.

Bridge 3:
So, yes, now yes, O yes!

7.
Praise O thank the Trinity
with our whole and uncommon, Yes,
  Praise O thank the Trinity
  with our whole and uncommon:
Father, Son, Spirit
You are, are, are
the whole-ly Trinity,
  You are, are, are
  the whole-ly Trinity,
    the whole-ly Trinity.

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Glossary of Key Terms

assimilated identity – shaped by the common of the surrounding context, which includes the norms of religious tradition and of culture (chap. 5:99).

circular problem – the difficult change to the new of whole-ly identity, which requires, on the one hand, being whole *as* living uncommon and, on the other hand, living uncommon *as* being whole—a problem demanding more than many Christians want to give for involvement in the primary (chap. 5:101).

commonizing – The process of reducing God on the basis of our human contexts (personal and/or collective), thus in terms of reduced ontology and function (chap. 1:3), and its influence shaping the gospel and its outcome of disciples and their discipleship (chap. 5:90).

commonized bias – the biased influence from the common or reductionism composing the human context, which has had the subtle primacy to define our ontology and determine our function (chap. 5:91).

confirmation bias – the pattern to interpret or selectively remember information in such a way that confirms and reinforces what we already believe, without testing its validity (chap. 5:89).

contextual contingency – understanding Jesus' relational words (God's whole relational terms) in the whole context of the Trinity's full relational action as well as in their immediate context (chap. 4:84).

contextualized bias – the biased influence from our particular surrounding contexts that has shaped us in our theology and practice (chap. 5:91).

the contingency function – the process of his disciples becoming whole from inner out and maturing in their whole-ly identity, as illuminated in the sixth Beatitude (Mt 5:8), whose catharsis of both the old and common are essential for our growth not to be stunted and for the maturity of our whole-ly identity not to be underdeveloped (chap. 6:187).

the core function – the humility of understanding our true condition, which unfolds from the third Beatitude to redefine our person and thereby form the new identity of those transformed in Christ (chap. 3:38).

covenant of love – The true nature of the covenant relationship that God established from the beginning to compose the truth of the gospel (chap. 1:19).

digital Christianity – Christian faith in a post-truth period, in which theology and practice are composed 'thinner and lighter' (chap 2:38).

discontinuity with their common way of life – the experiential truth and relational reality that whole-ly Jesus has this discontinuity at all levels of life, and that his whole-ly disciples engage in his same discontinuity, without which our light in the world becomes ambiguous or lost, unable to impact the darkness and make the essential difference needed at all levels of human life (chap. 6:156).

the distinguishing bias *with-in* the Uncommon – essential for all disciples to openly have and ongoingly exercise in their discipleship, the distinguishing bias emerging from face-to-face relationship *with* the Uncommon and unfolding unambiguously apart from the common and thus *in* the uncommon (chap. 5:95).

the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes – the constituting action by the whole-ly God to distinguish God's relational response of grace, the incarnation, the gospel, and God's ongoing presence and involvement in contrast and conflict with anything less and any substitutes—which challenges and confronts our theology and practice to be in likeness (chap. 4:67).

the essential difference – the ontology and function that is both whole and uncommon, which is essential to be distinguished as different from and to make a difference for all other ontology and function (chap. 5:99).

epistemological work – The relational work of the Spirit who is the basic source to know God (chap. 1:16).

the face (*paneh*) of God – The profile of the very front of God's presence, not an oblique, opaque or obscure view of God (chap. 1:19).

God's definitive blessing – The gospel of God's relational involvement in the depth of face-to-face relationship together, in which God brings change for new relationship together in wholeness (Num 6:24-26, chap. 1:19).

hermeneutic (interpretation) challenge – Listening before we interpret what God is saying, and do not make our assumptions the basis for any subsequent interpretations or we will end up speaking for God; ceasing our initial human efforts to interpret and understand and thereby give God the opportunity to speak, so that we can "know that I am God"—the identity of whom only God can disclose (chap. 1:5).

hermeneutic work – The relational work of the Spirit who is the basic source to understand God (chap. 1:16).

the holy partition – The insurmountable separation between the holy God and all that is common in the human context (including us), which was signified by the temple curtain that made God directly inaccessible—later destroyed by Jesus for direct relationship face to face with God (chap. 2:25).

improbable theological trajectory – The face of God's relational response of grace that *invades* the human context with nothing less than the whole and uncommon God (chap. 2:25).

integral identity – the whole-ly disciples emerging with nothing less than the *whole* who they are and unfolding with no substitutes for the *uncommon* whose they are (chap. 5:106).

the integral primacy – that composes the gospel in nothing less than relationship and in no substitutes for face-to-face relationship together (chap. 2:27).

interpretation of Scripture is making relational connection with the heart of God – This is the relational process and outcome that unfolds when we let God speak rather than speaking for God (chap. 1:7).

intimacy – the relational outcome when hearts open to each other and come together in relationship, which is necessarily integrated with equalization to integrally compose the transformed relationships of the new creation family (chap. 5:123)—that constitutes the church family as **the intimate equalizer** (chap. 5:143).

intrusive relational path – The provocative encountering of humans by whole-ly Jesus, no substitutes for face-to-face interaction that confronts, clarifies and corrects (chap. 2:25).

irreducible and nonnegotiable qualifier – Jesus' uncommon peace that determines his disciples in wholeness, which qualifies whom he sends out to fulfill his commission (chap. 6:150).

Jesus' paradigm – "the measure you give [or use] will be the measure you get" (Mk 4:24), which is basic for determining our theology and practice (chap. 1:8).

the missing *sola* – the uncommon wholeness of Jesus, missing from the Reformation, which integrates all the other *solas* (chap. 5:125).

narrative of this human condition – A summary of our human condition that all Christians need to understand, for which we are accountable and responsible (chap. 1:10).

normalized – faith not engaged as the relational work of trust in the primacy of relationship together but practiced as the secondary work of meeting the obligations or conforming to the requirements of a Rule of Faith, not the Relationship of Faith (chap. 7:193).

ontological work – The relational work of the Spirit who is the basic source to transform who, what and how we are into wholeness (chap. 1:16).

paltering – The active use of a truthful statement to mislead someone; e.g. a method of using God's truth in a fragmentary (or selective) process that reduces the whole truth by selectively stating only fragments of truth yet representing that as the whole truth, thus basically misleading others (chap. 1:12).

person-consciousness – the distinct consciousness of one's whole person from inner out (chap. 2:29).

paradigmatic for serving – the imperative for discipleship defining the function of intimate relationship together with Jesus as the primary priority, from which serving must unfold to be of significance to Jesus and others (chap. 3:57).

the pivotal processes of de-contextualization and de-commonization – the unavoidable ongoing involvement necessary to redeem any contextualized bias and commonized bias in order for our persons, relationships and churches *to be whole-ly* and function in the likeness of the whole-ly Trinity (chap. 5:145).

process of adoption – the primary solution for the human relational condition that fulfills what we are saved *to*: belonging in relationship together in the Trinity's family (chap. 4:80).

process of denial – the subtle yet common practice among Christians who don't want to think about or face inconvenience, uncomfortable and contrary realities in life (chap. 5:89).

process of equalization – transformed persons from inner out with no human distinctions, and relationships from their deficit condition embedded in a comparative process to their whole condition of relational belonging in the new creation family (chap. 5:123), which constitutes the global church family's ontology and function as **the equalizer** (chap. 5:131).

process of integrating priorities (PIP) – the indispensable process for all Christians to integrate the secondary matters in their life (however important) in the primary, which is always the nonnegotiable primacy of reciprocal involvement with Jesus (chap. 3:53).

reciprocating contextualization (RC) – being able to live in the human context by the primacy of God's context, wherein ongoing interaction with the primacy of God's context determines function in the person's primary identity while in the human context (chap. 5:104).

the reconciliation dynamic of family love – taking in those persons who are different and absorbing (not dissolving) their differences, that is, on a secondary level without using any human differences to determine the primary level of church make-up in ontology and function (chap. 5:135).

redemptive reconciliation – the integral function of redemption and reconciliation, which either by itself is insufficient to constitute what Jesus saves us both *from* and *to* (chap. 4:82).

the reducing dynamic of *diakrino* – the structural dynamic of the church without the stratifying barriers of distinctions that treat persons differently (chap. 5:133).

relational contingency – the relational progression to belong in the Trinity's family, which is contingent on being freed from limits and constraints on our persons and relationships (chap. 4:83).

relational work – the primary work of disciples that composes their discipleship in this primacy of relationship over all other secondary work (including serving and ministry, chap. 3:42).

the Relationship of Faith – the defining alternative to the Rule of Faith that prioritizes the relational response to God in only reciprocal relationship, the responsibility of which requires the mutual relational work of both *subjects* in the relationship (chap. 3:42).

the reverse dynamic of anything less and any substitutes – our terms used as substitutes for God's whole composed by the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes, which at best can only simulate God's dynamic with illusions in our theology and practice, when in reality are in reverse and opposing God's whole (chap. 5:93).

routinization of discipleship – discipleship not distinguished in following the relational progression of whole-ly Jesus but has replaced this whole-ly template with anything less and any substitutes, and is thus unable to be distinguished beyond that routine (chap. 7:198).

self-consciousness – the focus on one's self from outer in, and the related concerns that preoccupy persons and relationships in contrast to person-consciousness (chap. 2:30).

sin as reductionism – contrary to a weak view of sin, the breadth and depth of the human condition that defines our persons and determines our relationships by reduced ontology and function, the reductionism of which counters God's wholeness at all levels of life (chap. 5:92).

strategic shift – the improbable theological trajectory of God to be disclosed directly face to face, which unfolds further and deeper in the tactical and functional shifts of Jesus' intrusive relational path (chap. 4:68).

"**thinner and lighter**" – The parameters from the digital age that have imposed a binary perceptual framework and interpretive lens to limit our thinking and constrain our practice (chap. 1:9).

theological anthropology – the basic position underlying our theology and practice that defines our ontology and determines our function (chap. 2:29).

transformation – the inner-out change in our human condition of the old condition in reduced ontology and function to the new condition in whole ontology and function in likeness of only the whole-ly Trinity, the ongoing relational process and outcome of which unfolds in the essential dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes (chap. 6:190).

the triangulation process – ongoing involvement with the Trinity providing the reference point needed to navigate the surrounding contexts in order to define and determine engagement with culture and involvement in those context of the world, so that we could be whole and thus make whole (chap. 5:112).

the trinitarian relational process of family love – Jesus' relational work of grace with his vulnerable relational involvement distinguishing the Trinity's family love, integrally converges in God's strategic, tactical and functional shifts to fulfill the gospel and complete its relational outcome (chap. 4:79).

trinitarian wholeness – the wholeness of all our persons, relationships and churches in nothing less than and no substitutes for the whole-ly Trinity (chap. 5:119).

the unavoidable challenge – for all Christians is becoming disciples of whole theology and practice that unfolds from the gospel and is distinguished by its Word. For this relational outcome to unfold, however, integrally includes in the unavoidable challenge the ongoing fight against reductionism and its counter-relational work that subtly fragments the whole gospel and reinterprets the Word's wholeness into parts not integrated together or simply missing (chap. 1:8-9).

uncommon equality – the good news transforming the fragmentation and inequality of all persons, peoples, nations and their human relations, which emerges from the church's uncommon peace beyond any contextualized or commonized bias (chap. 5:142).

uncommon function – the function of our person in the world, to which we don't belong as Jesus didn't, that goes beyond what is common around us in order to distinguish us as "his disciples" (chap. 3:54).

uncommon identity of whole-ly disciples – the new discipleship that is integrally whole and uncommon, which forms the identity of Jesus' disciples as only whole-ly disciples (chap. 5: 99).

uncommon peace – the peace of Jesus that is distinguished from common peace, which should not be confused with what he gives to us and wants from us (chap. 5:129).

uncommon peacemaking – the assertive action of using Jesus' sword to fight against reductionism in order to make his uncommon peace in all human life, enacted by those who are maturing in the identity distinguishing them only as whole-ly disciples in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes (chap. 6:187).

'the veil' of our identity – those secondary aspects of our identity used to prevent direct involvement in relationship together face to face, thus requiring the veil of all our secondary differences to be removed for relational connection with the Trinity (chap. 5:92).

whole relational terms – The only terms that distinguish God's presence and involvement in relationship, which are necessary for relationship together with God (chap. 1:19).

whole-ly – The integrated condition that is both whole and holy/uncommon (combined in whole-ly, chap. 1:18).

the whole-ly template face to face – emerging from the holy partition being destroyed, the new template for the new covenant relationship together with whole-ly God face to face without the veil now is established for theology and practice, which is congruent with the integrity of the Word, unambiguously illuminates the Light of the invariable gospel, and thus provides the sole template for all disciples to be compatible in their discipleship with whole-ly Jesus (chap. 7:196).

Scripture Index (Primary Source)

Page numbers in **bold** indicate where the primary discussions can be found.

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